

# Barnardo's Fostering North East

Barnardo's

1 Lumley Court, Drum Industrial Estate, Chester le Street, County Durham DH2 1AN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's Fostering North East is a registered charity. It provides long-term, short-term, emergency and respite placements. The agency also offers specialist placements for children who have disabilities and life-limiting conditions, sexualised behaviour, parent and child, remand, unaccompanied children, staying put arrangements and for large sibling groups. The service has 29 children and young people in 28 foster carer households.

**Inspection dates: 15 and 19 August 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 **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 10 September 2018

**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 make good progress in stable and secure fostering families. This is because the agency carefully matches the children with their foster carers before they are placed. The agency ensures that as much information is shared with the local authority as possible, including detailed child-friendly foster carer profiles. These foster carer profiles are shared with the children, which helps them to settle into the family home.

Many children are settled in long-term fostering placements. They are embraced into the fostering family and are accepted as part of the day-to-day family living experience. Foster carers engage well with a range of professionals in the sharing of information and the recording of the children's daily living experiences. This enables good care planning to be in place to meet the children's needs.

Children make good progress in their education. They are supported to maintain good attendance and achieve. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of the children continued to attend school during national lockdowns. Other children were supported by their foster carers to take part in home schooling. Additionally, educational professionals provided online materials and resources to support children's learning. This more relaxed atmosphere enabled children to develop trusting and respectful relationships with their foster carers and maintain good educational routines.

Many children thrive while living with skilled foster carers, who access training from several sources, including e-learning and face-to-face sessions. Additionally, the specific needs of children such as their emotional well-being, health and safe care are supported by their foster carers, the agency, health and local authority professionals. Foster carers specifically receive training in therapeutic parenting, which is enhanced through reflective discussions with their supervising social worker. This helps foster carers to understand and support the children in their care effectively and with a nurturing approach.

The agency's staff support children to maintain family time with people who are important to them. Some children benefit from having family members welcomed into the fostering family home. The foster carers and the agency are very good at listening to children's views in this respect and arrangements are always made in the children's best interests. This enables children to develop trust in their foster carers and a sense of identity in their birth families. A professional commented on the agency as being particularly good at promoting the children's life-story work.

Children spoken with during the visit were very positive about their fostering families and the home living environment. One child said, 'The place that I live is peaceful and calm, they are animal lovers, talkative, funny and happy.' Another child commented on the many family activities such as going swimming, trips to the cinema, camping in the garden and swimming in the sea, and experiencing positive

sleepovers at a friend's house. Children enjoy positive daily experiences that promote their well-being and confidence.

The agency has continued to experience some challenges when recruiting new foster carers. There are plans in place to increase the number of foster carers that can support the needs of the children requiring a suitable fostering family. A newly approved foster carer spoke positively about the process of recruitment, assessment and training to enable them to care for a child.

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

Children spoken to say that they feel safe. The initial matching process and regular supervision supports the knowledge shared by the care team in recognising and supporting the reduction of risk to the children. Individual safe care policies provide the children and their foster carers with guidance, expectations and strategies on how to keep safe in the home and the community. These are updated regularly to ensure that actions to safeguard children are effective and proactive.

Children rarely go missing from their fostering families. A care team approach involving all relevant professionals ensures that the management and reduction of these occurrences are carefully monitored. The local authority social worker and the agency social worker work closely with the foster carer and the children, to establish strategies to support them. This helps to avoid any unnecessary disruption to the children's placements and keeps children safe from any potential harm.

The pandemic and the gradual lifting of restrictions led to the agency providing a thorough hybrid model of supervision to the children and their foster carers. This involved face-to-face and virtual visits, ensuring that the children were seen and spoken to alone. At times, the children would facilitate a virtual tour of the home, including their bedrooms, to ensure that they were provided with a safe environment in which to make progress. The agency completes two unannounced visits per year and, when necessary, more to ensure that children are safe and fostering families have the support they need.

The agency's recruitment practice for panel members and foster carers is thorough. However, the internal system for recording checks in respect of the agency's supervising social workers is inconsistent. One example was unclear in respect of the verification of references. There was no indication from information reviewed during the visit that any of the children were at risk of harm; however, this administration issue does not promote safer care recruitment practice.

Allegations made by the children are thoroughly investigated and shared with relevant professionals. The children are supported and listened to. The agency ensures that internal investigatory processes, including the review process for foster carers, are followed. However, following the conclusion of one investigation, there was a significant delay in the review of the foster carers coming to the panel. This is acknowledged by the agency, and a subsequent review of delays has taken place

and actions are in the process of being fully implemented with foster carers and other professionals. No children were harmed as a result.

A local authority designated officer commented on the efficiency of the agency in the notifications of safeguarding incidents, and the agency's good practice in the communication of any concerns and referrals. This included following advice, attending meetings and following statutory safeguarding practice. This supports the safe care of the children.

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

Leaders and managers speak positively about the children and the progress that they make. Effective monitoring and review processes enable managers and staff to identify and record the progress that children make and to identify any practice issues. The agency's tool for evaluating and recording the children's progress is a positive example of a comprehensive record that is maintained and well recorded. This supports good care planning that covers all aspects of the children's care standards, and reflects the stable and secure fostering families that the children live in.

The agency continues to promote the diversity of its fostering panel. This helps to ensure that a diverse group of people with relevant experience participate in the agency's fostering panels.

The chair and vice chair of the fostering panel are both experienced and knowledgeable about the service and the ethos of the agency. They strive to ensure that there is a thorough quality assurance process in place. The panel members are effective in their evaluation of reports submitted to them and identify key questions to support the safe care of the children. However, on one occasion, the minutes taken did not clarify the reason for the discussion and questioning. This made them difficult to follow and could lead to confusion in terms of making an informed decision by the agency decision-maker.

Staff receive regular supervision, which includes checking on their well-being. This is recognised by the staff as helpful and supportive. Foster carers also benefit from regular supervision, which is equally supportive.

The administrative support team acknowledged the support it received during the pandemic and how quickly the leaders and managers responded to the change in circumstances for all. This continues to be reflected in the positive morale within the team and many of the agency's foster carers spoken to during the visit.

There has been a delay in a small number of foster carers completing the Training, Support and Development Standards within the required timeline. This has been for a few reasons, but it is clearly an area for improvement. The agency has provided additional support to ensure that this is completed as soon as possible.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should make sure that the panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members. Specifically, in regards to recording the reasons for the discussions that take place when referring to individuals. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in staff recruitment. All personnel responsible for the recording and maintenance of safer recruitment checks are trained in, understand and operate these good practices. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 19.2)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.3)
- The registered person should ensure that as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 22.8)
- The registered person should ensure that they take action to address any issues of concern that they identify, or which are raised with them. In particular, ensure that all foster carers are aware of the timeline in respect of the review process and the return of documentation, which should be signed and dated. This is to avoid any delay in the decision-making process. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.8)

### **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:** SC042759

**Registered provider:** Barnardo's

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## **Inspector**

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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