

Family Foster Care

Family Foster Care Limited

63 Millbrook Road, Kingstown Industrial Estate, Carlisle CA3 0EU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is privately owned. It was registered in October 2013. At the time of the inspection, 16 approved fostering households were providing foster placements for 14 children and young people.

The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short-term
- long-term
- respite
- parent and child.

Inspection dates: 15 May to 18 May 2017

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	Requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 17 October 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children said that they feel safe in their foster families.
- All young people placed with the agency are attending school regularly.
- Children enjoy a range of social and leisure opportunities; this enables them to learn new skills and leads to an improvement in their self-esteem.
- The plan for some children is for them to remain with their foster families on a permanent basis. This enables them to feel part of their fostering family and to plan things for their future.
- Young people placed with the agency are rarely involved in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home.
- Foster carers feel valued by the agency and feel that they work as part of a team.
- Good-quality foster carer assessments demonstrate that the applicants have the skills necessary to be good foster carers.
- Foster carers complete their mandatory training in a timely fashion. The agency also ensures that additional foster carer training covers pertinent topics, which ensures that they retain the interest of foster carers and equip them with the skills to provide effective care.
- Effective challenge by the registered manager ensures that placing agencies are reminded of their obligations and children receive the support they need.
- The small size of the agency means that all staff have good knowledge of the agency's foster carers and children placed. This helps them to provide effective support in an emergency.
- The agency employs a part-time therapist. This ensures speedy access to advice and guidance for agency staff and foster carers.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Ensure the safe recruitment of staff.
- Improve quality assurance and monitoring to ensure that full and accurate records are maintained, that lessons learned from complaints are implemented and that the agency makes better use of electronic systems to help track children's progress.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>Ensure that the fostering service provider does not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in schedule 1. (Regulation 20(1)(3))</p> <p>Specifically, when a person has previously worked in a position the duties of which involved work with children or vulnerable adults' verification, so far as reasonably practicable, establish the reason why the employment or position ended and ensure that the agency is satisfied that those employed have the necessary insurance to transport children in their own vehicles.</p>	30/06/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering service's fostering staff. (National minimum standard 23.10)
- Ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. (National minimum standard 25.1)
- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. (National minimum standard 25.2)
- Ensure that information about the 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. (National minimum standard 26.6)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: Good

Most children are making good progress across all areas of their development. All children are attending school regularly and making good progress. This is a huge improvement for some. Many are settled with their foster families in long-term fostering placements, allowing them to feel part of the family. This sense of belonging is helping them to thrive.

The agency employs a part-time therapist. This ensures easy access to therapeutic support, both for individually commissioned work and for advice and support to foster carers and supervising social workers. Foster carers are able to 'drop in' for advice if they need assistance. Foster carers said that this support helps them to deal more effectively with some presenting behaviours displayed by young people. One foster carer commented, 'I am currently working with a child with high anxiety and who breaks things around my home on a regular basis. The therapist's training has been invaluable in my maintaining the placement.'

Foster carers celebrate children's progress and are good advocates for those in their care. A child's social worker commented, 'My child's foster carer supports him well to overcome his difficulties and takes him on holidays abroad and to specialised activities in the community.' Children are able to access a range of new activities and opportunities. This enables them to develop new talents and learn socially acceptable behaviours. This leads to improvements in their self-esteem as they start to believe in themselves.

Children have a number of opportunities to express their wishes and feelings. Supervising social workers see children regularly, as part of their support visits to foster carers, and the agency routinely asks them to provide feedback to inform the annual review of their foster carers. The agency champions young people's rights and ensures that they have access to an independent advocate, should they need one. One young person's independent reviewing officer commented, 'The agency showed good practice and acted in a very prompt, professional and considered way in promoting her rights and ensuring her views were known.' Consequently, young people feel that their views have been heard, even if ultimately a decision is made that they do not agree with.

