

Fostering Solutions Limited

Fostering Solutions Limited

Priestly Court, Gillette Close, Staffordshire Technology Park, Beaconside, Stafford, Staffordshire ST18 0LQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Solutions Limited (Midlands) is one of a number of fostering agencies owned and managed by the National Fostering Group (NFG). The registered office is situated in Stafford and there is a satellite office in Long Eaton, Nottingham.

Its function is to support, supervise and provide ongoing training to foster carers so that they are able to provide a comprehensive service that addresses the physical, emotional, educational and health needs of the children and young people placed.

The fostering agency has 94 approved fostering households. There are 115 children in placement. The agency provides short-term, long-term, permanent, respite and emergency placements. It also provides specialist placements for children with complex needs, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, children who present with sexually harmful behaviour, disabled children, bridge to foster, parent and child placements and staying put.

The registered manager has been in post for over two years. She has almost completed the level 5 qualification in leadership for health and social care in children and young people's services.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 August 2022

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: 9 July 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Foster carers feel welcomed into this agency by managers and staff. Assessments of foster carers are detailed, analytical and timely. The preparation and training of prospective foster carers is thorough. This enables them to become strong advocates and set high aspirations for the children they care for. Foster carers work closely with other professionals, such as teachers, social workers and therapists. As a result, the children experience positive achievements and make good progress from their starting points.

Staff provide valuable support and supervision to foster carers. For example, some foster carers are encouraged to attend reflective and consultation sessions and can access additional support from a consultant psychologist when required.

Children flourish. There are regular opportunities for them to share their views and influence their care. They develop a strong sense of identity and experience a wide range of positive personal achievements. Foster carers and staff quickly identify any developmental delays or behavioural concerns and introduce age-appropriate routines and play to support the child's development. The well-being and stability of the children is central to the aims of foster carers and staff at this agency.

Children's education is a priority. The agency provides educational services, such as additional tutoring and online resources, to all children, including birth children. As a result, the children's attainment and school attendance are good. This agency is particularly proactive in seeking input from their internal education and careers specialists. This ensures that foster carers have expert support and the children reach their full potential.

Children participate in a wide range of activities. For example, four children are on target to complete their bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award through the agency's scheme. Foster carers support children to access hobbies and activities in their local community. As a result, the children develop existing skills and interests and acquire new ones.

Foster carers promote and celebrate age-appropriate independence. For example, one child has become head girl at her school and other children have part-time jobs. The agency's staying put arrangements encourage the children to remain living with their foster carers into adulthood. This helps children receive the support they need to become successful adults.

Children maintain family links and sustain relationships that are important to them. Foster carers help the children and their families understand their past, and to experience positive futures. They promote the birth family and proactively support contact, while always listening to the experiences of the children.

Managers celebrate the achievements of the children, foster carers and staff. For example, all newly approved foster carers receive flowers, all children receive chocolates or flowers when they complete exams, and there are long-service awards for foster carers and monthly staff, and foster carer and child awards. This means people feel valued by the agency, which enhances their sense of belonging.

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

Managers, staff and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of the children are paramount. This practice is embedded in foster carers' assessment, approval, training, supervisions and regular support groups.

Foster carers help the children learn through day-to-day discussions and experiences. Family support workers and staff undertake one-to-one sessions with some of the children to explore specific topics such as healthy relationships and managing emotions. Foster carers and staff get to know the children's friends and family members to help manage risks and keep them safe. Where appropriate, the children are supported to access external agencies such as the clinical psychologist and women's aid. This helps the children develop knowledge that enables them to make informed decisions to keep themselves safe and healthy as they become adults.

There have been some incidents of children going missing from care. There have been regular meetings with partner agencies to identify and reduce risks. As a result, incidents for these children have stopped or significantly reduced. These actions have not, however, been reflected in the children's risk assessments and records.

The registered manager takes all allegations about foster carers seriously. She quickly informs relevant partner agencies and ensures that independent support is offered to foster carers. When required, post-allegation reviews are completed. These are considered by the agency's independent reviewing officer and fostering panel, even if foster carers resign during the investigation. This independent scrutiny of the agency's practice ensures that decisions are driven by the children's best interests.

