

Safehouses Fostering

Safehouses North Limited

The Fleece, 41 Oldham Road, Denshaw, Oldham OL3 5SS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Safehouses Fostering is a small fostering agency. The agency recruits, approves and supports a range of carers who provide short-, medium- and long-term care for children of all ages. It also has carers who can accommodate parent and child placements.

The agency is owned by Five Rivers Child Care Limited. This is a national independent childcare agency providing integrated care packages of fostering, residential, education and assessment and therapy services across England.

At the time of the inspection, there were 33 approved fostering households with 54 children in placements. The manager registered with Ofsted in July 2020.

Inspection dates: 1 to 4 August 2022

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: 19 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Foster carers, and the children that they care for, receive excellent levels of support, which remain consistent. A high number of children have been living with their foster carers for many years and are settled and happy. The longevity of placements enables children to overcome previous life adversities, thrive and reach their potential.

Comments from local authority social workers and commissioners were very positive, and include:

'They offer fabulous support, and they are the right carers for him.'

'When we are looking for placements, this is the first agency we turn to.'

'She [the child] is the happiest I've seen her.'

'The reassurance for the children has been exceptionally positive.'

All the children have identified education, and attendance is extremely high. Educational support is very strong, with all children making progress and some making exceptional progress. All the children's achievements are valued and celebrated by the agency.

Children live in extremely safe and stable placements, where they make exceptional progress towards their short- and long-term goals. Children are fully integrated into their foster carer's family and benefit from holistic care that is offered by the carers and the wider agency. Irrespective of the proposed length of their stay, children's moves are well supported. They are enthusiastically welcomed into their home and this enables them to feel part of the family from the start of their placement.

Foster carers greatly appreciate the wraparound care that the agency offers. This includes regular visits and calls from supervising social workers and additional visits and advice from support workers. The dedicated teachers also offer practical support to carers and individual educational support to children. Liaison with other agencies is extremely well established and described by agencies as being 'excellent'. This highly coordinated approach ensures that children's needs are very well met, and they continue to flourish.

Foster carers consistently report that the agency is 'always there' for them, including when using the out-of-hours service. Carers feel that they can seek advice from staff who genuinely know them and the children in their care. The continuous intensive support that carers receive ensures that children's progress and any difficulties they may face are understood at a very early stage. This in turn ensures the swift consideration and allocation of additional support or services. This gives foster carers the additional confidence and reassurance they need, as well as being highly beneficial to the children.

Foster carers, commissioners and placing social workers frequently described the approach of the agency as being akin to 'a family'. One commissioner said that the agency has a 'commendable ethos'. The agency ensures that each child and all carers are very well known by all the staff. This insight underpins the holistic and excellent support that children receive not only from their carers but also from the wider agency.

Children with complex needs are being cared for by carers who are fully committed to their care. When inspectors asked a child what could be done better, the child said, 'I don't need any improvement. I've got everything I need. I'm set.' Another child said of their carers, 'They are really good parents.' The nurturing and sensitive care that children receive results in a sustained and exceptional difference to their lives. Work with birth parents in parent and child placements is excellent, resulting in a positive and significant shift in the local authority's care planning which improves outcomes for the child.

Planning for children to live with foster carers is extremely thorough and detailed. There is a shared and exceptionally joined-up approach between foster carers, local authority social workers and the agency. This approach makes a significant contribution to the speed with which children settle with their carers, minimising any anticipated disruption to their lives. Social workers commented that they were able to meet potential foster carers prior to placement. This enables them to have good insight into carers' skills and supports robust and effective decisions as to whether the placement is in the best interests of the child. Siblings not placed with the agency's carers are also treated with thoughtful consideration. For example, a sibling of one child placed was able to visit and spend time with the child's foster carers in their home. The placing social worker said that the child's sibling no longer worries about the child who is living with carers.

Foster carers respect and nurture children's sense of self, such as their cultural heritage and gender identity. This ensures that children experience high positive regard and thrive emotionally, helping them overcome previous life adversities. Through the very secure relationships that are established, children are enabled to confidently explore and develop and express themselves.

The agency goes to great lengths to listen to children's and foster carers' views. Children's views are continuously sought at an individual and organisational level. Their involvement in shaping the running and future of the agency is taken seriously. Suggestions by children for innovative change, such as the introduction of a buddying system for children by other children, has been listened to and is being piloted. Children are also involved in the recruitment of staff. They have developed questions to be asked of candidates and been part of the recruitment panel process.

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

The agency has developed a very strong safeguarding culture, and it ensures that carers receive training that is over and above that which is simply routine. For

example, the parent company expects that foster carers undertake training in safeguarding once every three years. The agency makes this mandatory for all carers every 12 months.

Weekly managerial meetings identify foster carers who may require additional support at the very earliest opportunity. This reflective practice and high-level monitoring ensure that resources are allocated in a timely and needs-led manner.

Alongside training and regular support, foster carers are kept informed through weekly newsletters that offer resources and provide additional learning and information taken from research. This enables them to better recognise the risks that children may face and take appropriate action sooner. Foster carers know what to do and who to contact when there are situations of concern, and this gives them confidence to act decisively.

Relationships demonstrating the very high level of trust and respect between foster carers and the agency make the support effective. When foster carers face challenging behaviour or difficult circumstances, there is a well-coordinated and team around the child approach to providing support. A commissioner commented that staff are proactive and seek ways to stabilise a placement in the best interests of the child. Local authorities confirmed that when children need to move placements, the agency ensures this is done in a child-centred and thoughtful way.

Children spoken to during the inspection stated they feel safe and well cared for. This has enabled them to disclose past life trauma and to receive appropriate professional support to manage their emotions and feelings. Children become safer through living with carefully selected carers who are appropriately skilled and matched to their needs.

Generally, children placed by this agency do not go missing from home. When they do, foster carers act appropriately and are well supported by the supervising social workers. Foster carers demonstrate a good understanding of their responsibilities and make a positive contribution to keeping children safe.

Complaints and allegations are promptly and thoroughly investigated. The agency works openly with other agencies to ensure that children are protected and only carers meeting the required standards continue to foster. The agency actively seeks the views of children about their care and will challenge carers when needed. There are strong links established between the agency and the local authority designated officer (LADO). Training provided by the LADO in managing allegations has further strengthened the foster carers' understanding of the safeguarding framework.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are committed and passionate about improving the experiences and outcomes for children. Children are very much at the heart of the agency's activities. The manager understands the carers and children extremely well and is driven to ensure that practice continues to be of a very high standard.

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of improvements. The manager has established a black and minority ethnic carers support group. The agency has received an Investor in Children Award and is developing an initiative that supports a pilot scheme where children offer to buddy other children who are being fostered.

Managerial oversight of children's progress is extremely thorough and underpinned by weekly case discussions that review the stability and quality of children's placements. Early identification of difficulties ensures that children and foster carers receive the support and resources very early, when they need it most.

Staff are highly motivated, and morale is positive and buoyant. They work as a team, feel valued by managers and speak very highly of the support they receive. There are extensive training opportunities for both carers and staff and the agency actively promotes professional development.

Feedback from commissioners and local authority social workers is extremely positive. They feel that the agency offers an 'excellent' service to children and that foster carers have 'stickability'.

The fostering panel is very well established and highly effective. This, combined with independent reviews of foster carers, provides robust scrutiny and challenge to the agency. The panel offers very clear and strong recommendations that are exceptionally detailed and well informed.

Managers value and promote the 'family-feel' ethos of the agency. This has been achieved through maintaining additional visits and support to carers and children over and above those stipulated by the parent company.

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: SC066668

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Inspectors

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