

# SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC036081           |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 07/12/2015         |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Jacqueline Malcolm |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Full               |
| <b>Provision subtype</b>       |                    |

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| <b>Setting address</b>         | S W I I S Foster Care, Greys House, 99 Great North Road, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE3 5NA |
| <b>Telephone number</b>        | 0191 236 1150                                                                         |
| <b>Email</b>                   |                                                                                       |
| <b>Registered person</b>       | SWIIS Foster Care Limited                                                             |
| <b>Registered manager</b>      | Miss Sheena Mitchell                                                                  |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Mr Keith Stopher                                                                      |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 31/01/2013                                                                            |

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. is an independent fostering agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne. The agency assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children and young people. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 60 children and young people placed with approximately 59 foster care households.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people prosper in their foster homes as a result of their good care, protection and nurture within safe boundaries. Their family membership promotes a sense of belonging and helps most to thrive. The majority of children and young people achieve good outcomes with respect to their health, education, social and behavioural outcomes. One young person said about their foster carers, 'They are perfectly good to me.'

The recruitment of potential foster carers is performed with particular care. This means that people are turned away if they fail to meet the agency's high expectations. The preparation, assessment and scrutiny of potential foster carer assessments are timely and robust. This ensures that only suitable adults with the appropriate attributes, motivation and skills can care for children and young people. Excellent 24 hours support and good training opportunities ensure that foster carers are fully equipped to care for children and young people. Carer's suitability is reviewed annually. The registered manager continues to pursue placing social

workers to ensure their contributions count. Foster carers are highly valued by the agency and they are a firm part of the 'team around the child'. Effective partnership working with the majority of local authorities and other agencies ensures that children and young people's needs are well met. This promotes high quality practices. Matching is generally good, which promotes placement stability and outweighs the number of placement breakdowns.

Children and young people are safe. Allegations made against carers and complaints are quickly investigated with appropriate local authority designated officer input. These good practices promote children and young people's safety and welfare.

Children and young people's views influence their own care and how the agency operates. Agency staff and foster carers consult and listen to their wishes and feelings. They also act as strong advocates for them. This values and respects the voice of the child.

Leadership and management is efficient and effective. The registered manager is qualified, experienced and child focussed. She provides strong, yet inclusive leadership and is respected by many. Similarly, the new responsible individual has a realistic vision about service developments. He is an asset to the management team. Well-motivated, competent and highly skilled supervising social workers and family support workers know the carers, children and young people very well. The support and advice they provide maintains placements. They majorly go above and beyond their role and responsibilities to ensure that children and young people reach their potential.

The shortfalls identified at this inspection relate to monitoring systems. They have no negative impact on children and young people's safety and welfare.

## Areas of improvement

### Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

| Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Due date   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. Specifically 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)(3)) | 31/03/2016 |

## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

The manager should regularly monitor 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. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2). In particular, improve monitoring review reports.

Ensure that the executive side of the local authority or the independent fostering service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children (NMS 25.7 b). In particular, ensure the three monthly reports presented to the board include information about young people's progress and outcomes.

Ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 24.6). In particular ensure that annual appraisals are promptly conducted for the panel chair and all relevant staff working with children and young people.

## Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people make good progress. Most are settled and thrive in their foster placements. This is due to the high levels of support and protection that their dedicated foster carers adorn on them. In the majority of households, good placement stability is determined by suitable placement matching. The sound relationships formed between foster carers and children and young people help them to develop trust and emotional resilience. Foster carer's understand and can meet children and young people's diverse needs in conjunction with their individualised plans. This includes needs arising from their disability and cultural needs. Those children and young people that are cared for in transracial placements are helped to maintain in touch with their heritage, religious and cultural needs. This enables them to maintain a positive self-identity and excel in all aspects of their lives.

