

# Clifford House Fostering

Clifford House Fostering Limited  
7 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B61 7DL  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Clifford House Fostering service began in 1993 and became a limited company in 2010. In July 2014, the agency became part of the Partnerships in Children's Services (PiCS) group. The agency offers a range of mainstream fostering placements, which include short-term, long-term, bridging, unaccompanied minors seeking asylum and parent and child placements. There are currently 56 approved fostering households and 75 children living in foster homes.

**Inspection dates:** 20 to 24 November 2017

**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:** 10 December 2014

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children live with foster carers who are well trained and are skilled to meet their individual needs.
- The agency works hard to match children to foster carers who are best placed to meet children's needs well.
- Foster carers are highly motivated to make a difference to each child's life.
- An experienced and committed registered manager motivates and instils confidence in staff and foster carers.
- Children make good progress in stable foster homes. The agency works hard to support children to stay healthy, to achieve in education and to feel safe.
- Children feel safe and secure because their foster carers provide them with stability and routine. Foster carers know what to do if children's behaviour becomes unsafe.
- Children feel part of their foster families and the community in which they live.
- Children and carers receive practical and emotional support from the agency and enjoy regular social occasions to relax, enjoy and celebrate alongside staff and managers.
- An independent panel challenges the agency effectively.
- Placing authorities, children, foster carers and staff are wholeheartedly positive about the agency.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Individual risk assessments for children lack sufficient analysis and review.
- The registered manager does not always inform the regulator of significant events.
- Foster carers do not benefit fully from personal training and development plans.
- Foster carers do not complete their Training Support and Development Standards in expected timeframes.

## 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.

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))	31/01/2018

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. Specifically, that they are regularly reviewed with foster carers, children and placing authorities. (NMS 4.5)
- Ensure that all foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)
- Ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. (NMS 20.5)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make good progress. Children who have previously experienced frequent placement moves are now enjoying stability. Stable placements give children the secure base that they need to develop. One child told inspectors, 'I'm living with a family who loves me and cares for me.'

The majority of placements are planned. Children moving into foster care are able to see child-friendly information about their carers before they visit. The agency helps children to feel comfortable about moving in by organising careful introductions. This helps children to settle in, get on with their foster carers and feel part of the fostering family. One child told inspectors, 'They (foster carers) have shaped my life. Everything that I have achieved is due to their continued support and encouragement.' A placing social worker described a foster carer's welcome to a new child. He told inspectors, 'The minute he moved in, [the foster carer] learnt about what is important to him and rearranged his bedroom so it was like the one at home.'

Children live with well-trained carers who promote their progress. Carers enjoy regular opportunities to meet together and to undertake good-quality training. For example, carers are trained in therapeutic care practice, attachment theory and positive behaviour management. Training is put on in different locations and at different times. If necessary, training is individually delivered in carers' homes by their supervising social workers or the agency's trainer. This means that the whole carer household is sufficiently skilled to give the right help to fostered children. All foster carers have their own development plans. These record the training the carer has undertaken with the agency, but do not evaluate how this has supported carers to meet the needs of children living with them or identify any gaps in learning. New carers are welcomed and prepared well for the fostering task so that they provide positive outcomes for children from the outset. However, a number are still not completing their Training Support and Development Standards within acceptable timescales.

Supervising social workers are tenacious in their support for children's developing needs in placement. Children do well in their education. For example, one child has made 18 months' worth of progress with her phonics over a nine-month period. Foster carers take good care of children's health needs and encourage healthy lifestyles and leisure activities. Children with previously poor bedtime routines get into good sleep patterns. The agency listens and responds to any concerns from children when they do not feel at home in their foster families. Placing social workers told inspectors that their children 'absolutely thrived' in the agency's foster care.

A number of foster carers provide a good-quality fostering service to parent and baby placements and to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. These carers are very experienced and have an excellent understanding of children's language,

religion and cultural traditions. They undertake specific training and their approval status is amended to undertake this work only after consideration of their skills by the agency's fostering panel. One parent currently in a parent and baby placement told inspectors, '[the foster carers] are supportive, they help me when I need advice, if I am ill, if I am not sure what to do. If I move out, I still want to see the family.' Foster carers demonstrate insight and professionalism in working with interpreters, social work assessors, legal representatives and Home Office personnel. This ensures that parent and baby placements and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people get the right help and protection.

Children and carers receive good practical and therapeutic support from the agency and enjoy regular social occasions to relax and celebrate alongside staff and managers. The agency's supervising social workers provide immense individualised support to children and carers in complex situations. As one foster carer said about her supervising social worker, 'They are good at reminding you of the difference you have made and ensuring that you think of yourself and look after yourself, too!' The supervising social workers take time to get to know the children and build positive relationships with them. One child told the inspectors, 'She (the supervising worker) makes me feel that I count. That I'm somebody.' As a result, foster carers feel well supported. Staff and managers also put on award ceremonies, parties and fun days in the school holidays. These events are well attended and appreciated.

Managers and staff value all family members and consider their views. A foster carer said, 'They really care about the well-being of the foster family.' Foster carers' own children are included in events and separate sessions are held with them to support their experience of being part of a fostering family. Managers actively respond to children's feedback and seek their involvement in the development of the service. For example, a group of children recently prepared questions for new staff interviews.

