

Fostering Solutions

Fostering Solutions, Unit B8 Lowfields Business Park, Warhurst Road, Elland, West Yorkshire HX5 9DF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Solutions (North East and Yorkshire) is based in Elland and has a smaller office base in Gateshead. It is part of Fostering Solutions, a privately owned company with offices in England, Scotland and Wales. Fostering Solutions provides long-term, short-term, permanent, respite, and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection visit, there were 141 children and young people placed with 105 fostering families.

Inspection dates: 15 to 21 November 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 **outstanding**

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

Date of last inspection: 13 November 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:

- The agency approves foster carers who have the necessary skills and aptitudes to provide care for children and young people who may have complex needs. It provides them with good levels of support and training that help them meet identified needs.
- The agency takes care to place children and young people with foster carers who are suitable for them and provides children, young people and their foster carers with good levels of support.
- Foster carers are provided with training and support to help the meet children's and young people's psychological and emotional needs.
- Children and young people form positive relationships with their foster carers and are helped to make good progress. Consequently, many children and young people benefit from long and stable placements with their foster caring families, which help to promote their future independence.
- Overall attendance and attainment at school are good and their health needs are met.
- Children and young people are encouraged to develop their own leisure interests and activities. They enjoy positive times with their foster families and take part in a wide range of out-of-school activities.
- Children's and young people's views are taken into account and influence their own lives, reviews of their foster carers and the running of the agency.
- Child protection and safeguarding arrangements in the agency are robust and the agency works effectively with partner agencies and challenges practice where necessary.
- The agency responds promptly to any potential child protection concerns and addresses these thoroughly within agreed multi-agency plans.
- The agency is thorough in assessing risks faced by children and young people. Plans are developed to help manage these risks.
- The agency provides good protection for children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation.
- The agency provides children, young people and their foster carers with good support to help children to manage and understand their behaviour.
- The leadership and management of the agency are highly effective at both a strategic and operational level.
- Monitoring and quality assurance systems in the agency are impressively thorough.
- Highly developed administrative systems support the agency practice and ensures that work undertaken is complete, thorough and timely.
- The agency has a committed, skilled and experienced staff team whose members

are well supervised, trained and supported to fulfil their roles.

- Decision-making in the agency is well informed, robust and well evidenced.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Assessments of applicants to become foster carers should provide evidence of attempts by the agency to corroborate the information provided.
- When risks are more complex and significant, the management plans are not always clear.
- Minutes of panel meetings should include an evaluation by its members of the responses of applicants and foster carers to questions posed.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability includes evidence based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information. (NMS 13.7) Specifically, that information given by the applicant is corroborated wherever possible.
- Ensure that entries in records are legible and clearly expressed. (NMS 26.5) Specifically, that information in risk management plans is presented in a manner that is clear and readily accessible.
- Ensure that minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members. (NMS 14.7) Specifically, that minutes record the panel's evaluation of the answers given by applicants and foster carers to the questions it put to them.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This agency is very well managed, robust and effective in all its work. As such, it supports children and young people to live positive lives with their foster carers and to make good progress.

The agency takes a rigorous and careful approach to the recruitment, assessment and preparation of prospective foster carers. Assessments are thorough and evidence-based, although they do not, in every case, seek sufficient corroboration of information provided by applicants. Preparation training is thorough and appreciated by foster carers. It includes input from foster carers and fostered children and young people as well as from professional staff. This helps to give applicants an insight into the impact that fostering will have on their lives. Support and training for carers before and after their approval ensure that they have the necessary skills and aptitudes to care for children and young people who may have complex needs.

The agency works hard place to children and young people with foster carers who are suitable for them. It employs a social worker specifically to manage the matching and placement of children and young people with carers. This means that there is a consistent approach based on a clear knowledge of the placements available, foster carers' skills and situations and the needs of children and young people. Once placements are made, the agency provides foster carers with high levels of support and appropriate training to help them care for the children and young people placed. One carer said, 'I find our agency are very good at supporting us and will always try to help us in any way they can, even if it's just listening to us, and are very understanding, not just with the placements but with our own family. They give carers the opportunity to meet regularly and have support meetings regularly. They also give us the chance to ask for certain training which might help us to care for a placement if possible.'

