

The Children's Family Trust

The Children's Family Trust

Unit 4, The Briars, Waterberry Drive, Waterlooville PO7 7YH
Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Children's Family Trust is a charitable organisation that operates five independent fostering agency services across the UK. The trust supports children from over 100 placing local authorities and is governed by a board of trustees.

The South-Central service is based in Waterlooville in Hampshire. It was registered in June 2014. This service provides support to children who need emergency, short-term, long-term and short-break placements, as well as parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the service had 23 fostering households with 25 children placed, and three children in Staying Put arrangements.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 January 2024

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: 25 February 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 benefit from individualised care from supportive and nurturing carers who are invested in their outcomes and welfare. When there are ruptures in relationships in fostering families, efforts are made by staff to ensure that these are repaired with sensitivity and that any learning is identified. Children feel comfortable with the manager and supervising social workers and will actively engage in activities with them, such as go-karting and café visits. Children know who their foster carers' social worker is and feel able to tell them if they have any concerns.

Carers show dedication to improving children's education and their health. For children with complex health and developmental needs, carers go to great lengths to ensure that children receive appropriate treatment and support.

Children's placements are generally stable. Support from agency staff is specifically tailored to support this. This is complemented by therapeutic input from commissioned services. These mechanisms help carers to remain child centred and to make decisions in children's best interests. Children who are Staying Put give positive feedback about their experience. One said, 'They [carers and staff] are supportive... I just think that they are like a family. They are inclusive.'

Matching and referral processes are carefully considered. Foster carers are allowed the time and space to consider carefully any referrals that they receive from the agency. Supervising social workers identify children's individual needs and scrutinise whether carers can realistically meet these. Carers act with tenacity and fervour to ensure that children receive good-quality care and that their rights are upheld.

Support for when a child moves in is also carefully planned. Children are encouraged to write letters to those who are newly cared for by the agency as a way of welcoming them and allaying any worries that they might have.

Children's views are taken seriously and are starting to have a meaningful influence on how the service develops. For example, children contribute their opinions through the children's participation group. For children who are less confident about contributing to group discussions, arrangements are made to support them individually. Children are encouraged to attend seasonal activities with their carers and wider family networks. Children's views are meaningfully reflected in their case records, particularly those children who may be non-speaking or who articulate their feelings through their behaviour. However, children are not always proactively encouraged to access, amend or review their records.

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

Safeguarding practice is good. When incidents occur, there is a robust response, and effective support is offered to carers by supervising social workers. The agency liaises with other professionals and the networks around carers and children to inform its response to safeguarding incidents. The manager and staff have a healthy and transparent approach to addressing safeguarding concerns.

Managers and staff follow internal procedures when addressing allegations. They ensure that standards of care reports are timely and thorough. When allegations are made by children, the provider takes steps to ensure that the child's voice is heard. Carers are also suitably supported throughout these processes.

Risk assessments for children are specific, comprehensive and impactful. Staff take care to ensure that the rights and freedoms of children are considered in these plans. Staff follow clear procedures when children go missing. Carers have a good understanding of the positive steps that they can take to reduce the likelihood of these events occurring.

Foster carers receive appropriate training to ensure that they can respond effectively to children's vulnerabilities and the risks that might affect them. When children have very complex healthcare needs, carers are matched according to their skills and experience. On one occasion, carers had sourced their own specialist training. In this instance, it would have been prudent for the agency to provide additional support and guidance.

Overall, safer recruitment processes are sound. The requirement in relation to this from the previous inspection is met.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have high ambitions for the service. Despite her brevity in post, the registered manager has a good understanding of the children and carers in this region and has developed positive relationships with them. She has high expectations for what children can achieve and places great emphasis on ensuring that therapeutic, safe care is provided for children in every placement. The agency is reaching a point of relative stability after some changes to management and staffing since the previous inspection. Overall, staff say that they feel well supported and valued by the manager.

The organisational ethos is well embedded. This means that staff and carers focus on the children and on ensuring the longevity of their placements. Carers unanimously report that this is the reason for joining (and staying with) this agency.

Supervisions and appraisals are undertaken consistently. These discussions are detailed, reflective and child focused, with an emphasis on learning.

Staff and leaders sensitively manage any conflict, and there is an open culture of learning to help resolve any concerns. For example, one carer said that staff supported them 'unwaveringly' when an allegation was made.

The manager has good oversight of the service. Audits are regularly undertaken, and information is cascaded to staff so that they have a clear picture of areas that require attention. Matching summaries and significant events records would benefit from having more detailed analysis from the registered manager. This would enable events and risks to be tracked more clearly and ensure that decision-making and escalation can be expedited when necessary.

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

Recommendations

- The registered manager should ensure that they succinctly record and track their oversight of all records kept by the service to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. They should ensure that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2).
- The registered manager should ensure that foster carers receive guidance and training to provide appropriate care if looking after children with complex healthcare needs (NMS 6.8).
- The registered manager should ensure that information about children is recorded clearly and in a way that will be helpful for children when they access their records. Children should be encouraged to access their files (NMS 26.6).

Information about this inspection

The inspector has 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: SC477622

Registered provider: The Children's Family Trust

Registered provider address: Hanbury Court, Harris Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4DJ

Responsible individual: Marina Mulholland

Registered manager: Sarah Rockett

Telephone number: 01730 770750

Inspector

Tash Williams, Social Care Regulatory 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 www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

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 2024