Most children and young people integrate exceptionally well into foster care homes, which enables them to experience a positive family life. A young person said, 'I get lots of hugs. She treats me like one of her own and I love it when she listens to my great singing.' A social care professional said, 'My young person talks about her carers and their family in family terms. She is included in all family events.' Where unplanned endings have occurred, the proactive steps taken by the agency to seek a child focussed resolution promotes damage limitation. A representative from the agency said, 'We get no greater satisfaction than having a placement that works.'

Children and young people's health outcomes improve. They benefit immensely from the agency's health advisor interventions. This ensures children and young people's prompt access to a range of primary and specialist health services. Children and young people's emotional, physical, therapeutic and psychological needs are effectively promoted by these good practices. Foster carer training in a range of health matters, such as alcohol, drugs, sexual health, medication and healthy lifestyles enhances their capacity to promote children and young people's health, safety and welfare.

Similarly, the education advisor's liaison with education providers, coupled with their support to foster carers, challenge barriers to young people's educational progress. This has resulted in success for those young people who have improved their school attendance, grades and achieved some good examination results. A social worker said, 'The foster carer has worked hard to get a young person who was out of education for 6 years back into education and to keep him there.' Another said that the agency provides, 'Good academic support from carers and the agency.' Children and young people's achievements are rewarded and celebrated at an awards ceremony. This is organised and hosted by the agency. The creative support

provided by the agency to occupy those young people not in education ensures constructive use of their time. It also enhances their learning in other ways.

Children and young people's wishes and feelings are a major strength of the agency. Their views fully influence their care plans and the progression of the agency. For example, children and young people consulted about the plans for the Christmas party had their choice of separate age appropriate groups and venues granted. Good advocacy from the agency and foster carers ensure that young people are fully represented. A carer said, '(Name of the agency) intervenes and fights for the child.' An agency stakeholder said, 'The agency have a very proactive team of children's support workers who encourage young people in making choices and are strong advocates for them.'

Children and young people are well supported to maintain suitable contacts with their own family and friends, thus bonding their ties with their kith and kin.

Those children and young people that achieve permanence in long term, stable foster placements have in some cases, remained under 'staying put' arrangements. This provides consistency and stability, enabling them to continue their education and employment. This enables young people to have real opportunities to learn skills that help them to prosper in the future.

Children and young people's participation in a range of leisure activities provide them with lots of opportunities to expand their outlook on life. This also helps them to build their confidence, socially integrate and above all, have fun. The agency's family support workers are pivotal in ensuring that children and young people partake in organised activities. This affords the workers to nurture positive relationships with the children and young people, which acts as an additional support mechanism for foster carers. An agency stakeholder said, 'There is a participation group and lots of activities throughout the year for young people.' Children and young people's individual activities and hobbies are actively promoted by their carers. For example, visiting local places of interest and far away countries, swimming lessons, horse riding and joining youth groups.

Foster carers are highly proficient at collecting special mementoes for children and young people's life stories. This gives them valuable memories of the good times.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people benefit from an effective fostering agency that provides good quality services to them, their foster carers and placing authorities. A social

worker said, 'The fostering service appear very caring and supportive to the foster carers, the young person and me as social worker.' A member of staff from the agency said, 'I have worked for this service for 13 years and I have found (Name of the service) to be a good service.'

A clear recruitment strategy supports the range of carers needed to meet children and young people's diverse needs. Identified gaps that may limit some matching, such as recruiting more carers from minority ethnic communities are integrated into the strategy to ensure this shortfall is addressed.

The preparation and assessment of potential foster carers is good. This is because it is child focussed and the intensity of the process ensures that potential foster carers are in no doubt about the challenges of the fostering task. A new foster carer said, 'They are brilliant at what they do.' Assessments for potential foster carers are informative, thorough and timely. They provide a good evaluation of their capability and motivation to foster children and young people. The well-established and experienced panel effectively scrutinise the assessments. This ensures a robust quality assurance function that recommends only suitable foster carers and provides useful feedback to the agency about the quality of their work. Clear, unanimous recommendations are unique to potential carer's qualities, which demonstrate how seriously panel take their role and responsibilities.

