

Tutis Foster Care

Tutis Foster Care Limited

13 Duke Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7ER

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency was registered in July 2015. The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short term
- long term
- respite.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 11 approved fostering households, caring for 15 children.

The registered manager was formally registered with Ofsted in April 2020. However, she is a director of the agency, being actively involved in the setting up and operation of the agency from the outset.

This inspection involved both on-site and off-site inspection activity. Foster carers and children were able to take part by video and telephone calls.

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: 10 to 14 January 2022

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	requires improvement to be good

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

Date of last inspection: 22 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

Children live in stable and secure foster families. Wherever possible, children move in with and out of their foster families in a planned way, lessening their anxiety. Many children are living with their foster carers on a permanent basis. Children are well supported by their foster carers and feel part of the family. Young adults have been able to remain living with their family under 'staying put' or 'shared lives' arrangements. One child has also been legally adopted by their foster carers since the last inspection. These permanent arrangements help children to thrive.

The agency's practice is very child centred, with staff knowing the children well. Staff prioritise children's progress, ensuring that decisions are made in their best interest. Staff will also challenge placing authorities if required. The agency's staff are familiar to children, as they visit regularly, and they see them at family activity events. These have continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with some virtual events such as 'Tutis has got talent' and a Christmas quiz. They have recently been to an outdoor activity centre and to a theme park together. This enables staff to get to know the children and, consequently, children feel that they can talk freely to them. It also provides opportunities for children to meet with others who are in a similar position to themselves, reducing feelings of difference and isolation.

The agency's children's worker is proactive. He will set up specific groups if he feels this would be helpful. He also meets with children to ascertain their views prior to their carers' annual review. This enables children to contribute their views in a helpful and child-centred way. Additionally, the children's worker will provide time-limited childcare for foster carers if required. He is known to children and carers, who value his support.

Children are fully involved in usual family activities. Their individual interests and talents are actively encouraged, such as attending cadets or playing rugby. Foster carers go out of their way to ensure that children have positive experiences while in their care. Such opportunities help to improve children's self-confidence and social skills.

Without exception, all foster carers involved, both those spoken to directly during the inspection and those that contributed their views in writing, were positive about their experience with the agency. Some have transferred from other independent fostering agencies and report that they have no regrets about moving. One foster carer commented, 'I genuinely feel that foster carers are well supported, with staff often going above and beyond. The welfare and best interests of the children are at the forefront of the agency's thinking. This philosophy is naturally instilled into their foster carers, both in the initial training carers receive, and on a daily basis.'

Several children provided positive feedback as part of this inspection and commented that they feel part of the 'Tutis family'. One child nominated his foster carer for an award from his own local authority. She won the 'Foster carer of the

year' award. As part of his nomination, the child wrote, 'It is through [Name of foster carer] explaining to me that everything isn't my fault and showing that she loved me, even when I did stuff wrong, that I've become who I am today. Basically, she changed my life for the better.' The foster carer and the agency are rightly proud of this accolade.

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers is good. Assessment reports demonstrate the skills and experiences that applicants bring to fostering. The agency has grown slightly since the last inspection, with most new enquiries coming as a result of word of mouth recommendations. A good range of post-approval training opportunities are available for foster carers and they have easy access to advice from a psychotherapist. The psychotherapist regularly attends carers' support groups and is also available for consultation on an individual basis. This ensures that foster carers are responding to children in the most appropriate way to effect positive change.

Foster carers and staff understand the significance of early trauma on children's current presentation and progress.

Children's social workers are positive about the agency. The agency consults with them when considering placing another child with the same foster carer. This helps to ensure that the needs of the children living together are compatible. However, matching documents do not include the detail of additional conversations that have taken place, or the strategies to manage any potential areas of conflict when issues are identified. This would ensure that these matters are being dealt with in the most appropriate way. Although, in the main, the required local authority documents are located on children's files, there is no regular auditing system in place to help address any omissions swiftly, or an escalation policy to ensure that matters are not left to drift.

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

The agency ensures that each child receives a children's guide to fostering when they move into their foster home. The agency has two children's guides so that information is presented in an age-appropriate format. These are easily accessible on the agency's website as well should the child misplace their copy. This ensures that children have essential information, such as how to raise any concerns about their care. However, at the time of the inspection, the email contact details for the responsible individual were incorrect and would not have reached the intended recipient. This may deter children from pursuing their concerns further.

Children say that they feel safe and secure in their foster families. This is key to their progress. Positive comments received, as part of the annual Ofsted surveys, include, 'I have a home and family where they understand me' and 'I feel more like myself now. I'm really happy and my carers are nice.'

Most children soon settle into a new routine with their foster carers. There has been a marked reduction in risky behaviour for some teenagers, as their carers have

successfully engaged them in new and interesting activities, which have motivated them. Risk management plans indicate that children's risks are identified and understood, but these documents are not routinely updated following the identification of a new concern, thus reducing their effectiveness.

The agency works with children to provide them with information about specific risks, so that they can make informed decisions. The agency's youth worker has recently completed work on substance misuse and self-injurious behaviour, as well as first aid, and bicycle safety and maintenance.

Annual unannounced visits help to ensure that children are receiving high-quality care, even when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit. Routine health and safety checks of foster carers' homes enable the agency to be confident that children are living in safe, secure and comfortable environments. However, similar assessments are not being conducted on foster carers' caravans and holiday homes to ensure that children remain safe in these settings, despite agency staff having visited these properties.

The agency undertakes suitable investigations into any complaints or allegations, including the involvement of independent investigators if required. Clear records are maintained, and outcomes are used to inform future practice.

