

Tree House Care Fostering Solutions

Tree House Care Fostering Solutions Ltd

Tree House Care Fostering Solutions, The Old Vicarage, 17 Heneage Road, Grimsby, North East Lincs DN32 9DZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Tree House Care Fostering Solutions is a privately run independent fostering agency. The agency provides emergency, short-term, long-term and respite placements. The agency also provides specific therapeutic placements and sibling group placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 59 approved fostering households and 80 children living with foster carers.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since July 2017.

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 December 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: 19 June 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from stability and a sense of permanence. Most children have lived with their foster carers for a long period of time. The managers actively think about long-term planning at the start of any matching processes. This includes how best to support children to return to family if this is in line with their plans.

Foster carers and the team of support staff actively promote and advocate for children's education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, every child and foster carer had the support they needed to help to maintain the education of the children in their care. Risk assessments were in place for those children who were unable to return to school. These were regularly reviewed to ensure that information remained accurate. Children have been able to achieve the results they need to progress to college and to find work due to the support given to them by foster carers and the agency.

The manager and staff team work well with other agencies, including health, education and local authorities, to ensure that children's needs are met. Children with complex health needs are cared for by foster carers with the relevant training to do so. This helps to ensure that children have the support they need to stay fit and well.

Children's birth families are valued and are an important part of children's lives. Foster carers support these relationships in line with the children's plans, and some children have returned to their birth family as a result of this support. Birth families are consulted with and are included in decisions about children's lives, which helps them to remain connected.

The agency was quick to adapt to the restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The manager prioritised foster carers' and children's health while maintaining appropriate contact throughout the pandemic. The manager was quick to revert to face-to-face visits as soon as possible, and supported the team to be creative in how this could be achieved.

The assessment of new foster carers is thorough, and the agency follow up any concerns if they arise. Prospective foster carers are given information about to what to expect from the start. This helps to ensure that carers feel well supported throughout the assessment process.

The management team has recognised the importance of children feeling welcomed into the foster carer's home, and recently implemented welcome boxes for foster carers and the children. These provide children with information, but also opportunities to bond with their foster carers, such as promoting a movie night in order to spend time together.

The agency regularly seeks the views of children, and they advocate on their behalf. When children first arrive in their new home, they are given a copy of a children's guide. This provides basic information about the agency. However, this document lacks depth and is not child focused. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that children know what to expect from their foster carers and the agency.

There are pockets of exceptional work delivered by individual staff members, such as supporting children through a bereavement. Supporting staff members also help individual children when it is identified that this would be beneficial, such as helping children with their independence. However, this additional support is not in place or considered for all children, and depends on the individual supervising link worker identifying this need.

The agency is aiming to work therapeutically and it has strong links with consultant therapists to support the foster carers and staff team. There is a clear focus on trying to upskill and embed this into everything that the agency does. However, there are some missed opportunities, and some foster carers have not been encouraged enough to access this support.

Children make progress in all areas of their lives. However, the manager's tools for capturing this and identifying areas for development are not fully effective. This is particularly evident for children aged five and under. The manager is currently working on developing a more effective system.

Support groups for children have been tried, and there are lots of opportunities for children to take part in activities to celebrate seasonal activities. However, some opportunities have not always been well received by the children. A recent reinvention of a book club has improved interaction and engagement with the children, as well as encouraging children to develop a love of reading.

Approved foster carers feel supported and receive regular supervisions. The supervisions are very child focused and have clear actions for children. However, the foster carers' professional development and emotional well-being are not always consistently discussed or addressed. It is not clearly documented. Therefore, the manager is unable to track if actions have been met and information may be lost if staff members change.

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

Incidents when children go missing from their homes are managed well. Foster carers respond well. They are proactive in looking for children and reporting them to the police to ensure that they are returned quickly. Plans are put in place to reduce reoccurrences.

Support for foster carers is in place, with a supportive out-of-hours service. The manager ensures that out-of-hours support staff know about all of the families through discussions at team meetings. This ensures that supervising link workers

understand children's needs and can offer appropriate support to the foster carers. This, in turn, helps to support children well.

