

Young People At Heart

Young People At Heart Limited

Gresley House, Ten Pound Walk, Doncaster, Yorkshire DN4 5HX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Young People At Heart is a privately owned independent fostering agency that is registered as a limited company. The agency was registered with Ofsted in October 2019. The manager registered with Ofsted on 12 November 2020.

The agency offers short- and long-term sibling, parent and child and emergency placements. At the time of this inspection, there were 18 fostering households caring for 26 children.

Inspection dates: 20 to 23 November 2023

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: 10 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children live with experienced foster carers who are committed to ensuring that children have the best experiences. Foster carers treat children as members of their own family and have a sound knowledge of children's unique personalities, qualities and needs. Children develop strong bonds with their foster families.

All children attend an education provision and are making progress. Foster carers play an important role in promoting children's education. They have access to children's education plans and know how to support them to learn. In addition, when children are struggling to settle in school, the agency's social work assistants meet with teaching staff to help them understand what works for individual children. This means that the schools are better equipped to meet the needs of the children. Children continue to enjoy school and are learning.

All children are registered with local health services and are up to date with their routine health checks, such as optical and dental check-ups. Some children have more complex health needs or disabilities. Their foster carers understand how to help children make good progress because they take advice from specialists. One foster carer advocated strongly for the child in their care to have access to physical therapy, and in addition, the foster carer completed daily exercises with the child. The child used a wheelchair to get around when they first came to live with the foster carer; they can now run and climb stairs, which has significantly increased their independence.

Children take part in a wide range of activities that support them to develop hobbies and interests. Children are encouraged to attend after-school activities and join local groups such as Brownies. Foster carers also support children to get involved in activities they show an interest in. One child has taken up horse-riding. This has developed their confidence and improved their core strength. The agency provides swimming lessons and a bicycle for all children.

Children moving into foster homes benefit from well-coordinated plans that consider their needs. These ensure that the foster carers identified can meet their needs. Plans consistently consider the strengths and areas for development within fostering families. All children receive a welcome guide and a basket of treasures that are individualised, depending on their age and interests, but always include a quilted blanket and books. Unplanned endings are rare. When they occur, foster carers advocate strongly for children to ensure that any plans take account of the child's wishes and feelings.

The support provided to foster carers is a strong aspect of the agency. Foster carers receive high-quality support from staff and managers. When additional support is needed, the right support is quickly put in place. This helps foster carers to overcome challenges and means children experience stability.

Prospective foster carers are attracted to this agency because they hear positive recommendations from foster carers and through social media. Fostering assessments are detailed and completed in a timely manner. Foster carers said that the staff were responsive, contacted them quickly after their initial enquiries and were considerate of their needs during the assessment process. Foster carers are well prepared for meeting the needs of the children placed with them.

The agency has introduced a therapeutic model of care that has started to become embedded into practice. Foster carers benefit from regular group and one-to-one support provided by a qualified therapist and are enthusiastic about the benefits of this. The support is tailored to help foster carers better understand individual children's experiences and how these affect them. Foster carers are flexible and adapt their approaches following the advice of therapists. Children are thriving, and foster carers' resilience is increasing.

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

Children are helped to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with their foster carers and tell them if they are worried. In addition, children spend time away from their home with the agency's social work assistants who they have established relationships with. This provides children with the opportunity to talk about their experiences unhindered.

Children are helped to learn in creative and engaging ways. Staff meet with children regularly to talk about important issues such as staying safe and making sense of their past. The use of story sacks and building blocks helps children to explore important issues while having fun. One child described with enthusiasm the fun they had using building blocks to role play.

Staff and foster carers know and understand individual children's needs and risks well. Children's risk assessments are personalised and target their specific needs and identified risks. When new risks emerge, for example when there is a change in children's behaviour, children's plans are revised so they remain relevant.

Safer-care practice is taken seriously. Safer care plans are discussed with foster carers monthly and amended as changes arise. Child-specific safe care plans are written in a way that helps children to understand rules and why they are needed. In addition, annual health and safety checks ensure that the home environment is safe and free from hazards. This is helping to keep children and foster carers safe.

