

# Eastern Fostering Services

Eastern Family Services Limited

Unit 1E, The Gattinets, Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt, Colchester CO7 6QT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This small independent fostering agency is privately owned and specialises in providing local placements to local children predominantly in the Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex areas. At the time of this inspection, the agency was supporting 28 fostering households and providing care to 45 children.

The manager registered at the same time as the fostering agency in September 2011.

### Inspection dates: 25 to 29 September 2023

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

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

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:** 16 July 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

This agency provides outstanding care and support to children and foster carers. Children thrive because of the care provided by their foster carers and the wider network of support from the agency. Foster carers feel emotionally held and valued by the team of professionals around them. This enables them to provide the stability, nurture and understanding that children need to flourish.

Children are cared for in loving homes where they feel accepted and a sense of belonging as part of a family. Children said:

'The whole family welcomed me.'

'I am so happy now that I have the family I always wanted, and I know that Eastern Fostering Services helped with this.'

'If it wasn't for them (the agency), I wouldn't have my family.'

Foster carers are supported to provide children with well-planned, warm welcomes into their new homes. Decisions about where children live are carefully considered by the team around the fostering household that knows them best. As a result, children form close, trusting relationships with their foster carers and carers' birth children and enjoy familial relationships with the wider family group.

The agency provides excellent support to help children reach their full potential and to experience new and exciting opportunities that build their self-esteem. Foster carers and staff are aspirational for children. Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated by foster carers and the agency. Children learn new skills and grow in confidence through taking part in a wide range of agency-led activities and residential trips. Memories are captured in photos and records for children to access now and in the future.

All children are attending education. There are examples of children making exceptional progress from their starting points and developing a love for learning. Children who need extra support receive this quickly. This includes help at school, private tuition and funding towards specialist assessments. Children settle well into new schools and attain the grades that they need to attend their chosen college courses.

A dedicated 16-plus worker introduced a structured independence pathway that tracks the progress of children who are preparing for adulthood. This role works in partnership with children's social workers to ensure that children are involved in decision-making and planning for their future. This helps to achieve greater certainty for children and helps to reduce anxieties about moving on. Some children remain

with their foster carers after they turn 18. The agency helps children to fight for this if it is what the child wants.

Foster carers receive high levels of support from their supervising social workers, who are proactive and responsive to the needs of everyone in the fostering household. A nurture lead and 'young mentor' offer additional peer support to foster carers and their children. This includes helping foster carers and birth children to prepare for children moving on and managing subsequent feelings of loss. Foster carers are wholly positive about the support that they receive from the agency. Foster carers said:

'I feel protected because there is so much experience in Eastern Fostering Services, they are all about the children as well as looking at how best to help us.'

'Eastern Fostering Services has been by our side the whole way.'

'They are a first-class organisation.'

Due to smaller caseloads, supervising social workers regularly spend time with children and have a detailed knowledge of children's needs and what is important to them. There are excellent examples of supervising social workers using this knowledge to inform plans for children. This includes planning and facilitating children spending time with family members in meaningful, creative ways that children and their families enjoy.

The agency is committed to involving children in decisions about their own lives and improving the service. Staff have successfully engaged children in developing practice, including in relation to the recruitment of new carers. As a result, children feel listened to, and agency improvements are focused on what matters most to children.

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

Children enjoy trusting relationships with adults who they can share any worries with and who they trust to fight their corner. When needed, the agency ensures that children have access to an independent visitor or advocate to help them share their views.

Foster carers support children to take age-appropriate risks. This decision-making is supported by assessments and plans that take account of children's individual needs. As a result, children build independence skills. Children learn how to use public transport, manage their own money and recognise dangers in the community.

All foster carers have safeguarding and first-aid training. Many carers complete these courses before they are approved in preparation for the role. All foster carers have a personal development plan and access training relevant to the children they are caring for.

Children benefit from well-informed, attuned care. The agency requires all foster carers to attend therapeutic parenting training. This therapeutic approach is further promoted at the regular support groups led by the agency's therapist. This equips foster carers to respond to children's behaviour sensitively and to use strategies that help children connect with and manage their emotions. As a result, foster carers are confident in managing incidents such as self-harming and to put in place the emotional and practical support that children need to reduce these behaviours.

Foster carers and children are provided with guidance on how to keep children safe online. The latest guidance was researched and written by the children's participation group and includes children's top 10 tips for online safety.

Foster carers respond quickly to safeguarding concerns and escalate these appropriately to the agency and the child's social worker. Managers regularly review any safeguarding concerns to ensure that actions to reduce risks are in place and that foster carers receive the additional support that they need. The agency staff are tenacious in their efforts to get up-to-date information from local authorities to help them to minimise risks to children.

Managers and supervising social workers act quickly to keep children safe. This includes when there are emerging concerns about foster carers' practice or conduct. However, action taken is not always fully coordinated with the relevant professionals. While there has been no impact on children, this practice has the potential to undermine future investigations.

The fostering panel is well established and led by a well-experienced panel chair. The panel provides appropriate scrutiny of new applicants and the ongoing suitability of foster carers. The newly appointed agency decision-maker brings clear and effective challenge. This supports the continuous improvement of the assessment and review process and the development of the skills and curiosity of panel members.

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

The appropriately qualified and experienced manager leads a culture of respect and positivity. The manager, who is also the director, is highly valued by staff and foster carers. She maintains an excellent knowledge of the children for whom the agency cares and she remains accessible to foster carers. She demonstrates a personal investment in the well-being and progress of children and foster carers. She attends all events and participation groups and personally writes to children to recognise and celebrate their achievements.

Decision-making from the top down is child centred. As a result, children's needs are consistently met. Children have access to therapy and outreach support when they need it. If support is needed from external professionals, the agency advocates strongly for this. This includes challenging placing local authorities on behalf of children and escalating children's complaints to the Children's Commissioner. A foster

carer described the agency as 'small but mighty'. A member of staff said, 'We're not afraid to put our heads above the parapet. I feel that other professionals really respect us for that.'

The agency works effectively with other professionals, who recognise the high-quality care that foster carers provide to children. Children's social workers commend staff and foster carers for regularly going above and beyond expectations for the children.

The manager has established an experienced team that offers impressive support to foster carers. Staff feel empowered to be creative in the way that they support foster carers and build relationships with children. The team is highly motivated. Staff feel privileged to work for the agency and that they are afforded the time and resources they need to make a difference to children's lives. One supervising social worker said, 'We work really hard, and we care really hard.' Another supervising social worker said, 'Working at this agency has been life changing.'

Managers have addressed all shortfalls raised at the last inspection. Management monitoring and the systems that support this have improved and now enable effective oversight of incidents and practice.

The manager and newly appointed responsible individual have a clear understanding of the agency's strengths and areas of development. There has been innovation since the last inspection to embed strong participation of children and foster carers in the development and growth of the agency. Although the agency has grown, feedback is unanimous that the agency maintains the supportive 'family feel' that contributes to the high retention of foster carers.

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

### **Recommendation**

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection. This relates specifically to coordinating responses to safeguarding concerns with relevant professionals before taking action. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.7)

### **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:** SC437835

**Registered provider:** Eastern Family Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** Unit 1E, The Gattinets, Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt, Colchester CO7 6QT

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## **Inspector**

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

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