

Phoenix Fostering

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Phoenix Fostering, Queens Meadow, Wigmore, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 9UZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately funded fostering agency provides long-term and short-term care to children and young people with histories of developmental trauma and attachment difficulties. Phoenix fostering works to a therapeutic model and provides children, foster carers and team members with therapeutic support and training.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency was providing placements for 19 children living in 14 households.

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced.

Inspection dates: 30 September to 4 October 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 31 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: good

The family finding and agency development manager responds personally to all people who are considering fostering. This ensures that there is clear management overview of all applicants from the start of the process.

Managers and staff assess, prepare and train foster carers effectively. Assessments are timely and are overseen by the registered manager. Pre-approval training helps applicants to understand the ethos and support mechanisms provided by the agency. Ongoing training is well received by foster carers, who find it relevant and engaging.

A key strength of this agency is the availability of support systems for children and foster carers. All children have a family support worker who spends time with them every week. All children are linked to a respite carer with whom they spend a planned number of overnight stays during the year. Where appropriate, children and foster carers have the support of a behaviour specialist who is employed by the agency and who completes direct work. All foster carers have a supervising social worker who provides monthly supervision. The foster carers and the staff supporting them, and their children meet for bi-monthly therapeutic placement review meetings for each child living with them. Placing authority social workers are also invited to these meetings.

Children make good progress. They are well matched to their foster carers. Matching identifies any potential shortfalls in the experience of the foster carers and how this will be addressed so that the carers can meet the needs of the child.

All children who are of school age attend education. Foster carers and staff promote the importance of education and celebrate achievements. Supervising social workers support foster carers to advocate on behalf of their children. Where appropriate, the agency's family finding and development manager and behaviour specialist will go into the child's school to provide direct support or training to staff to help them to understand a therapeutic, trauma-informed approach in the context of the specific needs of the child.

Children feel listened to and consulted with by their foster carers, family support workers and other staff within the agency. One child said, 'They are really good at noticing when a kid is unhappy or upset. They notice what other people wouldn't. They then try and help. They are especially good at listening. They are great people. Like a massive family.'

Most children have long-term plans. Some have lived with their foster families for many years. Children are supported to successfully move on into adulthood and independence with some remaining either with their foster family, or another family within the agency, in staying put arrangements.

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

The well-being and safety of children is paramount. Everyone throughout the agency has a good understanding of their safeguarding role and responsibilities through regularly reviewed policies and procedures and informative training.

The registered manager responds promptly to safeguarding concerns and liaises closely with all relevant professionals. When there is a shortfall in practice by a foster carer, it is quickly and thoroughly investigated and, where appropriate, a post allegation review is conducted and a report made to panel and the agency decision-maker. This ensures that there is good independent review of incidents as well as transparency and scrutiny about the practice of the manager, staff and foster carers. This means the safety of the child is given priority.

Foster parents are skilled at supporting children who struggle to communicate their emotions and those who are at risk of exploitation or go missing from care. Incidents are low. When action is required, the registered manager and staff team take appropriate and effective steps to help foster carers keep the child safe. Where appropriate, work is successfully completed with safeguarding professionals to develop strategies that reduce the level of risk to the child.

The recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members is robust. This ensures that only suitable people are recruited.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The new registered manager has a clear vision for the agency and leads by example. Her aspirations energise the management and staff team, whose members share the same positive ambitions for the children and their foster families. Staff, foster carers and external professionals recognise the positive impact the new registered manager's presence is having on plans for the development of the agency.

The senior leadership team and registered manager have a clear overview of the recruitment, assessment, approval and continuing approval of foster carers and the impact this has on availability of foster homes for children. The agency's recruitment strategy has been recently reviewed and there are new initiatives in place moving forward to strengthen recruitment and increase the number of fostering households approved.

The agency employs a therapeutic, trauma-informed approach, in combination with positive behaviour support and dyadic developmental psychotherapy. The involvement of a qualified clinician in the facilitation of this approach has recently been reviewed. A new independent therapist has been commissioned to facilitate group supervisions for foster carers and the whole staff team.

The registered manager tracks the feedback from the independent reviewing officer and panel as well as all concerns, incidents and referrals. Patterns and trends are identified and monitored. For example, she looks at lessons learned when children experience unplanned endings and following post allegation reviews. This learning is

not currently being shared with the wider staff team, panel members or the independent reviewing officer in order to develop and consolidate practice. This is recognised by the registered manager and responsible individual, and there are plans in place to run a team training day.

A skilled and longstanding staff team provides consistent individualised support for foster carers and children. Staff receive a comprehensive induction and have access to specialised training that supports continued professional development. The registered manager provides staff with strong supervision and guidance. This helps the staff to reflect on their practice and focus on helping the children to thrive and achieve stability in their foster families.

There is close partnership working with other professionals, including teachers, placing social workers and therapists. Placing authority social workers value the bi-monthly therapeutic placement review meetings organised by the agency and comment on the positive support foster carers receive from supervising social workers, who attend all meetings. Foster carers advocate for children, and the supervising social workers challenge partner agencies when needed. Where appropriate, the registered manager escalates concerns.

The panel chair and independent reviewing officer are experienced and ensure that they and panel members provide the agency with professional challenge and independence. New panel members have been recruited to the central list, but membership does not represent the cultural make up of children and foster carers. Panel members are professionally curious and are making recommendations based on the strengths and vulnerabilities of foster carers. Panel members provide feedback to managers on a regular basis about the quality of reports and presentations by social workers. The agency decision-maker makes well-informed and clearly evidenced final decisions.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered manager regularly monitors 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. This specifically relates to ensuring that any lessons learned from panel feedback, placement endings and post allegation reviews are shared with the wider agency and used to develop practice. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. This specifically relates to recruiting panel members from cultural backgrounds that reflect the foster carers and children within the agency. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 31, paragraph 14.8)

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: SC357652

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Inspector

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector

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