

Olive Branch Fostering Ltd

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Hurstwood Court, New Hall Hey Road, Rawtenstall BB4 6HH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency offers long-term, short-term, respite and emergency foster care placements for children aged from birth to 17 years. Children who reach the age of 18 can continue living with their foster carers as young adults.

The manager registered with Ofsted in June 2021.

Foster carers and children were spoken to during the inspection.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was supporting 87 fostering households caring for 113 children.

Inspection dates: 25 to 29 November 2024

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	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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: 23 August 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points. They are helped to form secure attachments with their foster carers and the foster carer's families. Foster carers support children to develop trust and help them to develop their confidence and self-esteem. One child said about their foster family, 'I love being here, I love my sisters and my foster family, it is just so cool.' Another child said that '[Name of carer] has been an amazing carer.'

The agency is committed to delivering exceptional support to children and foster families. Through a diverse range of planned activities for children and foster carers, children's social and emotional well-being is promoted. Children receive nurturing care that enables them build enduring relationships, including with the birth children of foster carers. This helps children to develop a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Therapeutic support provided by the agency is exceptionally well-planned and grounded in research and evidence. This approach has a positive impact on children's experiences as children are supported to learn effective strategies to navigate their emotions and develop emotional resilience and growth.

A strength of the agency lies in its proactive approach to caring for children of different faiths and cultural identities. Foster carers and staff ensure that the individual needs of children are met with sensitivity and care. Thoughtful and inclusive practices exemplify the agency's commitment to promoting and celebrating diversity.

Children's moves into their foster homes are exceptionally well supported. Their needs are carefully considered alongside their foster family to ensure stability is maintained. One carer said, 'The placement officer is amazing. The perfect person for the job. They take into account our own family dynamics'.

Children's health and well-being are prioritised well. Foster carers receive comprehensive training to address health needs effectively. Support staff provide an additional layer of expert support for children, carers, supervising social workers, and professionals. This ensures that health-related issues are identified and addressed with urgency and care.

Educational support provided by the agency is bespoke. All children are engaged in education. When they are unable to attend mainstream education a plan of support is provided to ensure that children receive wrap around support to allow them to engage and continue to learn. Notably, some foster children have been successful in accessing support which has led them to go onto university. In addition, children are supported with advocacy which has enabled them to access apprenticeships appropriate to their career choices.

The agency's provision of parent-and-child placements ensures that children remain with their parents during care proceedings. These specialist placements are supported by highly skilled foster carers who provide nurturing environments and guidance. These carers enable young parents to develop the essential skills needed to care for their children with confidence and competence. One placing authority social worker said, 'I cannot be happier with the placement and wish we found it earlier.'

Support for young people transitioning to independence is excellent. Through the well-implemented 'staying put' initiative, young people benefit from continuity, stability, and robust guidance. Foster carers and staff provide a comprehensive package of emotional, practical, and financial support, enabling young people to build confidence and acquire critical life skills. This ensures that they are well-prepared and optimistic about their futures.

The agency demonstrates exceptional care in supporting unaccompanied children, ensuring that they make significant progress. Cultural and faith matching is handled with great care, enabling these children to settle well and thrive. This support extends to language and educational development which helps them develop a secure foundation for success.

Children's voices are central to the agency's ethos, actively influencing the shaping of services. Opportunities such as participation in young volunteer groups, contributions to children's guides and recruitment of panel members ensure that their perspectives are valued and acted upon. This collaborative approach ensures that services continually evolve to meet the needs of children effectively.

The agency's records are exemplary in their accessibility, they are written using child-friendly, jargon-free language and engaging visuals where required. These records not only reflect the voices of children but also integrate feedback from children, underscoring the agency's commitment to transparency and meaningful engagement.

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

An exceptionally strong safeguarding culture underpins practice across the agency. Children consistently feel safe with their foster carers. Open lines of communication between carers and their supervising social workers ensure that children feel supported and confident in sharing any concerns. This significantly promotes their overall sense of security and well-being.

Highly effective safer care and risk management plans contain relevant information to keep children and foster families safe. Plans are comprehensive, and regularly updated. When issues arise, they are promptly addressed, with all necessary information carefully documented to ensure children continue to receive the highest standard of care.

The agency's safeguarding training for foster carers is good and based in research and best practice. In-person sessions, complemented by online training, ensure that foster carers are well-equipped to address complex safeguarding needs. Supervising social workers maintain oversight of foster carers' training requirements and swiftly arrange bespoke training as needed. This further demonstrates the agency's commitment to safeguarding children that need specific support.

Supervising social workers visit children regularly, ensuring that their voices are heard and acted upon. These visits include private discussions with children, creating a safe space for them to express their views. Additionally, unannounced home visits form a key part of the agency's rigorous monitoring processes.

Allegations and concerns are handled with diligence. Each incident is rigorously reviewed, ensuring that lessons are learned and shared across the team to enhance safeguarding practices. This proactive approach highlights the agency's dedication to maintaining good safeguarding standards.

Direct work sessions with children are thoughtfully planned. These sessions address a range of issues, such as online safety, empowering children to understand risks and make informed choices. Tailored interventions are informed by extensive research and, when necessary, led by the support team, ensuring that carers are equipped with strategies to support children effectively.

Assessments that are undertaken on current and prospective foster carers are detailed and robust. When prospective carers first enquire about fostering to this agency, they receive a warm and positive welcome. Pre-approval processes prepare prospective foster carers sufficiently to understand the fostering role.

The agency's recruitment and vetting processes are thorough. Managers ensure that all staff and panel members undergo thorough vetting to confirm their suitability to work with children. The oversight provided by a dedicated officer further reinforces the agency's robust approach to safeguarding. This ensures that only those that are safe to work with children can do so.

Clear and comprehensive safeguarding policies are in place throughout the agency. When children go missing the agency works closely with relevant authorities to ensure children's safe return. Follow-up interviews are conducted to understand and mitigate risks, demonstrating the agency's proactive and child-centered approach to safeguarding. These issues are also part of the management auditing of the service and helps to identify trends, address emerging safeguarding issues, and implement improvements, ensuring that children's safety remains at the forefront of practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The fostering service benefits from inspirational and ambitious leadership that prioritises children's experiences and outcomes. The registered manager and responsible individual are highly qualified and experienced. They support a team of

suitably skilled managers and staff who are committed to providing exceptionally high-quality foster care for children.

Although part of a larger organisation, the agency has retained its family-centered ethos, maintaining strong local connections. Foster carers consistently praise the agency's nurturing and inclusive approach, emphasising its commitment to preserving a supportive family feel. The dedication and continuity provided by the director and registered manager have been instrumental in this achievement.

Leaders demonstrate a thorough understanding of the service. Monitoring systems enable swift identification and resolution of any issues, enabling continuous improvement. Leaders and managers review the data with feedback from children, carers, and staff to refine practices and address emerging challenges promptly.

Supervising social workers receive regular, impactful and reflective supervision sessions. Additional supervision meetings with support services take place when children receive specialised services. This approach promotes a high level of insight and responsiveness in the team.

The fostering panel is chaired by an independent chair and members of the central list have significant experience drawn from personal and professional experience. The panel operates with diligence and professionalism to ensure that robust recommendations are made. The agency decision maker is consistent and thoughtful with their decisions which are in the best interest of children. The agency has taken action to ensure that additional work completed by the panel chair does not compromise their independence.

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

Recommendation

- The purpose of the independent chair is to ensure that the panel may be seen to fulfil its quality assurance functions free of undue influence by the fostering service itself. 'Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4', Section 5.10)

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: 1230838

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Inspectors

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Nicola Forrester, social care inspector

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