Some children have moved on because they were ready for greater independence, or because foster carers could not manage their challenging needs. Many carers stay in touch with children, even when the move has been difficult. As one foster carer told inspectors, 'I still keep in touch with a girl who I fostered that got sectioned at age 12, following an overdose, and she is in her twenties now.' The agency tracks and reviews placement endings, including the handful of unplanned endings, to learn lessons about placement stability.

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

Children feel safe. As a result of the support that children receive, their behaviour becomes increasingly safe. This is because foster carers provide stability and routine. Furthermore, foster carers and staff identify, understand and manage children's risks. Carers and agency staff ensure that information about children is carefully reviewed at the beginning of each placement to assess and minimise risks that relate to children's behaviour and experience. Supervising social workers ensure that carers carefully supervise children by adopting safe routines around dressing, bathing, and medicines. These practices promote children's safety.

Children are safe in foster families that are rigorously assessed and regularly

reviewed. Close partnership working with placing social workers, parents and schools helps children to feel safe in consistent care. Up-to-date care plans and risk assessments provide valuable information to help foster carers and their supervising social workers monitor children's safety. Risk assessments, however, are not regularly reviewed by supervising social workers. This can lead to a lack of proportionality in the strategies identified, for example reviewing the supervision level required for parent and baby as the placement progresses.

Children are protected as far as possible from unnecessary risks at home or in the community. Foster carers help children to overcome anxiety, worry and unhappiness. Children who run away, or who are at risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking, are helped to be part of the plan to keep them safe. The agency takes action alongside safeguarding partners when risks are identified. Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are sound. Trained staff liaise with the local designated safeguarding officer about all allegations or concerns relating to foster carers. The agency provides good support to carers while any allegations against them are being investigated. Local authorities report extremely professional relationships and informal consultation about safeguarding thresholds. However, the significance of one of these events was not appropriately assessed by the registered manager to determine whether she needs to notify Ofsted. This means that the manager does not always inform the regulator of significant events. All concerns about carers are reviewed by the agency's panel to reconsider the carers' continuing approval. This is good practice.

Carers manage children's behaviour well. The clear and consistent boundaries that they provide contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for children. Carers and staff regularly discuss strategies for behaviour management that are based on positive relationships. The agency's social workers understand that creating positive, empathic relationships help children to feel safe and behave safely.

Carers express confidence about what to do about safeguarding, including dealing with allegations, children going missing, bullying, and disclosures. Staff train carers about the dangers that children face when going missing, such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. Staff have a clear understanding of the agency's policies and procedures and provide useful materials for carers to use with children. This means that carers know what to look out for and provide children with good help, advice and guidance as part of everyday living.

Systematic reminders and tracking in respect of health and safety checks, alongside two unannounced visits each year, ensure that foster homes are always safe places for children to live.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The agency is managed well by an experienced and qualified registered manager. She has been the registered manager since 2013. She has high expectations of what all children can achieve. Social workers, foster carers, senior agency managers and placing social workers speak highly of her positive impact. She has significant fostering and managerial experience. Staff told inspectors that the registered manager is encouraging and supportive. She promotes professional development.

Her active engagement in the daily conversations and decisions in the office provides motivational leadership for the staff.

The registered manager has an overview of each child's care plan and the progress that they are making towards their plan. She does this through effective supervision and team meetings with supervising social workers and the principal social worker. She is confident, from her consultation work with stakeholders, children and carers, that children continuously make progress from their starting points.

Leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity. The registered manager and social work staff are skilled and sensitive to children's backgrounds and experiences of abuse and neglect. They equip and expect carers to strive to add value to children's lives so that the gaps in children's development are bridged.

Leaders and managers have good-quality professional relationships with a large number of commissioning teams, social workers, schools and safeguarding professionals. They use these relationships well to ensure that children get good support in all areas of their development. Leaders and managers challenge professionals when responses from other services are not effective. For example, they ensure that decisions about whether or not to move children are made insightfully and carefully, especially when there are concerns or allegations about carers.

The registered manager has a full staff team that works energetically and effectively overall. She actively promotes team cohesion and mutual support, which benefits children and carers alike. Carers feel listened to and say that the agency empowers them to make a positive contribution as carer professionals in the team around the child.

All staff consulted felt well supported and enjoyed working for the agency. They receive regular professional supervision, which they say gives them the opportunity to reflect on their practice and receive guidance and support. Managers develop good working relationships with external agencies, including placing authorities. This is reflected in positive feedback from professionals. A clear statement of purpose helps staff, foster carers, placing authorities and parents to know what to expect from the agency. Children learn about their rights and entitlements in children's guides. These are currently being revised with help from children.

An effective panel, led by an experienced chairperson, makes informed recommendations about foster carers to the agency decision-maker. The panel gives good-quality assurance recommendations to assessing social workers and managers. This means that good-quality carers are recruited, and carers who are subject to review are upskilled to improve the quality of their work. The panel chair and agency staff have met to discuss their work. An annual panel training event is held, which includes agency staff. This provides opportunity to further develop and improve the agency's work.

## **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:** SC416290

**Registered provider:** Clifford House Fostering Limited

**Registered provider address:** Clifford House Fostering Limited, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Wavenden, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

**Responsible individual:** Simon Newstone

**Registered manager:** Naomi Ebanks-Simpson

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## **Inspector(s)**

Anne Daly, social care inspector

Rachel Britten, social care inspector



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