

Pathway Care (Midlands)

Pathway Care (Midlands) Limited

Bartlett House, 165a Birmingham Road, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B61 0DJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Pathway Care (Midlands) is one of a number of individually registered regional services that are part of the National Fostering Agency group. The service was first registered in February 2004. At the time of the inspection the service supported 84 fostering households (139 foster carers), with 114 children in placement. During the period 1 April 2017 to date, the agency recruited five new foster carer households.

The service provides long-term, short-term, parent and child, bridging and respite placements. Emergency placements can also be provided. The service also offers placements for disabled children and unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 February 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: 3 June 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 make good progress in all areas.
- Foster carers are well prepared and supported to promote children's progress.
- Children enjoy happy and secure relationships in their foster families.
- Children feel part of their foster family and of the community in which they live.
- Children are well prepared for their futures and can stay with their foster carers as long as they need to.
- Supervising social workers, family support workers and managers prepare and support foster carers well to provide good care to children.
- Supervising social workers play a key role in directly helping children with specific and more complex issues.
- Children feel safe, trust their carers and can talk to them.
- Children's individual risks are understood and managed well by carers and staff.
- Staff prepare and support carers well when children's behaviour is very risky.
- Leaders and managers have high expectations for what all children can achieve, and ensure that high standards of care are sustained.
- Leaders and managers prioritise meeting the needs of children and provide a supportive environment for staff.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Leaders and managers do not always identify weaknesses and shortfalls in practice, or take the most effective action.
- Managers do not always talk to children and carers after serious incidents, complaints and allegations in order to identify the best way forward.

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
Ensure that the system for review of quality of care provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (3))	10/04/2018

Recommendations

- Improve written guidance for foster carers and staff so that it makes clear how they will be supported during an investigation, including payment of allowance and any fee to foster carers while investigations are ongoing. (National Minimum Standards 22.11)
- Ensure that support and training is made available to hard to reach carers to assist them in meeting the specific needs of individual children. (National Minimum Standards 20.8) This is with particular respect to second carers.
- Improve the effectiveness of the procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes serious incidents, allegations, complaints and the quality of the service. (National Minimum Standards 25.1)

In particular, ensure that reviews of the quality of care examine the practice of carers and staff and identify ways to improve practice when children go missing or require physical interventions, or when there are allegations and complaints.

- Ensure that every approved foster carer is consistently supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer. Ensure that supervision meetings always have a clear purpose and 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. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. (National Minimum Standards 21.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children feel secure and happy. This is because they know that their carers genuinely care for them. One child said, 'They [both carers] are everything to me.' One social worker said 'I am very impressed with [carers] – they demonstrate fantastic insight into how to meet the children's needs and provide a loving and stable home for them. I can see how they will continue to thrive whilst living with them and achieve positive outcomes.'

Right from the start, children feel welcome and know that their carers want the best for them. Family support workers and supervising social workers make a prompt and high-quality contribution to children's welcome. They visit children and spend time finding out about their individual interests and wishes. The family support workers and supervising social workers ensure that individualised memory boxes, photo albums and children's guides are made for each child. They take these to the child, so that their carers can immediately start to make and save positive memories. Family support workers and supervising social workers build on the initial relationship as time goes on, by providing a valuable additional role model and advocate for children. For example, they sometimes undertake life story work with children. One child said, 'I feel that I can talk to her [supervising social worker].'

Most children do as well as they can in school. This is because carers know how they are getting on and encourage and support them, just as good parents do. Carers go to meetings about children's education and help them to get to school and college if they are living a distance away. They help children with homework, interviews, extra tuition, and any behaviour issues in school.

Children and young people become healthier and happier. They are active and enjoy holidays with their carers. They attend sports and interest groups in their communities. Their horizons broaden and their confidence grows because they are getting good quality care and understand their plans.

Supervising social workers and family support workers back up the good work that foster carers do, including attending education and care planning meetings. They also provide extra input to help children with specific issues. For example, a family support worker used 'social stories' and regular visits to help one disabled child. The worker's skilled input enabled the child to understand and cope with the death of one of her carers. It also helped her understand the start of her menstrual periods and how to manage them.

Supervising social workers and family support workers make sure that children are congratulated for the good progress that they make. For example, one carer said, '[Supervising social worker] brought a certificate and trophy for [child] who was now dry, day and night (after 7 years hard work). He was so pleased and proud.'