The two allegations made against foster carers since the last inspection were well managed, and the records are clear and well written. Children and foster carers are supported while investigations take place. The manager works with the police and social workers to ensure a multi-agency response. On one occasion, when practice concerns were identified, a standard of care report was completed by an independent manager from another service and presented to the fostering panel for an early review of the foster carer's approval.

Children's behaviour is improving because foster carers provide them with predictable routines and boundaries. Foster carers are trained in the agency's approach to behaviour management, including how to hold children safely if needed to prevent harm. This is only used as a last resort. Foster carers are becoming more aware of trauma-informed practice and more skilled at understanding the reasons for children's behaviours.

The agency staff and foster carers are appointed in line with safer recruitment practice. Relevant checks and references are completed, and any gaps in employment are fully explored. The manager takes reasonable steps to assure herself that staff and foster carers are suitable to work with and care for children.

Children rarely go missing from home. When they do, their foster carers act quickly and in line with the agency's missing-from-home procedures and the children's individual protocols. This means that children are found quickly and returned home safely. However, the manager has not checked that independent return-home interviews are being completed by the child's responsible authority.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency was swift in its response to COVID 19. The agency continued to offer high levels of support to children, foster carers, and staff who developed emotional resilience during the most challenging of times. The agency recognises and rewards the smallest of achievements through award ceremonies and gifts, including food hampers. This has helped build and sustain morale across the agency's staff and foster carers.

The manager is a strong leader who demonstrates high levels of commitment to ensuring that children are safe, happy and making good progress. She embodies the ethos of the organisation, ensuring that children remain at the centre of all she does. She is consistent in her approach, and the staff are confident in her abilities to lead. Workforce stability is providing consistency for foster carers and children.

The manager knows the agency well and has systems in place that support her to monitor the quality of care on offer. She has introduced auditing and evaluation of children's records so that she can better understand trends and patterns. The manager completes quality of care reviews, which are then sent to the regulator at regular intervals.

Staff describe having a very good experience of working for this agency and feel that they are invested in by managers and seniors within the organisation. They are encouraged to expand their knowledge and follow areas of professional interest. They receive training that is relevant and improves their practice. This means that foster carers and children are being supported by skilled staff who are enthusiastic and engaged.

The manager consults widely, including children, foster carers, and staff. She uses this information to review the service and consider improvements that could

enhance children's experiences. When one foster carer expressed an interest in therapeutic parenting, the manager completed her own research, recognising the benefits. She then secured training for all the foster carers, staff and foster panel members to ensure the learning was disseminated.

The manager is a champion for children and is not afraid to challenge others when their practice falls short. She escalates matters that go unaddressed. She has raised formal complaints with several local authorities when their actions, or lack of them, hinder children's progress.

Team meetings and staff supervision sessions are inspiring staff to do better through well-thought-out agendas. They are regular and of consistently good quality. Managers and staff reflect on their own practice and the impact this has on children and foster carers. A learning culture has developed.

The approval and review of carers are consistently of good quality. Paperwork is sent to panel members at least five days prior to the meeting. The fostering panel involves a rigorous process that is led by a confident and knowledgeable chair and supported by panel members who have a wide range of experience. A good level of curiosity is shown during panel meetings, and the questions asked are helping panel members to make informed recommendations. Decisions about foster carers' approvals are made in a timely manner.

Foster carers and professionals spoken to share a consistently positive view of the agency. One social work manager said, 'Children really are at the centre of everything they do,' while a foster carer said, 'I cannot fault the support; the manager is so persistent.'

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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that children who have been missing from home are offered an independent return-home interview by their responsible local authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 5.7)

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: 2500324

Registered provider: Young People At Heart Limited

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Responsible individual: Gary Cox

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Inspectors

Rachel Walker, Social Care Inspector
Evelyn Chafota, Social Care Inspector

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