The agency also holds regular participation events with children, as well as family activity events. During the inspection, children and their foster carers were looking forward to a day trip to Blackpool. The annual December 'drop and shop' also enables foster carers to enjoy a couple of hours' Christmas shopping with the reassurance that their children are engaged in fun activities with the agency staff.

Children and young people receive a helpful children's guide that explains what they can expect while in foster care. The agency has two versions that are targeted at different age groups of children. Children receive this on placement, along with an attractive memory box, which contains, among other things, a photo album, a

handmade blanket and a small cuddly bear with a story about his fostering experiences. This helps children to settle into their new families and encourages them to keep photographs and keepsakes during their placement.

Children receive helpful and child-centred information about their foster carers prior to placement, whenever possible. If a move is planned, children are able to meet their new foster carers in advance and they have the opportunity of an overnight stay. This enables children to seek answers to their questions and helps to lessen their anxiety about their move.

Supervising social workers are able to demonstrate the individual progress that young people make, as they know them well. Foster carers and the agency celebrate children's progress and achievements. The agency has a range of cards, with images designed by young people, which they send to mark young people's achievements. However, the agency's monitoring systems to evidence young people's improving outcomes over time are not yet sufficiently embedded to demonstrate this progress. The agency continues to make amendments to its relatively new electronic system, as currently it is not making best use of the information that it holds electronically. The approach by agency staff and foster carers also needs to be more consistent for the information to be meaningful.

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers are good. The agency participates in a range of recruitment initiatives, such as newspaper and radio advertising. Foster carers have also been recruited via word of mouth recommendation. Foster carers receive appropriate pre-approval training to ensure that they have a realistic view of the fostering task. These training sessions are held during both daytime and evening, to ensure a convenient time for applicants. Fostering assessment reports contain good analysis and evaluation, demonstrating the applicant's ability to care for children safely and competently.

Foster carers spoke positively about the agency and the support they receive. Inspectors received positive comments during the inspection. Examples of these include:

- 'I have received excellent support when I have needed it.'
- 'I feel communication from the agency is really good.'
- 'It doesn't matter who you speak to, the staff always know you and your situation.'
- 'I don't have any complaints. Staff are always there if you need them.'

The agency does its best to ensure that full information about children is available at the time of matching, so that it can ensure that foster carers have the skills to meet their needs. However, foster carers commented on the poor-quality information that they receive on occasion, as some children still require a placement in an emergency, when little is known about them. The agency has made improvements to its matching format, and inspectors saw evidence of a robust matching process. However, despite this, the agency's disruption rate remains higher than the national average. The agency is in the process of re-visiting these cases to see whether it would have been possible to identify any issues at the start, with a view to making further improvements.

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

Children said that they feel safe in their foster families. One commented in the annual surveys for Ofsted, 'My foster carers always make sure I'm safe.' Children receive information about how to make a complaint or raise any issues of concern when they are initially placed with the agency's foster carers. Annual unannounced visits also ensure that children are receiving high-quality care when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit.

Children rarely engage in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home. However, the agency engages children in information sessions, designed to help keep themselves safe. Topics recently discussed include road safety and internet safety. These interactive sessions give children the opportunity for discussion. This helps them to remember this important information.

Safe care plans and risk assessments outline the specific risks for each individual young person. They are agreed with placing social workers. However, they do not always contain sufficient detail to ensure that foster carers are clear about the specific action that they need to take. Managers were already working on improvements to the current format, at the time of the inspection, in order to improve the robustness of this document.

The agency acknowledges and deals with allegations and complaints safely. The welfare of children is the priority of staff. Records demonstrate that the agency engages in clear communication with other bodies that have safeguarding responsibilities. The agency has made amendments to its procedures when recommendations have arisen from an investigation, thus demonstrating a willingness to learn.

