

Childhood First

Institute of Integrated Systemic Therapy
Childhood First, 210 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1JX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Childhood First is an independent fostering agency. The agency is part of a large charitable organisation. This is the fostering agency's first Ofsted inspection.

The agency aims to provide high-quality substitute family care embedded in a systemic therapy model. The philosophy and ethos of the agency is to transform the lives of young people who suffer severe emotional and psychological difficulties, so that they can relate well to others, fulfil their potential and enjoy life.

The agency aims to primarily offer long-term stepdown placements to young people from the charity's four residential communities. Placements from local authorities will also be considered. Foster carers are in the Kent and Norfolk areas.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency has four approved foster-caring households. There were no young people placed with carers at the time of this inspection.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 July 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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 effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people benefit from the service's focus on promoting effective, healthy relationships, ensuring that the young people flourish and have positive experiences. Young people are nurtured and enhanced within their placements. This was verified by education professionals and social workers. As a result, young people make good progress from their starting points and their outcomes are good. A headteacher commented, 'For the first time in many years [X] has made and maintained a friendship outside of school.'

Young people receive highly individualized care that is tailored to meet their specific needs. They live in family settings that specifically focus on the recovery and rehabilitation of young people who have suffered abuse, neglect and other traumas.

Young people benefit significantly from the attention paid by the fostering agency to their emotional and therapeutic well-being. Foster carers receive expert support and training to enable them to sensitively communicate with young people and explore their emotional well-being.

Staff and foster carers explore and assess how the placements can enhance young people's emotional well-being and resilience. A range of therapeutic clinicians support foster carers to develop safe strategies to communicate effectively and engage positively with young people based on a systemic family model of intervention.

Young people's experiences are widened through the range of social and learning activities organized by their foster carers. Young people are supported to identify and pursue their talents while broadening their knowledge. One young person said, 'I live in a lovely home, with a lovely foster carer. We do everything together.'

Leaders, agency staff and foster carers have high aspirations for the young people in their care. They work diligently to improve the young people's lives and experiences. Education is closely monitored, and any barriers to a young person's learning are quickly responded to and any additional needs are identified and provided for.

Young people benefit from improved health outcomes. Foster carers work closely with specialist teams, to better understand and respond appropriately to young people's wide-ranging health needs.

Excellent matching, extensive pre-placement planning and placement meetings between foster carers, therapeutic clinicians and young people ensure that young people feel emotionally and physically safe and quickly at ease with their foster carers.

The agency is an inclusive organisation where dialogue with young people is positively sought at all levels of the organization.

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

The protection of young people is robust at all levels. Placements are carefully monitored and any causes for concern are quickly resolved. The agency and foster carers are highly aware of the vulnerabilities of the young people and are well informed of the underlying causes of behaviour that the young people can display. Innovative, research-based practice, together with the systemic therapy model of care, further contributes to keeping the young people safe.

The recruitment, assessment, preparation, intensive training and supervision of foster carers have a robust focus on safeguarding young people.

Appropriately qualified therapeutic social work staff complete foster assessments that are comprehensive and analytical and identify the strengths and competencies of prospective carers. Assessments and approvals are completed in a timely manner. Foster carers said that they appreciated the thoughtfulness of the assessment process. Assessors gave careful consideration in working around carers' individual obligations.

The fostering panel is fully committed to the young people's welfare and promoting their best interests. Panel members have a range of expertise, which includes social work, emotional and physical health and fostering. The panel chair is a highly experienced social worker. The panel provides detailed analysis of the information obtained from the assessment process of potential applicants, and makes reliable, informed recommendations. Relevant policies and procedures are in place to support the panel.

Training and support opportunities for therapeutic foster carers are impressive. All carers benefit from an extensive training programme based on recognition, understanding and supporting the complex needs of young people who have experienced severe emotional trauma. Foster carers said the level and quality of training are excellent.

Foster carers receive a high level of support and supervision from the agency, which is fully aware of, and is considerate of, the impact of fostering on family life. Foster carers receive weekly support from a range of professionals, including therapeutic practitioners, systemic family therapists and supervising social workers.

Young people's welfare and safety are enhanced through consistent safer recruitment practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is exceptionally well managed by an experienced, highly skilled and fully committed registered manager. She leads with confidence, ambition and tenacity. Her central purpose is to provide a quality service for the young people. Her

aspirations for the young people and staff are high, and she demands high standards. The manager's approach has earned her the full respect of foster carers and professionals.

The agency's statement of purpose is a detailed, comprehensive document that accurately outlines the philosophy, aims and objectives of the fostering service. The children's guide is well written and provides a short summary of the services provided for young people. However, it fails to contain good enough information on the complaint's procedures or access to advocacy services.

The agency is financially sound, and its business plan outlines plans for the service's future development.

Staff are highly qualified and well trained. Supervising social workers are trained in the systemic therapy model of care. Staff and foster carers all share the vision and enthusiasm of their leaders and managers. Foster carers said that they feel proud to be part of a carefully selected and trained group of professionals entrusted to provide care and support to vulnerable young people.

An excellent quality assurance system permeates all aspects of the agency's work and contributes to continuing improvement. The agency utilises effective technology, which contributes to excellent monitoring systems which provide staff with up-to-date information on the progress of young people and identify any shortfalls that need addressing. As a result, managers have good insight into the effectiveness of the service.

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

Recommendations

- The fostering service must ensure that children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding. Children know their rights to advocacy, how to access an advocate and how to contact the children's commissioner. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 1.5)
- The fostering service must ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 1.6)

In particular, ensure that the complaints system is easily accessible to young people.

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: 1263675

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Inspector

Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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