Excellent support and good training opportunities provided to foster carers helps them to care for children and young people and improve their outcomes. A representative from the agency said, 'The support and training for foster carers is excellent.' Foster carers confirm regular visits from supervising social workers and family support workers that provide regular child-focussed formal and informal supervision and support. A number of foster carers speak very highly about the 24-hour support they receive. They view this as a very important lifeline. A foster carer said, 'If I had not been with (Name of the agency), I wouldn't be a foster carer' and '24/7, there is always someone there.' A social care professional said, 'Excellent, experienced carers. Good support and a very good link worker.' Exceptionally good relationships shared between foster carers, managers and supervising social workers are professional, yet very approachable and friendly. The highly skilful and creative support provided by the family support workers is invaluable to the agency, foster carers, children and young people. This promotes mutual respect, maintains placements and keeps a focus on children and young people's care and protection. One carer said, 'It feels like quite a big family.'

Most foster carers are very experienced and qualified having completed the Training Support and Development Standards (TDS). This gives credence to their role and supports the delivery of high quality care. Good mandatory and bespoke training opportunities keep carers motivated and updated about the diverse issues that affect their care of children and young people. Training includes issues relating to

safeguarding, child sexual exploitation, attachment, behaviour management, health issues, advocacy and culture and diversity. Plans are in place to train all carers in the protection of children and young people from radicalisation. A carer said that the agency 'is responsive to training needs.'

A further strength of the agency is the value placed on carers as members of the 'team around the child.' Their active involvement in children and young people's plans and statutory reviews with the agency and placing social workers influences how their best interests are promoted. Foster carer's awareness about the local authority's delegated powers enables them to care for children and young people. This prevents institutionalised practices.

Annual carer reviews are timely. They provide a good opportunity for foster carers to evaluate their performance and plan their future objectives and goals. Foster carers and supervising social worker's written reports provide their perspective of the year and the difference it makes to children and young people's lives. However, despite the requests made by the agency for social workers reports, they have not been forthcoming. This does not ensure a sturdy appraisal of foster carer's ongoing suitability. The registered manager is addressing this issue. This shortfall bears no negative impact on children and young people's safety and welfare.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Safeguarding children and young people is central to all that the agency does. Well-integrated safeguarding practices are performed in conjunction with foster carers and external agencies. This promotes children and young people's welfare. Foster carer training in a range of safeguarding matters informs and alerts them about any safeguarding concerns. Unannounced visits include health and safety checks on foster carer's homes and their facilities, which further safeguards children and young people. Consequently, children and young people say they feel safe, which is a view that placing social workers concur with. One said, 'The foster carer I am working with from (Name of the agency) is excellent and well supervised so I have no concerns about my young person's safety.'

Good communication between by the agency and most placing authorities identify foster carers that can match the children and young people referred to them. Matching is good despite some placement breakdowns. Monthly reports completed by carers are shared with placing authority social workers, ensuring that everyone is kept updated. A social worker said, 'I have regularly been provided with monthly foster carer updates from (Name of the agency) and they ensure to share any



relevant paperwork with myself. (Name of the agency) have been proactive in promoting the outcomes for this young person and progressing their looked after children's plan.'

Children and young people's vulnerabilities are sufficiently protected by their individualised risk management plans. This informs foster carers about keeping them safe and where possible, eliminating risk. Those young people who present with unsafe behaviours are supported with advice and guidance to keep themselves safe. A social worker said, 'I feel the carer has tried hard to safeguard the young person who continues to put himself at risk.' Foster carer's good understanding of what constitutes safe care is supported by vigilant and supportive practices. A social worker said, 'From my observations, safe care is very much a part of all placements and included thoroughly in plans.'

Missing from home and unauthorised absences are properly acted on and rigorously monitored by the agency. Foster carers follow the agreed protocols to ensure their safe and well return home. Majorly, the missing from home events are linked to young people running to family and friends. Additional risks to young people, such as child sexual exploitation concerns are closely monitored, risk managed and implemented by foster carers. Effective communication with safeguarding professionals and other agencies minimises further harm to those who need this intense level of support and protection.

