

Three Circles Fostering Limited

Three Circles Fostering Limited

Dean Row Court, Summerfields Village Centre, Dean Row Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire
SK9 2TB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is privately owned. It provides long-term, short-term, parent-and-child, emergency, bridging and respite foster placements.

At the time of this inspection, that agency was providing foster care for 149 children in 96 fostering households.

The registered manager has been in post since the service registered in 2012.

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: 9 March 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive living with their foster carers. They are helped to make excellent progress in all areas of their lives. The warmth and commitment demonstrated by the agency's foster carers means that children receive care that is enriched with genuine love and affection.

Children, foster carers and agency staff feel valued and enjoy being part of the agency. They receive ongoing support and know that they are listened to.

Children are supported to develop a sense of belonging in their foster families. One child said, 'Honestly, I'm genuinely really happy. My family is their family and theirs is mine.' For children whose plan is long-term fostering, these strong and nurturing relationships provide children with a sense of stability throughout their childhood.

Many children, including those with additional and complex needs, remain with their fostering families into adulthood. This means that children continue to benefit from these relationships throughout their lives. The agency is committed to helping children to live with their brothers and sisters in line with their plans. This helps children to understand their early life experiences and gives them further shared experiences throughout their childhood.

Processes for identifying foster carers who can best meet children's needs are highly effective. This careful planning contributes to ensuring that children benefit from being cared for by foster carers who can meet their needs. Children are helped to move into their foster families in a planned way. Child-centred decision-making and successful moves for children are underpinned by clear, comprehensive assessments and exchanges of information between agency staff, foster carers and social workers. Children rarely leave their foster families in an unplanned way. However, records do not always clearly reflect the good practice that is taking place.

Some foster families and birth families have developed very positive and natural relationships. For one family, this has created a blended family dynamic with the child living between his extended birth family and his foster carer. This gives the child a sense of security and belonging and maintains his family identity.

A key strength of the agency is the focus on, and support for, children's education. All children, from the point of moving into their fostering family, are allocated a teacher from a commissioned teaching and advisory service. Teachers attend all children's personal education plan meetings to offer support and oversight. Teachers work directly with children at key points in their school career, such as transitions from primary to secondary school and in the lead up to completion of their secondary school education.

This educational support provided by the agency is highly valued by foster carers.

One foster carer said:

'What makes this agency stand apart is the additional teaching support they offer. This has genuinely opened up further doors for each of the children in our care. I now have children who have the confidence and the desire to achieve academically. They know that with any academic challenges that they might face there is a strong support system to advocate for them.'

Children have lots of opportunities to participate and to share their views about their care and the work of the agency. The agency's proactive and enthusiastic participation workers have worked with children to raise awareness about the specific needs of children from diverse backgrounds, including those who are young parents coming into foster families with their own children. These children now receive individual welcome packs to meet their specific needs. This ensures that all children, irrespective of background, feel valued and included.

Children benefit from receiving care that is trauma informed. Foster carers have access to high-quality training and development in the agency's model of therapeutic practice. This also incorporates one-to-one clinical support for carers that is individualised to the needs of the children in their care. This approach gives foster carers the skills to care for children in an emotionally intelligent way. This supports children to overcome adverse experiences and to develop their self-awareness and resilience.

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

Foster carers and agency staff have a strong understanding of children's needs. Foster carers are supported by a stable and skilled team of supervising social workers who help them to respond effectively to children. Foster carers and agency staff also have access to relevant training that helps them to develop their skills to identify and respond to risks. This helps to keep children safe in their foster families and in the community.

Foster carers and agency staff understand their responsibilities in keeping children safe. They share any safeguarding information in a timely manner. This enables professionals to work together to respond to and reduce risks for children.

Although foster carers know how to respond to children, written plans are not always individualised for children and do not consistently include written strategies for carers to follow. Children do not receive an age-appropriate safe care plan to help them to understand the expectations in the fostering household. These shortfalls in written records have not impacted on safeguarding practices but are missed opportunities to ensure that children and carers have access to clear, written plans.