There are very few incidents of children being held to keep them safe. When this takes place, the records are completed fully. The manager reviews these records and identifies areas for improvement and addresses them.

The agency responds quickly to safeguard children if an allegation is made. The actions taken help to reduce the risk of harm and ensure that all relevant professionals are notified.

Children's individual support plans are not all of a high quality and are not implemented in a timely way. This means that areas of support that children need are not identified or acted on quickly. This has the potential to hinder how foster carers respond to the children's risks and vulnerabilities.

Individual work is not always promoted to be undertaken by carers, and there is a reliance, at times, on external resources. This can mean a delay in the work being done to help children or their foster carers. While risks are reducing, more could be done to reduce this further for children.

Safe recruitment is thorough, and the provider follows safeguarding processes in detail. The manager ensures that the agency only employ the right people, who are safe to work with children.

Not all carers receive an unannounced visit twice a year as per the agency's statement of purpose. Some foster carers have had gaps of more than 14 months in between visits. The systems in place to ensure that these visits happen are not effective. This does not ensure that foster carers and children are seen as they should be, and may prevent potential concerns being identified.

Some foster carers who have had a complaint or allegation made against them do not feel well supported. Foster carers have raised concerns with the agency that they do not have access to information in a timely manner before attending panel or significant event reviews. This prevents the foster carer from being able to prepare or respond to complaints or allegations.

Despite there being clear safeguarding processes, there have been three instances where carers resigned while waiting for a review to take place due to unexplained delays. The meetings have now taken place and the information is on the foster carer's file that they would have been deregistered. However, this does impact on external safeguarding as these foster carers can continue to work with vulnerable children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager registered in 2017 and is child focused. She has supported the staff team throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that they remain connected to children, foster carers and other professionals, even when working at home.

The supervision of social workers is regular, purposeful and progressive. Staff confirm that they feel very well supported in their role. They are helped and encouraged to expand their competence and confidence in all areas of work. Consequently, this is a staff team whose members remain motivated and well equipped for their roles.

The therapeutic model of care is becoming further embedded. Some foster carers and supervising link workers understand and embrace the therapeutic model, whereas some struggle with the model. This is a continuing area of development that the manager recognises and supports.

The agency has adapted and created new training based on the needs of the children, which are ever changing. The manager continues to explore new ways of developing training to ensure that it continues to help to support the children.

The panel ensures that they have the information needed to make informed decisions and recommendations for children. The panel are good gatekeepers and offer stringent scrutiny of all applications to foster. Furthermore, the panel provide helpful feedback for the agency on the quality of reports and other matters. This helps the agency to continually develop and improve.

The process of decision-making following the panel's recommendation is good. The decision-maker considers a full range of information to satisfy themselves that recommendations are fair and based on evidence.

The manager works with her team to undertake lessons learned following complaints or areas where information may have been missed. These lessons have not yet been embedded in practice, which is preventing change from being made.

The manager is ambitious and has plans to further develop the agency. She has an action plan in place to help strengthen key areas of the service. However, progress is inconsistent, as not all identified actions have been acted on in a timely manner. For example, the manager identified the need to implement recording training for foster carers. This took six months to complete. This delay has contributed to inconsistent quality in children's records.

Due to staff turnover, the manager and team leaders made the decision to support some families in order to promote consistency. However, this has impacted on the ability for them to do their roles effectively. Plans were in place to try to prevent this from happening, but they have not been fully effective. This has contributed to some of the shortfalls in practice identified.

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

Recommendations

- The registered manager should ensure that foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 4.4)
- The registered manager 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. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short-break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered manager should ensure that as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. There is a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a foster carer should be removed as one of the fostering service provider's approved foster carers, in the interests of the safety or welfare of children. This is available to foster carers. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 22.8)
- The registered manager should ensure that they regularly monitor 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 is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- The registered manager should ensure that the foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. The child, subject to age and understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including photographs) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of (subject to age and understanding), significant life events. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.7)

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: SC033189

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