

Changing Futures Fostering Limited

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3 Abbey Street, Headland, Hartlepool TS24 0JR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency 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, and are aged between 0 and 18 years. Placements that they offer include short-term, short break, long-term, specialist placements and sibling placements. They also offer staying put arrangements. This is an arrangement that enables care leavers to remain living with their foster carers when they turn 18.

At the time of this inspection visit, in addition to the responsible individual and registered manager, the agency has an agency decision maker, one supervising social worker and one business support worker.

Six children are currently looked after by the agency in five fostering households. There are several ongoing assessments of potential foster carers who are at different stages of the assessment process.

The agency registered with Ofsted in July 2020. The agency has not previously been inspected.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 21 to 25 March 2022

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	requires improvement to be 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: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive good standards of care and support, which enhances their day-to-day experiences. Careful and well-considered matching of children with foster families helps the children to settle quickly. Children benefit from building trusted relationships with their foster carers, which supports placement stability. A child said:

'I love it here. [Names] are brilliant. They support me with everything. I'm doing well with everything. I feel that they care about me and that is really, really good. I am doing so well that I am the happiest I have ever been.'

Children receive appropriate support from their foster families to spend time with people who are important to them. Foster carers work well with children's placing authorities, which helps to support children in line with their agreed plans. This provides children with positive messages about the support that they are given. It also promotes the children's identity needs, as they enjoy the time that they spend with family and friends.

Children's participation is good. The agency ensures that the children are regularly consulted about the care that they receive. Children engage in activities of their choice. Children feel invested in and flourish because the agency values their participation, views, wishes and feelings.

Foster carers speak highly about the support that they receive, which helps them to support the children. Support groups for foster carers help them to share their experiences, connect with the agency and receive updates, as well as look at learning and development. A foster carer said:

'I honestly cannot fault the agency. They have been amazing. At times, it is tough. I enjoy meeting other carers and the one-to-one support I have had is beyond what I expected. They really do live by their values of being a not-for-profit agency. It is all about the carers and children.'

Children access the support that they require to achieve good health. Foster carers ensure that the children have access to universal services, as well as any specialist services identified. Children's health outcomes improve because of this.

Children make good progress in education. For some children they have made progress in how they regulate themselves in school, which has helped them to re-engage with their learning. Foster carers attend education meetings that discuss the children's education targets and goals. This helps foster families to support the children to achieve their learning objectives.

The agency was set up during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has not prevented the agency from fulfilling its roles and responsibilities in relation to their processes of recruiting foster carers and carrying out foster carer's reviews at panel. Rigorous

assessments of foster carers have ensured that the agency only considers suitable adults to care for the children. The agency's decision-making processes are good. The agency decision maker provides a clear evaluation in order to support the decisions that are made. She provides advice to the agency, which the manager considers. This helps support the manager to make good decisions when matching children to their foster families.

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

The manager takes decisive action when there are concerns about children. She works collaboratively with the necessary agencies and professionals to ensure that there is a joint approach to protect children. Effective safeguarding processes mean that the agency can help better protect children.

There has been one incident of a child going missing from care. The foster carers communicated their concerns by following the appropriate procedures. This aided the quick and safe return of the child. The manager ensured that the child spoke with an independent adult on their return home. This has been beneficial to the child, as there have been no further incidents.

Children spoken to say that they feel safe and well cared for. Foster carers work closely with the children's placing authorities to help reduce risks to children. Each child has an individual risk assessment. However, children's risk assessments do not consistently reflect children's emerging needs or where risks reduce or increase. Foster carers and the agency do follow safeguarding processes to help protect the children. However, unclear risk assessments for children have the potential to lead to unsafe or inconsistent practice. Furthermore, it is not helpful for children if they do not see where their risks are reducing or where they require support.

The agency is aware of its roles and responsibilities in safely recruiting anyone who works in the agency. The agency does complete the necessary checks. However, the agency does not have an effective audit system that demonstrates when references provided have then been verified via telephone. This means there is no clear accountability in order to ensure that the agency follows their own safer recruitment process.

The manager recognises the value and the importance of skilled staff and foster carers. Foster carers have received training during the assessment process prior to their approval at panel. Some foster carers have accessed additional training via the agency's training hub. They say that this is useful. The manager has introduced individual development plans for foster carers. However, foster carers are not sufficiently trained to hold children confidently. There is one recorded incident of a child being held to support them when in crisis. It was necessary and proportionate. It is important that foster carers are confident in using safe holds on children when necessary, and that they know how to record this. This supports safe practice in the use of physical holds.

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

The manager is suitably experienced and qualified for the role. The recruitment of foster families is in its infancy. The agency has five foster families approved. The manager has had a dual role while the agency develops. She has carried out her role as a registered manager at the same time as supervising foster families. She has prioritised the support she gives to foster families. However, this has led to some shortfalls in the management oversight of the agency. The shortfalls are not serious but demonstrate that her dual role is not effective. The agency has recently recruited a part-time supervising social worker. The manager has clear plans in place to address the shortfalls.

The manager recognises the value of diversity in the staff team, foster carers and panel members. While the panel members are male and female, and come from different backgrounds, the panel is not sufficiently diverse. There are no adults who have experienced living away from their birth families, and the ethnic mix of panel members is limited. This has the potential to hinder the panel's overall competence in making informed recommendations to support children from a wide range of backgrounds.

Children do make good progress from their starting points. However, the systems that the agency uses to track the children's progress are not consistently good. Information in the children's documents is sometimes vague and not suitably evaluated in order to reflect the children's progress from their starting points. This is not helpful for children, as they are then unable to recognise the areas where they have made good progress.

Overall, the agency's records in children's documents are good. However, there are some inconsistencies and inaccuracies in children's recorded documents. For example, there are some records that lack information such as dates and the accuracy of dates. Some records are difficult to follow because they lack clarity. Furthermore, the manager has reviewed her own practice in one recorded incident. This has prevented independent scrutiny of practice. Additionally, poor records do not provide clear accountability of the agency's practice.

The agency has not consistently followed their own escalation policy. This has resulted in the agency not having full access to some significant information and documents that relate to the children. This has not resulted in a child being harmed. However, this has the potential to delay the agency's response to children's changing needs, particularly when they do not effectively use their own escalation policy.

The manager is held in high regard by the foster families and other professionals. Her values, skills and knowledge help her to work effectively with foster families and other professionals to improve children's outcomes. A foster carer said:

'Sarah knows her stuff. She is brilliant at helping you to see what is behind the child's behaviour, and [she] gives you practical solutions. I am

so pleased I came to this agency, as she is just amazing. She makes me feel valued as a carer.'

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

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. In particular, that foster carers are suitably trained to use physical holds on children when it is necessary, and for their protection. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 3.8)
- 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 provider should ensure that the central list is sufficiently diverse to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.8)
- The registered provider should ensure that there is an effective system in place to record the details and evidence that appropriate reference checks are sufficiently completed to assess the suitability of individuals taking on responsibilities of working in the agency. This includes telephone enquiries to each referee to verify the written references. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.1)
- The registered provider should ensure that there are effective processes in place to ensure that managers, staff and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined. In particular, that the agency follows their own escalation policy and process. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 25.4)
- The registered provider should ensure that information and entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. ('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, that when tracking children's progress there is a clear evaluation of the progress they make from their starting points. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

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: 2594802

Registered provider: Changing Futures Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: 3 Abbey Street, Headland, Hartlepool TS24 0JR

Responsible individual: Martin Todd

Registered manager: Sarah Richardson

Telephone number: 01429 891444

Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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