

# Pyramid Care CIC Fostering

Pyramid Care Community Interest Company

Ravenshill Farm, Tibberton, Droitwich WR9 7NR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This community interest company was established in 2012. It is a non-profit making organisation. The fostering service offers a number of different types of placements for children. These include emergency and unplanned placements, respite placements, long-term placements, specialist placements for children with disabilities, and parent and child placements.

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2012.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 8 to 12 November 2021

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

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

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:** 25 September 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Children enjoy exceptionally positive relationships with their foster families. They benefit from long-term stability, with many staying with their carers for several years. Children feel welcomed and included in the wider foster family. They develop strong bonds with their carers, with some referring to them as 'mum' and 'dad'. The agency maintains a 'family feel' where all staff, including the registered manager, know the foster carers and children well. This positive and highly nurturing ethos sets the foundation for children's exceptional progress.

Staff and foster carers work exceptionally hard to settle children when they first move in with their new carers. They provide high levels of nurture and embed consistent boundaries and routines. Foster carers and staff closely scrutinise children's progress over time. Creative and innovative play-based strategies support children to manage difficult emotions and feelings. As a result, children make exceptional progress in a range of areas, including their emotional regulation, education, sense of identity, confidence and relationship building. A social worker told the inspector, 'This agency has high expectations of their foster carers and the care children receive. The children have come on leaps and bounds emotionally and physically.'

The agency works alongside a range of professionals to provide children with specialist and well-informed care. For example, the agency has commissioned a consultancy service to embed and oversee the agency's therapeutic play-based support model. External agencies work closely with staff and foster carers to implement and review a range of play-based strategies. This well-informed approach supports children with complex needs to make significant progress. A strength of the agency is its ability to adapt and use a range of support strategies to meet children's individual needs. For example, some children benefit from intensive one-to-one support while other children enjoy informal weekly 'catch-up' meetings.

Some children have a poor and disjointed education experience prior to living with their foster families. However, the registered manager, staff and foster carers quickly set children on the path to education stability and success. Staff and foster carers act as strong advocates for children. They act as any good parent would by working closely with teachers to address barriers to learning. For example, staff supported teachers to understand and implement a child's play-based support strategies throughout the school. This joined-up and well thought-through approach supports children to make excellent academic and social progress, considering their starting points.

The agency holds weekly activity events throughout the year, in which children, their foster families and staff participate. The events are agency-wide and provide the children with a chance to develop skills while forming friendships and a sense of belonging. For example, some children enjoy a weekly singing club, and staff

organise and take part in special events at Christmas and Easter. Children also enjoy a week-long annual residential trip. These enjoyable experiences bring children a sense of joy and strengthen the bond between them.

Children's health needs are consistently met to a high standard. Staff ensure that individual and detailed health assessments are in place. Children attend regular appointments at the dentist, general practitioner and optician. Age-appropriate healthy relationship support is offered by staff to some children as a proactive response to their developing needs.

Children's care continues to develop and evolve over time. This is due to the proactive and determined approach of the registered manager and senior leaders. For example, staff continually use research to explore the impact of trauma on children's neurological development. They use this specialist knowledge to create individual strategies for children. On occasions, the registered manager commissions an external psychologist and multi-disciplinary team of professionals to provide additional oversight and assessment of children's needs. This attention to detail means that children benefit from exceptionally well-informed care.

The quality of assessments of prospective foster carers is excellent. The registered manager provides good oversight of the analysis of the applicant's strengths and vulnerabilities. Staff use their excellent understanding of foster carers to inform placement decisions. As a result, they are very careful to match children to foster carers who can meet their assessed needs. Managers also carefully consider the impact of admissions on members of the fostering household. For example, staff use a range of booklets to prepare the wider foster family for the child's arrival.

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

Children feel safe and protected and are not exposed to risk. Detailed risk assessments and safer caring plans capture all known risks. In addition, staff use the agency's play-based support model to assess and manage children's behaviour. For example, each foster carer is provided with a comprehensive anxiety management plan which provides them with a range of play-based strategies to support children. Consequently, children learn to self-regulate by using subtle and enjoyable activities. As a result, most children experience positive relationships with peers and foster carers and make great progress in reducing their challenging behaviours.

Foster carers do not give up on children when they display challenging behaviour. This is in part due to the high level of support provided by staff. Foster carers and staff persevere and use professional expertise to help children to reduce their challenging behaviours. When necessary, staff provide foster carers and children with additional activities and respite care to help manage periods of crisis. This proactive and child-centred approach plays an important role in stabilising the child's placement. A foster carer told the inspector, 'I went through a difficult period. The agency was there for me. They called me daily. They were always a presence. They don't undermine you. They gave advice and empowered me to be his [child] carer. Their support was invaluable.'

Staff support and encourage children to take age-appropriate risks. For example, staff support children to enjoy safe and healthy relationships. Staff act, as any good parent would, by getting to know the children's friends and their families. This approach helps children to build key independence skills in a safe and controlled environment.