Supervising social workers work effectively with placing social workers to ensure that

children can remain with their carers for as long as they need care. One child's social worker said, 'It was decided that [carer] would make private law application to adopt the child. The fostering agency has been supportive of the plan and the carer. All discussions have been child centred and the agency approach reflected this at all times.' If it is right for young people to move on to independent living, carers, supervising social workers and family support workers make sure that they give young people good help and support. One young person said, 'I get on with [supervising social worker] really well – she explained the need for me to calm down at home and school – I have and this has helped a lot. I look forward to her visits and will miss her when I move on, although moving on will be exciting.'

Children are able to live with their brothers and sisters where possible. They get good help to feel part of their carer's wider family while retaining positive relationships with their birth families when this is right for them.

Foster carers feel very well supported to promote children's all round progress. One carer said, 'My supervising social worker is my rock. She is always on hand to help and listen. If she can improve my placement she will, all she can.' Supervising social workers and family support workers make sure that carers' own children receive support too. They organise groups, outings and parties to help all the children involved in the service. However, a few carers have occasionally experienced a dip in their support. For example, some carer support visits are not recorded when workers cover for sickness and staff vacancies. This means that any advice and targets given cannot be referred to or followed up.

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

Carers, supervising social workers and family support workers identify, understand and manage risks well. Carers, family support workers and supervising social workers are all trained in therapeutic care practices and show curiosity, accepting and empathic in their practice. As a result of this practice, children become increasingly safe. One child said, 'This family help me relax and calm down if I'm angry.'

Carers respond well overall to children who go missing from care and are at risk of exploitation, abuse, self-harm, bullying and radicalisation. For example, a carer said, 'I now get her to love herself and not put herself forward. I tell her that she is not in prison, but she needs to tell us and communicate with us and I explain what is dangerous. When she was 14 I helped her break away from a group who were self-harming and suicidal.' The young person said, 'Yes she has helped me – she asks me who I am going out with and she advises me.' Similarly, carers help asylum-seeking young people to meet friends from their own culture.

Children feel safe and secure. They trust their carers, supervising social workers and family support workers, and can ask them for help. Supervising social workers make sure that they see children regularly. They put on workshops for children, for example about bullying and being in care. They make sure that children are given information about how to stay safe and how to complain or express concerns and worries. They are alert to potentially unsafe individual situations and arrange to

minimise risks. For example, one young person who has learning disabilities benefits from the soothing impact of a hot tub. The supervising social worker and lone carer drew up some safety 'rules' around the use of the hot tub so that the young person was well safeguarded and the likelihood of an allegation against the carer was minimised.

Investigations into allegations of harm are shared with appropriate agencies and handled quickly and fairly. In most cases, sensitive and carefully assessed decisions are made in conjunction with the children's placing authority if removal of children from carers is necessary when carers are the subject of the allegation. However, it is hard for carers to find clear written guidance about payments of allowances while investigations are ongoing.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager has been registered for about 18 months. She shows an ambitious vision for what all children can achieve. She is dedicated to ensuring that high standards of care are achieved. She prides herself on knowing her carers and ensuring that the agency only accepts placements of children whose needs carers are able to meet.

Leaders and managers provide the right supportive environment for staff through effective supervision, performance management and training programmes. The quality of direct work with children that supervising social workers and family support workers do is therefore very good.

Overall, the registered manager understands the setting's strengths and weaknesses well. For example, she knows the agency's strength in providing secure and long-term placements for children through combining high-quality direct input to children with good support and training to carer households. However, the manager does not analyse care practice effectively enough when there have been serious incidents, such as children going missing. She does not consult enough with children, carers and placing authorities about serious incidents. As a result, weaknesses in care practice are not always identified and opportunities to improve it are sometimes missed.

The manager actively promotes inclusion, equality and diversity for staff, carers and children. She matches children from diverse cultural backgrounds and other countries with carers of equally diverse backgrounds. Together, they develop appreciation and enjoyment of one another's cooking, language, family traditions and lifestyles. The manager also ensures that carers and staff are rewarded and appreciated for their various contributions, and that there are good opportunities for everyone to meet for parties and activities. One carer said, 'Children and us as carers look forward to Pathway Care events – it feels like a family-run company.'

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: SC040373

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