

Synergy Fostering

Synergy Fostering Limited

Synergy Fostering Limited, Unit C2, Tavern Quay, Rope Street, London SE16 7EX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency is an independent fostering agency based in Southwark, South London. The fostering service specialises in providing a therapeutic approach to foster care. The service offers a range of placements, including short and long-term placements, respite, emergency, bridging and parent and child placements.

The agency registered with Ofsted in February 2004. The manager registered with Ofsted in December 2022.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had 24 approved fostering households with 34 children in placement. The inspector spoke with six of the children, one parent in a parent and child placement and a young person who had recently moved to semi-independent accommodation.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 March 2023

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: 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 receive care from nurturing and resilient foster carers. Children are supported by an agency which wants to maximise their potential. Foster carers express a committed dedication to their role. The vast majority of children are happier and more confident and feel part of their fostering family. Children describe their foster carers as 'nice people', 'caring' and 'great'. Foster carers express pride in children's independence skills, their progress and personal development.

A strength of the agency is the cultural matching with foster carers. Children make positive attachments, fondly referring to foster carers as relatives. A local authority placements manager confirmed that children 'are matched well'. Initial matching considers children's respective needs and clearly outlines why a specific foster carer was chosen for the child. Children also live with foster carers who can promote their religious needs. A parent gave an example of a foster carer helping them to reconnect with their faith.

Children are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. They benefit from good health outcomes. Foster carers ensure that children attend their health appointments. Foster carers also complete specialist training to manage children's health needs. Examples have been seen of improvements in children's mental health. Babies are also meeting their developmental milestones.

Children enjoy fun events with the agency and their achievements are positively recognised. Staff organise a range of group activities, which provide an opportunity for children to socialise together. Children gave examples of enjoying a wall-climbing trip, a picnic and going to a theme park. Children contribute to activity planning and a children's champion role is being introduced to give children a greater voice.

Parents in foster care with their children also have the opportunity to thrive. They receive guidance from foster carers who want to empower them. Children benefit from their parents learning the necessary skills and making the required changes for them to return home together. A parent said, 'I never would have got through this without her [the foster carer].'

Foster carers help children to develop a positive identity and maintain relationships with appropriate members of their family and friends. Examples were seen of good joint working with children's relatives and of sharing responsibilities. Foster carers understand the importance of praising the uniqueness of each child. This includes celebrating birthdays and taking photos to capture significant memories. This helps with children's life-story work.

Children's transitions are managed well. Foster carers sensitively assist children with making the transition to live with their birth family members or adopters. Older children make a smooth transition to adulthood. They maintain their relationships once they move on, which provides them with valued ongoing support.

The vast majority of children are achieving educationally. Foster carers are proud of children's educational achievements, which includes them attending further education and university. Evidence was seen of children's creative writing being published and children passing their exams. However, there is a gap in relation to the support for children not in education. Children not in education are not engaged in any meaningful activity.

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

Children confirm that they feel safe living with their foster carers. A local authority commissioner stated that the agency has 'good foster carers that provide a safe and secure home environment for children', which helps children 'flourish'. Foster carers benefit from safeguarding training which covers a range of topics, including internet safety, sexual exploitation risks and preventing radicalisation.

One of the agency's strengths is the therapeutic training offered to foster carers. Foster carers highlight how this training helps them to make a difference in the way that they interact with children. Foster carers are warm, understanding and professional in their responses to children. A child highlighted the improvements in their behaviour and that their foster carer had helped them to become 'more mature'.

Foster carers are responsive to children's trauma and complex needs. The agency uses a secure-base model which ensures that foster placements provide a safe haven when children are upset or anxious. There is a good understanding of secondary trauma and the need to ensure that foster carers' well-being is addressed.

Children develop trusting relationships with their foster carers. This is significant for some children as it enables them to share their feelings, disclose historical abuse and discuss their personal relationships. A personalised approach is taken to safe caring. Foster carers write directly to the child, explaining how they will keep them safe. Foster carers have meaningful conversations with children regarding unhealthy relationships, grooming and being safe online.