A wide range of training is provided for foster carers, including high-quality support and training from a psychologist retained by the agency. This helps carers to understand and meet children's and young people's psychological and emotional needs. This is appreciated greatly by foster carers and includes work on resilience, anger issues, trauma and attachment. In one case, work with the psychologist to develop an appropriate reward system for a child involving the whole family has significantly assisted the progress of the child and his sister.

Children and young people form good relationships with their foster carers and, consequently, many benefit from long and stable placements with their foster caring families. The majority of children and young people in the agency have been in placement for over two years, with nearly a quarter being with their families for over five years. This helps children and young people to make progress and live positive lives. Children and young people shared their views during the inspection, stating: 'They [foster carers] always make me feel part of the family, they allow me to pursue activities I like, they listen to me;' 'They respect me and my feelings, they

treat me as part of the family, they love me,' and 'My foster carers let me be myself, which I enjoy about this placement, and I am really happy that the family has made me feel like a family member, which I am incredibly grateful for.'

The agency's supervising social workers work closely with foster carers and get to know children and young people well. This helps them to deliver high levels of support, advice and guidance to foster carers and those placed with them. Work with placing authority social workers is effective, with the agency contributing well to supporting children's and young people's plans and advocating on their behalf where there are service shortfalls. This effective joint working and support helps to change children's lives for the better. Children and young people generally make progress that is better than good in some cases. For example, one young person who faced serious risks previously is now safe and making good social and academic progress. Another child has learned to understand and manage his own behaviour to such an extent that he is much safer and happier. In situations in which children and young people are not at a point to be able to accept help or where changes in their situations mean that they are not making progress, the agency shows a real commitment to continue to work with them. Good joint working and a tenacious attitude to supporting and protecting children and young people characterise the agency's work, even when positive outcomes are not being achieved at present.

The agency and its foster carers support and promote children's and young people's education well. Nearly all of the children and young people placed by the agency are in full-time education. Foster carers, supported by their supervising social workers, work well to arrange admittance to the most appropriate school for their fostered children and young people. They work well with school staff and to support their attendance and learning. Children and young people take part in a wide range of out-of-school activities, including school clubs, sports, uniformed organisations and music. They enjoy holidays and shared family times with their foster carers.

Children and young people have their health needs met. The agency is rigorous in ensuring that they are registered with all primary health services and that any treatment required is provided. The agency supports foster carers to advocate for any specialist services required and works well with placing authorities to help ensure that children and young people receive any support they need.

The agency makes sure that children and young people have a voice in their own care and the service they receive. Supervising social workers meet with children and young people in placement regularly and seek their views. Foster carers help to ensure that children's and young people's views are expressed in their own care meetings. In addition, the agency is thorough in ensuring that their views about foster carers and the care they receive are considered within foster carers' reviews. The agency's family support workers have a significant role in developing relationships with children and young people. The agency runs a number of events for children, young people and their families. It includes input from children and young people in its fostering panel in the form of questions for applicants. Children and young people have recently been trained and taken part in interviews for a new supervising social worker. One of the young people who took part in the interviews said that the experience made her 'feel so grown-up' and 'I think I know what

makes a good social worker because of my experience.' The agency has developed a 'youth council', which meets regularly. This council has been instrumental in the development of printed profiles of supervising social workers to help children and young people get to know them. In addition, it has developed a welcome pack for newly placed children and been involved in foster carers' preparation training.

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

The agency is good at working with foster carers and placing authorities to identify any risks faced by children and developing strategies to manage these. This work is effective and well communicated so that all people working with a child or young person are clearly aware of the risks identified. Foster carers have their own safe caring plan for their household. In addition, individualised plans are developed for each child or young person placed. These are specific and detailed, with clear statements about how care will be delivered safely. These plans clearly cross-reference with risk management plans. This works well for more straightforward or low-level risks. However, for children and young people who are at more significant risk, such as the risk of sexual exploitation, the structure of the form requires that the risk be broken up into a number of different areas. This leads to some repetition and a potential lack of clarity in, and accessibility of, the information contained.

The agency's support and training of foster carers helps them to understand and respond to children's and young people's behaviour, which may be a significant challenge to them. The agency provides its carers with training in matters such as responding to challenging behaviour, self-harm awareness, physical intervention, missing children, internet safety, attachment styles and working with young people who have been sexually abused. This helps carers to work with children and young people to help them make progress and to understand and control their own behaviour. For example, one young person, whose behaviour in the early stages following placement required a number of physical interventions in order to keep him safe, has progressed to the point that such interventions are no longer necessary.

