

# Community Foster Care

Community Foster Care

Unit 15 The Hawthorns, Hawthorn Lane, Staunton, Gloucester GL19 3NY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Community Foster Care is operated by an independent, not-for-profit charity. The agency has two registered offices in Gloucester (South) and Lancaster (North).

The Gloucester (South) branch oversees an additional office in Wootton Bassett, which does not carry out all the functions of a branch, so it does not have to be separately registered.

The agency recruits, assesses and supports foster carers who provide parent and child and short- and long-term placements for children and young people, some of whom may have disabilities. Emergency placements are also available.

The Gloucester (South) branch currently works with 29 approved foster carers and has 35 children placed. The manager was registered with Ofsted in October 2015.

**Inspection dates:** 22 to 26 October 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:** 8 June 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:

- High-quality, consistent foster care helps children and young people to feel confident and valued. This enables them to achieve their potential and to make good progress.
- Children and young people are very well consulted. They have made a significant difference to the agency's development by contributing their views.
- Foster carers are well supported by experienced, well-trained staff. They receive regular supervisory visits, excellent training and professional consultation with a qualified psychotherapist.
- The agency has a good reputation, which means that many foster carers are recruited through word of mouth. They are impressed by the agency's child-focused approach.
- The agency is well managed. Leaders and managers have introduced several new initiatives to further improve the service to children, young people and foster carers.
- Governance of the agency is highly effective. The fostering panel and agency decision maker provide good-quality assurance. There is a well-led and supportive board of trustees, which provides professional guidance and effective scrutiny.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The registered person should ensure that staff files are maintained in line with the requirements of Regulation 20 and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations 2011.
- The registered person should continue with plans to increase representation from minority ethnic groups within the agency.

## 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>
<p>20: Fitness of workers</p> <p>Ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3)(c) and Schedule 1)</p> <p>In particular, ensure that: there are no gaps in employment history; reasons for leaving employment are fully recorded; the agency carries out its own checks on panel members; and that identity information documents and staff qualification certificates are retained on file.</p>	<p>31/12/2018</p>

## Inspection judgements

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

The children and young people respond well to high standards of care. They form excellent relationships with their foster carers. As a result, they make good progress.

Some children and young people have made impressive achievements in many aspects of their daily lives. For example, some young people play sport to a high standard. One young person has achieved a football referee qualification. Another young person, who at one time declined to become involved with any physical activity, has gained sufficient confidence to participate in a game of rugby.

One young child had several placement breakdowns before he came to this agency. He has now been in a stable foster family for five years.

The foster carers are highly skilled and experienced. They are extremely dedicated and committed to the children and young people. Foster carers feel very well supported by supervisory visits, which are timed to reflect their experience, confidence and the level of risk in the placement. For example, parent and child foster carers receive weekly visits to help them to manage this high-risk area of work. Diligent monitoring by the foster carer and supervising social worker identified risks to a child and they worked well with the placing authority to intervene and as a result, this child is now safe. Foster carers also receive very good training to help them to meet the children's and young people's individual needs.

Children, young people and fostering families take part in lots of activities together. They have fun at regular social events and enjoy the annual residential camps. Activities are expertly led by skilled and experienced support staff. During the inspection, children and young people attended an independence skills day at a local community centre. They worked exceptionally well together in a group task, in which they had to choose a menu, go shopping and prepare a meal for everyone to share. The children and young people enjoyed themselves, while learning to work collaboratively and developing new skills.

Support staff also work with individual children and young people who need extra help. For example, one young person was thought to be at risk of controlling behaviour from a person in the community. A member of staff engaged this young person in a project to learn about a true case of a woman who had suffered serious harm from her partner. This helped to empower the young person to withstand oppressive behaviour from others and consequently, has helped to keep her safer.

Foster carers make sure that the children's and young people's health needs are met and that they receive a good-quality diet.

The agency is justifiably proud of its work to encourage participation. The 'Experienced in Care Squad' is a consultation group of young people who meet and discuss areas for development. The group has revised the children's guide and has

helped to recruit staff to work with the agency.

