

Fostering Solutions Ltd

Fostering Solutions

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 Agency (NFA Group). It was acquired by NFA Group in 2017. Work is coordinated from Stafford, with a satellite office in Long Eaton.

The agency's statement of purpose says that its function is to, 'Support, supervise and provide ongoing training to 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.'

At the time of inspection, the fostering agency has 172 carers in 97 households. There are 142 children and young people in placement. The agency provides carer assessments and long-term, short-term, respite and 'staying put' fostering arrangements.

The manager has been in post for almost two years. He has worked in the agency for about four years. He has almost completed the level 5 qualification in leadership for health and in social care and children and young people's services.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 July 2018

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: 16 November 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Most children and young people are well matched with their carers and a high proportion of them go on to experience long-term stability. As a result, children and young people make good progress in relation to their health, education and well-being.
- Children and young people usually experience sensitive welcomes into their foster family because of careful and considered planning.
- Carers know children and young people well, listen to them and spend time with them.
- Most children and young people make good progress in recovering from the impact of their past experiences.
- The agency provides good support and training to carers so that they have the skills and resilience to meet children's and young people's emotional needs.
- Carers and the agency support children and young people to have appropriate contact with family and people who are important to them, including past carers.
- Carers are ambitious for children and young people and advocate well for them, supported by supervising social workers.
- Carers provide children and young people with sensible boundaries and seek to understand the triggers for difficult and unsafe behaviour.
- Some children and young people make significant progress with overcoming risk-taking behaviour. They receive intelligent, caring responses from their carers and specialist help.
- The agency has a strong focus on keeping children and young people safe, including ensuring that children and young people have regular opportunities to talk to their supervising social worker without their carers.
- The agency's managers have high expectations for what all children and young people can achieve in stable and long-term placements.
- The agency's managers look to continuously improve practice through learning from when things do not go to plan.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Records contain too little relevant and useful advice for carers and children and young people.
- Records are not routinely referred to or used effectively as tools to promote children's and young people's progress.
- Managers do not monitor placement endings, education and missing from care incidents effectively to identify and address any carer and staff practice issues.

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

Recommendations

- 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. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 26.6)

In particular, adapt recording styles and content, so that children, young people and carers can understand records and refer to them, thereby ensuring that records help to drive children's and young people's progress and development.

- Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media. (NMS 4.4)

In particular, improve risk management records so that they are relevant, child-friendly and usable tools. Risk management records should be understood, referred to and used in everyday practice to help children to make progress with their unsafe behaviour and understand how to stay safe.

- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. (NMS 21.8)

In particular, supervising social workers should clearly record the professional advice, strategies and insights that they give carers. Carers can then refer regularly to their meeting records in order to help them to promote children's and young people's progress more skilfully and effectively.

- The executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:
 - b. monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children. (NMS 25.7(b))

In particular, managers' monitoring reports should contain clear analysis of practice around placement endings, children and young people going missing from care and outcomes in education. This will enable managers to identify and address any shortfalls in the carer's or social work practice.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people receive high-quality care and often long-term stability. They enjoy loving, caring relationships with their carers. They feel part of their foster families and the communities in which they live. They experience interesting, active lifestyles that significantly broaden their horizons. One local authority social worker told the inspector, '[Child] has lived there for ten years – it's family.' One child told the inspector, 'I love my family. They are kind and nice and lovely.'

Children and young people progress well from their starting points in education. They also become healthier, physically and emotionally. Their carers spend time with them, listen to them and help them. Many children and young people catch up developmentally with their age group and go on to achieve well. One young person said, 'I believe that without [carers' names] support I would not be where I am today and would not have had the successes that I have had so far.'

Supervising social workers, family support workers and psychologists provide helpful and timely advice, guidance, teaching, advocacy and support to children and young people and their carers. This promotes children's and young people's social and psychological well-being. It also ensures that children and young people are heard and that their rights and entitlements are well met. One young person said, 'I love living with [name of carer]. [name of supervising social worker] comes to see me and checks on me often. They helped me make some of the cakes for my cake sale and when I have problems at school they support me.'

Carers and the agency support children and young people to have appropriate contact with family and people who are important to them, including past carers. Respite arrangements are always child-centred. This enhances children's and young people's self-esteem, emotional resilience and sense of identity.

The agency encourages and facilitates group activities, consultation and involvement, so that children and young people have a sense of belonging to a wider fostering family. For example, children and young people are involved in interviewing new staff. They have also improved the information for new children and young people coming into foster care, to help them get to know about the staff at the agency and how those staff can help them.