When placing authorities do not provide statutory information for foster carers, this is not always escalated in a timely manner. Consequently, foster carers do not always have delegated authority agreements or local authority care plans to inform

their care of children. This reduces opportunities to ensure that foster carers are working in line with their legally delegated responsibilities.

Supervising social workers develop positive relationships with all children in the fostering household. All children are seen and spoken with regularly by the supervising social workers. This provides children with an additional trusted adult to speak with should they have any concerns.

When serious incidents or allegations occur, they are well managed with clear oversight from the manager. Relevant safeguarding professionals are notified as required. This ensures that there is an appropriate multi-agency response and oversight of safeguarding concerns.

The agency follows safer recruitment practices when employing staff, foster carers and panel members. This ensures that it recruits only those adults who are safe to work with children.

Foster carer recruitment processes are robust. Initial home visits and high-quality assessments include sufficient scrutiny. The fostering panel and agency decision-maker provide effective challenge and oversight to ensure that only applicants who are suitable to foster are approved.

Foster carer supervisions and review processes are effective and identify carer strengths and areas for development. Any concerns about carer practice are appropriately addressed to ensure that only foster carers who remain suitable can care for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are highly ambitious for the children in their care. They demonstrate empathetic and aspirational leadership for children, foster carers and staff. This ethos, which stems from the senior leadership team, is evident through all levels of the agency. One foster carer said, 'There is a really positive and caring culture in the agency which comes from the top all the way down. Everyone is valued equally.'

Active support and oversight from the director of the company provide an additional layer of scrutiny of practice. The director regularly shares information directly with foster carers. Foster carers can contact him directly to share their experiences.

Foster carers who shared their views with inspectors were, without exception, highly complimentary about fostering for the agency. One foster carer said:

'This agency has a real family feel. It has been a privilege to have been a part of this excellent service and being able to see children thrive and overcome some difficult experiences.'

Staff enjoy working for the agency. All staff are extremely complimentary about the support they receive to carry out their roles. Staff receive regular supervision from their line managers. This gives them the opportunity to reflect on practice and develop their knowledge. The registered manager receives practice-related supervision from an external social work qualified supervisor. As a result, there is strong support and challenge to staff across the agency.

Supervising social workers and foster carers have access to a range of role-specific training which helps them to develop and maintain their skills and knowledge. When staff and carers have an interest in a particular area of development, leaders support them to pursue and disseminate this knowledge.

A skilled and experienced external trainer supports new carers through their training and development standards portfolio. This provides carers with good-quality learning opportunities early in their fostering journey.

The agency has a learning culture which is driven by leaders and managers. There is evidence of reflection and learning from serious incidents. This learning drives positive changes in practice.

The fostering panel chair is experienced and suitably qualified. The chair facilitates effective panel meetings where all panel members contribute well to panel discussions. The agency has recognised the need to diversify panel membership, which has led to the recruitment of new panel members. There are currently no male panel members. This is something that the agency is taking action to address.

The agency decision-maker provides clear rationale for decision-making. Written decisions reflect detailed consideration of panel recommendations and the supporting documentation. Clear processes are in place for informing carers of decisions.

Leaders and managers have highly effective working relationships with placing authorities. Feedback from external professionals reflects how well regarded the agency is by professionals across the region.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that written pre-admission assessments provide a clear assessment of the needs of the child, the needs of other children in the household and how the foster carer can meet these needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that risk assessments and safer care plans provide foster carers with a detailed understanding of the risks and risk reduction strategies for each child. Children should be provided with their own age-appropriate safe care plan. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.1)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive the child's care plan and placement plan from the placing authority and should actively seek these documents if they are not provided in a timely manner. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.2)
- The registered person should ensure that as far as is practicable, panel membership reflects the issues under consideration, and, so should as appropriate, be gender balanced and reflect the diversity of the local community. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4', section 5.8)

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: SC443768

Registered provider: Three Circles Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Three Circles Fostering Limited, Dean Row Court, Summerfields Village Centre, Dean Row Road, Wilmslow SK9 2TB

Responsible individual: Jacob Sibley

Registered manager: David Edwards

Telephone number: 01625 441020

Email address: david.edwards@threecirclesfostering.com

Inspectors

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector
Aislinn Cooper, 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 children looked after, 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