

Phoenix Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Phoenix Fostering is an independent fostering agency located in the market town of Leominster in Herefordshire. The agency has developed a model of therapeutic parenting for young people who have experienced trauma, abuse, loss and separation and who exhibit a range of behaviours such as offending behaviours, aggression, sexualised behaviours and inability to trust. The service employs a psychologist and has a team of family support workers who work on a one-to-one basis with children and young people.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

The agency promotes the health, safety and well-being of children with good and outstanding outcomes for children and young people being achieved. Children and young people are supported to maintain healthy lifestyles and to have their healthcare needs met. Education is actively supported and promoted by family support workers and by foster carers. The agency has a team of family support workers who provide excellent support to carers and work with children and young people to promote and develop positive behaviour and self-resilience. The fostering agency ensures that the wishes and feelings of children and young people can be heard. Children and young people are happy in their foster homes. They feel that foster carers take time to listen to them and are supportive.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable to work with children and young people and delivers a good service which meets the needs of its users. The agency undertakes effective matching of children and young people with carers, which helps to ensure placement stability. The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is robust. The fostering panel and agency decision-maker make timely and thorough decisions about the approval and reviewing of foster carers. Foster carers receive good support and feel highly valued.

There are regulatory shortfalls in respect of updating policies and procedures, clarifying arrangements for child and parent placements and ensuring all checks are received before panel members sit on panel. Other shortfalls leading to recommendations are in respect of training in the administration of medication, development of risk assessments and in ensuring qualified staff undertake the social work functions of the agency.

Improvements since the last inspection

All requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Procedures have been developed to consider complaints and to monitor

the functions of the agency. The fostering panel consists of people with a good mix of skills, experience and background. Records are kept of checks and references for those working for the agency, although a shortfall exists with regard to panel members and will be made subject to a requirement.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency ensures that the health care needs of the children and young people are effectively identified, supported and met. Staff and foster carers are proactive in promoting healthy living, and children and young people have good access to health care resources including any specialist services that are required to meet their health needs.

The agency provides therapeutic family placements to children and young people who have suffered developmental trauma and associated attachment difficulties. They employ a psychologist, who as well as overseeing the therapeutic care plans for children and young people, provides direct work and support for young people, foster carers and staff.

Foster carers receive training in paediatric first aid and regular up-to-date training in health matters such as drug and alcohol awareness and attachment and trauma. Specialised training is actively sought for staff and foster carers to support them to promote the individual health and development needs of the children and young people being cared for. Foster carers, however, are not routinely trained in administering medication.

Children live in foster homes that provide a healthy environment and have the space they need. The agency has to date provided only single occupancy placements with the exception of parent and child placements and sibling groups. Foster carers encourage children to live healthy lifestyles. Children and young people have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities fully promoted by the agency.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people's safety and welfare are actively promoted by the agency. Children say they feel safe in their foster homes. Systems are in place which ensure the protection and safety of children and young people. The agency has a written child protection policy. This, however, does not accurately set out the procedures to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. It also does not include a statement of measures to be undertaken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements.

Foster carers receive safeguarding training to ensure they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and young people. Their welfare is

further promoted through direct work undertaken by a team of family support workers.

Fostering households have safe care policies that are specific to their families. Foster carers are aware of the individual risks and requirements of each child placed although risk assessments and safe caring plans specific to individual children are not always being completed. Foster carers, supervising social workers and family support workers meet regularly with children's social workers in therapeutic care planning meetings to discuss behaviour strategies and support plans.

Children and young people do sometimes go missing. When this occurs foster carers work closely with other agencies to ensure they return as quickly as possible and respond positively to them on their return. There is a policy and procedure in place if young people go missing from care. Foster carers are aware of the procedure to follow and report that they are confident in following it in the event of this happening.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people enjoy strong relationships with their foster families and interact positively with them. Foster carers and staff promote and support positive behaviour and encourage children and young people to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and ability.

The agency is proactive in ensuring foster carers are supported in managing their feelings and responses arising from caring for children and young people who display challenging behaviour. The agency adopts a wrap-around team approach, with foster carers gaining excellent support from supervising social workers, family support workers and the agency psychologist.

Children and young people are happy within their foster families and interact with their foster carers in a positive way. One young person commented that her foster carers are 'very supportive and always listen to what I have to say'. Another young person said: 'I am in the best family in my whole life, I love them much and want to stay with them.'

Children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities. The agency supports this by paying an allowance for each child and young person towards activities and leisure pursuits. Young people are encouraged both by carers and staff to engage in a variety of activities, from horse riding to hot air ballooning.

The agency has a strong focus on the promotion of education. This is promoted by the agency both within school and in the foster home. Family support workers accompany children when required in school and offer support within the classroom and at home. The agency offers training to teachers to help understand young

people's behaviour and provides home tuition to children and young people when needed. This level of support promotes the educational attainment of children and young people, improves communication with schools and provides immediate support to children and carers with difficult education issues. One headteacher commented that 'the input and support the young person received is second to none and I know that she would not have made the progress without that brilliant supportive network around her'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people's social and emotional needs are actively promoted by foster carers and staff to enable them to develop resilience, self-control and improved social skills. They are receiving excellent personalised care from carers that is meeting their needs. Foster carers are supported by family support workers and a psychologist through planned family support sessions and through six-weekly therapeutic care plan review meetings.