Robust monitoring takes place of critical incidents such as children and young people going missing, accidents and illnesses, police being called to foster carers' homes and child protection matters. This allows managers to identify any matters of concern or patterns and trends and to take appropriate action. Managers and staff work well with local authorities and other partner agencies and challenge practice where necessary. The agency has very clear and effective arrangements to undertake post-allegation reviews of foster carers following any child protection concerns relating to them. These are undertaken separately from the usual annual review process to allow for specific consideration of the matters at hand, the action taken and any learning points identified.

The agency works effectively where children and young people are at risk of, or have been subject to, child sexual exploitation. The agency is proactive in ensuring that children and young people are placed with foster carers who are trained and experienced in this area of work.

Recruitment processes for foster carers, staff and members of the central panel list are robust and thorough. This helps to ensure that people appointed are suitable to work with children and young people.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership and management of the agency are highly effective at both a strategic and operational level. There is an impressive focus on the quality of the service. Managers implement detailed strategic and operational plans to direct the agency's development. These are informed by learning from the wider organisation as well as from local developments. Managers and senior managers meet regularly across the organisation to share good practice. There is a culture of continuous improvement in the agency that places a clear focus on improving the lives of children and young people. A local authority social worker said of the agency, 'The welfare of the children and young people are at the centre; staff are well informed and there is an atmosphere of genuine care.'

This drive for improvement has resulted in management systems that are significantly more robust than at the last inspection. Highly effective administrative systems support the agency's practice and ensure that work undertaken is complete, thorough and timely. For example, systems to update foster carers' medical checks, disclosure checks and so forth are maintained by the administrative team who commence any processes required and prompt supervising social workers when they need to take steps. This means that the agency can be confident that all necessary work is done to assure carers' continued suitability to foster. The highly efficient administrative arrangements also help ensure that the agency's panel is able to function effectively and carry out its role in a robust manner. The agency's panel chair described the administrative arrangements as 'very, very good; whatever I ask for they get to me in a timely way'.

The agency's work with placing local authorities, both through the commissioning framework and at a practitioner level, is also highly effective. The agency uses these positive relationships effectively to work with local authorities so that young people receive the correct help and support services. The agency challenges other agencies appropriately in cases in which support is not as it should be. Recording in the agency is very good. This helps to provide social workers with detailed information about the progress of the children and young people they have placed and allows outcomes to be monitored effectively.

Decision-making in the agency is robust. Panels are drawn from a central list that contains people with a range of highly relevant skills and backgrounds. Panels give close consideration to matters presented to them and make clear recommendations to the decision-maker. Minutes of panel meetings are generally good. When panel members ask questions of applicants or foster carers at panel, their answers are recorded. However, there is no evaluation of the responses and how this has affected their thinking and judgement of suitability in the minutes. This means that the decision-maker is deprived of information about whether panel considered that the answers clarified matter sufficiently or were appropriate in addressing their concerns. The decision-maker makes robust, well-evidenced decisions promptly. At

every stage, there is effective monitoring of decision-making, timeliness and quality and clear systems to feed back on quality and any learning points.

Monitoring and quality assurance systems in the agency at both strategic and operational levels are impressively thorough. Managers have access to performance data about all areas of the agency's work, which they use to plan and develop the agency's practice. This data covers quantities and qualitative matters that is aggregated but can also be broken down to a case-by-case level. Information from this detailed monitoring is summarised in regular reports submitted to the agency's directors. They in turn give close scrutiny to these reports and follow up on matters identified. The monitoring and reporting also form the basis of the agency's comprehensive development plan. This is also reviewed on a regular basis and ensures that plans to continually improve the agency's practice are relevant and on track.

The agency has a committed, skilled and experienced staff team whose members are well supervised, trained and supported to fulfil their roles. They benefit from strong and supportive management, which ensures that they have caseloads they are able to manage effectively and provide good support to their foster carers, children and young people. The entire staff team reflects their manager's commitment to providing high-quality services that put children and young people first. They provide strong support and work very effectively with local authority social workers and partner agencies to ensure that children and young people receive the support they need. For example, the panel chair described social workers as being 'tenacious in not letting go' when seeking information from social workers of children and young people for the reviews of their foster carers.

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: SC053946

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