

Silver Lining Fostering

Silver Lining Fostering Limited

Suite B607, 6th Floor, Vista Centre, 50 Salisbury Road, Hounslow, Hounslow TW4 6JQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency registered with Ofsted on 12 October 2018. It provides a wide range of fostering placements for children from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, bridging, respite, short-, medium- and long-term placements. Many children currently placed with the agency's foster carers are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

At the time of the inspection, 64 children were placed with the agency's foster carers and there were 53 approved fostering households. Three young people have remained with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements.

The agency has a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 May 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: 4 November 2019

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 receive individualised care and support that are of exceptional quality. Foster carers are dedicated, caring, well trained and well supported by the agency. The agency is very child focused and is committed to ensuring that children who are placed with foster carers achieve the very best outcomes.

Foster carers and children have positive and warm relationships. Children become part of the foster carers' families and benefit significantly from a sense of belonging. One child said, 'It feels like home away from home.' Children are extremely happy and settled in their foster homes. They feel very safe and well cared for. One child said, 'I feel very happy, and my foster carer is the best. She always puts my needs first. I have so much fun with my foster carer. I feel safe and comfortable at my home. I have made many friends too.' Foster carers speak with pride about the children's achievements, as does the agency, which sends letters of appreciation and tokens in recognition of children's successes.

Foster carers, assisted by the agency, are diligent in ensuring that children have access to education and healthcare to ensure that their needs are met. Children are encouraged to make friends, develop their independence skills, pursue interests and hobbies and keep in touch with their families when this is possible. When children move on, they are supported to keep in touch with their foster carers as they enter the next stage of their lives.

Foster carers are excellent advocates for children, many of whom have to navigate some very complex situations, such as undergoing age assessments and Home Office interviews. Foster carers provide both support and challenge in these very difficult circumstances. As a result, in one situation, an age assessment was overturned.

Many children placed with this agency's carers are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who have experienced significant trauma before arriving in this country. Matching is carried out very carefully and thoroughly, considering the varying and sometimes unknown needs of the children. Foster carers are provided with extensive information about the child's country, and they make every effort to meet children's cultural needs. Foster carers provide a welcome book about their family so that children know what to expect when they arrive at the foster home. In addition, children have a welcome pack, developed because of feedback from children, which includes items such as a nightlight and a blanket.

The children's guides are available in audio and in several languages, to enable children to understand their rights and what to expect. There is also a specific guide for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, developed with the input of the children, which includes more information that is particularly relevant to their situation. This provides a strong foundation for successful placements.

Placement stability is very good. Unplanned endings are rare, and some children continue to stay with their foster carers once they are 18 under 'staying put' arrangements. This enables them to continue to feel safe and secure. Stability meetings are always held if the placement appears to be at risk of disruption, to see what further support can be given to enable it to continue.

Since the last inspection, there have been several developments that have had a positive impact on children's progress. This includes the development of a wraparound service that includes an education adviser, a therapist, a youth mentor and a LGBTQ+ champion. The agency also has a Pride Pledge and has developed a guide for foster carers to increase their knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ so that they can provide appropriate and inclusive support to children.

The youth mentor is a very valuable resource. He speaks five languages, so can communicate with most of the children in their own language. He also runs support groups for children every month, which gives them an opportunity to meet and share their experiences, as well as carry out activities to improve their financial literacy, their understanding of the culture and language of this country and to learn life skills.

The education adviser is another valuable resource for improving children's outcomes in education, and her use of an education tracker alerts her to any issues of concern. She provides vital training and resources for supervising social workers and foster carers to enable them to understand and navigate the education system and provide appropriate challenge. She will also provide direct intervention when needed. As a result, some children obtain a much-needed school place sooner or remain in school rather than face an exclusion.

Children are encouraged to share their views, and the agency uses any feedback to improve practice. As a result, the agency is developing an innovative and creative communication tool which will assist children to communicate easily with others in their network via an app.

The agency plays a significant role in supporting foster carers and children to achieve such positive outcomes. The secure base model of care underpins the practice and foster carers are fully trained to understand and use this model of care. One carer confirmed this and said, 'Secure base helps us deal with problems and gives good emotional support to our child, as we understand what they are going through.' Another carer said, 'Without this (training), we wouldn't know how to deal with the trauma.'

Assessments of prospective foster carers are thorough, and the recent development of the learning pack is an excellent resource to make this more evidence based. Foster carers have monthly supervision visits which focus on the child's progress as well as the foster carer's development. There are also weekly telephone calls, monthly support groups and training. The training is extensive, relevant and equips foster carers with a strong understanding of the fostering task. Foster carers are

universally positive about this agency, describing it as 'fantastic'. They comment very positively about the friendliness and helpfulness of staff, the good communication and the excellent support, which is described as '24/7'.

