

# Greater London Fostering

Greater London Fostering Limited

20-22 Gipsy Hill, London SE19 1NL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Greater London Fostering is an independent fostering agency. It provides a wide range of fostering placements for children from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, short-term, medium-term and long-term placements. It also provides parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 109 foster carers who were providing care for 135 children. The agency also provides 'staying put' placements for 14 young people over the age of 18 years.

The agency registered in February 2004 and the manager registered in 2017. The manager is suitably qualified.

### Inspection dates: 6 to 10 March 2023

**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:** 21 January 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children are thriving and developing in warm and nurturing foster families. Managers, staff and carers celebrate children's achievements, however small. At the end of every week, staff send certificates to reward children. Staff and carers help children to develop confidence in their abilities and build their self-esteem.

Children have positive relationships with foster carers, who they see as family. Children also have good relationships with staff who work for the agency. They know staff by their names and how they help their foster carers to care for them.

Staff and foster carers carefully monitor children's educational progress. The education consultant undertakes focused work with children. Excellent and consistent liaison with virtual schools has led to children obtaining school places after being out of school for a long time, and has also prevented school exclusions. Staff and foster carers have supported children to gain university places at Oxford and Edinburgh, which are significant achievements. Managers and staff have high aspirations for children, whether this is through academic or vocational pathways.

Staff and foster carers promote children's health needs exceptionally well. Careful monitoring of their health ensures that children attend essential health appointments, with the foster carers' support. Foster carers receive appropriate training in first aid for children, as well as the administration of medication.

Children are extremely ambitious and have high hopes and aspirations for their futures. This is because managers, staff and foster carers are committed to helping children achieve and flourish. Furthermore, in creative and innovative ways, staff and foster carers support children to discover their talents and skills. The agency provides them with opportunities to try new experiences and achieve their full potential and aspirations. For example, managers arrange trips to Oxford University for children so that they can make informed decisions about their future and talk to students who come from similar backgrounds to them.

Consultation with children is a strength of this agency. Children have an independent advocate to support them in expressing their views and understanding their rights and entitlements. A youth council is in place and managers regularly consult with children through this forum regarding changes in the agency, for example, making improvements to documents. Leaders and managers use children's surveys to influence change. Children have contributed to the recruitment of foster carers and staff have consulted children on activities for large agency social events.

Children have access to a wide range of social and leisure opportunities. These are either organised by foster carers or the agency. Foster carers praise the agency for

providing discounted entries to theatres, theme parks and other places of interest to children.

Children benefit from living in stable foster families. The agency has a greater number of children remaining in placement for up to a year than the national average. This is a strength of the agency.

Highly committed, diverse, empathetic and child-focused foster carers care for children. Foster carers report that they are prepared effectively for their fostering roles. One carer stated that the initial training and support provided them with the principles, knowledge and expertise to care for children who have a wide range of needs.

Foster carers support children with their independence skills. One child told the inspector that their foster carer helped them to become 'financially literate', by thinking more wisely about how to save money. Children remain with foster carers under staying put arrangements once they turn 18. This offers young people the familiarity and stability that they need as they continue with their education or preparation for independent living.

One foster carer said, 'I'm grateful that I'm contributing a little bit in making a difference for the better in the lives of children who come under my care, and I couldn't have done it without Greater London Fostering.'

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

There is a strong safeguarding culture at this agency. Children say that they feel safe and that foster carers talk to them about being safe and that they 'look out for them'. Specific safer caring plans for children mean that foster carers and staff understand the risks for children and can respond effectively to reduce the likelihood of harm.

A highly effective risk matrix and tracking tool means that managers and staff can monitor children's risks, identify patterns in behaviour and respond to new risks immediately. Consequently, the multi-agency response to safeguarding children is highly effective because of the innovative system for sharing information between staff and managers.

Managers and staff are proactive in bringing together relevant agencies to address early signs of harm to children. Foster carers say managers and staff advocate strongly for children. They swiftly escalate serious concerns to ensure that responsible authorities are alert to the identified risks and take appropriate action to safeguard children.

