

Family Foster Care

Family Foster Care Limited

Apex Office Space, 1 Water Vole Way, Balby, Doncaster, DN4 5JP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was registered on 01 December 2014.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including respite, long-term, short-term, and parent and child arrangements. Placements are provided by foster carers recruited by the agency.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 41 children and had 26 approved fostering households.

The agency's staff team is comprised of the responsible individual, a registered manager, one senior supervising social worker, two supervising social workers, two administrators and two family support workers.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 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 **outstanding**

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: 10 September 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

There is significant evidence of change and progress for children. This is because of the excellent quality of care that they receive from their foster carers and the agency's practice. Children enjoy trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers who know them well and have an excellent understanding of their needs.

Children develop a sense of belonging and are fully included in their foster family's lives. Placement stability and security are high priorities within the agency. When foster carers are assessed to provide long-term care, they understand that this can also mean committing to children into adulthood. Four children currently remain with their foster carers on 'Staying Put' arrangements, and a further four children have been adopted by their foster carers.

Children's feedback about their care was overwhelmingly positive. They were able to identify the progress they have made since living with their foster carers. One child said, 'I'm like a totally different person now.'

Prospective foster carers contacting the agency feel welcomed. One foster carer said, 'They care about the children, and they care about me. They give you lots of support; I can't recommend them enough.' Another carer described the agency as being 'like a family.'

Assessments are undertaken in a timely way. They are of good quality, and strengths as well as vulnerabilities are appropriately explored and evaluated. Safer recruitment processes provide assurances that carers are suitably vetted to care for children.

Children who are new in placement are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. Children are prepared in advance of any introductions with a welcome booklet from the foster carers, which contains a profile and photographs of the carers and the things they enjoy. Children are also given a 'Welcome Box' from the agency. This contains small items such as a 'Humphrey' bear, which is the agency's mascot, a booklet that describes Humphrey's journey in foster care, and a handmade blanket. The welcome box can also be used as a memory box for foster carers and the children to place mementos in. Older children receive a sports bag with age-appropriate items.

Agency staff and foster carers are proactive in ensuring that children's language and cultural needs are met when English is not their first language. Staff use interpreters when speaking with these children and ensure that key documents, such as the children's guide, are translated into their first language. One child expressed his appreciation of how his foster carer had researched food from his home country and then would make these meals on a regular basis within the home.

Family support workers and therapeutic input are available to foster carers and children, should they require additional support. Birth children are also able to

access this support if needed. Family support workers visit children regularly and seek feedback from them about all aspects of their lives. This is undertaken routinely outside of the foster carer review process, and all feedback is used to revise the agency's development plan.

Staff and foster carers recognise the ongoing importance of birth families in children's lives. Where appropriate, birth families are invited to meetings; foster carers facilitate family time both in and outside of the foster's carers home; and regular feedback is sought. One birth parent said, 'I think [name of foster carer] is a wonderful, lovely, caring woman. My kids couldn't have gone to someone better; I really appreciate everything she does. The agency, I find, is easy to contact and will support and help wherever needed.'

Foster carers feel valued and listened to. They say that they are never without support from the agency. The registered manager and staff know all the carers and the children well and provide personalised support and advice day and night. The agency's high expectations of their staff mean that the excellent levels of care and support enhance children's experiences.

Foster carers are well prepared for the panel by the assessing social worker. They receive profiles of all panel members and information about the purpose and process of the panel. As a result of how thorough this process is, they feel fully prepared and, find it a positive experience.

The agency's response during COVID-19 was both creative and innovative. Their approach has been widely disseminated to other independent fostering agencies and has been implemented by some of them as an example of excellent practice. One foster carer said, 'Nothing changed. All our support, supervision, groups and activities carried on; they just went online.' The agency produced regular online videos as well as reading bedtime stories for children and providing care packages. When required, home visits still took place, and staff cared for children both in the foster carers' homes or took the children out on activities to allow their carers some respite.

