

Fosterplus

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Fosterplus is a privately owned independent fostering agency that is registered as a limited company. The Registered office for the South region is located at Wavendon Business Park, Milton Keynes, which incorporates a sub office in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire. The agency supports fostercarers across much of the southern England and into the midlands.

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 that result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

This independent fostering agency has undergone some significant changes since the last inspection. The responsible individual has recently resigned and the agency joined the Partnership in Children's Services (PICS), which is a major provider of fostering services. Three previous offices are now merged into the one operating from Milton Keynes. Overall, the agency demonstrates a high standard of practice with a slight weakness around communication with foster carers. This shortfall has no impact on safeguarding or promoting children's welfare.

Numerous examples of children and young people making significant progress in key areas was evidenced. There are some notable areas of good practice resulting in the agency having a strong track record of safe and stable foster placements. The staff team is dedicated. The fostering panel is chaired very well and offers good scrutiny of foster care applicants. The leadership and management are highly effective in their duties and monitoring.

The views of the children and young people are valued. The matching of young people with foster carers that are right for them has been effective. Overall, the level of professional support offered to foster families from supervising social workers has been very strong. The highly valued training available to staff and foster carers is a key strength of this agency. This benefits the children and young people placed.

Areas for improvement

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.

The provider must:

Recommendations

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

- The supervising social worker ensures each foster carer he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all regulations and standards and the policies and guidance of the fostering service. (NMS 21.9)

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

Judgement outcome: Outstanding

The high standard of matching children and young people with the appropriate carer is an exceptional attribute of the agency. The pre-placement information provided to them reduces their anxiety allowing them to settle quickly. The matching process is carefully undertaken, giving consideration to a foster carer's ability to meet all the needs of children and young people whilst building a healthy and trusting relationship.

Children and young people are encouraged to follow their individual interests, and hobbies. They are provided with the opportunities to express themselves freely about their foster placement. They are encouraged by their foster carers to be involved in daily decisions when it is appropriate and in their best interest. They understand their rights and the proper channels for lodging a complaint if needed.

Substantial effort is made to ensure that children and young people enjoy good health especially when they are placed with a pre-existing concern. Some young people have made significant improvements in their physical health, particularly in terms of their diet and weight. Others have improved upon their personal hygiene and learned the importance of a healthy diet. One young person developed improved confidence by losing a significant amount of weight and completed a 3k charity run.

Extensive support is available to young people that assist in their ability to overcome historical concerns affecting their emotional well-being. Some children and young people have successfully engaged in therapeutic services resulting in them having a positive attitude despite issues that have plagued them for a considerable amount of time. The agency was able to evidence individual cases where children and young people made significant progress emotionally.

The education worker for the agency effectively tracks the educational progress of the children and young people. The data is updated every six months, often reflecting that children and young people have made huge strides in their education attendance and achievement. Several now attend regularly, and accomplish more based upon the support they receive from their foster carers and the agency. Records reflect that schools have made many positive comments about the progress children and young people make educationally.

A supervising social worker taught a young person how to effectively use sign language. The young person was able to improve their communication and understanding with their parents. This type of work with children and young people promotes and improves family ties or links: a prime example of the impact of the agency on children and young people.

A young person proudly spoke about the positive relationships formed with the family of the foster carer: 'I attend so many functions like, barbeques and other outings and everyone treats me like family.' The young person has been enabled to have a long-standing placement that is culturally sensitive. The young person said, 'I have learned to cook all the food I like to eat and my carer can relate to me.' This feeling of total acceptance by children and young people was apparent in all observed

placements.

The length of time children and young people remain in their placement takes into account their progress and relationship with the foster carer. Some placements records reflect that children and young people are 'staying put' in their placement past the original assigned end date. There are also examples of children and young people returning to previous placements when their transitions back home are not successful. These are clear examples that strong bonds are formed between foster carers, children and young people.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Placements for the children and young people are generally very stable due to the recruitment of committed and skilled foster carers. Recruitment of foster carers is a child-focused process and the initial training they are provided with is of good quality. Foster care assessments are completed in a timely manner, by skilled professionals who are able to obtain and analyse key information ensuring that suitable applicants are put forward. The panel is meticulous in its scrutiny of the quality of assessments presented.

A very experienced professional, with considerable knowledge about how an effective panel should function, chairs the panel meetings. The panel has recently formed a joint panel with another fostering agency. This will widen the range of professionals and experts in fostering available to it. The panel minutes presented were clear, accurate and reflected outstanding items being effectively followed up. Safe, secure and stable placements are made as a result of the effective functioning of the panel.

