

# Families for Children

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	23/06/2008

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This is an independent fostering agency that currently has 250 children and 350 foster carers. Services provided by the agency include parent and child placements; supported lodgings; permanence; Special Guardianship and long-term placements; short-term and emergency placements; placements for children with special needs; placements for unaccompanied minors; education support; preparation for adult life and tailored family support.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This agency provides a high level of support to carers which results in young people having their needs well met. Carers feel well supported. A carer said of working for the agency, 'It has been a better than good experience that encourages you to do more for young people.' High quality support is provided which results in placement stability. Young people make good progress in all aspects of their lives and are well supported into adulthood. Young people are happy in their placements and feel well cared for. They feel listened to and valued and as a result are thriving in their placements. There were no applications to the independent reviewing mechanism as at March 31 2012. This compares with 81 nationally. Thirteen young people went missing from their foster homes during this time compared to 7985 nationally. These low rates demonstrate that the agency is performing well in relation to national trends in promoting the welfare of children and young people.

A rigorous assessment and recruitment process and generally positive relationships with partner agencies helps to promote positive outcomes for young people. The agency could be better at providing supervision to some staff members. Current arrangements do not always ensure that areas for improvement are well addressed or promote partnership working. The agency could also be better at providing information about what to expect of fostering in more age appropriate formats for young people. The current guide to the service is aimed at older young people. Leaders are committed to fostering and generally have an accurate understanding of

the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They take effective steps to improve the service, however, better arrangements could be in place for ensuring that all carers have undergone child protection training after their preparation and for checking the quality of staff supervision.

## Areas for improvement

### Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
3 (2011)	ensure the fostering service provider provides a copy of the children's guide to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding) (Regulation 3 (4))	27/09/2012
21 (2011)	ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate supervision. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	27/09/2012

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practices, including skills to care for children who have been abused (NMS 4.6)
- ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring, specifically in relation to the quality of supervision records and the carers who have not completed child protection training. (NMS 25.2)

### Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Young people make good progress from the point of moving in with their carers. A strong emphasis is placed on meeting their individual needs. A commissioner said, 'The agency responds well to young people's needs. They arrange extra staff to stabilise placements and put together good packages of care.' Young people feel consulted, listened to and valued. One young person said, 'I got to stay at my old school when I moved in with my carers and I liked this.' Bullying is not described as a major problem by young people. They say they know that adults will support them

should they experience bullying. As a result of this support, young people do well in all areas of their lives. Carers are successful in building young people's resilience by building their confidence through praise and encouragement. This helps young people to make and sustain positive attachments and because of this placement disruptions are rare.

A high value is placed on education and staff and carers have high aspirations for young people. As a result, young people make good progress in this area. There is a strong drive to reduce the number of school moves and this promotes continuity and stability in young people's lives. A high level of quality direct work with young people is carried out which promotes young people's learning and achievements. For example, staff work in schools with young people and support them with homework. There is a dedicated education centre with a qualified teacher. This helps to ensure young people excluded from mainstream education have good opportunities to make educational progress. Young people are healthy and lead healthy lifestyles. A young person said, 'My carers nag me about eating well, I know it's because they care.' Health professionals work closely with the agency to meet young people's health needs. A health professional said, 'The agency is very good at raising health issues that are affecting individual young people.'

Young people do not generally engage in risky behaviour and understand the consequences of risks. They have good opportunities to engage in a wide range of experiences as carers are encouraged to promote these. This broadens their outlook on life. Young people are strongly supported in attaining independence and are confident about their readiness for adult life. Lots of support work occurs with young people to prepare them for their future. For example, a support worker said of their work with a young person, 'It took us all summer to look at appropriate college courses, we picked the right one.' A carer said, 'My young person was supported to move to supported lodgings when they were 18.'

## Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

There are strong arrangements for the recruitment of a range of carers who can meet the needs of young people placed with the agency. There is an established group of independent assessors, overseen by a manager, who carry out rigorous assessments. This helps to ensure that only suitable carers are approved and care is focused on the needs of young people. Careful attention is paid to the needs of the whole fostering family. This ensures that carers feel supported and young people are placed in households where their needs will be well met. A carer said, 'From my first contact with the agency I felt welcomed and supported.' Another said, 'My assessment as a foster carer was well organised and comprehensive.'

