

Amicus Foster Care

Amicus Foster Care Limited

St Werburghs Community Centre, Horley Road, Bristol BS2 9TJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Amicus Foster Care is a small private limited company which has an office based in a community centre in Bristol. The service covers Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire, North Somerset, Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset and Somerset. The service currently supports 26 fostering households who care for 33 children and 6 young people.

There is a suitably qualified and experienced manager in post who has been registered with Ofsted since December 2021.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 February 2026

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: 5 September 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are loved and nurtured by skilled and dedicated carers. Many children have been with their carers long term, including under staying put arrangements and ongoing support is provided into adulthood and beyond. The agency invests considerable time and resources to support carers through challenging times to ensure that children can remain with their carers as long as they need to.

All children are in full-time education and attendance is consistently high. The agency strongly advocates for children when there are gaps or shortfalls in services or care planning to ensure that children get the right support. For example, successfully challenging a local authority over their 'blanket' policy which did not consider a young person's unique situation and increased vulnerabilities.

The agency's therapeutic approach is thoroughly embedded across the organisation with a clear plan for further development which includes securing external accreditation. Children and carers benefit from interventions from highly skilled therapists. All staff receive therapeutic training including administrative staff to ensure that there is a shared, trauma informed response from the very first contact with the agency. The agency's exceptional therapeutic approach is threaded through all aspects of their work. This includes individual work and group work for children and when needed supporting other agencies in their role supporting children. For example, the agency is undertaking multi-agency work with the school for one child to reduce their significant anxiety enabling them to attend school, sit exams and progress to college.

Children receive support through specialised life story work to understand their personal journey and early childhood. The life story practitioner uses research-based techniques to support this work which is led by the child and carried out at their pace. Carers are involved in this process as it is recognised that they will often be the ones who need to offer a safe space for children to discuss past experiences and memories. For one child, this therapeutically guided journey helped them to make a positive and safe decision about their future.

The agency provides a wealth of activities for children and their carers which are regular, varied and well attended. An example are the family activity days which take place for children, young people and their carers which are open to their wider networks. These events provide opportunities for children to share special times with their friends and family, and carers are able to further strengthen their own support networks.

Children and young people speak confidently about the managers and staff and their positive relationships. Examples were given by children of being taken out one to one for lunch, to the park or for coffee, as well as the annual Christmas dinner at the manager's house. This festive dinner has grown over the years and is open to all

carers, children and staff. This highlights the 'family' approach that the agency had instilled throughout their practice and are extremely proud of.

The youth work offer is inclusive and extremely well developed, providing extensive opportunities for group sessions and tailored one to one work which is informed by the children's views. Children's participation is not seen as a standalone activity but thoroughly incorporated into the ethos of the agency. Activities are shaped around children's views and staff are quick to notice when children aren't included and find alternative ways to reach them. Leaders and managers consistently develop and adapt practice, trying new ideas and making sure every child has a place where they feel included. An example of children's involvement is their participation in the re-design of the children's guide. This project is being led by a young person with a keen interest in Art. Another example is the influence of the children's voice on the agency's approach to young people remaining with their carers into adulthood.

Training for carers includes a wide offer of courses to help carers understand how to meet children's needs. The training offer includes mandatory training and more bespoke training, such as specialist medical care that helps them to meet the needs of the children they care for. Training is facilitated in a range of ways through online self-directed courses, webinars, face to face training, podcasts and updates. Carers are supported to access training through flexible delivery methods, group sessions and practical help with IT where needed. Foster carers directly relate the progress children make to the specific training they have undertaken and are encouraged to reflect on their learning by their supervising social workers.

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

Children are kept safe by skilled and experienced carers. Carers understand risk and children are protected from harm. Amicus staff support carers to feel emotionally secure and in turn carers provide a safe space for the children. The trusting relationships that carers have with children help to reduce risk by allowing children to be open about their concerns and worries. Staff's proactive and therapeutic response to children's distress means that carers are equipped with the skills to support and calm children so that situations do not escalate. Consequently, there have been very few incidents for carers to respond to.

Where there are safeguarding concerns, including children who are missing or at risk of exploitation, carers are involved in multi-agency safety plans to respond to risk. When children are missing from home, carers follow safeguarding procedures and remain in contact with the agency or out of hours support as needed. Carers are supported by a well organised and responsive out of hours service when the office is closed.

Risk is well understood and plans to keep children safe are high quality. Plans give clear guidance on how to safely support children when they are at risk or experiencing distress. For example, a plan which was created with the child using their identified symbols to communicate feelings rather than the child needing to

express themselves with words. This helped the carer to quickly understand the child's feelings and respond to any concerns without delay.

Concerns into the standards of the care children receive are dealt with swiftly to avoid delay for children and carers. Investigations are transparent and robust with clear decision making regarding appropriate action to remove individuals from the role of foster carer. Complaints raised by children are thoroughly investigated and the outcome clearly communicated to all concerned. Where appropriate any practice concerns are followed up with the carer and monitored by the supervising social worker.

