

Caldecott Fostering

Caldecott Foundation Limited

Caldecott Fostering Ltd, Riverside Campus, Thanet Way, Chestfield, Kent CT5 3JQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency provides support to 13 children, mainly in the Kent area. The agency has 13 foster households. It provides a range of fostering opportunities for children. In addition, staying put arrangements are in place for young people to remain with carers beyond their 18th birthday. The fostering agency has an office in Chestfield, Kent.

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 January 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 18 January 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children and young people have strong and trusting relationships with their foster carers and can therefore make exceptional progress across most areas of their lives.
- The fostering agency staff hold children and young people at the centre of their work and are passionate and committed in doing their best for them.
- Most children and young people strongly benefit from individual direct work, such as life story work.
- Children and young people's views about the care that they receive are listened to and acted on.
- Children and young people are strong participants in the development of the service.
- The young people's panel is an outstanding and innovative piece of work.
- There is a highly effective, robust and rigorous panel in place that is complemented by a very experienced and independent agency decision-maker.
- Foster carers are highly skilled and totally committed to the children and young people in their care.
- Foster carers feel highly valued and supported by agency staff and are proud to work for this agency.
- Fostering agency staff have high morale and are totally committed to this agency.
- Training provision and quality is a huge strength both for staff and carers.
- Behaviour management by carers is effective and reflects their well-developed skills.
- Local authority colleagues highly value the communication with this agency and the high standard of placements offered.
- The registered manager is highly effective, tenacious and ambitious for excellence.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Five recommendations are made to encourage further development in the following areas: updating the systems used to record children and young people's progress; amending unnecessary detail in children and young people's risk assessments; ensuring that notifications of significant events are made promptly, even if not all the information is available at that point; training foster carers on the particular safeguarding issues concerning disabled children; and making sure that the premises feel comfortable and welcoming to all.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. (National minimum standard 2.1)
Specifically, ensure that systems used to record children's progress fully reflect individual needs and current best practice.
- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National minimum standard 4.5)
Specifically, ensure that risk assessments do not detail unnecessary management plans.
- The registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. (National minimum standard 29.1)
- Foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused. For foster carers who offer placements to disabled children, this includes training specifically on issues affecting disabled children. (National minimum standard 4.6)
Specifically, ensure that safeguarding training adequately covers the particular risks that apply to disabled children.
- The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its Statement of Purpose. (National minimum standard 27.0)
Specifically, ensure that the premises are comfortable for people from all faiths, and those with no faith.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Everyone in this small agency is strongly invested in the progress and experiences of all their children. As a member of the office staff said, 'Our key question is, what can we do to make this child's life better?' In practice, this means a genuine interest in how everyone in the foster family is doing, and where necessary, the practical provision of essentials to improve day-to-day life. Unsurprisingly, this secure and stable base enables a wide range of children to flourish. Young disabled children and older teenagers alike make excellent progress, and as a young person said, 'They are always so nice and understanding and they love us for who we are.'

Most children have been in placement for four years or more, and as such foster family relationships are well developed and children have secure attachments. Successful staying put arrangements are in place, and the agency highly values the input that older teenagers have into the agency's functioning, for example in helping both to train and recruit foster carers.

Children engage in a wide variety of stimulating social experiences, either with others, such as an agency water skiing event, or individually. For example, some children enjoy horse riding, skating or drama and others attend army cadets or other organised clubs. They are rightly proud of their successes in these areas. These new-found skills boost their self-esteem and confidence in themselves and enable them to tackle other new experiences.

Decision-making within the agency is child-centred and takes full account of children's views. They also feel able to share their views about the care they receive. For example, when appropriate, they are supported by the agency to change their placement.

Foster carers enable children to express their views and make choices. This has involved, in one case, enabling a child to develop their verbal communication. Children consistently provided extremely positive feedback on their care, with one child describing their carers as 'great and really supportive' and another saying, 'They care a lot and worry about us.'

Children feel central to the agency and know that their views directly impact on the development of the service. Through the systems now in place, children's consultation is embedded across all of the agency's work. This demonstrates how the agency values children's contributions. Exemplary practice in this area is evidenced in the young people's panel, which is chaired by a young person. Young people directly influence the approval of new carers through their participation. Foster carers are extremely positive about the support and scrutiny offered by their agency social worker. This is despite some having had several changes of social workers. One such foster carer commented, 'It was fine, all the

staff were available to support you.' Local authority social workers are also very positive about the agency, praising their regular and helpful communication. They are also extremely impressed by the foster carers that they work with directly, noting their willingness to 'go the extra mile'.

Foster carers are well supported by the agency to ensure that children get the best educational experience that they can. The success of this strategy is demonstrated in that all children have good or excellent education attendance records. Children's health also improves, in that some become much taller and settle at an appropriate weight, while others have major successes in toilet training and in using verbal communication. A social worker commented that her foster child now, 'ate loads of different foods' and 'His appearance is now much shinier.'

The agency has an explicitly therapeutic ethos that is strongly relationship-based. This is very well threaded throughout the organisation, mainly because of the excellent training and clinical support that foster carers have received. In addition, many children benefit from the individual sessions that they have with support workers, covering important areas like life story work. The positive impact of this approach is apparent in the exceptional progress some children have made, especially in the areas of communicating rather than acting out their feelings and dealing more effectively with stress and disappointment.