The directors meet at least twice a year with the foster carers to hear their views and to thank them for their service. Foster carers are also kept informed of what is going on through regular newsletters that always include input from foster carers and children. This contributes to the feeling of being valued by the agency, which foster carers universally expressed. This is summed up by one carer who said, 'We carers feel like being a part of a team whose overall object is to support the children in need. We feel proud of being part of the Silver Lining Agency.'

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

Safeguarding children is given a high priority in this agency. The vulnerability of the children is known and understood very well, and carers are appropriately supported and trained to develop the skills to manage this and keep children safe from harm.

Risk is assessed and documented well and reviewed in line with emerging needs. One strength of this agency is the multi-disciplinary safeguarding panel which ensures that risk is considered fully and contextually.

Another area of exceptional practice is the children's safeguarding resource pack. This provides children with a one-page information sheet about each specific potential risk, such as bullying, drugs, internet safety, alcohol, radicalisation, body safety and dating.

Currently, most children are not engaging in risk-taking behaviour. However, there is a responsive out-of-hours service as well as clear written guidance to support the comprehensive training that foster carers receive. This gives them confidence in managing any situations of concern.

Children said they feel safe and that they can talk to their foster carers about any worries. However, they also have the supervising social worker as well as their own social worker, the youth mentor and other avenues that are detailed in the children's guide, including the safeguarding lead.

Foster carers are recruited safely, and all the appropriate checks are carried out. Safe care is further promoted by short assessments of people who are on the periphery of the family, who may have access to the foster children, but are not assessed as secondary carers. Two unannounced visits are carried out each year, which are well documented and thorough.

Any allegations against carers are investigated thoroughly by an independent person, in consultation with the local authority designated officer for any support or guidance. Foster carers are supported during any investigation, but the agency is clear that children's safety and well-being are the priority. The same rigour is applied

to investigations into concerns about standards of care and complaints. Clear recommendations are made, which are used to improve practice.

Staff and panel members are generally recruited safely. However, one shortfall was identified during the inspection. The responsible individual and manager took immediate action to rectify this.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency has an extremely strong and effective leadership team. The two directors of the agency, who act as responsible individual and agency decision maker respectively, are both social workers with significant experience in managing fostering services. The registered manager is also a very experienced senior manager. They are all extremely innovative, aspirational and passionate about providing the best possible outcomes for children.

Staff are very positive about working for the agency and share the leaders' enthusiasm. They feel very well supported by managers, who are readily available to give advice and guidance. They receive regular reflective supervision in addition to case discussions and have access to good and extensive training opportunities. They feel they are a strong team with a good team identity, which is reinforced by regular team meetings, weekly catch-up meetings, and celebration events. The agency also uses independent social workers for some of its work, such as reviews, investigations and assessments. These workers also feel very well supported and part of the team.

There has been a steady growth in the number of foster carers since the last inspection. The agency now has several foster carers in the West Midlands. In response to this, it has appointed a supervising social worker who lives in that area to work with those carers and provide support to them. The social worker and the foster carers all confirmed that they feel well supported and part of the agency, despite the distance, and some support groups and events are carried out in that location. Leaders are considering how to take this part of the agency forward.

Arrangements for monitoring are excellent. The manager has systems for tracking significant incidents, complaints as well as children's progress and outcomes. These feed into extensive and informative quarterly management reports that are analytical and used to develop the service further. Leaders and managers know the service extremely well and have a very clear action plan for future service improvements. Feedback from young people and foster carers is used very effectively to drive improvement.

Partnership working is highly effective. One stakeholder commented:

'I have found working with this provider great. They always complete key performance indicators in a timely manner. The agency thrives in working well in partnership with the local authority and are always transparent and honest in their work.'

Local authority social workers have described communication as 'very good' and said that the agency is responsive.

The fostering panel is well established and effective in making appropriate recommendations about foster carers' suitability and ongoing approval and variations to their terms of approval. The panel chair is experienced, and the panel membership includes people with relevant personal and professional experience. The panel minutes are produced in a timely way and are of very good quality. This enables the agency decision maker to make an informed and timely decision.

Foster carer reviews are very thorough and ensure that foster carers' continued suitability is rigorously assessed. The independence of the reviewing officers adds an additional layer of scrutiny to the reviews and is an added protection.

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: 1277596

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Inspector

Rosemary Chapman, Social Care Inspector

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