

Jay Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Jay Fostering Limited is part of National Fostering Agency (NFA) who acquired the company in November 2010. The agency was first registered in December 2003. The agency's Statement of Purpose clearly defines the nature of placement types provided as short term, long term, bridging, respite, pre-adoption and parent and child. At the time of this inspection the agency has 104 sets of carers and has 168 children in placement. This fostering service was last inspected in August 2007.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The fostering service achieves good overall effectiveness. Children and young people are making excellent progress in relation to their health, education, social and emotional development. Children and young people's consultation and participation are well embedded in the practice of the agency, with direct benefits for representing their voice.

The preparation and assessment of foster carers is good. Good quality decisions are taking place with matching and preparing foster carers. Children and young people form good secure attachments to foster carers. Children and young people benefit from a safe, caring and nurturing environment. Foster carers receive excellent training and say they value the agency's efforts. Foster carers get good levels of supervision visits and are well supported by the agency. Foster carers effectively support the needs of children and young people. Equality and diversity is threaded well throughout the agency.

Leadership and management at the agency are good. They demonstrate strong commitment and a genuine interest in working with children and young people and producing positive experiences in their fostered lives. Clear development plans and quality assurance processes track the agency's progress and help to develop and sustain continual improvements.

There are two regulatory and two national minimum standard shortfalls. The agency must review the notification system to ensure that Ofsted is fully informed of all the outcomes from significant Notifiable events. Also they must review the foster carer's agreement so that it is up to date and relevant. The agency should ensure that foster carers are supplied with full documentation of the child's care plan and placement plan in all cases. Similarly, they should ensure all carers hold delegated authority. None of these issues detracts from the continued success that foster carers and the agency are having in producing excellent outcomes for children and young people.

Areas for 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.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
36 (2011)	ensure that 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 (Regulation 36 (1))	31/03/2013
27 (2011)	ensure that the matters and obligations in Foster Care Agreements are fully set out as outlined under Schedule 5. (Regulation 27 (5)(b))	31/03/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carers are supported to make reasonable and appropriate decisions within the authority delegated to them, without having to seek consent unnecessarily (NMS 7.4)
- ensure that the foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. (NMS 31.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Children and young people help to influence and develop the fostering agency and

engagement with them is highly accomplished. Their participation is wide range ranging and is a two-way process that ensures their views, feelings and wishes are acted on and routinely sought. For example, they attend quarterly meetings at the 'Child and Young Person's Consultation Groups'. They can write a wish, message, aspiration, thought or idea on a rain drop or cloud on the 'Rainbow Wall of Wishes'. This positively affects the fostering agency's practice development and training and increases accessible resources through using new forms of media for children and young people. As a result, consultation is innovative and meaningful to children and young people and is making a real difference.

Children and young people enjoy stable foster care placements. This is testimony to careful matching that is effective and meets children's needs. Children and young people enjoy living in safe and comfortable homes: they enjoy the space that they need to grow. One young person commented, 'I have been living at my home for a long time and it's brilliant because I love living there.' One social worker told the agency, 'The children have developed a close relationship with their foster carers, which has been previously so lacking in their lives.' As a result, children and young people experience fulfilled lives and feel part of their foster family. This helps nurture stable relationships.

Children and young people's health is excellent and their holistic health needs are comprehensively addressed. Children and young people lead healthy lifestyles which include healthy diets and enjoying a wide range of sports and leisure activities that help their confidence grow. Disabled children and young people receive substantial support with complex health needs. This includes support from different community health professionals and practitioners to coordinate health plans and address health needs. Disabled children and young people benefit because foster carers are highly cooperative and act as advocates and champions for children. Foster carers are extremely skilled at ensuring that all specialist equipment and aids are sought and installed in the home and this improves children and young people's quality of life. As a result, this fully supports disabled children and young people and their foster family.

Children and young people's progress in their education is excellent. Foster carers share their enthusiasm with children and young people to do well in their schooling and with their homework. Children and young people say they know that their foster carers are in continual contact with their school, checking their progress. Their attendance at school is high. In many cases, children and young people also receive extra support with maths and reading to help enhance their educational progress. In some cases they access private educational tutoring, organised and financed by foster carers. All children and young people are in education or training.

Children and young people have contact with people who are deemed important to them through clearly agreed contact plans. Contact is very carefully considered at the matching stage, including the levels and the way contact is set up. One young person commented, 'My foster carers are good and help me with my relationship with my Mum.' Children and young people get help and support to deal with any loss and separation issues. Consequently, this helps to reduce anxiety and helps children

and young people settle into living with their foster family.

