

Young People At Heart Limited

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Thames Enterprise Centre, Princess Margaret Road, East Tilbury, Essex RM18 8RH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The registered office is in is in East Tilbury, Essex. This not-for-profit independent fostering agency has other registered offices in Doncaster and Herefordshire. The agency recruits, assesses, approves and supports foster carers and their families.

The provider registered the Essex office in April 2015. The agency offers a range of foster placements and has foster carers living in Essex and Kent. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 18 fostering households and 17 children living with foster families.

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2022.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 November 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 January 2019

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 experience stability and feel they belong. Most children have lived with their foster families for over one year. Some children have grown up with their foster families and say they do not feel as if they are a child in care. Supervising social workers appropriately match children with foster carers who can meet their needs.

Some children live with a brother or sister. Foster carers and agency staff help children to spend time with other members of their family when this reflects the children's plans. Foster carers and supervising social workers are considerate of children's heritage and cultural background. Social work assistants creatively use child-centred resources to help children to develop an age-appropriate understanding of their life story. This helps children to understand the reasons that they are in care and to understand their identity.

All children attend college, school or nursery. Foster carers and agency staff attend personal education planning meetings. This helps the network around the child to identify and action the individual support that children need to succeed in learning. Children's academic attainment often improves, and some children exceed expected targets. Older children have part-time jobs. This helps them to prepare for becoming adults and to understand financial independence.

Foster carers receive consistent support from their supervising social workers and from the wider agency. Foster carers and agency staff are effective advocates for children. Children receive timely access to specialist health appointments when this is necessary. Children's physical health and well-being significantly improve. Some children's speech and language transforms. One child, who could not speak, enjoys singing. Children's confidence and self-belief improve.

The agency likes to recognise and celebrate children's achievements. All children receive help to learn how to swim, ride a bicycle or to drive a car. The agency arranges days out and events to encourage children to express themselves and have fun. This helps to complement the many different activities that children are involved in, such as football and horse riding and going on holidays. This ensures that children develop new skills and encourages children to take age-appropriate risks.

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

Children say that they feel safe and well looked after. Children easily identify trusted adults whom they feel comfortable talking to about their worries. Children say that the agency staff are good at asking them for their views and opinions on how to improve the agency.

Supervising social workers write individualised safer care plans for each child. Sometimes, children are involved in the process. Safeguarding incidents directly linked to children's behaviour are infrequent. Children rarely go missing from their

foster homes. When incidents do occur, supervising social workers and foster carers work well together to make clear plans to reduce the risks for children. Furthermore, social work assistants routinely spend time talking with children. They help children to think about day-to-day decision-making. This helps children to learn about trust and to understand how to keep themselves safe when they go out in the local community.

Initial assessments of prospective foster carers' suitability are thorough and show good analysis of applicants' motivation to foster. Not all applications to foster result in approval. This demonstrates that the agency is committed to recruiting carers who share the agency's ethos. Prospective foster carers' children are invited to attend pre-approval training. This helps to prepare all members of the household for fostering.

The agency manages allegations against foster carers appropriately and takes seriously information which suggests that standards of care may be a concern. The agency appropriately escalates and shares information with the local authority designated officer. Foster carers are subject to review and additional enquiry from the foster panel following an independent evaluation of any concerns.

The foster panel is professionally diverse and includes representatives with lived experience. Several members have remained on the panel since the last inspection and this offers continuity. However, the quality of induction for new foster panel members lacks depth. This does not demonstrate that new members are fully introduced to the agency's ethos.

The foster panel chair has significant relevant professional experience and offers good levels of scrutiny and feedback to the agency about the quality of reports. Recommendations on the suitability of a prospective foster carer or on the continued suitability of a foster carer are clear and help the agency decision-maker to make considered decisions about approval. Nonetheless, when there is a change to a foster carer's circumstances, the agency is too slow to realise how the change may directly affect children; for example, house moves or new partners. This does not show that the agency has a proportionate approach to these assessments of risk.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by like-minded managers who share a vision to help all children to fulfil their potential. The registered manager is experienced in working in foster care.

The responsible individual and directors are the founders. They are actively involved in running this not-for-profit service. Foster carers and agency staff say that the directors are a visible and approachable presence and are achieving their vision of a child-centred agency.

Foster carers felt supported during COVID-19 lockdowns. Extra help from the agency included staff spending time virtually with children. This helped the agency to keep

in regular contact with children and foster carers while creating opportunities for fun and laughter.

Since the last inspection, there has been a change in registered manager. The responsible individual arranged for a manager from another registered office to support the team. This helped to minimise the disruption. Staff, foster carers and local authority social workers said that, since joining, the new registered manager has brought positive change. The registered manager has successfully advocated to ensure that individual children get the resources that they need from their placing local authority. This helps to improve placement stability.

Many foster carers benefit from a range of training, both in person and online. The agency is actively working to embed a model of therapeutic parenting. This helps to raise foster carers and staff's understanding of attachment and the impact of early childhood trauma. The agency has become more effective in having conversations with individual foster carers who are not meeting the minimum training expectations. However, professional development plans lack detail and do not focus enough on the needs of individual children. This does not ensure that every carer remains equipped to meet the individual and changing needs of the children in their care.

The quality and content of some children's and foster carers' records are not of a sufficient standard. Records of conversations with children during unannounced visits lack focus. This does not demonstrate that all staff and foster carers understand the agency's expectations for recording written information.

The directors are committed to continuous improvement. Since the last inspection, they have created a new quality assurance post and managers have introduced file audits. File audits are effective in identifying shortfalls in practice and recording. Nonetheless, the actions identified in the audit process are implemented slowly. This does not ensure that immediate action is taken to address issues raised from monitoring. While the other recommendations from the last inspection are met, this recommendation is repeated.

Supervising social workers and social work assistants benefit from regular professional, child-focused supervision. The introduction of practice workshops helps the agency staff to learn and reflect and implement statutory guidance and learning from recent research.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. In particular, make timely updates to the risk assessment when there is a change to a foster carer's circumstances. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 5.5)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 40, paragraph 20.5)
- The registered person should ensure that each person on the central list is given induction training which is completed within 10 weeks of joining the central list. In particular, ensure that the induction meaningfully reflects the agency's ethos and approach to the care of children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 48, paragraph 23.9)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors 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 should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. In particular, ensure that there is timely follow-up on the areas identified for improvement following case file audits. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.1)

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: SC486913

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Inspector

Rosie Davie, Social Care Inspector

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