

Changing Futures Fostering Limited

Changing Futures Fostering Limited

3 Abbey Street, Headland, Hartlepool TS24 0JR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Changing Futures Fostering Limited is a small, not-for-profit organisation that recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide care to children who have a wide range of needs, aged between 0 and 17 years.

The organisation was established in July 2020. The manager also registered with Ofsted at the same time in July 2020. At the time of this inspection, the staff team consists of a responsible individual, registered manager, two supervising social workers and one business support. The agency currently has 14 fostering households providing care for 20 children.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 July 2024

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: 21 March 2022

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 benefit from trusted and stable relationships with their foster carers who know them well. Children develop a sense of permanency and are fully integrated into their foster home. Children make good progress because foster carers have a clear understanding of the children's needs. This helps children to feel secure in their home. One child said, 'I love my home and my family here.'

The leadership team, staff and foster carers promote a family culture. Furthermore, the foster carers' own children are consulted with and involved in assessment and review processes. The agency considers the opinions of foster carers' own children and includes them in planned activities.

Children benefit from a range of activities that promotes their interests and hobbies. This helps foster children to feel part of their foster family and have a sense of belonging and feel valued. Consequently, this helps to develop positive and meaningful relationships in the foster family home.

Children are encouraged to share their views. Some children chair their statutory review meetings, which helps them to be involved in decisions that affect them. Children help to develop the agency and attend 'policy and pizza' nights, where children give their views and opinions to influence change. Children provide input to develop the children's guide and welcome pack for new children coming into foster care. Additionally, the agency seeks children's feedback to inform the annual reviews of their foster carers. This ensures that the children's voice is heard and considered.

Children attend full-time education provisions. Foster carers advocate on behalf of children to ensure that they receive educational support from a provision that can meet their needs. Foster carers attend meetings with education staff and challenge actions when necessary. The manager tracks children's progress and is aware of children's attainment and attendance. Consequently, children make good or stable progress. Some children achieve qualifications to progress to further education. This increases children's future career options and raises their aspirations.

Newly approved foster carers unanimously said that they felt welcomed into the agency. The foster carers benefit from preparation to foster training alongside the assessment process. The foster carers described the assessment process as an enjoyable experience. The agency has a clear process for assessments which are undertaken in a timely way. Any vulnerabilities are addressed at the earliest opportunity and the agency shows commitment in supporting prospective carers to overcome these. The quality of assessment ensures that recommendations made to panel are considered and accurate, and that only suitable carers are approved.

Children are supported to develop independence skills in line with their stage of development. Children are made aware of 'staying put' arrangements and equally supported to explore alternative options. This means that children can make an

informed choice about their future options. Children who do not wish to remain living with their foster carers after the age of 18 say that they would like to live in the same geographical area as their carers. This means that they continue to receive practical and emotional support.

Children who are new to their foster home are welcomed sensitively. Some carers provide a video to introduce themselves to children. This helps to remove some of the anxiety the move can bring for children.

Foster carers diligently learn about children's cultures and identity. One carer has independently researched and developed skills to help children care for their hair and skin. The children recognise this commitment from their foster carer. This has helped some children tell foster carers about their past experiences that are influenced by their cultural identity. Consequently, the carers sensitively help children to understand some of their past experiences.

Foster carers understand the importance of family ties for children. Children are helped to repair relationships with siblings and extended family members. This promotes children's identity and helps to maintain relationships. Additionally, this helps children to have a wide network of support that they can rely on now or in the future.

Foster carers understand the importance of record-keeping of children's day-to-day events and celebrations to inform their life-story work. However, foster carers are not always recording information about children in a helpful way. The quality of foster carers' logs is mixed. Supervising social workers are not regularly discussing with carers how to write child-friendly records. This is important because children may want to read them now or in the future.

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

Children say that they feel safe at their home. Foster carers understand the risks of social media and internet use and help children to understand how to stay safe. Foster carers recognise when children have friendship groups that are not positive and put strategies in place to reduce the risks.

Foster carers adopt a therapeutic model of care when caring for the children and promote positive behaviour. They understand children's triggers and effectively use de-escalation techniques. Consequently, there has been no need for physical holds. This helps children to continue to flourish and maintain positive relationships with their carers.

Investigations into allegations are swift and effective. The agency communicates with safeguarding professionals and follows procedures. The manager uses information to complete an internal investigation to inform decision-making. The manager considers what, if any, support can be provided to the foster carers when needed. This process helps to ensure that children are listened to and safeguarded, and that foster carers are treated fairly.

Foster carers receive and attend relevant mandatory training in line with the required timescales. This helps to ensure that foster carers have the relevant skills and qualifications to meet children's needs.

Safer recruitment is followed when carers are assessed. Social workers undertake unannounced visits to the foster carers and children are seen and spoken to. Children know who their foster carers' supervising social worker is and what their role is. A regular review of health and safety checks helps to ensure that the environment is safe for children.