The agency has an enthusiastic team of family support workers who work directly with children and young people to help them develop a sense of belonging in their placements. All children and young people placed with the agency are allocated a family support worker. They offer focused work with children and young people in a variety of different ways, completing life story work, promoting positive identity, safety, developing independence skills and providing education support. This helps children and young people to develop in confidence and self-esteem which leads to greater stability in placement.

This level of support is recognised by other professionals who have commented that the agency has 'provided valuable background information and input into the assessment and care planning process', and that staff are 'insightful and show a high level of commitment to providing the very best input and support'.

The agency ensures children's wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care. Foster carers, supervising social workers and family support workers strongly advocate for young people ensuring their views and wishes are heard. This has resulted in children and young people having improved contact arrangements and greater placement stability. Children and young people say that they are listened to and their views are sought.

Children and young people know how to complain. This information is provided in a number of age-appropriate formats to ensure that this is accessible to children and young people of all ages.

Foster carers support children and young people to have constructive contact with family and friends in accordance with their care plans. Family support workers facilitate and supervise contact between children and members of their families. This helps to ensure that children are appropriately supported and the foster carer's

position is not compromised.

Children and young people are carefully matched to their foster placements. They are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home, where possible, in a planned and sensitive manner. Introductions are conducted prior to placement and they are given information and photographs of their prospective carers and their families. Children and young people are also given pictures and information about their family support worker. At the start of each placement children and young people are given bags with gifts to enable them to record memories of their time within the placement. This enables the young person from the beginning to have a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency makes sure that children are prepared for, and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic well-being. Staff and foster carers support young people to develop age-appropriate independence skills. Young people have been supported through college, work experience and apprenticeships.

The agency has developed its own pathway plan and self-care skills evaluation checklist. Foster carers and family support workers work directly with young people to complete these, alongside the local authority pathway plan.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency works closely with children, young people and foster carers to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and met. The religious and cultural needs of children and young people are considered during the matching process. Additional allowances are paid to foster carers to provide the best possible care to children and young people who have diverse needs. All staff and foster carers are given information and training with regard to equality and diversity.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable and qualified to work with children and young people. The agency has been in a period of transition and without a Registered Manager for a period of time. Management structures, however, have been in place which ensure the agency has been delivering an effective service which meets the needs of its users. The manager is currently undergoing the registration process.

Systems for managing serious incidents, allegations and complaints are in place and the manager is monitoring these in line with regulatory requirements. Recruitment procedures for staff ensure that all appropriate checks and references are

undertaken and appropriately ratified. There are, however, shortfalls with regard to the recruitment of panel members who had been allowed to sit on panel before all checks had been completed.

Records are well maintained and clear, and contribute to a child's understanding of their life. Placement plans, however, are not always in place which clarify the roles and responsibilities for delegated authority at the start of parent and child placements. This has the potential to lead to confusion within the placement.

The Statement of Purpose provides a clear outline of the aims and objectives of the agency. The agency has devised a child-friendly children's guide which can be personalised and available in age and gender-appropriate formats. This will enable children and young people to have a clear understanding of the service provided to them.

Prospective foster carers are recruited and assessed to ensure they meet the needs of children and young people. Assessments are detailed and analytical and identify the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop. All new foster carers receive a first review after six months and thereafter on an annual basis.

The agency provides extensive support and advice to foster carers. Six-weekly therapeutic care planning review meetings give a specific focus to considering the individual needs and progression of each child and young person. This is supported and reinforced by regular and planned family support sessions. Foster carers state that they feel well supported. The agency, however, employs social work students to carry out some social work functions and not all foster carers are receiving formal supervision by a named, appropriately qualified social worker.

Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively. There is a comprehensive training programme available to foster carers to assist them in meeting the specific needs of children and young people.

The agency undertakes effective matching of children and young people with carers which helps to ensure placement stability. The fostering panel consists of a core group of members who make timely and thorough decisions about the approval and reviewing of foster carers. They prioritise first reviews and those where there are concerns. The fostering panel is made up of people from a central list who have a good mix of skills, knowledge and experience.

Foster carers feel highly valued within the agency. Carers have commented: 'Our experience with the agency has been outstanding. We stay with them because they support us, provide what we need as carers, make us feel valuable, capable and engender a can-do attitude.'

What must be done to secure future 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 Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
12 (2011)	prepare and implement a written policy which sets out the procedures to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect and must include a statement of measures to be undertaken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements (Regulation 12)	30/11/2011
1989	ensure that respective roles and arrangements for delegated authority are clarified when arrangements for child and parent placements are made (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2.14)	31/10/2011
20 (2011)	ensure all information required under Schedule 1 is obtained in respect of people working for the agency before they commence work. This refers to checks conducted in respect of panel members. (Regulation 20)	31/10/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication (NMS 6.10)
- ensure the agency implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. This refers to ensuring safe care plans and risk assessments are developed which reflect the individual needs of children and young people (NMS 4.5)
- ensure each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker (NMS 21.8)
- ensure unqualified staff carry out social work functions under the direct supervision of experienced social workers, who are accountable for their work. (NMS 23.7)