

Beta North Ltd trading as Evolve Fostering

BETA North Limited T/A Evolve Fostering

The Old Exchange, Barnard Street, Darlington DL3 7DR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This small independent fostering agency was formerly known as Beta Care Services. From 1 September 2020, the trading name changed to Evolve Fostering. The agency has been registered with Ofsted since 2012 and operates in the north east of England.

The agency provides emergency, respite, short-term and long-term foster placements. They have several staying-put arrangements.

In addition to the responsible individual and registered manager, the agency staff team includes two supervising social workers, an agency decision-maker and one business support worker. There is currently a vacant post for a supervising social worker. The agency has external staff to complete some of their assessments.

At the time of the inspection, 35 children were being cared for in 23 approved fostering households. There is one ongoing assessment of prospective foster carers with a panel date set in March 2022.

The manager registered with Ofsted in February 2018.

We carried out an assurance visit on 18 March 2021. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 January 2022

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: 12 March 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children flourish and make remarkable progress from their starting points. The diverse range of children's needs are extremely well considered and understood by the agency and the foster families who children live with. Highly skilled foster carers receive suitable training and support from the agency, which helps them to deliver bespoke care and support to children. A professional said:

'I really cannot fault the carers or the agency. They are amazing. The progress that [name of children] have made is phenomenal. They are so therapeutic in their approach. I am confident that the carers are skilled and resilient enough to manage any challenge. I cannot praise them enough.'

Excellent matching of children with their foster families provides children with stability and consistent care. This greatly enhances the children's day-to-day experiences. The agency has very few placements that breakdown for children. When placements do breakdown, the agency supports a learning culture. They review and reflect on practice to improve outcomes for the children. A child said:

'I cried when I knew I was going into foster care, but now I feel really happy living here. My carers help me with everything. They help me to not be worried and I feel safe. There is nothing I would change, as it is all good. I am doing really well now, especially in school.'

Foster families benefit from the support of a clinical psychologist that is commissioned by the agency. Group training sessions and one-to-one consultations, delivered by the clinical psychologist, are well received by foster families. Common feedback from the foster carers about the support that they receive is described as 'invaluable' and that they feel 'valued'. Many foster carers say that the agency is 'child and foster carer focused', which is the reason that they stay with the agency.

Children achieve improved health and overall well-being. Children with complex health needs are supported extremely well, which ensures that their additional health needs are identified quickly and are then met. Foster carers work tirelessly with the children's care teams to improve the children's health and emotional and social well-being. Consequently, some children have exceeded their expected level of progress with their health because of the care and support that they are provided.

Children make exceptional progress in their education and learning. This is because the agency staff have excellent relationships with educational professionals. Children receive support in line with their educational plans, which are kept under regular review. Most children continued to attend school during the national lockdown linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided the children with good routines and structure. Children are proud and pleased to share the exceptional progress that they have made.

Children benefit from having their views, wishes and feelings considered. The agency continually reviews how the children can meaningfully engage. The agency regularly consults with the children to improve how the agency responds to their needs. For example, the children are involved in the recruitment process for new panel members. In addition, most of the children attend the events and activities that are available, which supports their foster families and their networks. The agency has innovative ideas to engage the children in different cultural events, and they encourage children's creativity. Children thrive because of their contributions.

Children's family time is supported very well. Foster carers are trained to understand the importance of children maintaining key relationships with their families. This supports effective working relationships between the foster carers and the birth families. Children have clear plans in place to ensure that their family time is promoted in line with their agreed plans. Children are supported to spend time with their birth family and friends, regardless of geographical location. Children's identity needs and overall well-being are improved because of this.

The agency provides the foster carers with opportunities to attend support groups. These meetings are well attended and well organised. They provide the foster carers with the opportunity to receive regular updates and reflect on practice, as well as offer peer support to each other. Foster carers value this protected time.

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

Children are supported to become increasingly safe. Children's risks are identified, understood and managed in line with their individual safety plans. The agency ensures that the foster carers have relevant training and clear guidance around managing the potential risks to the children. Foster carers use effective strategies to help protect the children. Children say that they feel safe.