The agency facilitates regular activities and events, which include not only foster children but also their birth children. One birth child said, 'We are all treated the same. We all receive a welcome box, easter eggs, a selection box at Christmas, birthday cards and vouchers.' Separate support groups and activities for the foster carers' own children are also facilitated. When required, staff provide transport to ensure that birth children can access the groups, and they also provide advice and support to foster carers about issues involving their birth children. This approach recognises the importance of all children and supports placement stability.

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

There is a very strong and proactive safeguarding culture across the agency. Both staff and foster carers understand their safeguarding responsibilities, and the safeguarding procedures are consistently followed. Staff work with placing local authorities and foster carers to provide highly effective planning to manage and minimise risks to children.

Staff and foster carers provide children with a clear message that their safety and well-being are a high priority to them. When children make allegations against their foster carers, these are taken seriously and thoroughly investigated. The agency has high expectations of their foster carers, which are reinforced in standards of care meetings. When concerns arise, foster carer reviews are brought forward. Independent oversight and review from the fostering panel considers the ongoing suitability of the carers. These measures ensure that only those foster carers who can provide the appropriate standards of care continue caring for children.

When children go missing from home, which is infrequent, the agency's policies are always followed. The manager has an excellent oversight of these incidents and ensures that there is a detailed package of support when risk is escalated. When children return home, the agency proactively seeks to arrange an independent return home interview. If these do not take place, as well as escalating this to the local authority, the agency conducts its own return home interviews. This proactive response enables the agency to identify any safeguarding concerns as well as any worries that the child may have.

The health and safety reviews ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of children. These include a regular review of the foster carers' health and Disclosure and Barring Service and medical checks. Unannounced home visits provide the children with regular opportunities to express their views without their foster carers being present.

Children's records, including risk assessments and safer care policies, are thorough. When new risks emerge, these documents are updated in consultation with the foster carers and placing local authorities and include clear actions for the carers to follow.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager and responsible individual have an ambitious vision for the service. They are passionate about their roles; they have high expectations and are aspirational for children. They lead by example, and there is a continual focus on listening and improvement. The registered manager understands the service exceptionally well. Regular audits and dip sampling of records helps the manager to ensure the quality of records, but this excellent practice is not always reflected on the case files. Shortfalls identified during the inspection have already been recognised and form part of the agency's development plan.

Foster carers are actively encouraged to join support groups and access training to help them meet the specific needs of the children in their care. Support groups provide foster carers with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills as well as an opportunity for peer support. Feedback from carers about these groups has been overwhelmingly positive.

Foster carers find the regularity and quality of supervision to be good. They value the opportunity to reflect on their practice. Recordings of these sessions are thorough and identify actions which are then followed up. Staff also receive regular reflective supervision that is focused on the needs of foster carers as well as the children's experiences and their plans. There are some minor inconsistencies in staff's case supervisions not being recorded on the case files and there is a lack of consistency in the quality of carers' monthly logs. These shortfalls have had no impact on children,

Panel minutes provide a comprehensive appraisal of panel business. When required, the panel appropriately raises practice issues and defers items for further work. Panel members attend bespoke training and case study reviews on a regular basis. This is an opportunity for both agency staff and panel members to come together and reflect on an assessment that has been presented to the panel with a view to learning from and improving on practice.

The agency decision maker's (ADM) oversight and scrutiny are rigorous. The decisions made and the rationale behind them are very clear. Recommendations made with regards to quality assurance ensure a high standard of work. The ADM, panel chair, registered manager, and responsible individual meet regularly to review panel business. This is an opportunity to reflect on practice and identify lessons learned to continually improve practice.

The system used to track progress does not always accurately reflect how much progress children are actually making.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that information about a child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. In particular, when tracking children's progress, ensure there is a clear evaluation of the progress they make from their starting points. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carer records are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. They should be written in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that all records kept by the service are regularly monitored to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. In particular, ensure that the registered manager's auditing and quality assurance activities are evidenced on the case records. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept on the case files of each case supervision for each member of staff. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 24.5)

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: SC483928

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Inspector

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector

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