Extensive multi-agency consideration about a carer's ability to meet a child's needs is considered when decisions are being made about a new child moving into a foster placement. Before a child is placed there are frequent multi-agency meetings and if appropriate introductions with the child. Amicus's therapist is also involved at this stage to identify any additional support needs or vulnerabilities for the carer. This cohesive approach aims to ensure that carers and children have the best possible opportunity for stability.

There are few unplanned endings, although when these do occur there is thorough learning and reflection to better understand events. Where possible children have moved to live with other Amicus carers in their network to provide continuity. Amicus's therapist carefully supports carers to ensure that they are fully prepared for another child and if there are any remaining concerns, carers have a period of time with no children living with them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are aspirational for children and their carers. They role model a child focussed therapeutic approach to staff. Leaders and managers are committed to the best possible outcomes for children. They are visible and approachable which is shared by children and carers as a significant strength.

Leaders and managers have a strong vision about decision making regarding carers having the right skills to meet children's needs. The agency has several fostering vacancies but are firm that decisions about placing children are based on the skills of carers to meet children's needs. In addition, carers supporting young people are not financially disadvantaged. This supports decisions about young people moving on being based on them being ready for independence.

Support and retention of carers are high priorities and, as a result, carers report feeling valued by the agency. The agency has a number of foster carers who have been with the agency since it started. The majority of carers have referenced a strong sense of belonging and pride to be part of the 'Amicus' family. Exceptionally positive feedback was received from carers, using words like 'exceptional', 'unwavering dedication', 'truly amazing', 'above and beyond'. Comments from carers included, 'we feel hugely held, emotionally and professionally supported', 'They don't just treat you as a carer...they welcome you into a family....I feel safe, valued, and

empowered in ways I never have before', 'I can honestly say that they have never let us down', 'They make us feel apart of decision making and this makes me feels valued and listened to', 'strong sense of community and therapeutic approaches run through all actions by staff and carers'.

There is a strong and stable staff team with no vacancies and very careful planning for any new staff to joining. Several members of staff have been with Amicus since it started. Staff feel a genuine sense of commitment to supporting each other and the agency place high value on staff welfare, team cohesion and valuing the individual. The administrative support team are very efficient and ensure the agency functions to high standard. Feedback from staff is exceptionally positive with comments such as, 'the management team are highly supportive, accessible, and responsive', 'This is the first workplace where I've truly felt that my wellbeing, and the wellbeing of all staff, genuinely matters', 'viewing Amicus not as a collection of foster families, but as a foster village where we all have a role to play in shaping the young people in the agency's care'.

Supervision for staff and team meetings are purposeful and reflective, giving social workers space to think clearly about risk, relationships and boundaries. They are opportunities for support and appropriate challenge which helps social workers to manage complex and emotionally demanding cases while keeping practice child-focused. Supervisions support the management of case direction and decision-making, with clear challenge around roles, networks and therapeutic approaches, ensuring practice remains safe, and staff are well-supported.

The training offer for staff is exceptionally well developed and there are numerous examples of bespoke or individual courses being funded to enhance professional development and/or needs of the team. Leaders and manager are constantly exploring ways to better understand and meet the needs of children and their carers using evidence-based approaches. For example, the agency is currently looking at theories and models which help staff and carers manage more complex emotions in children, with the aim of reducing escalation.

Plans for recruitment of carers are based on identifying carers who can work therapeutically and be part of the wider Amicus network. Leaders and managers have high expectations for the quality of their assessments of new carers and have implemented quality assurance processes to monitor progress. Assessments of new carers are lengthy but thorough with good levels of analysis and some excellent examples of research being used to inform professional judgement.

The panel chair, reviewing officer and agency decision maker all hold the relevant experience and subject knowledge, making them well placed in their respective roles. The panel chair and reviewing officer are externally employed and maintain their independence from the agency. The panel functioning is robust with clear, defined processes for quality assurance, scrutiny and oversight with an appropriate level of challenge to the agency One professional commented on Amicus's high level of efficiency and communication, stating that they, 'hold them in very high regard'. A further strength of the panel lies in the diversity offered through panel membership.

Whilst the child's views are obtained for panel, there is a drive for improvement for more meaningful inclusion of the child's views in the process. Panel minutes capture relevant discussions but lack detail on some of the vulnerabilities discussed. Action is being taken to address this.

In most children's files, recordings are written to the child, using strengths based and child focussed language. However, in one case file, the language used was not child focussed and was blaming of the child's behaviours and distress. More needs to be done to ensure consistency across all files.

Managers carry out regular audits of case files to ensure consistency of practice, however these audits have not always identified when there have been gaps or updates needed to information.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the 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. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 51, paragraph 26.5)

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: SC389720

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