Older young people approaching adulthood are receiving committed support. They develop the skills they need as they become more independent. They develop practical skills such as cooking, budgeting and traveling independently. The agency fully supports 'Staying Put' for those young people who are 18 and beyond. As a result, young people feel fully prepared and are able to plan for the future. One young person commented; 'I am now living with my foster carer as a young adult having my own key, driving my own car and working part time to support myself at college. I have clear plans for my career and I am going to university next year.'

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

The recruitment, retention and assessment strategy of the agency is good. Specialist dedicated staff quickly deal with enquires and initial visits to potential foster carers. Overall, the agency's supervising social workers complete assessments. This allows for continuity for prospective foster carers and consideration of issues they are likely to face and the skills and areas for development in the future. The agency has steadily grown and the capacity to provide suitable families is good. As a result, the agency is able to respond to need and foster carers are satisfied.

Good information and communication about children and young people is clearly evident and well-illustrated in a range of records. The vast majority of foster carers receive appropriate information about care plans and placement plans from the child's social worker. In a very few situations, some foster carers do not receive appropriate care plans despite the tireless efforts made by the agency. Similarly, delegated authority is not in place for a few of the foster carers. As a result, this hampers these few foster carers' knowledge and understanding of children's written care plans and delegated authority. The fostering agency is aiming to take further steps to help address this gap.

Matching children with placements that meet their needs is good. Excellent attention is given to children and young people's identity, culture and ability to practise their religious faith. The vast majority of children and young people remain at the same school they attended prior to fostering. This helps children and young people to experience continuity in their educational experiences.

Foster carers' preparation, training, support and supervision are excellent. All prospective foster carers attend an extensive programme on 'Skills to Foster'. A senior manager commented, 'We provide training for applicants to ensure they have an understanding of the additional needs of looked after children.' Foster carers enjoy the benefits of regular foster carer support groups to enhance, develop and support their fostering knowledge and personal networks. Training is given a high priority by the agency. Accessibility is enhanced with a combination of e-learning and workshop-based courses. One foster carer commented, 'Training is really of a high quality and you can ask for specific training also.' Foster carers are making

exceptional progress with attaining their 'Training, Support and Development' (TSD) standards. Equally, behaviour management is given a good priority by the agency through improved training and supervision. Subsequently, foster carers gain knowledge and confidence to understand the underlying reasons behind children's poor behaviours and have increased confidence in dealing with challenging needs.

The agency's fostering panel is effective and makes good quality decisions about prospective foster carers. New additions to panel membership has enhanced and refreshed the panel further. Panel members benefited from recent training and are forging appropriate networks to enhance further good practice models. Overall, assessments reach a good standard because of the thorough quality assurance process carried out by the management team at the agency. The panel administration is of a high quality and reports are prepared well in advance of panel meetings. One foster carer commented, 'Panel asked searching questions and we were made to feel welcome and listened to.'

Foster carers are central to the team around the child and effectively supported by the agency. Their achievements are frequently recognised through local authority awards and nominations made by the agency. Equally, children and young people's progress and development are formally acknowledged and celebrated. Foster carer's birth children are well supported and encompassed as part of the whole fostering family. For example, they have equal invitation to all consultation and celebratory events.

Children and young people's rights are actively promoted. Foster carers learn to understand children and young people's needs through 'Skills to Foster' and 'Championing Child's Legal Rights' training. For example, foster carers have specifically supported unaccompanied asylum seeking young people with their human rights. Supervising social workers', team support workers' and foster carers' embedded practice ensures the rights of the child are central to the work of the agency.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The agency promotes children and young people's welfare well. Their safeguarding practice, policies and procedures are good and they are proactive in their safeguarding practice. Foster carers ensure that children and young people learn to have a strong sense of safety and well-being. Children, young people, foster carers and their families benefit from clear safe-care policies, risk management and accident prevention monitoring. Safe care plans are regularly reviewed as circumstances change. Unannounced visits take place and this ensures scrutiny is taking place. One foster carer commented, 'We are checked regularly and the supervising social worker always checks our home fully including the bedrooms.' Foster carers say that children and young people are protected from the harmful effects of bullying. They are attentive and quickly deal with any incidents.

