

Caritas Care

Caritas Care Limited

218 Tulketh Road, Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston PR2 1ES

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering agency is run by a charity. It provides a range of placements to children. It is responsible for the assessment, approval, training, supervision and support of foster carers.

The agency currently supports 22 children in 30 concurrent carer placements. It also supports 32 children in 25 mainstream fostering households.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in August 2020.

Inspection dates: 26 to 30 September 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 May 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

On the whole, children are placed with foster carers who can meet their needs, and the planning for children to live with carers is carefully considered. Foster carers expressed a high level of trust in their supervising social workers. They felt that this trust aids their decision-making when considering whether they are able to meet the needs of children referred to them for placements.

Feedback from foster carers and local authority social workers was overwhelmingly positive. Foster carers said of the agency:

- 'There is a genuine sense of care and love for both the children and ourselves.'
- 'The supervising social worker is very wise, helpful and caring.'
- 'I feel I have built a great professional rapport, which has built trust, and they are able to bring the best out of me. In turn this helps the children in my care.'
- 'The support and preparation we received to be concurrent carers has been fabulous. The agency could not do any more.'

Children and their foster carers benefit from a number of services that the agency provides. Social work support assistants provide individualised and child-focused interventions such as therapeutic life-story work. The agency's therapist further complements this work. These services help carers understand how previous life experiences impact on children's development and help children to strengthen their attachments.

The majority of foster carers feel they are supported to meet children's physical and emotional health needs. The training and advice provided to foster carers contributes to children feeling well cared for, happy and secure in their homes. Most children enjoy the benefits of a positive family life. However, there has not always been timely challenge from the agency when foster carers have called the police to manage low-level behaviours from children. This is not only distressing for children but also has the potential for them to be criminalised.

Children and foster carers benefit from a specialist education consultant provided by the agency. With this support, supervising social workers are able to successfully challenge and advocate on behalf of children. This ensures children receive appropriate assessments and the education provision that best meets their needs.

Over time, children develop a sense of permanence with their foster carers. In line with their plans, they are supported to stay with their foster carers after the age of 18. Some care-experienced young adults stay in contact with the agency and receive a warm and supportive response.

Many babies and young children placed with concurrent carers benefit from achieving early permanence with their foster carers, who are also approved adopters. They are supported to develop strong attachments and a sense of belonging in their foster family from an early age. The agency provides a high level of support to these children and their carers, including at times when decisions are made for children to return to their birth family. These transitions are carefully managed to enable children to successfully transfer their attachments. Additional support is also available to carers to help them to manage and come to terms with a child moving on.

Children are supported to sustain positive family identities and many children, including those placed with concurrent carers, benefit from being able to live with a brother or sister. In line with their plans, children are helped to keep in touch with people who are important to them.

When decisions are made that children need to move on from their placements, the support to carers is not always consistent. In most cases, the agency works hard to ensure that this is achieved in the least disruptive way for the child. Foster carers work with the new placement and local authorities to enable as smooth a transition as possible. Examples of good practice also include foster carers and supervising social workers supporting parents to successfully assume care of their children, in line with local authority plans.

It was identified during the inspection that one carer who had given notice to end placements had not received visits from their supervising social worker. In another case, there had been a breakdown in the relationship between the agency and a carer. Despite support and management involvement the agency had been unable to resolve ongoing difficulties. Until raised by the inspectors managers had not considered using other resources to bring about effective change.

Children's achievements are celebrated and valued. Children's identities are well understood, and they are accepted by their foster carers, enabling them to develop a positive sense of self.

Children enjoy everyday family life. They are also given opportunities to experience new activities that may previously have been unavailable to them. This includes family holidays, meals out and community-based activities. The agency also promotes fun activities that are open to everyone within the service and their children.

Children and foster carers have been well supported through periods of national and local restrictions. The agency has been flexible in their approach to maintaining contact and providing visits. They have embraced technology to ensure that foster carers and children continue to receive timely support and children remain protected. The agency has been responsive to the impact of the pandemic on children placed with carers. Many children and carers experienced additional delays

to achieving permanency, resulting in concurrent carers being approved as foster carers for longer than initially envisaged.