Staff and foster carers receive regular training and guidance on keeping children safe. An extensive and wide-ranging training programme of online and face-to-face training covering safeguarding issues is available to staff and foster carers. The

agency provides specialist training to foster carers, for example in female genital mutilation, to ensure that foster carers have the knowledge and skills to care for children.

Foster carers use positive parenting methods to develop consistent and clear boundaries with children. They explain to children the reasons why boundaries are in place, which helps children to accept and adhere to them.

Recruitment procedures for staff and panel members are robust and ensure that only suitable and safe adults are employed. Prospective foster carer assessments follow national minimum standards and regulations in relation to the completion of statutory checks. The fostering panel is highly effective in quality assuring reports provided for their consideration, with a strong emphasis on the duty of care to children and their safety.

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

Leadership and management are exceptionally strong at this agency. Leaders and managers have extensive knowledge and experience of fostering and are at the forefront of practice. The chief executive of the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers stated, 'As an agency, they are trying to drive forward best practice across the whole sector. They willingly share good practice with other independent fostering agencies and seek wider views on practice challenges to inform their own approaches.'

Staff described leaders and managers as 'inspirational' in their approach, going 'above and beyond' to ensure children receive the best care. Leaders and managers set ambitious standards and where shortfalls in practice are identified, they respond quickly to rectify them. There is pride in the high quality of care provided to children. One staff member described the management team as, 'collaborative, and creativity mixed with respectful challenge, so that things neither drift nor go down an unchecked path'.

Leaders and managers have been successful in developing and maintaining a clear ethos and culture of child-centred practice within the agency. Staff and foster carers consistently reported a sense of being 'part of a family', where managers understand their own support needs. Managers are accessible and listen to staff and carers and 'make things happen'.

Staff receive regular reflective supervision which places an emphasis on their own well-being and development. A skilled mentor/therapist provides reflective time to staff, offers consultation on cases and acts as a mentor to newly qualified staff. Staff benefits are extremely generous, and children receive support from staff who feel valued and recognised for the skills, experience and capabilities that they bring to the agency.

Foster carers overwhelmingly praise the 24-hour support that they receive from their supervising social workers and team leaders. Supervising social workers spend time

with foster children, for example, baking and going out on trips. Foster carers appreciate this level of support and have developed close relationships with staff.

Staff and foster carers say they love working for the agency and children benefit from this level of commitment.

There is a strong focus by leaders and managers on achieving the best outcomes for children. The agency's innovative 'Positive aspirations' project helps children to identify and achieve their aspirations, no matter how small. The investment in an education and advocate lead for children is an example of leaders' and managers' commitment to ensuring that children benefit educationally from being in foster care and that staff listen to children's voices.

Highly effective reporting systems are in place to monitor children's progress, including in health, education and emotional well-being. Leaders and managers meet regularly to discuss children's progress and agree any actions to increase children's safety and enhance their progress.

The experienced panel chair manages and runs the fostering panel effectively, with an experienced agency decision-maker. The panel member central list has a wide range of expertise, which helps to reach well-informed panel recommendations. The fostering panel regularly reflects and considers ways of improving panel and agency practices.

In the main, leaders and managers notify Ofsted of serious incidents as required. On a small number of occasions, they have not informed Ofsted of the outcome of child protection investigations. This management oversight did not put children at harm.

Commissioners talk positively about their relationship with the agency in achieving stability for children. One commissioner noted that most carers have been 'really excellent', and the agency is 'one of the best I have worked with'. Another commissioner added that the agency worked in a 'very collaborative spirit', doing joint work to help the local authority improve its referral information.

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

### Statutory requirements

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

Requirement	Due date
<p>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) and schedule 7)</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must inform Ofsted of the conclusion of any section 47 child protection investigations.</p>	<p>30 April 2023</p>

### 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:** SC035327

**Registered provider:** Greater London Fostering Limited

**Registered provider address:** 20-22 Gipsy Hill, London SE19 1NL

**Responsible individual:** Melanie Yearwood

**Registered manager:** Marcella Denis

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## **Inspectors**

Colin Bent, Social Care Inspector

Louise Hocking, Social Care Inspector

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