

Sunbeam Fostering Agency Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC425236
Inspection date	26/09/2012
Inspector	Christy Wannop
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

Setting address	383 Broad Lane, COVENTRY, CV5 7AX
------------------------	-----------------------------------

Telephone number	
Email	info@sunbeamfostering.com
Registered person	Sunbeam Fostering Agency Limited
Registered manager	Sandra Rachel Williamson
Responsible individual	Karamjit Singh Dhull
Date of last inspection	28/03/2011

© Crown copyright 2012

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This independent fostering agency has an office in Coventry and a linked resource office in Worksop and is operated by a private company. The organisation has a head office and separate branch registered in Middlesex. The organisation also owns a third agency operating under a different name. It currently provides: emergency; short-term; bridging; respite; long-term placements; asylum placements, and parent and child placements. It supports 69 fostering households offering 156 possible foster places, and currently has 72 children in placement spread across the Midlands and the north of England.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

The vast majority of children are very positive about their experience of care. Outcomes for children and young people are good. Placing authorities are confident that the organisation's ethos delivers a quality service for children. They comment very positively about the way the agency keeps children safe, for example: 'I have found the agency to be pro-active in safe guarding of children & young people and responding appropriately to concerns.'

This is the first inspection of the service since registration 18 months ago. There are a number of regulatory and national minimum standard breaches, but these have not impacted negatively on the welfare or safety of children and young people. Children are consulted about plans for their care and are kept informed of progress; however their views are not fully embedded in service development. There are shortfalls in the processes of proper consideration, approval and review of foster carers.

Despite this, the agency has many strengths; the people who work for and with this agency are keen, motivated and enthusiastic about their direct work with children. Stakeholders are also complimentary about the service and are very pleased with the progress that children make in placement. Foster carers are very satisfied with the fostering service and with the quality of working relationships they experience. They

feel well trained and are very appreciative of the regular, reliable support from fostering social workers.

Leaders and managers recognise the strengths and areas for development at this early stage in the operation of the registered agency and the agency has good capacity to make improvements.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
3 (2011)	ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose (Regulation 3 (5))	31/10/2012
22 (2011)	maintain a record of all accidents occurring to children whilst placed with foster parents (Regulation 22 & Schedule 2 paragraph 3)	31/10/2012
23 (2011)	ensure the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel (Regulation 23 (7))	01/04/2013
27 (2011)	ensure the service do not approve a foster parent unless they have completed their assessment of X's suitability (Regulation 27(2)(a))	31/10/2012
28 (2011)	review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation; specifically that the written report of the conclusion of the review sets out the correct terms of the foster parent's approval (Regulation 28(1) & (4))	31/10/2012
28 (2011)	give written notice to the foster parent that they propose to terminate, or revise the foster parent's approval ("a qualifying determination") together with their reasons and a copy of any recommendation made by the fostering panel, and advise of their right to make written representations and apply for a review by an independent review panel (Regulation 28(7)(a))	31/10/2012
20 (2011)	ensure full and satisfactory information is available in relation to any person working for the fostering service in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1 (Regulation 20(3))	31/10/2012
35 (2011)	ensure the review of the quality of care provides for consultation with children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 35(3))	01/04/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children understand how their views have been taken into account and where significant wishes or concerns are not acted upon, they are helped to understand why. This with particular reference to a formal response to expressions of concern (NMS 1.2)
- ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- implement a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. For example, that avoidable hazards are reduced consistent with a family home and that safer care plans have sufficient information to help foster carers to keep children safe (NMS 4.5)
- ensure that, except where there are particular identified factors which dictate to the contrary, foster carers should be given delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions regarding health, education, leisure etc. (Volume 4, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.10)
- ensure children are carefully matched to a foster placement (NMS 11.2)
- ensure written reports on the person's suitability set out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision, and are countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager. Specifically, that all checks and investigations are complete before approval (NMS 13.7)
- ensure that the panel provides a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to the panel (NMS 14.2)
- ensure that the fostering provider's decision maker makes a considered decision that takes account of all the information presented to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel, specifically where panel have reservations or conditions about approval (NMS 14.9)
- ensure that the agency decision maker takes account of the Hofstetter principle (Statutory Guidance Volume 4, paragraph 5.40)
- ensure parents, foster carers, staff and the responsible authority are clear about the services and facilities it provides, with particular reference to the types of foster placement and other services it can provide to meet children's needs (NMS 16)
- demonstrate consistently, including from written records, that it follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment (NMS 19.2)