Overall, children and young people's challenging behaviours are well managed by trained foster carers. Clear routines and boundaries instilled by foster carers, coupled with mutually positive relationships help children and young people to self-regulate their behaviours. This enables them to develop socially acceptable characteristics. Foster carers communicate any critical incidents to the agency and these matters are discussed with agency social workers to allow for reflection when challenging incidents occur. A social worker said, 'Carer insight and understanding around boundaries and the child's emotional regulation helps keep my young person very safe in placement.' Another said, 'When the placement began the children struggled to manage their emotions and behaviour; this is no longer an issue.'

Children and young people know how to complain. They can identify suitable adults to talk to about any concerns they may have, which includes approaching any staff from the agency. Their views are listened to, taken seriously and the issues are fully investigated. Allegations against foster carers are promptly addressed in conjunction with the local authority designated officer (LADO). This enables the appropriate processes to be followed and safeguards children and young people. Some foster carers are de-registered. An agency stakeholder said, 'If there have been difficulties I believe that the agency strives to educate carers and where necessary have de-registered carers who fail to understand and comply with safeguarding issues.'

The agency staff and foster carer recruitment and vetting procedures are robust. This protects children and young people from having contact with unsuitable adults. Children and young people's voices are heard during the recruitment of panel members, which shows their influence during this process. A panel member said, 'Panel has a list of questions from children in placement and chooses one to ask prospective carers at panel.'

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people benefit from an efficient, effectively managed and reliable service that puts them first. The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out what services the agency provides and this mirrors current practice.

The registered manager is experienced, qualified and child focussed. She is well respected by staff, foster carers, panel members and other professionals. A carer said, '(Name of the registered manager) takes a personal interest in the young people.' A panel representative described the registered manager as, 'A safe pair of hands. It is a pleasure and a privilege to work with (Name of registered manager).'

The agency is currently experiencing a period of organisational transition and strategic change. This is intended to deliver a linear service across the agencies to stimulate common practices. The registered manager and newly appointed responsible individual have a good understanding of how the changes will be made with minimal negative impact on service delivery. This is viewed positively by the staff and foster carers, which, through consultation with them has minimised any potential anxieties.

The good relationships with local authority contractors and to various degrees, local authority social work professionals ensure that children and young people's holistic needs are met. The registered manager makes effective use of the escalation process to challenge local authorities. This enables her to secure services for children and young people when barriers are identified.

The registered manager prioritises the agency's service needs through the development plan. She understands the children and young people's outcomes from their starting points. However, this is not clearly reflected in the monitoring review reports, therefore the difference that the agency makes to children and young people's lives lacks lustre. The contents are insufficiently robust and do not fully comply with the regulations. This is specifically with respect to providing for consultation with all foster carers, placing authorities and parents. Similarly, the three monthly reports presented to the board, although informative does not appraise them about outcomes for children and young people. This shortfall does not

present a negative impact on children and young people's safety and welfare.

The staff team is strong. It consists of a well-established, qualified, skilled and passionate workforce that go above and beyond their role and responsibilities. The team is proud of what they do to enhance the lives of most children and young people placed with foster carers. An agency representative said, 'We have an excellent reputation which is well deserved. We strive to provide the best possible outcomes for every young person who enters the (Name of the service) door.' The agency and support staff have an excellent understanding of the carers, children and young people helping to maximise their potential. The staff team are well trained and regularly supervised, which supports their learning and development. A representative from the agency said, 'We have systems in place such as regular team meetings, practice meetings and regular supervision. My manager is also approachable and we have access to a manager at all times.' Agency staff appraisals are carried out annually, but do not include children and young people's views about them. Not all panel members have been annually appraised, which is an area that the provider addressed at the time of the inspection.

One requirement and one good practice recommendation made at the last inspection has been addressed. These relate to submitting the written review report to Ofsted and pathway planning.

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.