A major strength of the agency is the quality of support available to foster carers that allows them to be successful in meeting the needs of children and young people. Supervising social workers have excellent rapport with their allocated carers. Some carers described their supervising social worker as 'amazing'. Another said, 'You can ring the office anytime for advice or additional support.' The foster carers are actively involved in the care planning for the children and young people. They ensure that the children and young people are consulted about their day-to-day routine and their voices are heard at all meetings.

The training provided to foster carers continues to be exceptional and cross-links to other training. Carers believe the training has improved drastically over time and is now administered by enthusiastic trainers that keep the courses interesting and relevant. Carers attend training alongside agency staff promoting consistency in their practice relating to the children and young people. The 'skills to fostering' training allows carers to walk in the shoes of children and young people promoting a better understanding of their experiences.

The agency is proactive in assisting with the contact that children and young people

have with their birth families. This positive approach helps young people maintain important relationships, which may be crucial to sustaining their sense of identity and culture. The agency continues to work very well with the local authority through purposeful attendance and contribution to reviews regarding the care of children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people are safe; they are confident that any concern raised for their safety and well-being will be taken seriously. They trust their foster carers and the supervising social workers and confide in them when needed. This is the main reason that there are few incidents of children and young people going missing or being exposed to child sexual exploitation on record.

The policies and procedures for children and young people that go missing and at risk of sexual exploitation are clear and easy for all to follow. The agency, despite the low number of these incidents, prioritises the training on these matters.

Allegations against all foster carers are addressed with a well-organised response by the agency; effective measures are undertaken to keep the children and young people safe by cooperation with investigating authorities from the agency. An effective relationship between the agency, police and placing authorities help to resolve these matters promptly.

Risks associated with young people are clear to foster carers; they actively intervene when necessary to help keep young people safe. The regularly reviewed risk assessments with the supervising social workers offer supportive guidance to carers. Unannounced visits are undertaken at frequent intervals to promote transparency.

Effective training is made available to foster carers so they continue to develop their ability to maintain safe, stable placements. Foster carers are confident when dealing with disclosures, and know what action needs to be undertaken. Some of the safeguarding training that has been completed by carers includes child sexual exploitation which was presented by two police officers and examined the issue in relation to both males and females; training on radicalisation is offered and covered within the safeguarding policy.

The recruitment practice for new staff is thorough and involves validating and reaffirming information provided during the initial stages before offers of employment. All probation periods are effectively monitored. There is a clear, positive, whistleblowing procedure. The senior management monitors all significant events ensuring that incidents do not go unexamined and consequence or remedial actions are followed through.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Leadership and management is an exceptional attribute of the agency. They display a high level of professionalism and are dedicated to the children and young people. The management has effectively established working relationships with placing authorities that value the service it offers to young people. Any issues are promptly discussed and solutions offered. These effective relationships assist young people to receive a good care experience.

The recommendations at the last inspection have been implemented. The statement of purpose clearly reflects the agency's ethos, policies and procedures. The updated children's guide provides information to children and young people in an age-appropriate format which they understand. The views of children and young people are evidenced throughout their records. Children and young people feel their views have contributed towards their care. A young person said, 'Everyone always ask for my opinion. They always want to know if I need anything and how I feel about my placement.'

The long-standing registered manager has been in post since 2007. She is extremely dedicated in ensuring that children and young people achieve the best outcomes while in placement. The insight that the manager has into the agency including all placements was proven purposeful and meticulous. Without having to review documentation, the manager successfully provided information on a complex query made during the inspection. It is clear from the development plan that she is hands on and understands the strength and areas of improvement for the agency.

Placement plans for children and young people are developed based on their care plan outcomes. They are individualised in nature and support clear goals such as improved family relations, long term care, independence, and improved health. The systematic monitoring of plans through supervision and reviews ensures that achievable goals are in place. The process effectively identifies when further action should be taken to ensure that children and young people make appropriate progress. The development of the agency electronic recording system to accurately track outcomes will add to an already robust monitoring system.

Notifiable events are appropriately reported to all relevant agencies including Ofsted. This helps support effective external monitoring of the actions of the agency.

The agency is appropriately staffed, resourced and financially viable. Joining the PICS network provides additional benefits in terms of training and professional expertise, further promoting the welfare of young people. Plans for the recruitment of high quality foster carers are ongoing, including excellent support and monitoring for current foster carers.

Management provides substantial, regular, reflective supervision to supervising social workers. They believe it enables them to be more effective with carers, children and young people. The training they receive is comprehensive contributing towards their

development and practice. Specialist training is available if required and appraisals do reflect the views of foster carers, children and young people. The senior management has recently completed secure training adding to their practice development.

Some foster carers felt they were insufficiently informed when it came to certain financial payments for children and young people. The management was aware of the views expressed by the foster carers and are reviewing how information is passed to foster carers so that they do not feel alienated at any time.

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, 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.