

BETA Care Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Monica Hargreaves
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is an independent fostering agency operated by a private limited company. It offers a range of long and shorter term foster placements for children and young people aged between 0 and 17 years of age. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 7 carer households and 5 young people placed.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This is the first inspection of this agency since its registration in August 2012. The agency is working well with a number of neighbouring local authorities in order to understand the needs of the young people they are looking to place. This helps to ensure that recruitment for carers is targeted effectively.

The agency is well managed. The Registered Manager has very good oversight of the work of the service and the monitoring arrangements are robust. The manager demonstrates a clear commitment to ensuring that the agency continues to improve as it grows. She regularly seeks the views of young people, foster carers and stakeholders in order to inform the future development of the service.

Foster carer assessments are of a very good quality. They provide a clear analysis of carer's strengths and their life events, demonstrating how these affect the carer's

capacity to understand the needs of young people and to parent effectively. Assessments are presented to the foster panel well within the required timescales. This ensures that the agency maintains the interest and enthusiasm of prospective carers. The panel works very effectively to make clear recommendations about carers. The agency decision maker scrutinises panel papers and assessments thoroughly before making a decision to approve. This is also done in a timely way so that there is no delay for carers. These arrangements ensure the safety and suitability of carers.

The matching process is extremely thorough, ensuring that young people are appropriately placed with carers who are able to meet their needs. Foster carers report that the supervision and support that they are given is very good. They say that they are treated as part of the team working with children. They feel that their views are listened to and respected by the agency and by local authority social workers. They demonstrate a strong commitment to the young people they look after and when there is a need, advocate with other agencies on their behalf. Professionals report that foster carers work very well with placing authorities to ensure that young people's plans are progressed and they are cared for safely. As a result of the way they are looked after, young people enjoy being part of a family and they achieve positive outcomes.

One recommendation has been made as a result of this inspection. This relates to the fostering panel's quality assurance process.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- provide a quality assurance feedback to the service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. (NMS 14.2)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Young people make good progress overall in their foster placements. They are fully included in their foster carers' families and daily life. They report that they feel safe and settled with their carers. For example, one young person said 'It's really good here. It's home'. A number of children had been placed with their carers for some time before carers transferred to this agency and they have benefitted from maintaining these settled placements. Other young people have been placed with carers since the agency opened. Careful preparation for these young people has enabled them to move successfully into their new placement.

Young people have an excellent level of attendance at school or college, with almost

all regularly achieving over 95%. This maximises their opportunity to achieve. Young people make good progress in education, attaining their identified targets and in some cases exceeding them. This helps to improve their chances in later life. Most young people take part in a number of after school activities. This helps them to make and sustain friendships and broaden their interests. Young people also enjoy holidays and activities with their carers. This supports their sense of belonging to their foster family and helps them to feel settled.

Young people enjoy good health. Their physical and emotional health needs are well met and they are encouraged from an early age to learn about healthy lifestyles.

Young people remain in touch with their family members, when it is safe and in their best interests to do so. This benefits young people emotionally and helps to support their sense of identity.

Young people are given frequent opportunities to express their views about every aspect of their care. They give feedback about their carers for their annual review and they contribute to their own reviews. Young people are also consulted about the agency itself. For example, they were asked to let the manager know which local charity they would like the agency to donate money to and they all gave their views. Young people report that they know how to complain. They feel that their views are listened to and that things have changed as a result of consultation. This empowers young people and helps to develop their confidence.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The manager works closely with neighbouring local authorities to ensure that the agency recruits carers who can meet the needs of children and young people who are referred for a service. This meets the aims of the agency as outlined in the Statement of Purpose.

The agency has robust arrangements for the preparation and assessment of carers with a strong emphasis on safe care and safeguarding. Checks are undertaken on carers at an early stage. Independent social workers then complete thorough assessments of carers which are presented to the fostering panel.

The fostering panel works effectively to ensure that sound recommendations are made about the suitability of carers. Panel members possess a diverse range of experience that is relevant to looked after children, including fostering and experience of care in childhood. These experiences inform their discussions at panel meetings. The panel minutes provide a detailed overview of these discussions. The agency decision maker scrutinises the assessment reports and minutes, ensuring that decisions are robust and safeguard young people. Carers are always consulted about their experiences of the panel process and panel members have also been asked for their comments. The feedback from this consultation is used to drive improvements. The chair of the fostering panel has provided some feedback to the manager on the

panel process, but has not yet formalised a quality assurance process. The manager is currently working with the panel chair to develop this.

The agency provides a good range of training to carers to prepare them for their role and to support them in their understanding and care of the young people they look after. This includes training in safeguarding, attachment, de-escalating challenging behaviour and first aid. Experienced carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards in fostering and newly approved carers are working to achieve this within the required period of time. Carers have an individual training and development plan that identifies how their specific training needs are to be met. They are very enthusiastic about the quality of the training they are given. They said that their initial training and assessment 'was a very good experience' and that the on going training is 'excellent'. The manager is proactive in ensuring that additional training is made available to carers to enable them to meet the specific needs of young people. For example, she has identified a training package for one family to support their communication with a young person with complex needs.

