

Freedom Fostering

Freedom Fostering Limited
27 Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton WV1 4DJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Freedom Fostering is an independent fostering agency registered in 2003. The director of the company is the responsible individual. The agency undertakes recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. The range of placement types provided include emergency, long-term, medium-term, short-term and parent and child placements. The agency currently has 14 fostering families and 34 children placed.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 July 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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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: 16 April 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Staff and foster carers support children and young people to make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives. For example, one child has made significant improvement with their speech and language development. Another child has learned self-care skills and is working towards attending a mainstream education provision. This had not previously been thought possible due to his health needs and lack of engagement in school historically. Children and young people are not disadvantaged despite their challenging starting points. They have a brighter future due to the dedication of the foster carers and the staff.

A strength of this agency is the outstanding commitment that staff and carers demonstrate to promoting education for all children and young people. Consequently, children and young people make exceptional academic progress. All children and young people who are of compulsory school age are in full-time education, with the majority achieving 100% attendance. Children and young people are supported to attend the best local schools, submit applications for university and seek employment. Staff and foster carers have high aspirations for children and young people and support them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Children and young people have a strong sense of belonging and report that they feel happy. Over 80% of placements are long-term, giving children and young people the opportunity to build extremely positive relationships with their carers and become part of their family. Foster carers support children and young people to see their birth families on a regular basis. Foster carers actively build relationships with birth parents when appropriate to do so, and gain an understanding of the family's cultural needs. This is particularly beneficial for children and young people in transracial placements, and helps children and young people to understand why they are not able to live with their birth families.

Foster carers support children and young people to manage their health needs and improve their emotional health and well-being. For example, one young person struggles to regulate his emotions and build positive relationships. The foster carer provides him with a structured routine, communicates daily with his school and supports him to understand what behaviours are acceptable. Strong relationships with other professionals support the young person to access mental health services. This has been hugely beneficial for him. Another young person is more able to recognise and manage his feelings and emotions. One of the many benefits of this is that his school attendance has increased from 76% to 100% over a 12-month period.

Foster carers are provided with additional training to manage children and young people's specific health needs, for example microcephaly. Consequently, children and young people are cared for by knowledgeable, skilled foster carers who help them to progress.

There have not been any placement breakdowns since the last inspection. When children and young people have moved this has been in a planned and positive way, with foster carers being fully involved in the transitions. Children and young people moving into foster placements are warmly welcomed and settle quickly. They are provided with a range of child-friendly information about the foster carers. Staff are developing this further to include more pictures, which will allow children and young people to better understand where they are moving to.

Children and young people have many positive experiences with their foster families. They enjoy family holidays, and families can use the agency's holiday caravan free of charge each year. Staff at the agency spend quality time with foster children and birth children. Staff take them out on day trips and weekends away, and transport them to activities and provide educational experiences. All care provided by the staff is child focused and gives foster carers a period of respite.

The direct work that staff carry out with children and young people is excellent and is underpinned by research and social work theory. Children and young people are taught in a fun and positive way about valuing others. This develops children and young people's empathy and their ability to care about and consider others. Staff provide children and young people with the opportunity to make positive contributions in innovative ways. For example, children and young people make Christmas boxes for soldiers, cakes for the homeless and 'twiddle blankets' for patients suffering with dementia.

One of the many direct work sessions organised by staff focuses on the concept of sharing. Staff use a ball game at a local park to undertake the work, which is underpinned by constructivism theory. The sessions are successful and allow children and young people to identify the feelings that they had when they were not given the ball or when they lose and win. Children and young people are helped to understand how they can have a positive impact on others by including them in games.

Staff actively seek children and young people's views through direct work, a children's panel and evaluations. These give children and young people forums to raise any concerns or complaints that they may have, and lots of opportunities to share their ideas. For example, children and young people requested that a residential trip should be planned, and this was then arranged by staff. Staff are also considering how best to meet children and young people's requests to be part of the recruitment process for proposed foster carers.

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

Foster carers and staff are skilled and experienced. They do not give up on children or young people when they exhibit challenging behaviour. Foster carers are provided with support, training, advice and guidance from staff and external professionals when this is required to meet children and young people's specific needs.

Risk assessments are up to date and highlight all known risks. They provide carers

with strategies to manage these risks and keep children and young people safe.

When child protection concerns arise, managers and staff act quickly and increase the support that children, young people and foster carers receive. Staff work collaboratively with other professionals, but appropriately challenge them when staff deem that their practice is poor or not in the best interests of the child or young person.

Foster carers and staff work with children and young people to teach them how to keep safe. Children and young people are taught about right and wrong and are supported to make good choices. Foster carers and staff are provided with training to support children who may be at risk of child exploitation, and screening tools are used to assess such risks. There are no children or young people in the agency who are considered to be subject to exploitation or involved in criminal activity.

Children and young people do not go missing from their foster homes. This is because they are settled and happy and have built trusting relationships with their foster carers.

Prior to the inspection, managers had identified that they should have reported some incidents to Ofsted sooner. Inspectors also found an incident that had not been reported. However, appropriate action was taken. This shortfall does not detract from the otherwise excellent safeguarding practices.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is currently without a registered manager. The previous registered manager has recently left. All requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been addressed.

Leaders and managers have taken the decision not to recruit any foster carers since the last inspection. They have focused on strengthening the service, allowing them to make substantial improvements. Staff feel more skilled and confident in their role. This is due to training and exceptional communication throughout the service. Documentation such as risk assessments and records of staff and foster carers' supervision are much improved and now capture the outstanding work that is being done. The development of a new recording and monitoring system ensures that any areas of development are identified quickly and acted on.

The responsible individual has developed a culture within the agency of high aspirations and exceptional care for all children and young people, in a family environment. This culture and vision are disseminated throughout the service and shared by staff and foster carers.

Foster carers receive regular and in-depth supervision that focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people. Each session provides training that is linked to understanding the national minimum standards. Supervising social workers are skilled at challenging practice if needed, and identifying any training needs that carers may have.

Foster carers' annual reviews are of an exceptionally high quality. They are detailed and give a clear overview of the foster carers' practice over the past year. They provide clear targets and recommendations for the following year.

Staff supervision is of a high quality. The emphasis is on children and young people in addition to professional development. Staff are actively encouraged to access training that interests them and that will support their future development.

The agency retains experienced foster carers from a diverse background who can offer high-quality care to children who have complex needs. Since the last full inspection, no foster carers have left the agency. Most carers have been with the agency for many years.

The responsible individual works with local universities to offer placements for social work students. The responsible individual understands the need to create an environment that provides learning opportunities for all.

The responsible individual makes child-centred decisions when matching children to foster carers and is creative about how to meet the children and young people's needs. Transracial placements have been successful. Foster carers and supervising social workers support children and young people to ensure that their cultural needs are consistently met.

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.

Requirement	Due date
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))	26/07/2019

Recommendations

- Unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. Wherever possible, children are able to visit the foster carer's home and to talk with the foster carers in private prior to a placement decision being made. Children can bring their favourite possessions into the foster carer's home. (National minimum standard 11.3)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC037304

Registered provider: Freedom Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: 27 Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton WV1 4DJ

Responsible individual: Maureen Johnson

Registered manager: Post vacant

Telephone number: 01902 429290

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Inspectors

Lisa O'Donovan, social care inspector

Annemarie Parker, social care inspector



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