Regular health and safety checks, safe recruitment and unannounced visits help to safeguard children. The agency appropriately manages standards of care issues. Children are well supported by the agency's supervising social workers and the leaders and managers, who strongly advocate for their needs.

Some children do go missing and they are very vulnerable. Staff engage in a range of stability and professionals' meetings focused on safeguarding these children. The plans to prevent these children going missing are not always effective. Foster carers highlight when they are unable to keep a child safe. The agency's internal monitoring system also focuses on placement stability outcomes and concerns.

Children's risk assessments confirm that the risks to their welfare are generally understood and managed effectively. However, children's risk assessments are not

always updated with the most recent information following incidents or with the measures implemented to prevent their occurrence.

The agency notifies Ofsted of significant events. However, some notifications were not sent in promptly. This means that Ofsted is not kept aware of incidents in a timely manner, as legally required.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The small family feel of the agency enables all staff to have an in-depth knowledge of the service, children and foster carers. The highly experienced management team leads with passion and ambition. Leadership is centred on providing a high-quality therapeutic service for children. The registered manager has a wealth of experience and they are currently completing their required leadership and management qualification.

Leaders' and managers' active membership of national forums ensures that they are influential and keeping updated on good practice. This contributes to their ability to provide high standards of care. Children's needs are prioritised through the focused examination and evaluation of their individual outcomes. Children's artwork, photos and poems are on display in the office, which contributes to the family atmosphere.

The culturally diverse fostering panel is purposefully committed to promoting children's best interests. Central list members have a range of expertise, which includes fostering, adoption, social work, education, health and counselling. The panel chair is a highly experienced multi-skilled professional. The fostering panel constructively challenges the agency and contributes to the agency's continual improvement. There is good accountability and the fostering panel has a clear understanding of its safeguarding role.

The agency benefits from good administrative support and experienced social work staff. Social work staff find working here 'refreshing'. They appreciate the opportunity to directly support children and the ability to use their own initiative. Staff feel well supported both professionally and personally. New staff receive a structured induction and ongoing training, alongside regular supervision and team meetings.

Leaders and managers readily work in partnership with local authorities. Leaders and managers robustly challenge local authorities to provide the necessary documentation and resources to fully address identified needs. A placements manager highlighted that their local authority had 'a really positive relationship with the agency' and stated that the agency 'help us to make informed decisions'.

Children receive care from foster carers who have access to 24-hour support. Foster carers take pride in their work and the agency has high expectations of them. Foster carers feel valued and well supported. They benefit from a wide range of support groups, which includes specific groups for men, and parent and child foster carers. The agency focuses on the holistic needs of foster carers. Foster carers

appreciate the flowers, spa days and vouchers that they receive and the fun and thoughtful activities organised by the agency.

Foster carers understand the need to be child-focused and professional. Foster carers benefit from an annual conference and a wide range of training and development opportunities. All foster carers are required to complete their therapeutic training and to meet the learning objectives identified in their personal development plans. However, some of this training is still to be completed from previous years. Personal development plans do not highlight how these foster carers are going to be helped to complete the required training.

The requirement and recommendations from the last inspection have been met. A social work-qualified recruitment and placement officer has been employed to assist with the recruitment of more foster carers. There is a generally good-quality assurance system, which includes file audits. The quality of care reviews provide an evaluation of the service and there is an action plan for further improvement. The reports have limited feedback from children, foster parents and placing authorities. However, this information is gathered and is available in other documentation.

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))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must promptly notify Ofsted of significant events.</p>	1 May 2023
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The system must provide for consultation with foster carers, children and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(b) (3))</p>	1 May 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the care and support provided to children minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should a child go missing. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 5.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. In particular, they should ensure that risk assessments are updated following incidents. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.5)
- The registered person should ensure that children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 8.2).
- 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', 20.5)

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: SC043377

Registered provider: Synergy Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Synergy Fostering Limited, Unit C2, Tavern Quay, Rope Street, London SE16 7EX

Responsible individual: Gurmeet Sodhi

Registered manager: Martin Smith

Telephone number: 0203 713 7293

Email address: enquiries@synergy-fostering.co.uk

Inspector

Sharon Payne, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023