

Pathway Care South West

Families First (South West) Limited
Glentor, Balland Lane, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7DA
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Pathway Care South West is an independent fostering service. It is operated by National Fostering Agency, who are a national provider of independent fostering services. The service is based in Ashburton, Devon and has a branch office in Bristol.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service provides 74 fostering households and has 88 children and young people placed with foster carers.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 December 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 **outstanding**

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

Date of last inspection: 2 March 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:

- Children and young people make very good progress educationally, emotionally and physically. The children and young people are cared for effectively by foster carers who build trusting relationships and offer the children and young people nurturing care, consistency and stability.
- Foster carers commented that the agency provides them with excellent support and extensive training opportunities. The comprehensive programme of training ensures that the foster carers have the skills and resilience necessary to care for the children and young people placed with them effectively.
- Managers, supervising social workers and foster carers strongly challenge other professionals if they think that a decision is not in the best interests of a child or young person, or if children are not receiving the services they need.
- Foster carers comment very positively about the quality of the support they receive from the agency. Support is available to the foster carers all of the day and night from supervising social workers who know all of the children and their foster carers well. The supervising social workers offer effective and comprehensive behaviour management strategies for foster carers to use if they are finding it difficult to manage the behaviour of a child or young person placed with them.
- The agency offers additional support to children, young people and their foster carers through providing a range of activities and individualised therapeutic support, such as sporting activities and art therapy.
- The agency fostering panel provides a comprehensive and effective quality-assurance function. The panel supports leaders and managers to drive improvement and ensure positive outcomes for the children and young people.
- A strength of the agency is the provision of parent and child fostering placements. These placements ensure that a parent's parenting capabilities are fairly and comprehensively assessed while they are placed with supportive, but child-focused foster carers.
- Since the previous inspection, the agency has been acquired by a large national fostering service. Management systems and governance of the agency are now strengthened and improved. Outcomes of the children are now tracked and evaluated as part of the agency's quality assurance process.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Placement plans do not always contain the views and wishes of the child and young person and how best they think the foster carer could support them.
- Behaviour management plans do not always contain clear guidance for foster carers about when they should restrain a child or young person. Behaviour management plans and the agency behaviour management policies do not state that foster carers should not attempt to restrain a child or young person unless

they have had the appropriate training in safe restraint holds.

- Referral information is sometimes given to the foster carer verbally by telephone. Foster carers are expected to decide whether they can meet the needs of a child or young person without first having the opportunity to read and reflect on the child or young person's care needs. Foster carers report that it is very difficult to make the decision to accept a child into their home without first reading the information.

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>The fostering provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 31(1)(a)(2)(3))</p> <p>In particular; that the agency's behaviour management policy does not state that the foster carers should not attempt a physical restraint on a child or young person unless they have received the relevant training in safe physical restraint holds.</p>	<p>31/01/2019</p>

Recommendations

- Ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement and that foster carers have full information about the child. (NMS 11.2)
- Ensure that the foster carer is supported to assist the child to put forward their views, wishes and feelings as part of each review process, and the fostering service helps to ensure that these are fully taken into account by the child's responsible authority. In particular; that the views of children and young people are contained in their placement plans. (NMS 31.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people benefit from living in stable and successful placements. They are happy and said that they feel well cared for. They take a full part in the foster carers' family life and said that they feel part of the family. Many children and young people remain with their foster carers for at least two years. They benefit and make progress from the stability and security that this gives to them. One young person said: 'My foster carers are the best people known to man.'

A strength of the agency is how well the children and young people make progress with their education. The agency has high aspirations for the children and young people. All children and young people are in school or college placements. Two young people recently left school to attend university. The agency employs an education champion. Her role is to track the educational progress of the children and young people and assist them in obtaining any support or extra help they need at school or college. Recently, additional educational support was obtained for a young person who speaks English as an additional language and was struggling at school. As a result of this intervention, the young person is now making good progress.

The agency ensures that the emotional and physical healthcare needs of the children and young people are met. The agency employs psychotherapists and art therapists if a need is identified. Supervising social workers ensure that the foster carers are supporting children and young people to receive any healthcare they need, such as vaccinations and dental checks.

Foster carers work as part of the professional team around the child. Turnover of foster carers is low. They attend relevant meetings and are fully involved in planning and decision-making. The fostering service recognises the value of their foster carers. The foster carers report that they are well supported by the agency and are able to support the children and young people in their care effectively because of this assistance.

The foster carers report that they value the regular supervision provided by the agency. This supervision is challenging and supportive. Supervising social workers know the foster carers they are supporting well. Many of the foster carers have successfully fostered for many years with the agency.

The agency participation team support workers are energetic, enthusiastic and passionate in ensuring that the children and young people benefit from a wide range of activities and additional support. This year, the agency ran a summer camp for the children and young people that involved camping on Dartmoor. Other activities arranged include kayaking and rock climbing. The children and young people comment about how they value the time spent with the support workers.

The children and young people are encouraged to attend first aid and fire prevention training and become involved in staff recruitment interviews and foster carer

training. Placement plans offer comprehensive guidance to the foster carers about how best to meet the support needs of children and young people. The children and young people sign to say that they agree with the content, but their views and wishes, and how they think the foster carers could best support them, are not documented in the plans.

