

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Limited

Atlas Chambers, 33 West Street, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 2RE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency is a private limited company that also owns children's homes and a school. The organisation specialises in the therapeutic care of children.

At the time of the inspection, 39 children were living in 31 approved fostering households. They offer short- and long-term care.

The manager registered with Ofsted in June 2024.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 August 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: 15 November 2021

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 build trusting and secure relationships with their foster carers, who know them well. They are seen regularly and alone by workers who use creative direct-work skills and alternative communication methods to ensure that children are supported to understand their circumstances and any changes which they may experience. The colourful children's guide provides clarity about how to make a complaint.

Children make good progress in many areas of their lives because of the care and support they receive from their foster carers. Children experience a wide range of activities which enrich their lives. They are supported to develop new interests and hobbies and to participate in community activities. Most children have been on holiday with their foster carers.

Foster carers support children to meet their physical and emotional health needs. If a child wishes, they can access specialist therapy. This provides an opportunity to safely make sense of their emotions, feelings and past experiences. Foster carers also access therapeutic support, which helps to develop their knowledge and insight. This helps them to meet the needs of the children in their care.

All children are in education, training or employment, and their foster carers support their individual education, development and achievements. Children are well prepared and supported for the next steps in their developmental journeys, such as starting a new school, learning about safe sex, getting a job or learning to ride a motorcycle. Children are encouraged to develop their social and life skills for adulthood through the 'life skills development programme'. Several children have lived with their foster families for many years and some young people remain with their foster families into adulthood.

Children benefit from carefully assessed and considered family time, which promotes their understanding of their individual identities and sense of belonging. Foster carers prioritise these opportunities for children, and, because of their experience and confidence in providing foster care, are proactive and flexible in organising these arrangements independently in line with children's plans. The regular child-centred placement reviews and network meetings ensure that children's plans are up to date and reflective of their individual needs.

Children's needs and vulnerabilities are carefully assessed to ensure that their foster carers can meet their needs. Thoughtful early planning supports children to positively move in and settle in their new foster homes. A small number of children have experienced an early ending to their care. Leaders and managers reviewed and analysed this and identified for these children there is insufficient recorded evidence to show how their needs will be met in their next foster family. Managers are aware of this and are working to strengthen their matching process. When unplanned endings occur, foster carers are supported to carry out restorative work with

children. This helps children to maintain their relationships with carers after their placement ends.

Staff and foster carers are reflective and curious about children's behaviours and what they may be communicating. Foster carers are supported to develop and sustain consistent, nurturing relationships with children. This helps children to start to understand their own feelings and emotions.

Prospective foster carers are welcomed to the agency and report positive experiences of the assessment and preparation process. Prospective foster carers are assessed and prepared effectively for their fostering roles. The bespoke 'skills to foster' training and the additional specialist training equip them for their fostering roles. They are well supported through the regular and effective supervision and additional activities, including the 'pod' meetings that provide a space to reflect and consider how they respond to children in line with the agency's chosen therapeutic approach.

Leaders recognise that the language used in records and risk assessments does not always reflect the therapeutic ethos of the organisation and acknowledge that there is more work to do to improve this.

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

Children live in homes that are stable, safe and secure. Children feel safe, and they each have a trusted adult who they can confide in and share their worries and anxieties with. There is robust consideration about how best to support children to be safe. Children's plans provide clarity about what is needed to promote this. Foster carers are prepared, knowledgeable and supported in how to respond to risk and matters of concern.

Foster carers and staff are trained in the agency's preferred approach to behaviour management. The agency's ethos is to support foster carers to follow and apply a therapeutic parenting approach in how they support and care for children. Foster carers use a variety of de-escalation and calming strategies to support children, and restrictive physical intervention is avoided. Children's achievements and positive behaviours are rewarded and celebrated.

When a safeguarding concern arises, it is appropriately reported, referred and investigated as required with children's needs and safety taking priority. Allegations have been appropriately reported and responded to with evidence of thorough work with others, including the local authority designated officer. This has ensured that children's safety is paramount. There is effective information-sharing with others, which is informed by a clear understanding of the child's voice and views.