Staff recruitment processes are thorough. The necessary checks are undertaken to satisfy managers that those employed are suitable to work with vulnerable children and foster carers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She has substantial experience of fostering, both as a practitioner and a manager. She is a director of the agency. She is currently completing her level 5 management qualification, which she is scheduled to conclude within the next few months. However, a change in the senior management of the agency, since the last inspection, has resulted in the registered manager no longer receiving any professional supervision, which would ensure her continued effectiveness and provide a safe environment for critical reflection and professional development. The registered manager is well respected by staff and foster carers.

A small team of qualified social work staff undertake the assessment and support of foster carers. The staff are well supported by an office manager and a dedicated children's worker. Independent assessors are commissioned if required to supplement the workforce. An independent adviser for the fostering panel is also a recent addition to the service, introduced to alleviate some pressure on the manager's workload.

Staff receive regular supervision, but decision-making in relation to children and foster carers is not recorded on these individual records, making an audit trail of

decision-making difficult to follow. It is also more problematic for other staff to provide accurate advice if they are called on to do so, if the case holding staff member is unavailable. Members of the central panel list and most staff receive an annual performance appraisal. However, the senior supervising social worker has not received an appraisal, due to confusion about her role, as she too is a director of the agency.

The fostering panel is appropriately constituted, and there has been an experienced panel chair. However, the chair has recently resigned and a new one has yet to be appointed. The panel provides a robust quality assurance role, ensuring that foster carers are only approved when its members are satisfied that all the necessary checks have been performed adequately.

While the agency decision is generally made promptly, the decision-maker has on one occasion requested further work and for the case to return to panel, resulting in a significant delay in the decision. Due to the delay, the foster carers would not have had the opportunity for an independent review, should they have chosen this course of action. Furthermore, the decision-maker is not always recording his decision-making process clearly, omitting to list what documents he has considered, or his own reasons for reaching his decision. This would ensure a clearer audit trail of decision-making. Additionally, the decision-maker has not yet observed a meeting of the fostering panel to assure himself of the conduct of the panel and the skills of the chair, in particular to inform the chair's annual appraisal.

The registered manager produces quarterly review reports on the quality of care and operation of the agency. A requirement was made in relation to the quality of these reports at the last inspection. While improvements have been made, shortfalls still remain. They fail to identify shortfalls in practice and target areas for improvement. They are not being used effectively to inform the development of the agency. Furthermore, reports are not being sent to Ofsted on completion, as required.

There are outstanding maintenance issues relating to the premises of the fostering agency. While staff have been home based since the onset of the pandemic, delay in addressing a damp problem in the building has resulted in further deterioration and a partial collapse of the ceiling. The premises are not currently suitable for occupation until repairs are completed. While the agency has introduced an electronic record system since the last inspection, where the majority of their records are safely stored, some archived files remained on the premises. While these files were stored in locked cabinets, burglar alarms were inoperable due to the condition of the building, limiting the files' secure storage. These records were moved to a more suitable storage facility during this inspection.

Senior managers are acutely aware of the areas for development. The impact of the pandemic and staff sickness has resulted in them having to prioritise where to concentrate their time. Positive outcomes for children have been prioritised in the short term, resulting in less time to devote to management tasks and the wider development of the agency. Senior managers now have plans in place to address these shortfalls.

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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>Specifically, that health and safety assessments are completed in relation to foster carers' caravans, and that children's risk assessments are updated swiftly following any incident of concern.</p>	25 February 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>This relates specifically to the appraisal of the senior supervising social worker.</p>	25 February 2022
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and;</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority.</p>	25 February 2022

(Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(2)(3))

Specifically, that consultation is included and evaluated, targets are set to help drive forward improvement, and that reports are sent to Ofsted in a timely way.

This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the agency's decision-maker should make a considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. (National minimum standards 14.9)
- The registered person should ensure that they only suggest foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the impact of the placement on existing household members has been fully considered, and strategies agreed to manage any potential areas of conflict. (National minimum standards 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the children's guide includes correct details about how to contact the responsible individual. (National minimum standards 16.4)
- The registered person should ensure suitable arrangements are in place for them to receive professional supervision. (National minimum standards 24.3)
- The registered person should ensure that they regularly monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standards 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that decision-making is recorded in foster carers' and children's records. (National minimum standards 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its statement of purpose, including the facilities for the secure retention of records. (National minimum standards 27.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the agency's decision-maker attends a proportion of panel meetings as an observer, in order to review the performance of the panel chair. Views about the chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel.

(The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services, Paragraph 5.15)

- The registered person should ensure that, when reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* [2009] EWCA 328 (Admin), in which the court set out guidance for the way in which an adoption agency decision maker should approach a case, whether it is a decision based on the agency panel's recommendation or the independent review panel's recommendation. This applies equally to fostering decision makers. The court said that it would be good discipline and appropriate for the decision maker to:
 - list the material taken into account in reaching the decision;
 - identify key arguments;
 - consider whether they agree with the process and approach of the relevant panel(s) and are satisfied as to its fairness and that the panel(s) has properly addressed the arguments;
 - consider whether any additional information now available to them that was not before the panel has an impact on its reasons or recommendation;
 - identify the reasons given for the relevant recommendation that they do or do not wish to adopt; and
 - state (a) the adopted reasons by cross reference or otherwise and (b) any further reasons for their decision.

(The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services, Paragraph 5.40)

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: SC489594

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Inspectors

Mandy Williams, Social Care Inspector

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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