

Fostering Changes Life

Fostering Changes Life Limited

FCL Fostering, Roundhill Lane, Haslingden, Rossendale BB4 5TY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned, family-run fostering agency offers short-term, long-term, emergency, respite foster care and specialist foster care placements for unaccompanied children. The agency is responsible for the assessment, approval, training, supervision and support of foster carers.

A manager has been appointed but has not submitted their application to register with Ofsted. The manager was absent during this inspection and the inspection was supported by the responsible individual.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was supporting six approved fostering households that are providing care to nine children.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 June 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 24 May 2021

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 are at the centre of this agency. They are helped to develop positive trusting relationships with their foster carers and agency staff. Children benefit from child-centred, individualised care and experience nurturing and loving foster families where they can thrive. Consequently, most children make good progress when living with the agency's foster carers.

Foster carers and children value the agency's strong family feel. They know other carers, children and agency staff well and develop a strong connection to the agency. One child said, 'It is amazing. It really is just the best.' Another child said, 'My carers are brilliant, I never want to leave.'

Despite a number of management and staffing changes, foster carers say that they receive a high level of support and that they value being part of the agency. One foster carer said, 'I am pleased to say that the agency has always been there to support me with any issues that might arise. It is a very friendly and caring agency with a family atmosphere. Nothing is too much trouble for them, no matter how big or small the situation is. I am pleased that I made the decision to move to this agency and plan to stay with them until I retire.'

Decisions are made in children's best interests. The agency completes robust matching processes to ensure that children are placed with foster carers who can meet their needs. Children receive information about their foster carers and are provided with a children's guide telling them all about the agency. The agency ensures that this is also accessible to children when English is not their first language. Matching documents are detailed and reflect the carer's skills against children's needs.

Children's moves into and out of their foster placements are predominantly well planned. However, when children's placements end in an unplanned way, the agency has missed opportunities to implement clear processes to reflect and identify any learning for the agency and foster carers.

Family relationships are supported and children are helped to keep in touch with people who are important to them. Where possible, the agency seeks to keep siblings together, with nearly half the number of children placed with the agency's foster carers living with their brother or sister. Children are supported to develop skills in preparation for becoming more independent. Where appropriate, young people have been supported to stay with their foster carers post-18 and remain in touch once they have left. This helps them to benefit from the continued support of their foster family into adulthood.

Children's health needs are well understood. Foster carers promote healthy lifestyles and ensure that children have access to routine and specialist health services. Foster carers are supported to attend additional training to further develop their

understanding of children's health conditions. This ensures that foster carers have the relevant skills and training to meet children's health needs.

Foster carers and agency staff proactively advocate for children to ensure that they are being supported to achieve their educational potential. They attend regular meetings and liaise with education professionals to address any concerns.

Children are provided with opportunities to enjoy new activities and holidays. Their interests are nurtured, and they are encouraged to take part in structured activities. This helps children to develop their social networks and increase their confidence and self-esteem.

Children are listened to. Foster carer records are child-focused. There are plans in place to further strengthen opportunities for children to share their views about the care they receive, to ensure that their voices are reflected throughout all aspects of agency practice.

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

Practice in the agency is underpinned by a strong safeguarding culture. Foster carers know how to keep children safe. They implement clear routines and boundaries and children say that they feel safe. Professionals agree that children are kept safe. One professional said, 'Children are happy and safe. They are a good agency to work with.' Another said, 'My child benefits from a household filled with love and care. He is like a different child thanks to them.'

Foster carers understand and are vigilant to risks that children may be exposed to in the foster home, the community and online. Children are involved in age-appropriate discussions about risk, to develop their understanding and help them to make safer choices.

Children's risk plans identify their risks and vulnerabilities alongside strategies for their foster carers to follow to keep them safe. However, risk plans are not always updated following incidents. Although this has not directly impacted on children or foster carers, it limits management oversight of strategies used by foster carers to safeguard children.

Children's behaviour is well managed by their foster carers. When incidents occur, foster carers know how to respond, and they feel well supported by agency staff. However, significant incidents have not been reported to Ofsted as required by regulation. This limits the regulator's oversight of agency practice.

