

The Fostering Team

Care 4 Children Residential Services Limited

1 Stuart Road, Bredbury Park Industrial Estate, Bredbury, Stockport SK6 2SR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency offers a range of foster placements, including long-term, short-term, parent and child, emergency and therapeutic foster care.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since November 2020. The previous registered manager is now the responsible individual.

This inspection involved both on-site and off-site inspection activity. Foster carers and children were spoken to during the inspection.

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: 5 to 9 July 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 4 September 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

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 49 fostering households caring for 82 children. The agency has almost doubled in size since the last inspection in September 2017.

A key strength of the agency is its commitment to increasing children's stability by providing them with long-term foster care. Some children continue to live with their foster carers when they reach 18 years of age. This clearly reflects the agency's child-centred ethos and practice.

The agency is successful at keeping sibling children together. This helps the children to sustain a positive family identity and a strong sense of belonging.

Leaders, staff and foster carers are aspirational for the children. This is demonstrated in the exceptional educational achievements for some children. For example, some children are attending university.

Children enjoy personalised care and support, and they thrive. This is reflected in a commissioner's comments: 'The carers have shown a great amount of commitment to the child, and they have been outstanding. They do their utmost to make sure the child feels secure, safe and loved.'

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, children have continued to take part in activities and have fun. For example, the agency organised a virtual quiz, a talent contest and Christmas celebrations for the children and foster families. The carers and children benefited from the leaders' and staff's unwavering support during the pandemic.

The foster carers are supported extremely well. One carer described the agency as 'fantastic'. Another foster carer said, 'My supervising social worker is brilliant. I couldn't have got through the year without her and the team. She has been amazing.'

The agency promotes equality and diversity well. It ensures that the foster carers have a good understanding of the children's cultural identity and needs. However, some foster carers had not been provided with training on the specific needs of the children in their care, such as self-harm, foetal alcohol syndrome and autism spectrum disorder.

Although the children are consulted on a regular basis, the agency does not always do this in a meaningful way. For example, seeking the children's views for the foster carers' annual reviews. On one occasion, the agency did not act swiftly when a child raised some concerns about their foster carer.

The matching process is effective. As a result, many children are settled and enjoy long-term permanent care. However, the rationale for matching children with foster

carers is sometimes poorly recorded. For example, important matching considerations, such as the child's needs, foster carers skills and the potential effect on current family members, are not consistently recorded. Consequently, some records do not provide sufficient information to enable robust scrutiny of the matching decisions.

The agency's placement plans are not routinely updated. Therefore, any changes made to children's care arrangements are not being clearly documented on the children's files. This recording shortfall could lead to inconsistent practice.

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

On the rare occasion when children go missing from care, the agency takes swift action to ensure that they are quickly located and safely returned to their foster home.

The recruitment and approval of foster carers are robust. Approval assessments are thorough. All required checks are undertaken prior to the application being presented to panel. Furthermore, the agency's panel and decision maker have a strong safeguarding focus. Children's welfare and safety are clearly at the centre of this agency's practice.

Allegations and complaints are responded to effectively. Outcomes of investigations are used to inform future practice. Continuous reflection and learning from allegations and complaints further enhances children's welfare and safety.

The unannounced visits, which involve children being spoken to alone, act as an additional safeguarding measure to ensure that the children are safe and feel safe.

The routine health and safety checks of the foster carers' home provide reassurance that the children are living in a safe, secure and comfortable environment.

The foster carers value the agency's out-of-hours support. This service provides the foster carers with consistent guidance and support during times of crisis.

Some shortfalls in recruitment practice were identified. This was in relation to consistently obtaining references from current or most recent employers.

Foster carers do not have sufficient knowledge to help them to suitably respond when children self-harm with a ligature. The leaders acknowledge this shortfall, and training relating to safely removing ligatures has been sourced for foster carers and staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are highly motivated and ambitious for the agency. They have a clear vision for developing the agency and understand its strengths and areas

for development. For example, they have plans to expand the therapeutic input so that more foster carers can access this support.

The registered manager is suitably qualified and experienced. He is child-centred and a strong advocate for the foster carers and children. This is demonstrated in the children's positive experiences and improved outcomes.

As a co-founder of the agency in 2012, the responsible individual has been involved with its development from the start. Her commitment and passion for the agency, foster carers and children is unwavering.

Undoubtedly, leadership is strong. Managers are visible and approachable. One foster carer said, 'It is a family, not a fostering agency. I feel like I have an extended family. I get the support, and I know what is expected of me.'

The staff work well as a team. The registered manager ensures that they have time to reflect on their practice and opportunities to continue to learn and develop. This is achieved through regular professional supervision, on-going training and performance appraisals.

The registered manager and staff work collaboratively with other professionals to ensure that the children's needs are suitably assessed and met. Communication between the agency and professionals, including social workers and commissioners, is good. As a result, the agency has built strong partnerships with all professionals involved in the children's care.

Monitoring systems are an area for development. This is in relation to the monitoring of foster carers training and improved oversight of all children's progress and experience.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 1.1). In particular, obtain children's views for foster carers' annual reviews in a meaningful way and take swift action when necessary.
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 4.3) In particular, that foster carers are aware of and implement the strategies in place to protect children who self-harm.
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the potential impact on existing household members is considered. ('Fostering Services: National Minimal Standards', 15.1) In particular, ensure that the agency's records clearly detail the rationale for matching the child with the fostering household.
- The registered person should ensure that safe recruitment practice is consistently followed when appointing staff and panel members. ('Fostering Service: National Minimum Standards', 19.2) In particular, obtaining references from the applicant's current or most recent employer.
- The registered person should ensure that support and training is made available to foster carers to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.8) In particular, provide foster carers with training that reflects the children's specific needs, for example self-harm, foetal alcohol syndrome and autism spectrum disorder.
- The registered person should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating the activities of the service and the agency's impact on all children's progress. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.1) In particular, improve the systems for monitoring all children's progress and foster carers training and development.
- The registered person should ensure that all decisions and reasons for them are clearly recorded and are signed and dated. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.5) In particular, the agency's placement plans are routinely updated.

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

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