One child has been missing from home on a number of occasions. On each occasion, the foster carers and the agency have followed the missing-from-care protocol to aid with the child's safe return. The agency reports all of these incidents to the child's placing local authority and to the police. They ensure that the child can speak to an independent adult on their return home. The manager's monitoring of these incidents ensures that the child's safety plan is reviewed and updated regularly, to better protect the child.

Children receive nurturing care and support. A clinical psychologist helps the foster carers to use therapeutic parenting techniques. This is extremely effective as the agency's proactive approach to therapeutic parenting reduces the need for foster carers to hold the children when they are in crisis. The children benefit from this level of support as they are helped to regulate their emotions and can talk about their worries and concerns with their trusted adults.

Foster carers say that they are never without support. Due to the agency being small, the carers state that they benefit from having personalised support. This is because the staff know the foster families well. A foster carer said:

'I transferred here from a large fostering agency and have been a foster carer for many years. I feel so valued and appreciated here. I should have made the move years ago. I would recommend the agency in a heartbeat. I like that if I need to speak to someone that they are there. They respond quickly, and I am never left worried. I could not do without them.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Highly effective leadership within the agency has ensured that the service continues to provide foster families with excellent care and support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Foster carers receive advice, welfare calls and unannounced visits that are carefully risk assessed, especially during a time of government restrictions. Foster carers value the relationships that they have with the agency.

The manager has fantastic oversight of the foster carers' and the supervising social workers' practice. She ensures that their practice remains safe, and that it is kept under review. For example, the foster carers and the supervising social workers receive monthly supervisions and an annual appraisal of practice. The excellent quality of supervision provides the foster carers and the agency staff with opportunities to reflect on a range of topics and discuss their professional development. Every foster carer and agency staff member have a personal development plan. This is tailored to their learning objectives.

The agency installed a new electronic system to store records. The agency commissioned an independent audit in the summer of 2021. The audit highlighted that some of the administrative tasks could be improved, especially the storing and retrieving of some of the electronic information. The leadership team has improved this service by implementing these changes. The agency continues to look for ways to develop and improve children's participation. They are currently working through a plan to achieve this.

The leadership team is highly ambitious and aspirational for their foster families. For example, they continue to make developments in the service that aim to improve foster carers' support networks. Some projects available to the children provide them with new experiences and opportunities to broaden their learning. This enriches the children's experiences, which helps them to enjoy, achieve and make a positive contribution.

The agency understands the value of having a diverse team of foster carers, staff and panel members. The agency recognises where the barriers are to enable them to recruit a varied workforce, and they have taken steps to address this. This has been effective, as the recent recruitment campaign has attracted people from different backgrounds, with varying experiences.

Children are cared for by suitable adults that are appropriately assessed through a stringent assessment process. Foster carer assessments are considered for approval by panel members who have an array of experience and qualifications. The fostering panel is chaired by an independent and experienced professional. The minutes from the panel demonstrate that the panel understand their roles and function, making evidence-based decisions. The panel administrator provides a clear appraisal of the panel's business, which informs the agency decision-makers' deliberations. Decisions made by the agency decision-maker are made in a timely manner. Her recommendations provide a clear evaluation of decision-making.

Children's outcomes improve because of the agency advocating on their behalf. The agency works well with external agencies. In some instances, the agency has commissioned expert assessments to support the children's planning. This ensures that the children access the support that they require. A professional said:

'This is an amazing agency, the best in my opinion. They just get it. They understand children. Their practice from the top down is based on evidence-based research and practice. They manage situations well before there is a crisis and this supports placement stability for children.'

The manager is very efficient in her monitoring of the service. Effective monitoring systems help the manager to monitor all aspects of practice and the children's progress. The leadership team is excellent at identifying the agency's strengths and areas for development. Together, the leadership team implement continuous developments to improve the service that deliver better outcomes for the children and their foster families.

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: SC448211

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Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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