Foster carer annual reviews and supervisions are detailed but do not always demonstrate professional curiosity by agency staff. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that there is clear oversight of the care provided to children. However, the use of independent reviewing officers for foster carer reviews provides independent scrutiny and oversight and strengthens the process for reviewing foster carer approvals.

Shortfalls in monitoring systems mean that necessary health and safety checks and training refreshers are not always identified in a timely manner. This has not currently affected children or their foster carers but limits opportunities for leaders and managers to consistently ensure that children are cared for in safe environments.

Foster carers have access to a range of online training opportunities to further develop their abilities to meet children's needs. However, updates to personal development plans do not always clearly identify when foster carers need to refresh their training. This does not ensure that all foster carers complete relevant training within identified timescales.

The agency completes appropriate checks and references of prospective foster carers and agency staff. Assessments for new carers are comprehensive and provide the agency decision-maker with sufficient detail to make objective decisions.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

There have been a number of staffing and management changes in the agency since the last inspection. The responsible individual has been proactive in trying to recruit and retain a suitably skilled and experienced manager and a supervising social worker. However, changes in circumstances for several individuals employed by the agency have meant that staff turnover has been high.

Despite these changes, the responsible individual has remained committed to providing stable and secure foster placements for children. Carers and children are complimentary about his involvement and say that he is like the 'glue' holding the agency together.

Since the previous supervising social worker left, the current manager has also been supervising foster carers. She knows all the carers and children well and foster carers say they value her support. A new supervising social worker has recently been appointed and is in the process of completing her induction.

The competing demands of the manager's dual role have negatively affected her ability to carry out some management tasks effectively. Internal monitoring and auditing processes, including the manager's quarterly review reports on the quality of care and operation of the agency, do not support leaders and managers to have effective oversight of the service, highlight patterns and trends or identify when agency policies have not been adhered to. This not only has the potential to impact on children but limits management oversight of agency practice and reduces opportunities to identify any learning and development. A requirement made at the last inspection has been restated.

Supervision of the manager and agency staff has not been sufficiently robust. Opportunities to provide clear direction, address concerns and reflect wider management oversight and decision-making have been missed.

There has been a reduction in the number of foster carers approved by the agency. This is due to a number of reasons, including carers retiring due to personal circumstances and others ceasing to foster to enable them to achieve permanency options for children. The responsible individual has prioritised supporting foster families over recruitment initiatives but has clear plans in place to support agency expansion.

Members of the central list have a wide range of experience relevant to fostering. The recently appointed agency decision-maker and fostering panel chair both provide appropriate challenge to the agency and are continuing to develop the agency's fostering panel and agency decision-making processes. Panel minutes reflect a clear rationale for recommendations but lack clarity and do not always reflect discussions around key issues. Consultation forms for panel members to provide feedback to the agency have been developed but are not yet fully embedded. Panel members, including the panel chair, have not had their performance appraised annually as required by legislation.

There is effective multi-agency collaboration. Foster carers and agency staff are proactive in building relationships with professionals external to the agency to ensure that children's needs are being met. Social work professionals and commissioners speak positively about the care provided to children. When issues arise, external professionals feel able to raise these with the agency and know that they will be addressed.

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.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)) In particular, ensure that the registered manager has effective, up-to-date monitoring systems in place to support their oversight of the quality and activity of the fostering service. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	31 July 2024
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them— receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))	31 July 2024
The registered provider must ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table.	31 July 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service, and that any shortfalls are identified and swiftly addressed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager monitors effectively all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends, and that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. This includes, but is not restricted to, foster carer development plans and health and safety documents. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair. ('The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4', Section 5.15)
- The registered person should ensure that when a placement is ending, foster carers and the fostering service should work with the child's social worker and others to help the child to understand why they are moving and should support the child through their transition to a new living situation, whatever that may be. In addition, that work is completed with foster carers and agency staff to identify any patterns or areas for development. ('The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4', Section 3.5)

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: 2586729

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Registered provider address: Roundhill Lane, Haslingden, Rossendale BB4 5TY

Responsible individual: Raymond Porter

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspector

Caroline Bertram, Regulatory Inspection Manager

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