The young people are encouraged to learn independence skills to prepare them for when they will move on to independent living. Work with the young people by the participation team includes supporting the young people to learn how to budget, shop and cook.

The process of matching children and young people to foster carers has recently been improved. An extensive evaluation of the foster carers' skills and expertise and the composition of the fostering household is undertaken prior to a young person being matched with them. Information is usually given to foster carers in writing, so they can carefully read and decide if they are able to meet the care needs of the child or young person being referred to them. Some foster carers report that on some occasions, they are expected to decide whether to accept a child or young person based on verbal information in a telephone call from the agency. The foster carers report that this does not give them the opportunity to carefully consider the information before making their decision.

Parent and child placements are a strength of the agency. A comprehensive 12-week assessment is undertaken during the placement. The foster carers undertake a programme of parenting support with the parent. The assessment of parenting skills is undertaken by an independent assessor. The work undertaken by the agency and foster carers is high quality and ensures that the parent receives a fair assessment of their parenting skills. The foster carers always ensure that the main focus of the foster carer is the safety and well-being of the child.

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

Children and young people report that they feel safe living with their foster carers and could name someone they would speak to if they felt worried or concerned. Foster carers know what action to take to safeguard a child or young person if they go missing or make a safeguarding disclosure.

Risk assessment procedures are improved. All risk assessments now contain a comprehensive evaluation of any risks and document control measures in place to minimise risk. They give clear guidance to foster carers of what action they should take to keep a child or young person safe. Foster carers and the agency staff are vigilant and know the children and young people in their care very well. If a child or young person starts behaving out of character, then foster carers and the staff act promptly to find out the reasons why and take appropriate safeguarding action.

Safeguarding professionals report that the agency always promptly reports any safeguarding concerns to them and takes the appropriate action to keep children and young people safe. This is a learning organisation. The manager comprehensively reviews any safeguarding incidents and acts swiftly if necessary to

improve practice and procedures to ensure that children, young people, foster carers and others are safe and protected.

The agency implements a comprehensive recruitment policy for foster carers and staff to ensure that only suitable people become foster carers or are employed as staff. A rigorous series of checks take place for foster carers, including checks with ex-partners and social media accounts.

Foster carers manage the behaviour of most children and young people effectively, safely and skilfully. Some of the children and young people have extremely complex care needs. On one occasion, a foster carer restrained a young person when it was not clear if they had received training in safe restraint. Behaviour management policies do not clearly state that foster carers who are not trained in safe restraint techniques should not attempt to restrain a child or young person.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership and management of this fostering service are very strong. The manager provides inspirational and clear leadership to the foster carers and the staff, who comment very positively about the exceptional support that she provides to them.

The agency recently became part of a large national organisation. This organisation has undertaken an extensive evaluation of the strengths and areas for development of the agency. It strives for continual improvement and development through the 'journey to excellence' programme. Governance of the agency and particularly management systems and processes have been strengthened and quality assurance systems are being further developed and embedded.

Frequent monitoring systems at both service and organisation level provide a valuable oversight of the quality of care being provided to the children and young people and the foster carers. Tracking of outcomes and progress of the children and young people identifies effectively any actions that need to be taken if specific help and support are required to help a child or young person progress.

The agency is influential in positively changing the lives of children and young people. Many young people are making excellent progress from their starting points. One young person said: 'Staff are very passionate about their jobs and making children's lives better. I can't think of anything they could do better.'

The agency provides good-quality placements to student social workers. They encourage the students to undertake projects that increase their knowledge and inform the agency. The agency is currently working with Bristol University to train foster carers about the topic of compassion fatigue. Research will be undertaken with foster carers to determine if compassion fatigue impacts on placement stability. The agency is linked to an online portal. Foster carers can access this portal to find information and make applications.

The agency provides staff and foster carers with an extensive training programme

that ensures that they have the knowledge and skills to undertake their roles. Foster carers comment that they can request specific training to meet the care needs of a child or young person, such as autism spectrum disorder training or self-harming behaviours.

The staff and foster carers receive regular, good-quality supervision. Foster carers report that they have good relationships with their supervising social worker, who challenges their practice if necessary, but remains supportive and is easily contacted should the foster carers need advice and support.

Complaints are dealt with in line with the agency's complaints procedure in an open and transparent manner. Children know how to complain and report that they thought that any complaints would be dealt with in a fair way and they would be listened to.

The fostering panel performs an effective quality assurance function, led by an experienced and suitably qualified chairperson. The panel is challenging and curious. It is made up of a diverse range of people who have the appropriate knowledge and skills to make informed recommendations about the suitability of prospective and current foster carers.

The agency has strong working relationships with placing authorities and commissioners. Feedback from placing social workers and commissioners was exceptionally positive.

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: SC367941

Registered provider: Pathway Care

Registered provider address: Glentor, Balland Lane, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7DA

Responsible individual: Patricia Jarrett

Registered manager: Janet Delaney

Telephone number: 01626 333787

Email address:

Inspector

Tina Maddison, social care inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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