The agency works well with the local authority to ensure that children's and young people's moves in and out of foster care are carefully and sensitively managed. Some young people stay with their carers into adulthood. Young people get good help and support to prepare them for independent living and their carers keep in touch with them, providing ongoing support.

Records are rarely seen or used by children and young people. Records are not written in ways that help children and young people to see how carers and professionals will help them to progress and develop more as time goes by. For

example, records of direct work carried out with children and young people do not show the content or impact of the work completed. Children, young people and their carers do not have materials to refer to and use on an ongoing basis. Similarly, carers' supervision notes do not contain enough advice from supervising social workers. This means that advice gets lost and carers' skills develop more slowly.

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

Most children and young people feel safe and protected in their placements. One child said, 'Being here has made my life so much better. [Carers' names] help me when I am upset.' Carers are usually confident about how to help children and young people make safe friendships and relationships. Carers are confident about what to do if a child or young person discloses abuse.

Managers and supervising social workers are good at identifying and understanding children's and young people's risks. They train and advise carers well about providing safe care. They provide an environment that minimises the likelihood of unsafe behaviour. Supervising social workers regularly talk to children and young people on their own to check for any concerns. Children and young people say that they trust their carers, supervising social workers, local authority social workers and teachers and can talk to them about any concerns.

Most carers for teenagers have a good understanding about risks associated with offending, drugs, self-harm, going missing from care, sexual exploitation and radicalisation. They know the various risks associated with use of the internet and social media. This is because supervising social workers and family support workers give carers up-to-date reading materials and advice about how to manage these risks. Sometimes, supervising social workers and family support workers provide young people directly with specific advice sessions or they refer them to relevant helping professionals and counsellors. For some young people, the intelligent, sensitive help that they have received means that they no longer run away and are much less vulnerable to exploitation.

Carers have a good understanding of the link between children's and young people's behaviour and their past experiences. They are therefore able to tolerate and respond positively when children and young people show aggressive, rejecting, damaging and/or sexually harmful behaviour. They provide sensible boundaries and seek to understand the triggers behind the behaviour. Carers are determined to help change behaviour through positive relationships.

The written tools being used to help carers plan and deliver safe care do not address children's and young people's key risks. These documents do not contain creative ideas for carers to use that will teach children and young people to understand their own key risks and learn how to keep themselves increasingly safe. For example, safe care policies state that risks around internet use, sexual behaviour and drug misuse should be minimised through restrictions and close supervision, rather than through teaching, discussion and getting to know children's friends. This creates a rigid, risk averse impression and fails to promote more innovative, proactive care practice.

Careful recruitment and regular monitoring of staff and carers prevents unsuitable people from being recruited or having the opportunity to harm children and young people or place them at risk.

Preparation of new foster carers addresses the potential impact of abuse and neglect on behaviour and helps to prepare them for the developing needs of the children and young people placed.

Allegations and disclosures are handled fairly and in accordance with statutory guidance and children and young people are supported and protected. Decisions about whether to move children and young people away from carers are taken sensitively and carefully, with good communication with local authorities and designated officers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager and the manager of the Long Eaton sub-office work well together. They ensure that there are high standards of care and have high expectations for what all children and young people can achieve. They say that the agency's strengths lie in good carers retention and good-quality support to carers. Most carers say that the support of the agency helps them to cope with the demands of fostering. One child's local authority social worker said, 'The supervising social worker for my child's foster carers is approachable, available and understands his complex needs. I have confidence in this service.'

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the progress that children and young people are making against their plans. This is because their supervising social workers know carers and children and young people very well. Supervising social workers show skill, diligence and sensitivity to carers and children and young people alike. They work with managers to ensure that additional training, respite, family support worker input or psychological advice is provided in a timely way if children's progress is stalling or specific needs require meeting. One carer said, 'I have been with them six years – they are brilliant. They are supportive and there is always someone there. My supervising social worker will set up meetings and help me get in touch with school if there are any problems. She makes me keep up to date with training.'

The registered manager has good professional relationships with the local authorities where children and young people come from. He and staff take responsibility for ensuring that all professionals involved in the team around each child and young person work together in the best interest of each child and young person. If necessary, he and staff will actively challenge when responses from placing authorities or other services are not effective.

The registered manager and the manager of the Long Eaton sub-office monitor the service quarterly. Their system for doing this prompts them to review serious incidents. However, they do not analyse the quality of care and support practice when there are placement endings and when children and young people going missing from care or for children's and young people's outcomes in education. This

means that any practice weaknesses and themes in these areas are not identified and opportunities to improve are missed.

Overall, the agency is meeting its stated purpose, which is to, 'Provide a comprehensive service that addresses the physical, emotional, educational and health needs of the children and young people placed with them.'

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

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