The agency benefits from the support and opportunities from the connected charity. Although the agency is independent, the working relationship between the charity and the fostering agency adds value and enables additional support for children and young people. For example, the charity is working alongside the fostering agency to develop the children's independence skills in preparation for when they move to semi-supported accommodation.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. On the occasions when children are missing, the foster carers take appropriate action such as informing safeguarding professionals and looking for the child. However, the agency does not use the local police's 'Runaway and Missing from Home and Care' (RMFHC) protocols and procedures, known as Philomena. This limits the opportunities for police to take swift actions to find the child. Foster carers are supported to understand how to respond to children who return from being missing from home. Children are welcomed back into the home and their welfare is a priority. However, children are not always provided with the opportunity to speak to an independent adult and the agency does not consistently escalate this request with the placing authority. This is a missed opportunity to inform safer arrangements and planning for children.

Overall, children's risks are understood and managed well by the foster carers. However, children's individual risk assessments are not updated when risks change, or new vulnerabilities emerge. One child's risk assessment did not reflect that previous risks were reduced, or identify that more current risks are evident. This means that not all risk assessments are up to date and do not say what strategies should be used to support the child to reduce the risks.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by a manager who is ambitious for children and foster carers. She adopts a therapeutic approach that supervising social workers and foster carers also model. The manager has developed a child-centred approach that is characterised by family values where she, supervising social workers and foster carers work collaboratively to enhance children's experiences. The vision is shared by senior leaders, and they recruit staff who share the same values.

The ethos of providing a trauma-informed approach is fundamental in developing the service. This vision is evident in the training and support that carers receive. The foster carers said that they feel valued, supported, and respected in their role.

The manager is held in high regard by foster carers, supervising social workers and professionals who are part of children's network. The manager and staff's communication with other professionals is effective. Local authority social workers said that the agency is always visible at important meetings about the children and that foster carers are well supported to care for the children.

The fostering panel is chaired by an experienced former social work practitioner who has held a range of senior positions in various local authority settings. The fostering panel consists of experienced social workers, care-experienced adults, and adults from a range of professional backgrounds with senior positions. The panel meeting minutes reflect the effectiveness and efficiency of the quality assurance process. This process helps to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny to safeguard children.

Feedback received from panel members commends the agency and how it assesses, supports and trains foster carers. The agency decision-maker is a qualified and experienced social care professional and provides robust oversight and rationale when approving foster carers.

Supervising social workers complete annual reviews thoroughly. This includes the views of the children, carers' children and professionals involved. The manager uses a tracker to ensure that annual reviews are completed effectively and presented to the agency decision-maker within timescales. This efficiency ensures that the suitability of carers is continually assessed so that they are safe to care for children.

The agency provides good-quality support to foster carers, which benefits them and the children. Foster carers receive peer support and attend foster carers' meetings to share good practice and gain advice from each other. Children's day-to-day experiences are enhanced because of this continued support. Foster carers feel empowered and more confident in their role. Foster carers unanimously said that a member of staff from the agency is always available to help.

The manager knows the children well and has a good understanding of their needs and interests. The manager has developed a tool to track and monitor the progress of the children. However, this has not yet been implemented for all children, and therefore this shortfall has not been met.

The manager does not have an effective process for identifying that statutory documents have not been received from children's placing authorities. This includes review meeting minutes and health assessments. Consequently, the manager cannot be reassured that the supervising social workers and foster carers are following the most up-to-date plan when providing care for the children.

Foster carers say that they receive regular supervision that helps them to reflect on their practice. However, this is not consistently evident in supervision records. Some

supervision records are brief and do not record the advice from supervising social workers, progress and needs of the children or the training and support that foster carers need. This is a missed opportunity to evidence support and progress to children.

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

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that they implement a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. In particular, that children's individual risk assessments are reflective of their emerging needs and known risks. Risk assessments should explicitly reflect where risks to children reduce or increase. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards,' 4.5)
- The registered person should ensure that entries in records, decisions, and reasons for them, are clearly expressed. In particular, ensure that language used is helpful to a child who may wish to access a record of their life story. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards,' 26.5)
- The registered provider should ensure that information about a child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. In particular, when tracking children's progress, that there is a clear evaluation of the progress they make from their starting points. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards,' 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that when a child is absent from the fostering home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the child is missing), the fostering service's procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures, known as Philomena, applicable to the area where each foster home is located. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards,' 5.7)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a consistent approach to children speaking to an independent person when returning from missing from home incidents. ('Fostering Services: National minimum standards,' 5.9)
- The registered person should ensure that they take action to address any issues of concern that they identify, or which are raised with them. In particular, they should ensure that there is a consistent approach to accessing children's documentation from the respective local authority. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards,' 25.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' supervision has a clear purpose and provides opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and ensure they offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop competencies and skills. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards,' 21.8)

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

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Inspector

Cat Makel, Social Care Inspector

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