

Family Care Fostering

Family Care Fostering Ltd
60 School Lane, Bamber Bridge, Preston PR5 6QE
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Family Care Fostering was registered in July 2012. It operates from a main office in Preston, but also has a sub-office in Wolverhampton. This inspection considered the work undertaken at both offices. The agency provides a range of placement options for children from birth to 18 years. It provides emergency, short-term, long-term, bridging, respite and parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 44 approved fostering households providing foster placements for 60 children.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 September 2018

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|---|---------------------------------|
| Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account | good |
| How well children and young people are helped and protected | requires improvement to be 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: 5 June 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The registered manager has worked hard to address most of the issues raised at the last inspection. He is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the service.
- Foster carers and children are well supported by enthusiastic support workers and have easy access to therapeutic support.
- Many children have been able to continue to live alongside their brothers and sisters. Over half of the children placed with the agency live with a sibling.
- Placement stability rates are good. Many children benefit from long-term, stable placements.
- Children are making measurable progress from their starting points.
- All children placed with the agency attend school regularly.
- Most foster carers say that they feel valued by the agency and that they feel that they are part of the team.
- Before children meet their foster carers, they now receive helpful profiles of the foster carers and introductory visits take place whenever feasible.
- All foster carers are completing their essential post-approval training within the required timescales.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Despite many positive changes being implemented since the last inspection, further improvements are required.
- There has been a high turnover of staff, which has had an impact on several issues, such as case recording, complaints records and case auditing.
- Although reports are completed by the management team on a quarterly basis, these do not include all the information required to meet regulation or to update the directors about the operation of the service.
- There has been a delay in reporting serious incidents to Ofsted. In addition, a notification was not made in relation to one incident and other notifications contain inaccurate details.

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 a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation. (Regulation 18(4))</p> <p>Specifically, that a complete record is maintained of the whole process.</p> | 02/11/2018 |
| <p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1))</p> | 02/11/2018 |
| <p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))</p> | 02/11/2018 |

Recommendations

- Ensure that children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. (National minimum standards 4.1)
Specifically, that children's risk assessments contain pertinent information and that these are shared and agreed with their social workers.
- Ensure that when a child goes missing, the fostering service arranges a meeting in private between the child and the responsible authority to consider the reasons for their going missing. (National minimum standards 5.9)
- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and

decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. (National minimum standards 13.7)

Specifically, that all health information is clear and that the fostering panel or independent reviewing officer, in relation to foster carers' annual reviews, are updated verbally if the agency is aware of any recent update information.

- Ensure that as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. (National minimum standards 22.8)
Specifically, that a review is not completed prematurely.
- 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. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standards 25.2)
Specifically, regular auditing of foster carers' and children's records.
- Ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, and are signed and dated. (National minimum standards 26.5)
- Ensure that when considering whether or not a person is suitable to become or continue to be a foster carer, the fostering panel is required to take account of all information passed to it, and may request any further information which it feels may assist in making a recommendation, including legal or medical advice. (Guidance and regulations, volume 4: fostering services, page 42, paragraph 5.21)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children who live with foster carers for this agency make good progress across all areas of their development. They attend school regularly and do not change schools unnecessarily. Some children have made excellent educational progress and achieved good GCSE results, allowing them to follow their chosen career pathway.

Similarly, children's health needs are addressed, as they routinely attend check-ups with health professionals, such as the dentist and optician. Helpful monitoring systems, established since the last inspection, help to ensure that children are up to date with such appointments. In addition, the agency employs therapists and a psychologist to help to address children's emotional health needs. They provide advice and support to supervising social workers and directly to foster carers, as well as being available to undertake individual work with children. This ensures that issues are dealt with swiftly, before the stability of the placement is jeopardised.

Placement stability rates are good. Many children benefit from long-term, stable placements, allowing them to feel part of their foster family. This sense of belonging enables children to thrive. Over half of the children placed with the agency are living alongside a brother or sister, which helps their sense of identity and security. Similarly, the agency supports young people to remain with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. Ensuring that they only move to independence when they are ready to do so.

Foster carers offering parent and child placements do so after careful consideration and suitable training. This ensures that they can implement appropriate boundaries and ensure the safety of all those involved. There have been some successful outcomes, where the local authority's involvement with the baby has ceased because of the progress made.

Foster carers now have helpful profiles about themselves. These introduce the family in a child-friendly way and can be shared with children before they meet. Introductory visits also take place whenever feasible. These things help to reduce children's anxieties. Children also receive a visit from one of the agency's participation workers, after placement, and receive a helpful pack of useful information about the agency and whom to contact if they are unhappy in placement. Children know these workers well, as they keep in touch by sending regular newsletters and inviting children to attend frequent events. This includes day trips during school holidays and an annual adventure holiday. Staff also hold consultation events with children to help in the development of the agency.

Since the last inspection, there has been a decrease in the total number of fostering households and a small decrease in the number of children placed with the agency. Foster carers have left the agency for a variety of reasons, such as transferring to another agency, retirement and deregistration. Only two new families have been approved. The agency has not been actively recruiting new foster carers, as it has

been waiting until it felt in a strong position to do so. Those who have contacted the agency say that they felt welcome from the outset. The quality of fostering assessments has improved since the last inspection. Reports contain more analysis and evaluation, demonstrating the applicants' ability to care for children safely and competently. However, both assessments omitted health information on the applicants, leaving the reader being unclear about the condition and its implication for fostering.

