

Alpha Plus Fostering Limited

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Chambers Business Centre, Chapel Road, Oldham OL8 4QQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned fostering agency offers short-term, long-term, emergency and respite foster care. The agency is responsible for the assessment, approval, training, supervision and support of foster carers.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since July 2020.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 56 approved fostering households. These families were caring for 63 children, including two children under the 'staying put' arrangements.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 January 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 10 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are at the heart of this agency. The registered manager, staff and foster carers are exceptionally child-focused and place children's experiences at the centre of their practice. The agency is part of a larger group of fostering agencies but has a strong family feel, where children, foster carers and staff know and support each other extremely well. One foster carer said, 'Alpha is so small, so actually you know all the supervising social workers, people know us and we know them. We know people in the office. We have a lot of input from [name of member of staff] and we go to all the events.'

Supervising social workers have excellent relationships with other professionals who work with children. They all work together to ensure that children's best interests are central to decision-making. One social worker said, '[Name of supervising social worker] is very clear and is very proactive and feels supportive of [name of child] and the carer.'

Highly effective matching processes mean that children are supported to live with foster carers who can safely meet their needs. Agency staff and foster carers work closely with other professionals and family members to find out about children before they move into the foster home. Children are provided with information about their foster families to help them to settle in. There are support mechanisms in place that wrap around carers and children to address any issues that arise and to avoid children having to move on from their foster family in an unplanned way. On occasions when children have to move on from their foster family earlier than originally planned, the registered manager takes appropriate action to identify any learning for the agency and carers.

Children are encouraged to become involved in various aspects of the work the agency does. Children have the opportunity to take part in regular youth panels that interview applicants wanting to be foster carers. Their questions are insightful and challenging to applicants, and their views are incorporated into wider decision-making as part of the recruitment process. This also enables children to develop their confidence and to learn valuable interview skills, which they will be able to use later in life.

Children's accomplishments and achievements are exceptionally well recognised and celebrated. An annual awards ceremony provides further opportunities to celebrate children's successes, and they are supported to develop a sense of pride and motivation to achieve. Initiatives such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and British Explorers Society further encourage personal growth and development and provide children with opportunities that they may not otherwise have experienced. One child said that the trip to Iceland was 'like opening a door to a whole new world of possibilities'.

The wraparound support offered by the agency is exemplary. It provides education, therapeutic resources and social outlets for foster families. This includes a well-attended therapeutic art group for children to express themselves. This holistic support creates a nurturing and inclusive culture and enhances the overall experience of all involved.

Many children are helped to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18. This commitment provides vital stability, emotional security and continuity of care, enabling a smoother transition into adulthood. This practice reflects a child-centred approach that prioritises children's long-term outcomes and well-being.

Inclusivity is a key strength in the agency. Children's voices are reflected throughout agency practice, and their views contribute to the care they receive. Children who speak English as an additional language are provided with tailored support to ensure that they feel valued, included and empowered and are able to fully engage in all aspects of their care and development.

Children in fostering households use a virtual platform to share their views on their care. Any concerns raised are promptly flagged to the registered manager so that she can take timely action and monitor continuous improvement in the quality of care provided. This strong focus on encouraging children and young people to share their voices emphasises how their opinions are both heard and valued.

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

Safeguarding practice is exceptionally strong and embedded throughout the agency. Supervising social workers have excellent relationships with children and foster carers. They conduct regular announced and unannounced visits to foster homes. Foster carers speak highly of the support they receive and understand that the role of supervising social workers in these visits is crucial, as it allows for early identification of any concerns. In addition, children speak to supervising social workers alone to ensure that they can share any concerns. One child said, 'If I had worries or concerns, I know who I would go to, in fact I would go to my foster carer first.'

Each child's unique needs, history, vulnerabilities and strengths are carefully considered when developing highly effective risk and safe care plans. These individualised plans are updated regularly to reflect current concerns and support agency staff and foster carers to keep children safe.

The agency has embedded highly effective safeguarding panels that oversee any safeguarding concerns by a range of agency professionals, including therapists. This ensures that tailored support for children, foster carers and supervising social workers can be arranged when needed.

Foster carers receive comprehensive and relevant training, equipping them with the necessary skills to identify and respond effectively to potential risks. This training is key to ensuring that foster carers are prepared to manage the diverse needs of children in their care. In addition, foster carers also benefit from comprehensive supervision sessions.

Robust processes are in place for the safer recruitment of agency staff and foster carers. Recruitment of foster carers is overseen by a centralised team from the agency's parent company and has seen a steady increase against the national trend. Reviews of foster carers' suitability are completed independently and in a timely manner. These reviews include the views of children and professionals to ensure a balanced assessment of carers' capability. This ensures that everyone involved in the care and safeguarding of children meets the highest standards of safety and suitability.

Foster carers are proactive in sharing safeguarding concerns and relevant information with the agency and appropriate authorities. This ensures that children's safety and well-being are prioritised. This effective communication ensures that investigations can take place while safeguarding the welfare of children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is highly experienced and consistently demonstrates a robust, child-centred approach, ensuring that the well-being and safety of children are at the core of the agency's work. Her calm and composed demeanour inspires confidence among staff, foster carers and external stakeholders, and this generates trust and stability within the agency. The manager has high expectations of her team and, alongside the team manager, ensures that children's needs are the focus of all decisions. Together, they nurture a culture of support and accountability, driving positive outcomes and exemplifying a commitment to excellence in care.

The registered manager has excellent oversight of the service and clear monitoring systems to identify strengths, areas for development and emerging patterns and trends. Her leadership promotes a culture of open communication across the agency, enabling a shared commitment to the child-centred mission and ensuring that all staff are aligned to the well-being of the children they care for.

Supervising social workers benefit from highly effective and reflective supervision, which equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in their roles. These sessions ensure that timely action is taken to maintain compliance with the regulations. Supervising social workers have low caseloads, which allows them to dedicate time and attention to ensuring high standards of care for children and their families.

The experienced office manager and support staff play a pivotal role in the smooth running of the service. Their efficiency and expertise ensure that operational

processes are seamless, enabling the agency to focus on its core mission of supporting children and families.

The agency's fostering panel is led by a highly experienced and effective chair, whose long-standing leadership has been instrumental in maintaining robust and consistent recommendations. Panel members are encouraged to share their views openly. The panel boasts a diverse and well-rounded membership, including care-experienced individuals who bring valuable insights to the decision-making process.

The agency decision-maker ensures clarity and transparency in decision-making, providing robust and well-reasoned decisions that uphold the agency's high standards. Annual reviews for foster carers are conducted rigorously by highly experienced independent officers, ensuring that standards are consistently met and improved.

The agency values its foster carers immensely and offers a range of well-attended support groups and buddying systems for foster carers throughout their fostering journey. This is something that foster carers value.

Leaders and managers are responsive to feedback and are open to adapting and evolving in response to the views of foster carers and children. Foster carers are kept informed about the agency and receive weekly updates packed with valuable information, including reminders about training, event schedules and support group dates. These updates ensure that foster carers remain informed and supported in their roles. One foster carer commented that the agency has been there 'every step of the way' in her fostering journey.

No requirements or recommendations were made at this inspection.

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: SC069335

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Inspectors

Colin Jones, Social Care Inspector

Michelle Greenhalgh, Social Care Inspector

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