Overall, staff ensure that allegations are fully addressed through detailed and transparent investigations. They work in partnership with other professionals, including the designated officer and social workers to promote the safety and welfare of children. Following investigation, staff present a comprehensive summary report of the process to the fostering panel for further scrutiny. On one occasion, staff did not notify the designated officer in a timely manner about an allegation involving a foster carer. The impact of this shortfall was lessened as a child protection investigation had already started and staff intervened to keep children safe.

Most children are very settled in their foster homes and incidents of restraint are rare. Overall, foster carers use restraint as a last resort to prevent the child injuring themselves or others or causing serious damage to property. However, on one occasion, the use of restraint was not appropriate or proportionate. In addition, a small number of foster carers are not fully trained in the agency's behaviour management model. This means that some foster carers do not have the appropriate skills and knowledge to use restraint. To date, this has not had an impact on children's care. The registered manager acknowledges this vulnerability and plans to address it.

Staff actively promote safe care and make at least one unannounced visit to each foster carer annually. Children can speak with trusted staff without their foster carers being present. They also provide feedback about their foster carers for their annual reviews. Consequently, children feel safe and heard.

Recruitment of staff and panel members is robust. All appropriate checks are made as part of the initial application, including the applicant's previous work experience and any gaps in their employment. Appropriate references are obtained and verified, and criminal record checks undertaken. Foster carer recruitment is equally robust. All required checks are completed prior to the application being presented to the fostering panel. Staff provide children with opportunities to scrutinise new employees as part of the recruitment process.

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

The passionate and inspirational registered manager and staff lead by example. The registered manager has managed the agency since its inception in 2012. Throughout this time, he has overseen the development and growth of the service, while ensuring that the focus of the agency remains child centred. The agency has not rested on its laurels since the last inspection. The registered manager and staff have implemented positive changes that have sustained the outstanding status of the

agency. Foster carers and staff feel inspired by this continual journey of improvement. This creates a culture of high expectation for children's care.

The registered manager and staff place a strong emphasis on monitoring children's progress. Systems to monitor the quality of children's care are exceptional. For example, the registered manager commissions an independent social worker to gather foster carers' views each month. The responsible individual scrutinises this feedback to identify learning. In addition, staff take part in 'fostering analysis of business' meetings to explore strengths and areas for development.

Children are at the heart of the agency. The registered manager, staff and leaders care about the children as if they were their own. This ethos is shared by the foster carers, who take deep pride in children's achievements and progress. Foster carers have access to 24-hour support. Effective support and guidance support foster carers to manage periods of challenge and crisis. As a result, children benefit from stable and highly nurturing care.

Staff feel valued and supported. They know foster carers and children exceptionally well. Staff benefit from a robust training programme and high-quality supervision and development opportunities. The agency social workers benefit from a small and manageable caseload. They use this as an opportunity to provide foster carers and children with exceptional support. An agency social worker told the inspector, 'Lesser cases does not mean lesser quality. We use this time well. We follow up all queries and get answers for our foster carers and children. We will go that extra mile.'

The functioning of the panel is a strength of the agency. The panel chair has extensive experience in fostering and is clear about the role of the panel. The panel central list has a range of skills which include social work, health, education and fostering. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. The quality of foster carers' assessments presented at the panel is of an exceptional standard. The panel also carries out an effective quality assurance role to provide additional scrutiny of staff practice and the agency's overall performance.

Foster carer and staff relationships are exceptionally strong. This is because of the high level of ongoing formal and informal support foster carers receive. For example, staff provide foster carers with a robust and bespoke training programme, frequent welfare calls, high-quality supervision and annual reviews. In addition, staff provide foster carers with a range of meditation and massage therapies to promote relaxation. Foster carers feel appreciated and believe children are at the heart of the agency. A foster carer told the inspector, 'They [staff] are always there for me. They will support children no matter what. They are an agency like no other.'

Foster carers enjoy support groups, social events and other opportunities to meet collectively. This provides foster carers with regular opportunities to discuss the demands of the role in a safe environment and to share good practice. A foster carer described the agency as 'one big family'.

Children routinely provide verbal and written feedback about their experiences. This feedback is used as an integral part of foster carer reviews and staff appraisals. Children complete an 'all about me' booklet prior to their statutory reviews of care. This means that children feel listened to and valued.

Staff have strong and effective working relationships with a range of external agencies. They have established an excellent reputation with local authorities. Feedback provided by professionals during the inspection was unanimously positive. Some local authorities told the inspector that they use the agency as an example of good practice. An independent reviewing officer told the inspector, 'I enjoy working with the agency. They are very caring and supportive, and they offer significant support to foster carers and children. The quality of their reports is amazing. I use them as the standard for all other reports.'

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

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that—</p> <p>restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 13 (1)(2)(c))</p>	3 January 2022

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that allegations against people who work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering agency to the designated officer. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 45, paragraph 22.6)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are fully trained to equip them with the knowledge and skills to use restraint when necessary. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 13, paragraph 3.8)

### 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:** SC453308

**Registered provider:** Pyramid Care Community Interest Company

**Registered provider address:** St Anne's School, Spetchley Road, Spetchley,  
Worcester WR5 1RS

**Responsible individual:** Stuart Day

**Registered manager:** Yaf Yafai

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## **Inspectors**

Gareth Leckey, Social Care Inspector  
Patrick McIntosh, Social Care Inspector



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