The agency records children's progress in a thorough and detailed way. However, the method used is outdated, and some children's experiences do not fit well within it. This system does not sufficiently reflect either the progress made or the level of commitment to recording and celebrating it.

Prospective foster carers feel welcomed and valued when they approach the agency and for some this a very welcome contrast to their experiences in approaching other fostering agencies. The foster carer assessment process helps them reflect on their skills and gaps and the final assessment reports are appropriately thorough and analytical. Full information on prospective placements is always shared with foster carers and this helps support both placement stability and foster care retention.

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

High-quality safeguarding practice is at the centre of this agency's success. Where possible, the agency tries to exceed expectations, for example by completing two unannounced visits a year to foster carers rather than one. Foster care reviews are all scrutinised by the panel chair, providing an effective safety net, and panel members are asked to read and discuss the learning from relevant serious case reviews. This helps remind them of their crucial gatekeeping role. All foster carers follow a bespoke safeguarding pathway from their assessment point and this is repeated at least annually.

In addition, safeguarding training has been overhauled, resulting in separate courses, for example on child sexual exploitation. This is commendable, but the

risks to safety experienced by disabled children are not sufficiently covered in safeguarding training. However, overall, the agency's strong and effective emphasis on equipping staff, the panel and carers with safeguarding skills reduces the possibilities of children being at risk of harm.

Foster carers are well equipped to deal effectively with such risks as child sexual exploitation, social media, or children going missing from their home. Foster carers not only follow missing from home protocols effectively, but tenaciously search for children who are missing and are active participants at strategy meetings. The agency also encourages children to keep themselves safe, for example by holding individual sessions on internet safety.

Risk assessments are regularly and thoroughly completed, and helpfully reflect the positive impact of the agency in decreasing risks in areas such as substance misuse and aggressive behaviour. However, some risk assessments lack clarity and sharpness in that they detail unnecessary management plans when no actual risk is identified.

Behaviour management is a strength in this agency. The excellent training and support that foster carers receive enables them to deal very effectively with challenging and difficult situations. Foster carers can report several examples of when they successfully de-escalated conflict using skills that they have learned from the agency, and this gives them further confidence to deal with other tense situations.

There is safe recruitment practice in place, with appropriate checks and verification of foster carers, staff and panel members. This helps minimise the risks of unsuitable people gaining access to vulnerable children.

The agency makes appropriate notifications to Ofsted, and these clarify the sound actions that have been taken. However, on occasion, the agency waits for further pieces of information to come through, which delays the notification being sent. This does not put children at risk but does not support appropriate scrutiny. The agency is very prompt at acting on concerns about the safety of a child and is willing and keen to defend its decision to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). This further demonstrates their commitment to protecting children from possible harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

There is a highly effective, appropriately trained registered manager who has been in post since 2015. Since that time, she has had a relentless focus on improving the service to children and foster carers. Consequently, in these three years there has been a massive amount of positive change. For example, there is a new panel chair, a whole new staff team, new systems and processes, a new electronic recording system and a clear focus on upskilling foster carers. These necessary initiatives have not been achieved without stress and setbacks at times, but they are now complete and have ensured that the agency is now highly professional, safe and totally child-focused. As an internal colleague said,

'She has been courageous in raising the bar, and all of them [staff and foster carers] now really want to do this job just right.'

The agency is appropriately staffed, with an excellent mix of different skills. It is well resourced, and any financial pressures that might compromise quality are absolutely minimised. The current premises do have strengths; for example, there is a café on site, but it is a proudly faith-based setting, and this may not be a comfortable space for all to visit. The agency is now poised to expand, and senior managers are sympathetic to a moderate pace of organic growth that will not risk the wins that have been hard fought for. There is a very effective panel in place that offers robust gatekeeping services to the agency and has appropriately high expectations of the quality of work presented to it.

There are comprehensive monitoring systems in place covering all processes. Of particular note is the registered manager's placement monitoring tool that details the reasons and learning from any placement that ends. This provides excellent opportunities for all parties to reflect, and most importantly learn practice lessons for the future.

Effective action has been taken to meet the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. As part of the radical change programme, some deregistration decisions were made that have resulted in appeals to the IRM. The agency decision-maker has demonstrated the agency's strong commitment to providing a high-quality service by carefully considering, but not always following, the IRM's recommendations. However, the agency has scrupulously followed proper process, and agency decisions are well made and well founded.

The registered manager has excellent knowledge of the children in the agency's care, as indeed does the whole team. As such, matching is an informed and collaborative process. On occasion, there have been gaps in the provision of agency social work support to foster carers. The registered manager has adeptly filled these gaps and has been a strong advocate for both foster carers and for children. A foster carer commented, 'The transition was seamless. The registered manager stepped in and already knew everything that she needed to know.'

Supervision and appraisal are routinely carried out for both carers and staff. They include the appropriate balance of support and challenge. Training and development are big strengths in this agency. Carers and staff alike refer to it as 'excellent', and there is a good mix of mandatory and more bespoke courses. All foster carers have achieved their training, support and development standards within an appropriate timescale.

The agency is clearly meeting its aims and objectives. A foster carer commented, 'This is a fantastic agency and we are so proud to be part of it.'

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: SC420507

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