Foster carers do not ordinarily use physical intervention. When physical interventions have been needed, specialist training in de-escalation is given to those foster carers, and supervising social workers regularly reflect with the foster carer to help their development. This means that restraints are only used as a last resort to keep a child and others safe, and they are rarely repeated.

Managers and staff consult with all the children on a regular basis through supervisions, annual reviews, youth council and the youth voice tool. Children also have access to an advocacy service. As a result, the children can confidently identify adults who they can talk to and share their worries and concerns.

There is careful recruitment and regular monitoring of staff and foster carers that prevent unsuitable staff or foster carers from being recruited and having the opportunity to harm the children or to place them at risk.

Foster homes are safe and secure and protect the children from harm or the risk of harm. They provide comfortable and welcoming environments in which the children can grow and develop.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Experienced and appropriately qualified managers have good oversight of the agency. They have a clear plan and vision for the service, are reflective and drive change.

Managers know the strengths of this agency and the areas that require development. For example, the agency has gone through a period of staff changes. Managers are aware that this has caused drift in some areas of practice, including youth council meetings, second unannounced visits, foster carer supervisions and standard of records. All supervising social worker posts have now been recruited to. Managers have reviewed practice, have plans in place that are developing these key areas and are working with the staff team to ensure that good practice is embedded moving forward.

Most case records reflect the children's lives, their achievements, the work that is carried out with them and plans for their futures. The quality of these records is improving in line with manager's plans. However, some still lack clarity, and this has not been identified or addressed by staff or managers. This could impact the understanding that the children have about their histories, background and experiences and how the children are kept safe.

Leaders and managers actively and regularly monitor the quality of care provided. They use learning from practice and feedback to further develop the experiences of foster carers, staff and the care of children. For example, staff are currently trialling working a four-day week. There are plans in place to ensure all staff and foster carers have attended the foundation for therapeutic parenting training by the end of November 2022. A family space is being developed in the office and a transitions day for children moving between junior and senior school is being run for the first time in August 2022. This ensures that the agency continues to develop to meet changing needs.

Managers and staff work proactively and positively with other agencies and professionals. They build effective working relationships with social workers from placing authorities and with the local authority where they are located to secure positive outcomes for the children.

The culture of the agency is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for staff, all foster carers and the children. This is demonstrated in practice.

Staff feel well supported and receive regular good-quality supervision, appraisals, team meetings and training. They are now also accessing monthly reflection meetings with a clinical psychologist and have covered topics such as managing stress and supporting foster carers who are experiencing compassion fatigue. This ensures professional development and results in the right environment for good practice to thrive.

There is a successful range of imaginative foster carer recruitment strategies. These involve carer recruitment officers, staff, foster carers and volunteers. There is excellent management oversight, and rewards schemes and recognition for all those involved. As a result, recruitment targets were exceeded last year and have been met for this year.

Foster carers receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children's experiences, needs, plans and feedback. Foster carers receive a formal review annually. Early reviews are held when needed. Mandatory training for all foster carers has been increased. From the beginning of 2022, a greater emphasis has been placed on monitoring training through annual reviews. As a result, staff and management overview of training has increased, and specific training needs are now clearly identified and any drift is monitored.

The agency's independent reviewing officer and fostering panel are challenging and effective. They provide good-quality assurance functions. The agency decision-maker makes reasoned decisions, with comprehensive qualifying determinations. The agency decision-maker, the fostering panel chair and the registered manager meet regularly. This adds to the strong quality assurance. The panel includes a good range of qualified and experienced professionals. Panel members have annual appraisals and undergo training that helps them fulfil their roles and responsibilities. This ensures that they keep up with developments in practice.

A key strength of this agency is the child-centred decision-making when matching children with foster carers. This is comprehensive, well considered and explores the specific needs of each child and the foster carer's ability and knowledge to meet need. Another key strength is the support that staff give to foster carers who enable brothers and sisters to remain living with each other or nearby.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers know and implement the fostering service and responsible authority's policy in relation to children going missing. This specifically relates to ensuring there is an accurate record of the event and actions taken. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 5.2)
- The registered person should ensure that managers and staff regularly monitor all records to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify concerns about specific incidents and identify patterns and trends. Also, that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

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: SC060642

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