The agency helps to prevent children and young people from going missing from foster homes. This is a rare phenomenon. Missing from home events, as defined by the police protocols, are low and predominately relate to older adolescents and very few go missing more than once. In all cases, the agency fully reviews these events to develop multi-agency strategies to prevent reoccurrence. Young people learn to understand why they are placing themselves at unnecessary risk and to avoid this level of risk. There are many examples of good outcomes for children: children with previously persistent patterns of missing from home prior to foster placement, subsequently stop doing this due to good support to them and because of the foster carers' keen vigilance.

Children and young people's right to representation is actively promoted. Good practice shows that the agency has used advocates and the Children's Right's Director in order to safeguard and protect the views and wishes of the child or young person. Children and young people are well informed about how they can complain. In addition, the agency has employed a young people's ambassador who promotes the voice of children and young people in care. As a result, the agency ensures that adults are fair to children and young people.

Recruitment and selection practice of staff and of foster carers is good. In all cases, the agency follows its own policies and procedures correctly. Clear induction, training and performance review ensures that adults are suitable to work with vulnerable children and young people. Consequently, this protects children and young people's welfare.

The handling of allegations is good. During the past 12 months there have been four allegations; all have been properly investigated and concluded, with clear outcomes and implementation of action plans. The agency has, in all cases, referred foster carers back to panel for a full review. The agency is open and transparent about learning key messages arising from allegations. Good practice has included further training and monitoring to further advance foster carers practice, knowledge, understanding and increasing professional responsibility.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **good**.

Leadership and management are good. The Registered Manager, appointed in July 2012, leads by example and has a full visible presence to foster carers, staff and children and young people. Partnership working with relevant commissioners, health professionals, education professionals and children's placement teams is well embedded. The agency and the management team demonstrate a clear vision and ambition for fostered children and young people. This is evident in the increased growth in both the number of foster carers and the amount of children and young people placed with the agency. Equally, there is good emphasis on children and young people's participation and engagement in consultation events, conferences and workshops.

The agency has a good quality assurance process which is used to good effect. There is a full managerial overview of all placement breakdowns and complaints. Allegations are reviewed so that lessons learnt are well embedded in practice. As a result, practice improves and develops; policies and procedures are refined and training is enhanced. There is careful tracking of quality of supervision, monitoring and record keeping related to the fostering households. However, the foster carers' agreement is not fully up to date. The agency has already identified this is a shortfall within their records and is taking action to address it. The agency invested in another electronic recording system in July 2012 and this has increased flexibility and supports monthly quality assurance checks further. Consequently, this ensures supervising social workers are supporting foster carers to deliver good quality placements for children and young people.

Foster carers are producing optimum outcomes for children and young people. Successful and effective matching ensures that children and young people are living with foster carers that meet their individual needs, identity and diversity. There is a good representation of black and minority ethnic foster carers in the agency's diverse profile and this is also reflected in the staff group. Equally, disabled children and young people have good support and a strong commitment by the agency.

Children and young people are able maintain continuity in their education and contact with family and friends. One commissioner commented, 'The agency tends to offer placements to children and young people who need a foster placement with more complex needs and they are able to do this very well.' This inclusive practice leads to excellent outcomes for children and young people.

Foster carers feel they are members of the team at the agency. Supervising social workers and team support worker strongly communicate this fundamental principle to all foster carers. There are many examples where the agency communicates this valued ethos through training, foster carer groups and organisational events. Foster carers say that they feel listened to and heard. For example, there are representatives from the agency at all children and young people's reviews including their educational reviews. Foster carers say that they are supported to act as advocates, helped by their positive relationships with children and their knowledge and understanding of children's specific needs, wishes and aspirations. This makes for effective team working at the agency.

The organisation and sufficiency of staffing is good. The staff are suitably qualified and are experienced social work practitioners. All supervising social workers' performance is supervised, reviewed and monitored. They are well supported by managers and a group of support staff who provide extra assistance to foster carers. All staff enjoy continual professional development. For example, gaining qualifications in advanced counselling. The agency is also sponsoring a senior social worker to do a further social work qualification. This demonstrates the agency's commitment towards the importance of professional training.

Complaints management is effective. All complaints are dealt with sensitively and

professionally. Over the past 12 months there have only been two, with subsequent clear steps to improve practice.

The fostering agency's notification system is broadly good. The fostering agency has correctly notified social workers, police and the local authority of significant events taking place at the agency. However, the agency did not notify Ofsted of all events, in respect to reporting all the outcomes. As a result, Ofsted was not aware if the concerns were fully resolved. The agency is taking immediate steps to address this oversight.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure 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.

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.