Foster carers are clear about their responsibilities to keep children safe. Foster carers routinely receive training in safeguarding as well as topical matters, such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. The small size of the agency and visible presence of managers means that foster carers are able to raise issues quickly and respect the registered manager's views. They feel that staff listen to them and that the agency will commission additional support or training, if they suggest that they would benefit from this. One foster carer requested a group for bridging foster carers, who are moving young children onto adoption. Consequently, the therapist was commissioned to arrange such a group. Foster carers appreciate such a response. Possibly because of such training, one child's social worker commented, in feedback taken by the agency, 'The adopters feel that [Name of the child] was very lucky to have had [Name of foster carer] as her foster carer and she made them feel very welcome.' This is essential to ensure a child's smooth transition.

This inspection identified some shortfalls in relation to the safe recruitment and employment of staff. Although this is largely satisfactory, contact had not been made with previous employers when an individual had worked in a position with

vulnerable adults, in order to confirm the reason for this employment ending. In addition, one staff member has been permitted to transport children in their own vehicle without confirmation of the necessary insurance cover being in place. This practice does not conform to the principles of safe recruitment and employment. Managers took immediate action to address these shortfalls.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: Requires improvement to be good

A qualified and experienced registered manager effectively manages the fostering service, receiving formal registration with Ofsted in July 2016. A small team of qualified social work practitioners completes the assessment and supervision of foster carers. They receive regular and good-quality supervision to support them in their roles. This also enables them to reflect on their practice. Annual performance appraisals also ensure that the agency addresses the development needs of staff and new targets are set for the coming year.

The agency has reduced in size since the last inspection, and staff members have faced the prospect of redundancy. However, recent recruitment activity and a dynamic approach to utilising the skills of staff members have resulted in increased security and a financially stable outcome. The organisation also ensured that staff were able to access independent support during this difficult time.

All foster carers complete their training, support and development standards within their first year of approval. The agency then builds on their core understanding by providing a wide range of training opportunities, both taught and online. The agency also ensures that training takes place to suit the availability of foster carers, so this includes both evening and weekend courses. The agency frequently commissions specialist training from a very experienced practitioner and trainer. Foster carers really appreciate this investment in their development, One commented, 'Because of her, we look forward to training. She makes you want to learn.' By ensuring the provision of good-quality training, along with providing direct access to the services of the agency therapist, the agency hopes to provide foster carers with the skills that they require to provide high-quality care.

The agency has a central fostering panel that meets to consider cases from across the agency's registered offices. It meets at a geographically central point. The central list of fostering panel members brings a range of experience, both professional and personal to the panel. The panel chair is independent of the agency and is suitably qualified and experienced. The panel processes ensure a suitable degree of scrutiny and challenge. The agency decision maker responds promptly and clearly lists his own reasons for reaching his decision. Panel members have access to training provided for foster carers, as well as online training. However, there has been no annual joint training day with the fostering staff for over twelve months. This would ensure panel cohesion and give the opportunity for panel members and agency staff to explore issues together.

While the registered manager audits foster carer case records, the agency's

monitoring systems are not yet fully effective, as inspectors found some documents missing, gaps in foster carer supervision records and gaps in foster carers' daily recording of children and young people. The latter makes it difficult for children to gather a true picture of their time in foster care, if they were to choose to access their records in the future. The agency responds promptly to complaints and makes appropriate notifications to HMCI and other safeguarding bodies. It has learned lessons as a result and has amended its practice accordingly. However, on occasion, some time after the event, managers lost sight of this and have resumed their original practice, forgetting the valid reasons for amending it. For example, an increase in the frequency of unannounced visits to bi-annual, to provide the agency with assurance regarding the quality of foster care, has subsequently reverted to annual.

Stakeholders described the communication from the agency as good. Managers provide effective challenge when this is necessary. The registered manager requests planning meetings when required and chases social worker for timely decisions. For example, she is currently pursuing agreement to a specialist respite provision for one young person, as this is best able to meet his specific needs.

Leaders and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They are currently in the process of drafting an organisational development plan, which will include specifics for this office. The agency has taken action to address the one requirement and three recommendations made at the last inspection. This demonstrates their desire to learn and to develop the service.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC468924

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