

# UK Fostering

UK Fostering Limited

Bridge House, High Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency's head office is in Kent, with two additional offices located in the Midlands and North West. At the time of this inspection, the agency provided support and supervision to 119 approved foster care households and 141 children in care. The provider states in the agency's statement of purpose that it provides warm and loving fostering families, from emergency, short-term and long-term homes for children, and a small number of specialist provisions, including remand and parent and child homes.

The registered manager has been in post since May 2012.

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: 13 to 17 September 2021

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of last inspection:** 12 March 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children are at the heart of this agency's practice. The leaders and managers inspire a culture of high aspirations and expectations for all their staff and carers to transform and improve the lives of the children. As a result, most of the children experience care which is responsive to their identity, helps them to form a positive view of themselves, and enhances their ability to form attachments and build resilience.

The registered manager said that his agency likes 'fluffy'. In this agency, 'fluffy' represents purposeful actions that signify value and care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency provided fostering families with subscriptions to streaming services for films and books. Other measures included sending children butterfly and sunflower kits, personalised letters with certificates of achievement, and children's journals in which they can log their emotions. Staff implemented many other creative initiatives to keep regular contact and provide practical support to the children and the carers.

There is a strong drive throughout the agency to improve education outcomes for the children. The children's successes, however large or small, are acknowledged and celebrated. A recent education review shows that all the children had made either some or substantial progress. Many children have ambitious goals. One child has been talent spotted with the potential to compete in the Olympic skating team. Another child plans to sit for a scholarship exam. Progress is closely monitored by the education and achievement officer to maximise opportunities for all the children.

Carers at the start of their fostering journey are encouraged to think beyond age-limited relationships. Many of the carers' relationships with the children continue into adulthood in 'staying put' arrangements and beyond. This provides children with support and consistency in their early adult life. The long-standing relationship emphasis for children in long-term care increases the children's sense of permanence and ability to form and sustain attachments.

Staff make high-quality matches between the children and the foster families. The matching process carefully considers the skills, experience and personalities of the carers, alongside the impact on existing family members. This helps to ensure that children joining fostering families are cared for by adults that can meet their needs. Feedback from one child's social worker stated, 'I see him in this family for life. I think this placement is life-changing for him.'

Occasionally, if unplanned endings for children occur, the welfare and well-being of the child remain paramount. Supervising social workers ensure that support is put in place to maintain and repair relationships. The registered manager is passionate that endings do not have to lead to a breakdown in relationships. As a result, many

children remain in regular contact and connected with their fostering families after they leave.

Supervising social workers provide carers with information and resources to collate memory boxes for the children. Carers are encouraged to write later life letters, print out photographs, and save mementos. For example, one carer took great care and sensitivity to write a beautifully worded later life letter that captured special memories between that carer and the child. Photographs are also saved on the agency database to mitigate against them becoming lost. Staff and the carers recognise the importance of the children developing their understanding and narrative of their life story.

The carers' diaries and the staff's records use a caring and appropriate language. Managers and the staff recognise that these records belong to the children. They ensure that records do not use stigmatising language, in preparation for when the children may wish to access them.

Carers actively encourage the children to lead full and active lives. Children have access to a broad range of activities, hobbies and opportunities to try new experiences. An affiliated charity to the agency provides annual opportunities (pre-COVID-19) for a group of the children to visit India and take part in a school-based community project. This experience provides the children with life-enhancing personal growth opportunities, as well as lasting memories for them.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Safeguarding is central to the staff's practice. Managers and the supervising social workers know and follow procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of the children. When safeguarding issues occur, leaders, managers and the staff are open and seek to learn, inform and improve future practice. Regular staff team meetings, reflective practice, and learning from serious case reviews support learning and development. Consequently, supervising social workers are not complacent. They remain alert and curious about risks to children.

Leaders and the staff purposely radiate inclusive values throughout the fabric of the agency. Carers feel valued and are well equipped to provide attuned nurturing care. Children build trusting relationships with their carers who know them well and understand their needs. Consequently, the children feel safe, loved and well cared for.

Carers benefit from supportive relationships with their supervising social workers and the managers. Help and advice is readily available for the carers when they need it. The carers appreciate and value the support provided by the agency. The agency provides regular support groups, alongside smaller support groups for male carers and parent and child carers. This ensures that the carers receive effective support and develop confidence in themselves when dealing with difficult situations.

Leaders recruit practitioners from specialised safeguarding backgrounds to enhance practice. Staff monitor and provide support for fostering families where exploitation and risks outside the home are a concern. Risk assessments and safe care plans support the carers to safely meet the needs of children in their care.

Carers' supervision meetings have a clear purpose. Supervising social workers support and challenge carers, ensuring they are meeting the children's needs and have the resources to do so. Children enjoy regular time with their carers' supervising social workers. This builds good rapport between them. These visits, along with unannounced visits, ensure that the children have regular opportunities to speak to known professionals and can share any worries or concerns.

The agency fostering panel fulfils its quality-assurance function through providing insightful and helpful feedback to the agency about the quality of assessments and external overview of practice. Panel members provide an effective gatekeeping role for ensuring that unsuitable adults do not become foster carers. Thorough scrutiny by the panel and the agency decision-maker ensures that carers are only approved if they have the necessary skills and experience to provide safe and caring homes for the children.

The in-house children's care council reflects the inclusive ethos of the agency. Its members include children in care, carers' birth children, unaccompanied children, and a young person who was previously fostered. This forum provides the children with an excellent opportunity to have their views heard. Moreover, the agency learns about how the children are feeling and what is important to them.

Staff encourage the children to develop ideas and projects. A recent example includes the children's care council input into the development of personalised welcome bags for children. Small acts of kindness promoted by the agency help the children experience a sense of belonging to the fostering family from the outset.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The registered manager and the responsible individual are directors of the company. They are visible, innovative and accessible leaders with an unwavering focus on continuous improvement to provide high-quality care. Managers undertake regular monitoring and have a sound understanding of what is happening in the lives of all the children.

Leaders promote an inclusive and welcoming culture within the agency. Cultural needs are well catered for and considered, such as ensuring Muslim children are provided with a Quran. Another example involved a manager and a supervising social worker facilitating an online support group for Afghan children in response to recent events in Afghanistan. Leaders, managers and the staff ensure that the carers promote all aspects of diversity. This helps the children to develop a positive self-view and explore their identity and cultural heritage.

There is a careful selection of the fostering households and the staff. The agency benefits from a centralised safer recruitment process that provides good recruitment and vetting practices. This prevents unsuitable people from having access to the children.

A broad and varied training is a strength of the agency. Research-informed practice is evident in the training programme. The completion of training is carefully tracked, and the attendance is excellent. However, one carer who was caring for an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child had not received specific trafficked children training. This has now been completed. Other recommendations made at the last inspection have been fully met; however, the training recommendation is restated.

Some minor shortfalls were found in some records, such as paperwork signed with the wrong dates and a foster carer agreement not signed at the time of their approval. These shortfalls were addressed on inspection, and in part were due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The introduction of a bespoke digital interactive information system has been a major development for the agency. The new system enables the quicker sharing of information and improved management oversight, which will reduce the likelihood of administration errors. Of significance is the potential of this system to increase the children's engagement with their care planning and personal development.

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

### **Recommendation**

- The registered person must ensure that suitable training is made available to foster carers, to assist them in meeting the needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. In particular, ensure foster carers that care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have specific trafficked children training. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 20.8) This recommendation was made at the last inspection and is restated.

### **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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## **Inspectors**

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