Foster carers respond timely and appropriately to episodes of children going missing, which is in line with children's individual plans. Coordinated responses and referrals to others ensure that children are located as quickly as possible. Once the child returns home, they are welcomed and their welfare and whereabouts are enquired

about. A member of staff has recently been trained in how to carry out return home interviews. Following consultation with a child's placing authority, and at its request, the member of staff has carried out a child's return home interview. They have provided helpful insight regarding a child's welfare and whereabouts during the missing-from-care episode, which has then been shared with others.

Foster carers have an understanding about the risks that are present for children online. Foster carers and staff receive training regarding the potential risks and how to respond to them. For some children, social stories have been used to support them to have a greater understanding of these risks. This has helped to develop their understanding of the risks when using their mobile phones or when accessing the internet.

Safer care plans are updated as required and provide clarity about what is needed to keep children safe. Plans for older children are not routinely created in consultation with them. There is regular oversight of foster carers' homes, which ensures that children remain safe. Unannounced visits to carers' homes take place at least annually, and children are regularly seen alone to ensure that their voice and views are known and understood.

The recruitment of foster carers and staff is focused on keeping children safe. There are robust safer recruitment systems and processes in place which focus on ensuring that children are safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are ambitious and have high expectations for the children in their care. Leaders and managers are committed to the agency's ethos and aims as described in its statement of purpose. There have been changes in the management and staffing of the agency in the past year. This has now stabilised, and the newly formed team is developing and embedding into the agency. Managers have clear systems in place which support them in how they monitor and review the effectiveness of the agency, and this informs the up-to-date agency development plan. Leaders, managers and staff have a clear understanding about the agency's strengths and areas to further develop. An area the agency plans to develop further is how children participate in the development of the agency. The agency is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager.

Staff are child focused, with a clear understanding about what is required to support foster carers to meet children's needs and create an environment in which children can flourish. Children's plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that their needs are identified, met and updated to reflect progress made. Many children have lived with their foster families for several years and have enduring and strong relationships with their foster carers.

Staff receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children's experiences, plans and the progress they make. Newly appointed staff report being helpfully inducted to the agency through a variety of developmental activities. Staff

access regular team meetings, a wide variety of appropriate training and have their practice appraised at least annually. This supports their individual professional development. The agency is properly staffed and resourced.

Staff and panel members are appropriately qualified and have been suitably vetted. The diverse panel provides additional robust oversight and scrutiny, which promotes safe and secure foster placements. Panel members have an annual appraisal of their practice; however, there is little evidence to show that they have accessed regular training to support their knowledge and understanding. Leaders and managers are aware of this, and a specific day's training event is planned alongside an additional strategy to encourage independent panel members to attend.

The agency decision-maker's records are basic and further development is needed to strengthen these. The pro forma used contains helpful prompts. However, these are not being fully utilised, and the independent person's rationale and reasoning are not detailed or documented.

Foster carers are well supported through regular and effective supervision and training. This equips them to meet the individual needs of the children in their care. The additional support provided to foster carers via the practical help, responsive support through office hours and the out-of-hours service helps them to provide stable homes for children. Foster carers are supported to carry out their required developmental standards and training.

Leaders and managers have formed effective professional relationships with partners, stakeholders and voluntary groups, which positively impacts on how children's needs are met and supported. Feedback is regularly sought from children, foster carers, staff and stakeholders, with findings informing the agency's planning. Complaints and concerns have been fully explored, with complainants receiving conclusions and outcomes. Matters of concern and significant events have been notified to the required authorities.

The agency has a clear strategy and plan to recruit foster carers. This is to attract carers who can apply its chosen therapeutic parenting approach and meet children's specific demands and diverse needs. The agency is on target to recruit the aspired number of carers in line with its business plan for the coming year. The agency is financially viable.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service provider's decision-maker makes a considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel, and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.9)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure that the placement plan sets out any additional training, resources or support required. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)

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: SC463937

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Inspectors

Amanda Maxwell, Social Care Inspector

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