

Therapeutic Fostering Limited

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Astra Office Suites, Astra Business Centre (E), Roman Way, Preston, Lancashire PR2 5AP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency was registered by Ofsted in July 2016. The main function of the agency is to undertake the recruitment, assessment and training of foster carers and to provide care and support to children and young people.

The agency provides emergency, short-term, long-term and respite placements. The agency currently has 11 approved fostering households and 15 children in placement.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 July 2021

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| Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account | good |
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| How well children and young people are helped and protected | good |
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| The effectiveness of leaders and managers | good |
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 8 May 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency is child centred, placing children at the centre of all elements of practice. This supports children to make good progress in all aspects of their lives. They feel cared for, respected and valued by their carers and by the agency staff. One child said, 'I love living here. I have lots of things to do and have loads of fun. I want to stay here forever.' Another child said, 'My carer does everything she can to make sure I am safe, happy and part of the family. I have settled here, and I am going to stay until I am old enough to live by myself.'

Most children experience stable placements. There is a clear matching process in place. This, alongside the manager and staff's knowledge of the carers and their skills, contributes to stability of placement for children.

Foster carers provide nurturing and welcoming homes which children feel part of. All children spoken with at the time of inspection, and those that responded to questionnaires, say they are happy living with their foster families. Some children refer to their foster carers as 'mum' and 'dad', especially those that have been matched in long-term placements. This demonstrates that children have a real sense of belonging within their fostering family's household.

The agency ensures that it has as much information as possible about the children prior to placement to contribute to matching and care planning. Wherever possible, children have an opportunity to visit their foster carers prior to moving in. The agency also provides children with information about their foster carers and the agency before they are placed. Information is in age-appropriate guides, written in child-friendly language, with pictures to further help them to understand where they will be living. This careful and considered matching and planning minimises the risk of placement breakdown.

Children do well at school and attend on a regular basis. Foster carers, supported by staff from the agency, advocate on behalf of children to access the most appropriate educational setting. The agency provides appropriate challenge when it is felt that the proposed school is not in the best interests of the child. As a result, some children have achieved higher outcomes than they were originally assessed to achieve.

Foster carers support and enable children to make choices and express their views. Any concerns or complaints raised are followed up and action is taken to address them. This further demonstrates the child-centred practice of the agency. Foster carers understand the importance of positive contact for children with their families and friends and work in accordance with individual care plans to facilitate this where it is appropriate and agreed to be in the child's best interest. This helps children maintain positive relationships with family members.

Children can remain living with their carers post-18 under the 'staying put' arrangements, with the agency working with placing authorities as early as possible. This provides reassurance and minimises anxiety for children on their path to adulthood. One young person said, 'The supervising social worker helped me to understand what it would mean for me and helped me to get my finances organised. This meant I could concentrate on college studies instead of worrying about where I was going to live.'

Foster carers support children to develop the necessary skills to prepare for adulthood. Children are encouraged to take age-appropriate risks as they are preparing for independence. The agency has introduced an independent training guide for children, which foster carers are actively involved with. This helps children learn skills which are age appropriate and, as a result, children become more self-assured and confident.

Children have their physical, mental and emotional health needs met well. Foster carers ensure that children attend routine health appointments. When additional healthcare needs are identified, the agency and foster carers follow these up with the relevant healthcare professionals to support the holistic health of each child.

The agency actively involves children in gaining their views about the care and support they receive. This includes meetings with children, involving them in the development of questions for prospective foster carers, foster carer reviews and staff appraisals.

Foster carers say the great strength of the agency is the support they receive. This includes from the initial contact as prospective carers, through the assessment period and post approval. Foster carers' assessments are detailed, well presented, analytical and evaluative. Recruitment is largely through recommendations from existing foster carers. Post approval, a buddying system supports new carers in their role. As a result, they feel part of a team dedicated to supporting and enriching children's lives.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Safeguarding underpins the agency's policies, procedures and working practices, and the agency is excellent in reviewing its practices. Children have strong, positive relationships with their carers and, as a result, feel confident in discussing any concerns they may have with them or staff from the agency. Foster carers receive training and guidance on how to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns and their practice helps to keep children safe.