Young people are carefully matched to carers. The agency ensures that each young person has a pen picture of their carers before they are introduced to them. This supports young people at a time of transition. Carers report that when placements are made, they are given sufficient information about young people to enable them to understand and meet their needs. Foster carers work very effectively with placing social workers and are fully involved in the care planning and reviewing processes. They attend all reviews and meetings that are held about young people and advocate on their behalf, demonstrating a clear commitment to ensuring that young people achieve positive outcomes.

Carers support young people's contact with their families and help young people to understand about their background and history. Some carers have welcomed parents into their home for contact. This has helped young people to deal with any feelings of conflict of loyalty. Other carers have kept in touch with young people and parents for a time when a young person has gone home. This has helped to support the young person through the transition.

Supervising social workers visit carers very regularly to monitor and support them in their care of young people. Carers are very positive about the agency and report that they feel they feel valued as key members of the team working with young people. One said 'We are very much part of the team - it's not them and us'. Carers also report that the agency is keen to hear their views about how the service is run and how it might be improved to benefit young people.

All carers have information about the placing authority's scheme of delegated authority and reported that they understand which decisions they can take on behalf of or with young people. This enables them to give permission to young people for such things as sleep overs and school activities. This benefits young people as it means that they are able to access the same opportunities as their friends and there is no delay in decision making.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency is committed to securing the safety and well-being of young people and the arrangements to ensure this are robust. All of the young people who contributed to the inspection reported a strong sense of safety. They are supported to take age-appropriate risks and to develop an understanding of how to protect themselves. Young people know who they can talk to about any concerns they have. They said that they know how to complain, and that they would feel able to do so. They feel confident that they will be listened to and that they will be supported. Professionals reported that they have no concerns at all about the safety of young people and believe that they are 'very safe' with their carers.

All foster carers complete safeguarding training at an early stage in their work with this agency. The training is regularly refreshed to ensure that carers' knowledge of child protection remains up to date. As a result of their training and the work they do with the agency, carers fully understand the potential impact of abuse on young people and how best to meet their needs. The agency has clear safeguarding procedures in place. Carers have a good knowledge of these procedures and are confident about following them. The agency also has a clear whistle blowing protocol which carers understand and confirmed that they would use. They reported that the agency works in a very transparent way sharing all information openly. This promotes a culture of open communication which helps to ensure the safety of young people. The manager has made links with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer for Child protection. There have been no allegations against carers or other safeguarding concerns since the agency has been in operation.

The agency requires placing authorities to give them detailed information about young people. From this information, staff and carers develop risk assessments that are incorporated into placement plans. These are shared with the young people themselves, at a time and in a way that is appropriate to their needs. This helps young people to understand the detail of their plans and the reasons for them. Carers and young people talk openly about risks and these are well managed to ensure that young people are safe. At the time of this inspection, there had been no incident of a young person going missing from care. However, the likelihood of this is carefully considered when a young person is placed and is identified in their plans. The agency has a clear protocol for managing such incidents. This takes account of the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocol. Carers have a good understanding of these protocols, which are incorporated into their handbook. Consequently, they know what action they should take to protect young people if they do go missing.

Supervising social workers make very regular visits to carers. These include unannounced visits. Young people reported that they are always involved in the discussion with their foster carer and that supervising social workers also talk to them separately. This gives them an opportunity to raise any issue they want,

independent of their carer.

All staff and panel members are vetted before they start work with the agency. The agency's arrangements for managing this process are robust and protect young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency is managed very well. The manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She demonstrates a sound knowledge of her role and responsibilities and a clear commitment to ensuring that young people are well cared for and fully supported to achieve to their optimum. She has developed effective working relationships with placing authorities. This is confirmed by social workers who made many positive comments about the agency and the foster carers. For example, one said 'Communication from the supervising social worker and the foster carer is very good' and another 'I would be very happy to place another young person with this couple'.

The arrangements for monitoring the work of the service are robust. The manager regularly monitors all the records that are held in the agency. She seeks the views of young people, carers and placing authorities about the agency and the care of young people. The agency has been in operation for a little over a year and to date the manager has produced two detailed reports of the reviews she has undertaken. These also highlight the proposed developments in the agency. The manager has submitted the performance and data forms to Ofsted as required by the standards. In addition, she has undertaken some of the unannounced visits to carers. The information from these visits has also informed the monitoring process. The responsible individual also has good oversight of the work of the agency.

The agency's Statement of Purpose is clear and detailed. The manager has recently reviewed the document to ensure that it remains up to date. Guides for young people are produced in formats that are age appropriate and relevant to their needs. They provide young people with good information about fostering, this particular agency and their rights in care. All of these documents are available on the agency's web site, making them easily accessible to current and prospective carers, young people and professionals.

The agency is staffed in line with the information provided in the current Statement of Purpose. Plans are in place to employ further staff as the agency grows and the number of carers gradually increases. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced for their different roles. There are plans in place for the first annual appraisals of all staff.

Staff and carer supervision is effective. The manager and supervising social worker have regular supervision from a professional outside the agency. This provides a degree of independent scrutiny. Carers have regular visits from a supervising social worker, ensuring that there is good oversight of the carers and the well-being of

young people. Foster carers value the support that they receive from the agency and as a result, they feel confident in their role with looked after children. Staff and carer morale is high. This has a positive impact on the care of young people and promotes positive outcomes.

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, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.