

Reach-Out Care

Reach-Out Care Limited

Reach-Out Care, Hope House, Burnhope, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 7ER
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A private provider operates this not-for-profit agency. The agency provides foster care placements for several placing authorities. The agency recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide care to children and young people who have a wide range of needs aged between 0 and 17 years old. They also offer parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 32 children and young people, in 24 foster carer households. There were also two young adults living in 'staying put' placements.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since March 2016.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 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: 12 October 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:

- There is careful matching during the placement process. Foster carers and the children and young people they care for receive high levels of support. This includes advice from the senior behaviour support worker and a contracted child therapist.
- Many of the children and young people have been living in foster placements for many years. Some can stay with their foster carers after they reach 18 years of age.
- The agency has a strong commitment to participation. Children and young people's views are sought and considered in the running of the agency.
- The agency provides its carers with a wide-ranging training programme to help them work with children and young people who may have complex needs.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The agency does not have up-to-date information from the placing authority for every child or young person placed with them.
- The agency's continued requests for missing documents from placing authorities, including escalating these matters to managers, have been unsuccessful.
- Foster carers do not challenge education providers when a child or young person is excluded from school, and if they are not provided with a full-time education timetable.
- Foster carers do not challenge placing authorities to start the pathway planning process as outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 to allow sufficient time for young people to be prepared for their transition to independence.

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
The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17(3))	01/09/2018

Recommendations

- Children are helped by their foster carer to achieve their educational or training goals and foster carers are supported to work with a child's education provider to maximise each child's achievement and to minimise any underachievement. (National Minimum Standards 8.4) In particular, this relates to ensuring that foster carers have the knowledge and support to challenge education providers who are not meeting their responsibility to provide full-time education to children and young people.
- The fostering service ensures that there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs. (National Minimum Standards 12.3) In particular, to ensure that placing authorities start the pathway planning process to allow sufficient time for young people to be prepared for their transition to independence.
- Ensure that the foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. (National Minimum Standards 31.2) In particular, to develop an effective escalation policy referring to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 when contacting the placing authority and if necessary challenge the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and escalate the

matter to the Director of Children's Services.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency provides good-quality foster placements for children and young people who have a wide range of needs. This includes some who have complex health and physical disabilities. The agency works hard to match and place children and young people with foster carers who are suitable to meet their needs. The introduction of a placement and recruitment officer helps make sure that the agency has full information from the placing authority. This stringent vetting at the point of referral keeps placement instability and disruption very low.

The children and young people are making good progress from their starting points in all areas of their development. Foster carers support and promote the children and young people's education well. This includes ensuring that they have more help when needed, such as extra home tuition. All the children and young people are in education and training and some have gone on to take, and pass exams. When a child or young person has been excluded from school, foster carers do not challenge the education authority. This is due to the agency's and foster carers' lack of understanding about statutory education guidance. This resulted in one young person being without a full timetable of education.

The children and young people's cultural, ethnic and religious needs are promoted. Foster carers support the children and young people to have contact with their parents. One foster carer said, 'It is good when they see their mum and I have promoted it because they love her.' This supports their family history, positive identity and self-esteem. This openness also offers placement stability as the children and young people do not feel disloyal to their birth family.

The agency supports foster carers to help the children and young people live healthy lifestyles and improve their physical, emotional and psychological health outcomes. This is through their access to primary and specialist healthcare services. Foster carers are knowledgeable about specific health conditions and work with medical professionals. Foster carers have access to a contracted child therapist who can offer advice and support. He provides carers with information about the impact of a child or young person's previous experiences of neglect and trauma. Individualised strategies help foster carers to stabilise placements during difficult times.

The children and young people form positive, trusting relationships with their foster carers. They are helped to make good progress and enjoy a range of different experiences. The children and young people enjoy living with their foster carers and feel part of the families that they live with. One young person commented that 'We go on holidays and out to nice places. All our foster family's other family like us. We fit in well. It is like our own family.' Many enjoy long and stable placements with almost a half of the children and young people living with their foster families for over four years. This offers them a sense of permanence and belonging.

Two young adults have been able to remain with their foster carers in 'staying put'

arrangements. Foster carers provide consistency and ongoing practical and emotional support into early adulthood. This prepares the young adults for independence at a pace that is right for them. They have increased chances of success in further education or employment. Another young person is planning to remain with his carer after his 18th birthday, but there has been a lack of pathway planning by the social worker. The agency's and foster carer's lack of challenge to the placing authority has resulted in no formal plan in place with only months to go until the young person is 18 years old.

The agency's commitment to child participation is particularly strong. A high number of the children and young people attend the participation groups which cater for different age ranges. These groups offer a social event so the children and young people can meet peers in a similar situation. They have fun, alongside providing their views which are used in the running of the agency. The children and young people recently changed the children's guide to make it more child-friendly. They also made useful suggestions about what should be included in their welcome box when they first move into their foster placement. This included a game or book as well as a picture frame to keep their important photographs safe. These ideas will help other children and young people who move in to the agency's foster placements.

Some children and young people interview new staff and some sit in on the agency's meetings. Their views are sought on their placements for the foster carers' annual reviews. They have good relationships with the supervising social workers whom they see regularly. The children and young people know how to complain. They feel confident that the supervising social worker would listen to them if they had any concerns or worries. This is particularly important for those that have had many changes of local authority social worker.

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

Children and young people receive good help and protection. This is because the agency takes its safeguarding role seriously by placing the children and young people firmly at the centre of safe practice. The children and young people feel safe in their foster placements.