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

There is a wide range of training that supports foster carers' safe care of children and increases their understanding and knowledge base. The agency strives to ensure that training remains engaging and interesting.

Children are regularly seen by supervising social workers and, on the whole, unannounced visits to carers take place at appropriate intervals. However, these are not always conducted by a qualified social worker within required timescales.

Incidents of children going missing from home are low and these have recently decreased. Foster carers work well with children to enable trust and openness to develop. This means that children become safer through the decisions they make. Generally, safe care agreements are appropriate, however, on one record it is not clear as to the levels of checks required before the foster carer gives permission for the child to remain away for the night.

Managers have responded appropriately to allegations made by children and have worked well with other agencies. However, on several occasions, the manager did not notify Ofsted.

Recruitment of foster carers follows procedures that ensure children are not cared for by adults who may pose a risk to their safety and well-being. Assessments of proposed foster carers are thorough and reports are comprehensive.

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

Collaborative working with partners is strong. Commissioners and social work professionals speak positively about the high quality of the service and good levels of communication. The vast majority of foster carers express a high degree of satisfaction with the agency.

Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about their work and morale among staff is very high. They are knowledgeable about the children placed and the strengths and areas for development of the foster carers. Staff feel the managers were very accessible and promoted a culture of openness and learning.

The fostering panel is established and effective. The panel scrutinises all information presented and provides effective and robust recommendations. However, one foster carer's annual review was not completed in line with regulatory timescales. The manager was aware of this shortfall and has taken steps to prevent any reoccurrence.

It was identified during the inspection that the process following the completion of a carer's annual review is not robust. The agency decision maker does not provide clear reasoning for the decisions made and processes for informing carers are unclear. This leaves the agency open to challenge.

The manager makes use of a range of tools and systems to monitor the effectiveness of the service. However, some staff supervisions fail to record important discussions regarding foster carers' actions and the care of children.

Most foster carers receive good formal and informal support, and this enables them to continue to offer care in challenging circumstances. However, the recording of foster carers' supervision is variable. On some occasions, support being offered to carers in these circumstances has been limited to telephone contact. Records detailing this support are not comprehensive.

A recommendation made at the previous inspection has not been met and is therefore restated. This relates to the records kept by the agency being comprehensive for example, key conversations and meetings being recorded.

There is a wide range of training available for staff and foster carers. To support children in placement, the agency promotes therapeutic approaches to caring for children to ensure their emotional needs are met.

The concurrent fostering service records are well maintained and oversight by line managers is strong. Concurrent foster carers have a strong connection with the concurrent planning service but have limited contact with the wider agency and carers spoken to did not know who the registered manager was.

It was identified during the inspection that the manager was not aware of action taken by a supervising social worker to support a carer. This action had wider implications for the child's safety, emotional well-being and confidentiality. This had not been considered by the manager until raised by inspectors.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation. A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28 (1) (2))	31 December 2022
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))	31 December 2022
The agency decision maker must ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM. (The Children Act 1989, Volume 4 Guidance and Regulations, Section 5.40)	31 December 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, identify any concerns about specific incidents and identify patterns and trends. In particular, ensure children and foster carer files contain all necessary information and are signed and dated, that third-party information is appropriately protected and demonstrate that robust action is taken to obtain missing information. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure entries in records, decisions and reasons for them are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5)

- The registered person should ensure foster carers receive support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly when children display very challenging behaviour, and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.7)
- The registered person should ensure the fostering service's approach to care minimises the need for police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and avoids criminalising children unnecessarily. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.10)
- The registered person should ensure the foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision-maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.10)
- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. ('Fostering service: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair. ('Volume 4 Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Section 5.15)

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: SC037797

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Registered provider address: 218 Tulketh Road, Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston PR2 1ES

Responsible individual: Susan Swarbrick

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Inspectors

Pauline Yates, Social Care Inspector

Caroline Bertram, Social Care Inspector

Jessica Higginson, Social Care Inspector

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