Foster carers spoken to during the inspection were full of praise for the agency. The agency surveys foster carers' views and acts on the results. For example, foster carers requested that training should be provided locally. The agency has responded to this and has organised training closer to where foster carers live.

Communication between agency staff and placing social workers is very good. Placing social workers are happy with the quality of care and the children's and young people's progress. They are pleased that some young people are so engaged with their foster families that they want to remain with them into adulthood.

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

The agency ensures that children and young people are safe. Risk assessments for individual young people are detailed and contain clear strategies. Risks associated with fostering households are also safely managed.

Some young people have gone missing, but the agency has responded appropriately in each instance. This includes escalating concerns to a wider professional group and instigating meetings with other agencies.

The agency's leaders, managers, staff and foster carers are aware of the local safeguarding procedures. The registered manager or responsible individual (RI) appropriately report any matters of concern to the relevant local authority designated officer when required.

Children and young people receive prompt support to help them to manage their behaviour. The agency staff work collaboratively with placing social workers and foster carers and other agencies to ensure that there is consistency of approach to children with very complex needs. This helps children to feel secure and confident that responses to behaviour are measured and appropriate.

Recently, the RI has commissioned a qualified psychotherapist to help train foster carers and the staff. The psychotherapist listens to what foster carers and the staff have to say and gives them advice about how to help children and young people who need extra support. This will help to further improve placement stability. Foster carers are extremely positive about this development.

The fostering service has a good system for responding to concerns and complaints. Leaders and managers ensure that these are fully investigated and that there is a prompt and appropriate response.

Although many aspects of staff recruitment meet regulatory requirements, there are a number of shortfalls in the staff recruitment files. The agency is still in the process of transferring all information to an electronic system. Consequently, not all of the recruitment information is kept in the same location. This has made management monitoring difficult.

During the inspection, most of the gaps in information were remedied. The RI amended the agency's recruitment procedures to ensure that there are effective management checks in future. These shortfalls do not have a negative impact on the children and young people.

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

The agency is very well monitored. Leaders and managers have good oversight and prepare regular, evaluative reports for the board of trustees and for the fostering panel. Children's and young people's outcomes and experiences are recorded well and tracked to ensure that they are making progress.

The appointment of a new RI earlier this year has led to a number of creative initiatives. Staff and other professionals commented on the positive impact of the new RI. He is ambitious for the agency but is careful to ensure that it grows in a sustainable manner. He and the registered manager work well together to ensure that the agency is well run and that it retains children and young people at the centre of its focus.

Financial planning has been reviewed. Leaders and managers identified an area of the agency's non-fostering activities which was financially vulnerable. They took decisive action to ensure that this area of work was restructured. As a result, the agency has sufficient reserves to continue to provide a good service to children and young people and to remain financially viable.

The staff are highly motivated, very child-focused and passionate about their work. Supervising social workers and support staff receive very good-quality training and now have access to professional consultation. This helps them to provide a good service to foster carers and consequently, to children and young people.

The agency has an efficient, well-chaired fostering panel, which provides an invaluable quality assurance function. For example, the experienced panel chair and agency decision maker meet quarterly with the agency's managers to discuss learning and development, raising standards and other quality assurance matters. This has led to some creative and innovative ideas.

Leaders and managers have identified a young adult, who is care-experienced, with a view to this person joining the panel. This will help to increase the diversity of experience among panel members. There is still a need to increase ethnic diversity on the panel, as well as among the group of foster carers. The agency has already identified this as an area for improvement, but, to date, there have been no suitable applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds.

## **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:** SC035415

**Registered provider:** Community Foster Care

**Registered provider address:** Unit 15 The Hawthorns, Hawthorn Lane, Staunton, Gloucester GL19 3NY

**Responsible individual:** Mark Kingston

**Registered manager:** Linda Taylor

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## **Inspector(s)**

Heather Chaplin: social care inspector



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