The agency is proactive in working with other professionals who have responsibility for safeguarding. They make appropriate safeguarding referrals to enable children to receive additional help to minimise risks.

Since the last inspection, the agency has significantly improved the response children receive following incidents of going missing from home. This is particularly

in relationship to independent return home interviews. The manager makes sure appropriate challenge is made to local authorities when there is a delay in these taking place.

The agency has clear systems in place for managing complaints and allegations, responding to these in a timely manner, with outcomes clearly recorded. Notifications of significant events are made to appropriate authorities, including the regulator. This enables independent oversight of any patterns or trends.

Foster carers, panel members and agency staff are recruited safely and in accordance with regulation. This helps to make sure that only safe and suitable people work with, and have access to, children.

Assessments of foster carers are undertaken appropriately by the agency. They are comprehensive and the panel provides suitable scrutiny and challenge to make sure any recommendations for approval are made following careful consideration. These recommendations are then considered by the agency's decision-maker before making an overall decision.

Good oversight and tracking systems are in place to ensure health and safety checks of fostering households are in place. In addition, the agency undertakes a minimum of two unannounced visits each year. This, along with regular supervision visits, makes sure that foster carers' homes remain safe places for children to live.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. He was registered to manage the service in August 2016 and is aware of the legal responsibilities which accompany his registration. He demonstrates effective leadership, having high expectations of foster carers and staff to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Foster carers receive good levels of support from the manager, who, alongside the qualified and experienced supervising social workers, ensures that the child-centred ethos of the service is central to the decision-making process. The responsible individual maintains a high profile in the agency and is accessible to staff, foster carers and children. Carers say this makes the agency feel like a 'family unit', which they say is the great strength of the agency.

The agency remains small, with recruitment mainly through recommendations from existing carers. However, the manager is looking at additional ways to target recruitment and currently there are several assessments of potential foster carers in process which are due to be presented to panel soon. If successful, this will increase the number of placements the agency has to offer.

Commissioners of the service report that they have good relationships with the agency, which is responsive to requests made. One commissioner said: 'The agency has been receptive and responsive to requests for placements. When a placement has been due to end, the agency has extended their notice period to enable

additional time to search for a new placement. For example, one child wished to move nearer their family. It took time to find the right placement but with the flexibility of the agency and the extension of the initially agreed placement end date, this enabled a smooth transition for the child.'

The support provided by the agency to the children and their foster carers, and to the placing social workers, is seen as a strength by placing social workers. One said, 'The staff from the agency are excellent in supporting children and make sure that they spend time with them whenever they undertake visits to the foster carers. They provide regular updates to me and are excellent in working in partnership me.'

Ongoing training, development and supervision for foster carers is good. Training is provided by a mixture of online and face-to-face training. Foster carers say the training and individual supervision has developed their knowledge and understanding to help them support the children they care for.

Staff receive regular supervision. However, the supervision records do not consistently demonstrate how long supervision has taken place for or provide strong analysis and reflection of practice. As a result, staff are not provided adequate opportunity to review and reflect on their practice.

The manager receives his supervision from the agency decision-maker. Timescales for this vary and it is not held on a planned and regular basis. This agency is small, and the manager undertakes visits and direct work with carers. Therefore, it is important he has the opportunity to reflect on and analyse his own practice.

Annual appraisals are held within agreed timescales, with the views of foster carers and children included. This demonstrates the agency's commitment to another area of consultation which children are involved with.

The manager has ensured that the recommendations raised at the last inspection have been addressed. These include increasing the diversity of panel membership, improving the monitoring systems of the agency, following up return home interviews for children who have been missing from home and preparing children to make the transition to independence.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person, with particular reference to frequency and recording of supervision. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 24.3)
- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record should be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of supervision. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 24.5)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 1236901

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Inspectors

Sarah Oldham, Social Care Inspector
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