Foster carers have a good understanding of safeguarding issues. They take part in training on relevant subjects such as child sexual exploitation. This helps them to identify concerns, to protect children and young people, and to reduce risk-taking behaviour. Foster carers help the children and young people to take age-appropriate risks throughout their childhoods. This helps children and young people to develop their self-confidence and learn about keeping themselves safe.

No children and young people are known to be at risk of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation or extremism. Children and young people do not go missing from home, but foster carers know what actions to take in the event this happens. An on-call supervising social worker is available outside of office hours. This offers reassurances to foster carers that they have someone to contact for advice during a safeguarding incident. One said, 'I can talk to my supervising social worker at any

time. She has also been out a couple of times when I have needed her.'

The agency provides foster carers with high levels of support. Extra help and advice are available from the senior behaviour support worker in areas such as behaviour management. This work gives foster carers new skills to de-escalate a situation, and to help the children and young people to understand and manage their behaviour. Children and young people learn techniques to help regulate their behaviour. They have reduced outbursts and show less risk-taking behaviours.

The behaviour support worker conducts direct work with children and young people. She educates them in areas that affect their lives. Her work covers issues such as internet safety or keeping safe work.

Regular team meetings allow the staff team to share information about the foster carers, children and young people. This helps staff to understand and assess the current stability of the foster placement. Staff work well with the placing authority social workers, attending regular care team meetings. This results in an agreed support package for those children and young people where there is a cause for concern for the stability of the placement. Safe care plans are updated and monitored to ensure that the support remains effective in stabilising the situation.

The introduction of daily recording on the agency's computerised system has been welcomed by the foster carers. Supervising social workers have quicker access to daily records. Monitoring is rigorous and ensures oversight of any incidents or patterns and trends. The quality of foster carers' recording is monitored to ensure that a consistent and high quality is maintained. Extra training is provided when needed. One foster carer said, 'I didn't record something properly and I was sent on a training course. We have to stick by the policies and do the job right. It is to protect us carers as well.'

The agency undertakes appropriate employment checks on all its staff, including panel members. The assessments of prospective carers are thorough. The fostering panel members and agency decision-maker are effective in reviewing the assessments and considering the prospective carers' suitability to look after children. These factors help to protect children from contact with or being looked after by adults who may pose a risk to them.

The manager and panel members investigate complaints and allegations effectively. This makes sure that the standard of care for the children and young people remains high and that the children and young people are safe in their foster homes.

The agency ensures that the foster carers are visited regularly, including at least one unannounced visit a year. In addition to this, there are annual health and safety reviews of the foster carers' homes and any pets. This all helps to ensure that the homes in which children and young people live are safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, the agency now has a permanent registered manager who

was registered in March 2016. She is suitably experienced and qualified. A knowledgeable responsible individual offers her good support. The agency is now well run and managed. Both are passionate and committed about positive outcomes for children and young people. They share the same ethos of putting children and young people at the centre of all they do.

A review of the agency was held by the directors, during which time very few families were assessed and recruited as foster carers. This caused some existing foster carers to become unsettled, particularly as long-standing supervising social workers also left for their own professional development. Foster carers report that things are now far more stable.

The management team has made many improvements with processes, recording and procedures. The requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been met. The focus is now on recruiting and training foster carers who can meet the needs of children and young people in the local area who are being referred to the agency. Alongside this, current foster carers are being empowered to take a more active role in care planning, such as attending and contributing to placing authority meetings.

Investment in an internet agency is now reaping rewards. There has been a recent significant increase in the number of families applying to the agency to become foster carers. A more rigorous initial visit assessment is undertaken. This is designed to make sure that any new applicants have the necessary aptitude and skills to care for children and young people who may have complex needs.

The agency is staffed and resourced to meet the needs of foster carers and children and young people. The fostering panel members are from a diverse range of backgrounds and experience to make child-centred decisions in respect of issues put before them.

Improvements have been made with regards to training provided to foster carers, which panel members can also attend. The agency provides foster carers with a range of training which now includes online training to make it more accessible to those carers that work. Some foster carers are working with an external trainer on a project to develop skills in ascertaining the wishes and feelings of younger children. Foster carers now have a wide-ranging training programme.

The support and training available for foster carers ensures that they have the necessary skills to care for children and young people. Foster carers all speak of the improvements made in training, with one saying, 'The training is good. For a while we would do training with no refreshers. I found it extremely difficult to get to training. Online things have made it more flexible. This was in recognition of the need for greater flexibility.'

Due to the small size of the agency, the registered manager and staff know the carers and the children and young people well. Foster carers enjoy working for the agency because of its size and welcoming family feel. The staff also like working for the agency; they value the clear, child-focused approach. They feel supported

through good induction, training and management oversight. They meet the aims and objectives, as set out in the agency's statement of purpose.

Placing authorities describe the agency as being creative when looking at the needs of the children and young people. They report that there is very effective communication. Where necessary, managers challenge the views of other agencies working with the children and young people but at the same time maintain effective working relationships. However, staff's many requests for missing documentation, and escalation to senior managers, have been ineffective. Some children and young people still have no up-to-date care plan or delegated authority on file.

The management team has a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency. The improved understanding of the agency's computerised system has resulted in better monitoring and auditing. This includes weekly monitoring undertaken by the responsible individual. The manager also completes in-depth three-monthly audits and reports for directors. These help to identify areas to improve the quality of care for the children and young people. A comprehensive plan outlines area for development with a clear vision for the future.

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: SC036188

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Inspector

Tina Ruffles, social care inspector



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