Assessments have been completed in a timely manner and foster carers speak positively about the support that they are receiving post-approval. One foster carer commented, 'I have had more support in a few weeks, than I did over many years when I fostered for the local authority.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children placed with the agency seldom engage in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home. Children report positive and trusting relationships with their foster families and the agency's support workers. However, some areas of the agency's practice do not yet meet the standard for good. For instance, when children have been missing, the agency does not ensure that they receive an independent return interview to consider the reasons for them going missing from home. This hinders the agency's opportunity to address any difficulties within the foster placement.

A new and improved individualised safe-care plan and risk-assessment document is now in use. This helps to identify the high-risk areas for each child and how best to manage these. However, these have on occasion omitted relevant information, and the detail relating to events that have led to an increase in risk have not been clear. Furthermore, these documents are not routinely shared with children's social workers to ensure that all pertinent issues have been addressed.

The agency acknowledges and deals with allegations and complaints safely. The welfare of children is clearly a priority. Staff engage in clear communication with other bodies that have safeguarding responsibilities. However, records do not contain a clear chronology of actions taken and the outcome of any investigation. By cross-referencing and making further enquiries, inspectors were able to evidence the actions taken by staff. However, such information may be lost if the records are unclear or difficult to locate, especially given the staff changes in the agency.

Furthermore, in one instance a foster carer's review had been held and a recommendation made, prior to their appeal of the outcome of a complaint, so the incident had not fully concluded. This resulted in a confusing recommendation. Similarly, it is not always clear that the independent reviewing officer, or the fostering panel, has been verbally updated concerning incidents that have arisen between the completion of reports and the meeting itself. Consequently, a recommendation may be made without access to all the relevant information.

The agency provides a range of safeguarding training for staff and their foster

carers. This includes de-escalation, internet safety and radicalisation. This supports those involved with the agency to recognise the significance of changes in children's behaviour and equips them with knowledge about what to do next.

Foster carers receive regular unannounced visits, thus ensuring that children receive a positive fostering experience, even when a social worker is not expected. The agency ensures that as a minimum these take place annually but aim for twice yearly. A good-quality record is kept of these visits.

The agency undertakes staff and carer recruitment safely. This ensures that unsuitable individuals are not able to place children at risk. The agency has referred concerns appropriately to other safeguarding bodies.

The agency's current system for notifying HMCI of significant events is not robust. There is frequently a significant delay in these notifications being made. Inspectors also identified a significant event that had not been notified at all and another where the details in the notification did not reflect those in the agency's case records.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A suitably experienced registered manager manages the fostering service effectively. He received formal registration by Ofsted in April 2017. He has yet to complete his level 5 management qualification, although plans to do so soon. A practice manager supports him in his management role. However, at the time of the inspection this post was vacant, as the most recent post-holder had just left. Staff turnover continues to be a challenge for the agency, as it was at the time of the last inspection. However, senior managers are hopeful that they are now entering a period of stability, with staff committed to the ethos of the agency.

A small team of qualified supervising social workers undertakes the assessment and supervision of foster carers. Social workers receive regular supervision, which includes separate sessions for personal and casework supervision. Clinical supervision with the agency's therapists also helps workers focus on addressing challenging issues. Supervision is reflective and decision-making is clear. Those who have worked for the agency for over a year have received an annual performance appraisal. This includes discussion about their personal development. Managers are keen to consider the development needs of staff and they are currently supporting one support worker to complete his social work training. Staff appreciate this investment in their development.

The agency's fostering panel continues to meet at a geographically central point, between the two office bases. The agency has appointed a new panel chair since the last inspection and increased the number of members of the central list. However, the panel has not met frequently over the last year, because of the small number of new approvals. Consequently, some members are inexperienced and have yet to complete training on their roles and responsibilities. Inspectors identified issues that required further exploration in both assessments considered by the panel in the last year. However, panel members had not addressed these. Panel members are due to attend training relating to their role in October 2018. They are also able to access a

range of online training courses, which are available to foster carers. This will help to ensure that they are alert to all the issues that require consideration.

All foster carers approved for over a year have completed their training, support and development standards. There has also been an increase in the completion of mandatory training for foster carers. The introduction of an independent reviewing officer for foster carers' reviews has helped to encourage foster carers to complete training, reminding them that it is a requirement of fostering.

The registered manager has introduced several new monitoring systems since the last inspection, ensuring that children's progress is now well monitored. This allows managers to intervene when children are not making the expected progress. However, audits of case records for both foster carers and children are infrequent. In some instances, case records failed to indicate that important contacts with other professionals had taken place, contained incorrect dates and documents were missing. A routine audit would have ensured that these issues were rectified.

Leaders and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of the agency. They have worked hard to implement positive change since the last inspection, accepting that there is still more to do. Action has been taken to ensure the completion of the majority of the seven requirements and eight recommendations made at the last inspection. Improvements to the quality and content of quarterly management reports, designed to help improve the quality of foster care provided, would further assist the agency's change programme.

The agency has positive relationships with those commissioning its services. They report that communication with staff is good and that they have confidence in the agency. One commissioner commented, 'I meet with the manager. The agency always replies promptly to any placement requests. Matching is good: we have a number of stable placements with the agency.'

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 differences 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: SC450903

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Inspectors

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