

Star Fostering Ltd

Star Fostering Ltd

Unit 2b, East Bridgford Business Park, Kneeton Road, East Bridgford, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG13 8PJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Star Fostering Ltd is an independent fostering agency based in East Bridgford, Nottinghamshire. The agency was registered by Ofsted in 2019.

The agency offers a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, it had 17 fostering households and 22 children in placement.

The registered manager has been registered since 2019.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 28 June to 2 July 2021

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: this was the first inspection of the agency since registration. An assurance visit was carried out on 24–27 November 2020, where no serious or widespread concerns were identified.

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

'They keep you safe and they do a good job. I thank them for that.' This comment from a child reflects how children feel about their foster families. They form close and caring attachments to their carers. Children genuinely feel part of their fostering family. They learn to trust adults and to have fun, which for some children is a new experience.

Feedback from involved agencies and professionals includes:

- 'Since moving into this placement, my child is thriving.'
- 'He has come on so much, he is part of the family and extended family.'
- 'The child is really settled, really attached and I cannot imagine she will not stay with her carers after she turns 18.'

Children are fully involved in all aspects of the care and support they receive. Well-being questionnaires are completed by children when they first move in with their carers. They have completed questionnaires regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected them. They have been involved in setting questions for new staff joining the agency. One young person sat in as an interview panel member. Young people also take part in the Skills to Foster training for applicants. The young people have mentors and advocates to support them. This reflects an agency that places children and young people at the centre of its practice. They are actively encouraged to contribute to all aspects of how the agency is run.

All children placed with the agency have appropriate education or training in place. One child has returned to full-time education after not attending for several years. He now has goals and aspirations for his future. Others have similar stories, with education now being an important and valued part of their lives. Carers and agency staff have developed some excellent working relationships with education providers and support staff. This has led to children being found education placements quickly after moving into their homes. The agency is in the process of considering appointing a support worker, with a focus on education needs. This will further strengthen the already positive support and focus on educational attendance and attainment for children.

Children feel very much part of their foster families. They get to experience a wide range of fun activities. Despite the limitations over the past year due to COVID-19, carers and agency staff have ensured that children still get to socialise and try out new things. One child proudly spoke of taking up kickboxing with his foster mum. He was rightly proud of how this is improving his physical health and emotional well-being. Carers have promoted walks, bike rides, day trips out and made sure that children could do as much as possible, despite national restrictions.

Children's healthcare needs are understood well by their carers and are met. This includes children with complex health needs. Carers take their roles seriously and ensure that children are supported to attend all routine and specialist health appointments. One child has particularly complex health needs. The carers and agency are working hard to support this child currently. The agency health plan for this child does not clearly set out what medical interventions and assessments have been, or will be, carried out. The carers are providing extremely high levels of care and support but would benefit from clearer and more timely support from health agencies and the placing authority.

Prospective carers all report high levels of satisfaction with the agency. The assessment process is seen as robust and very thorough by applicants. One approved carer summed up the views of many spoken with: 'This is a very friendly agency with a family feel to it. We feel that support is there when we need it. We know we can refer to our supervising social worker or the manager for support and advice.'

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

Children feel safe and are kept safe in their foster homes. Carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They are confident and competent in managing risk and any safeguarding concerns. There have been no reported incidents of children going missing from care since the agency registered.

The agency provides high levels of support to its carers to ensure that placements are safe and are meeting children's needs. Risk assessments reflect the known or potential risks posed to/by children. Carers use monthly supervision meetings with their supervising social workers to consider and address any specific concerns or issues of risk.

During the pandemic, foster care support group meetings have continued to take place online. Carers sometimes use these informal meetings to discuss and share their experiences in relation to safeguarding and protecting children from harm. This is also supported by a range of training opportunities for carers around safeguarding and risk management.

There is clear evidence of children's risk factors reducing since moving to live with this agency's carers. Several stakeholders commented on the improvements in confidence, safety and behaviours of children. As children form attachments, feel safe and trust their carers, any safeguarding issues have reduced. Agency staff carry out two unannounced visits to each fostering household every year. This provides further opportunities to meet with children and ensure that they are safe and happy.