Effective arrangements for the fostering panel help to promote safe, secure and stable placements. Appropriate and timely decisions are made by the panel with an overriding objective to promote the welfare of young people. Panel members are supported through an appraisal system which allows them to reflect on practice and

focus on improvement. There are good arrangements for the matching of young people with suitable carers. The service works closely with placing authorities to help ensure that young people's needs are well understood. A high level of support is provided to carers and this empowers them to provide effective care for young people. For example, there are three workers appointed in each of the agency's six sub-offices who work directly with carers and young people. This is successful in promoting placement stability. Carers say, 'They look after us' and 'The support is amazing.' All say training within the service is excellent. One carer said, 'Training is tailored to meet the needs of the young people in placement.' A staff member said, 'Carers can off load on us.' Carers are actively involved in planning for young people. One carer said, 'We are taught to ask for reviews of care plans in our training.' The strong working relationships that exist between carers and the agency support high quality placements.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Safeguarding young people is at the centre of practice within the agency. As a result, young people are safe and feel safe. They benefit from safe care from people suitable to work with them. The recruitment and preparation of new carers, including their family and friends, has a strong focus on safeguarding and child protection. A commissioner said, 'The agency has robust policies and procedures to put things right when they go wrong such as standards of care or safeguarding issues.' Young people receive advice about keeping safe from foster carers. This is supported by the training that carers receive. For example, carers say that training in street gangs, the internet and bullying has helped them to feel confident in protecting young people. Young people do not report bullying as a major problem for them. They say that they have a trusted adult who they could talk to about any concerns. Young people are encouraged to speak up about their concerns. They receive a supportive and sensitive response from carers when they do.

There are good arrangements for checking the on-going suitability of carers. For example, unannounced visits to carers' homes happen on a regular basis during which safety measures are checked. This helps to keep young people safe. Carers are supported to recognise the impact of abuse and take appropriate action in response to this. They receive guidance on child protection in their preparation and in supervision sessions. Most carers have undergone further child protection training. This helps to protect young people's well-being. However, a small number of carers have not attended follow up child protection training and as a result are less prepared to respond to concerns about young people's welfare. The agency is proactive in ensuring that carers understand how to reduce the risks of young people going missing and respond to it safely. As a result there are low numbers of young people who go missing from their homes. A robust response is taken to this and this promotes their safety.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

There are generally good arrangements for monitoring the delivery of the service. Managers have a variety of tools for measuring what the service does. The agency carries out insightful reviews of practice and uses these to drive improvements. However, monitoring is less robust in relation to the quality of some supervision and the people who have not completed child protection training. The promotion of young people's well-being is less strong in these areas. A strong emphasis is placed on listening to staff, carers and young people in the monitoring of the service. A staff member said, 'They genuinely listen to us and take on board what we say.' As a result, this is a service that makes improvements that promotes positive outcomes for young people.

Staff in the agency are well qualified and experienced and this enables them to provide good quality care for young people. There is an inconsistent approach to providing high quality supervision in this service. Some supervision does not adequately address serious concerns regarding practice issues. It also does not promote a positive approach to working with partner agencies. This inconsistency leaves some staff less prepared to meet young peoples' needs and does not create relationships that improves the care of young people. However, some staff say supervision is valued in this agency and is used to promote good practice. They also say that training is of good quality, up to date and relevant to the needs of young people. A staff member said, 'Training is focused on the needs of the children.' Another said, 'They are supportive about career progression.' As a result, staff are highly motivated and enthusiastic and this goes some way to promoting young people's welfare. Furthermore, there is generally a recognition in the service that a holistic approach is a fundamental principle to working effectively with young people. A partner agency said, 'There is real partnership working with the agency.' Another said, 'That the service has good verbal and written communication.'

The agency is well resourced to meet the needs of young people and promote placement stability. A clear and accessible Statement of Purpose helps stakeholders to be clear about the aims and objectives of the service. There is a children's guide that has been well thought out to promote the well-being of young people new to the service. However, this guide is aimed at older young people so does not sufficiently promote the well-being of younger children who say that the start of a new placement is 'scary'. Staff do, however, talk to younger children about their new placements and this helps them to understand what to expect. Notifiable events are responded to appropriately. This ensures that young people's welfare is promoted and partner agencies are able to contribute to this.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.