Recruitment of agency staff is robust and thorough. It prevents unsuitable staff or carers from working with children. The assessment of prospective carers is similarly robust and detailed. Either agency or independent social workers carry out the assessments. Detailed and comprehensive reports reflect the high standard of assessments undertaken. The registered manager and responsible individual carry

out quality assurance of all reports before they are presented to the fostering panel.

An allegation made against one foster carer has not been documented well. It is not clear from their records as to the actions taken to resolve the concerns, or the outcome. The designated officer was contacted and involved. The person subject to the allegation has not been provided with written information about the concerns and outcomes. This did not result in any safeguarding concerns or issues for any children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager shows a commendable passion and commitment to her staff, carers and the children placed. Agency staff hold the manager in very high regard. As one member of staff stated: 'Management give positive feedback to staff and offer excellent support. They look after the staff and carers' mental health and welfare.'

Foster carers feel that they are respected, listened to and valued in their roles. Matching children to the right foster family is seen as a key strength. Carers report that they do not feel under pressure when considering taking a child into their homes. Very careful consideration is taken by the agency staff, the managers and carers to consider all potential referrals. There has only been one placement ended to date, with the child being moved to other carers within this agency. The complexity of that child's needs were not known at the point of referral and placement. Carers and the agency staff pride themselves on not giving up on children, and in providing very stable placements.

The agency has implemented clear monitoring and tracking systems. These provide agency staff, managers and carers with detailed information regarding the progress being made by each child. Carers complete monthly reports, detailing children's progress in several areas. This is starting to inform agency staff and carers as to the specific needs of each child. It is informing how they need to support children further to make sustained progress in all areas of their lives.

Another key strength of the agency relates to its strong partnership working. Staff and carers value the involvement of other professionals. This is an integral part of their success in supporting children to feel safe and happy. A placing authority social worker commented: 'The carers and the agency work well with professionals to ensure that the child's holistic needs are met.'

Carers and agency staff have access to an extensive range of learning and development opportunities. Agency staff can access the same online training courses as carers, which they really value. Agency staff are being supported to complete further training, including management diplomas, Theraplay and practice educator qualifications. This reflects the commitment of managers to their staff and in supporting their professional development.

The fostering panel consists of a range of suitably skilled and experienced members. The panel chair and agency decision-maker have a wealth of relevant experience and provide very robust and competent oversight of the panel business. Panel members have been included in training events and are subject to annual reviews of their performance. Panel members feel fully included, with feedback such as: 'I have been well supported by the agency manager. We get a clear and detailed business report before each panel [meeting] from the manager. The chair has extensive experience and knowledge.' Panel members give full consideration and appropriate challenge to all assessments and review the reports brought before them. The agency decision-maker has extensive relevant experience and provides high-quality decision-making records.

Agency staff and carers receive regular supervision. The current format used to record carers' supervision does not include clear details of what the agreed actions are. There is the potential that identified issues are not clearly recorded, followed up or considered at the next supervision meeting. The supervision template also does not clearly consider or address the training and development needs of carers. This includes what relevant or mandatory training carers have completed and what additional training needs to be sourced for them.

The shortfalls identified at the previous assurance visit have been fully considered and responded to.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that supervision meetings have a clear purpose and offer a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills.

In particular, ensure that clear goals and actions are set following each supervision and additional training needs are identified and tracked by the agency. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 43, paragraph 21.8)

- The registered person should ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 45, paragraph 22.7)
- The registered person should ensure that where children have specific health issues or conditions and they need additional input to promote their health, foster carers and staff of the fostering service work with the social worker to ensure that they have proper and immediate access to other medical, psychological or psychiatric support needed. This should be set out in the health plan. ('The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, volume 4: Fostering Services', page 23, paragraph 3.55)

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: 2567404

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Tracy Murty, Social Care Inspector
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