- ensure foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively. This with specific reference to training all foster carers in the management and administration of medication, positive care and control of children, including de-escalating problems and disputes and physical intervention if required by the organisation's behaviour management policy (NMS 20)
- ensure a clear and comprehensive summary of allegations, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and decisions reached, kept on the person's confidential file. A copy of this is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded (NMS 22.7)
- ensure management of the service ensures all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures (NMS 25.3)
- ensure the registered manager takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. (NMS 25.8)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children and young people say they feel safe in their foster homes. Few children have unplanned endings. Many thrive; placing social workers have commented on how children grow physically and emotionally stronger in the care of their foster families. Children do develop a positive self-view and an understanding of their backgrounds; many have a record of memories and mementos that foster carers create. An independent reviewing officer said, 'Life story work is undertaken and the children are kept informed, appropriate to their age.' Brothers and sisters usually stay together or nearby, because the agency has a good capacity to place larger sibling groups together or in two foster homes where they can have easy links. Children's need to have regular contact with their families is respected.

The majority of children say they feel part of their foster family and are comfortable in their foster homes. An associated professional said, 'The children are fully integrated into the placements and expected to live in a family unit.' However, their ability to enjoy normal life events is sometimes hampered when the placing authority has not made proper arrangements to devolve their authority to foster carers to make day-to-day decisions about health or education, where this is possible. Children said they want their carers to be able to make decisions about their daily lives, like whether to have sleep overs with friends, and have haircuts, so they can feel the same as other children. Children have very good opportunities to go on holiday with carers, develop hobbies, interests and new skills and the agency is very good at providing lively activity based groups for children. Fun days are well attended; theatre trips and craft sessions contribute to giving children a happy experience and positive memories of foster care.

Children and young people's wishes and feelings do influence their care and they contribute to the plans for their care, according to their age and understanding.

However, the management of children's complaints is unclear. Not all children say they know how to complain, or identify a member of the fostering agency they would approach if worried. Some are not aware of the children's handbook, which does contain this information along with other details of children's advocacy services and Ofsted, and the children's support worker is available and familiar to them. When children have raised concerns and insecurities directly with the agency in writing, it is not evident that the agency has considered this under its complaints procedure or given a resolution. Young people may feel that their concerns are not taken seriously. Despite this, one independent reviewing officer had very positive views about children's satisfaction with their placements: 'they have continued to express how well they think of the carers, there has never been any concerns they have raised.'

Children are very likely to stay with foster families of the same ethnicity, or culture, or who speak their language or practice their religion. They feel comfortable with people who understand their backgrounds and can help them settle in to their new community. The majority of children move to foster homes in an emergency, but they have good pictorial information about their foster carers and this is available to placing authorities on the same day. One placing social worker said of the security that foster carers give to the children: 'Brilliant, couldn't speak more highly of them. They have done whatever they can, they facilitate contact, the children have become their lives.'

Children get the health care and information they need and can have individual health education from trained agency staff if they need it. They do have additional support from child mental health services, paediatric review and child health nursing services and speech and language therapy. Children do well in education. All have mainstream or individualised education placements. Some children have achieved significant success in education, despite their journey through care, and are proud of their achievements. They get good support from foster carers who are knowledgeable about individual needs and advocate on their behalf.

Young people who are getting ready to leave care acquire the skills they will need for the next stage of their young adult lives. They learn practical life skills with their foster carers, like budgeting, how to operate bank accounts, manage laundry and prepare for interviews. Young people play an active role in the pace of this work and independence and transition plans are adapted to meet the emotional readiness of each young person to move on.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

The agency supports children's diverse needs and has recruited a large number of carers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, of different religions and cultures, speaking a range of languages. This means that children with those linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious needs are well able to find a match with carers. Some carers have fostered for other agencies for many years, others are new

to the task. The agency's recruitment strategy has resulted in a large expansion of foster carers across a wide geographical area, and half the potential places filled. A new strategy is now in place, targeting potential foster carers for other children needing placement across the Midlands and North regions.

There are shortfalls in how the fostering panel functions and how the agency makes decisions about approving and reviewing suitable foster carers. The establishment of the current panel allows for conflict of interest. Written assessment reports are completed well within timescales, but do not always set out all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker need in order to make a robust decision. It is not clear that the fostering panel considers suitability reports that are always complete, countersigned by a fostering manager. The agency decision maker sometimes makes approval decisions based on incomplete applications and conditional recommendations from panel. The agency decision maker does not take account of statutory guidance in detailing full consideration and the approach taken to reaching the decision to approve, or not. When terminating an approval, the agency does not notify the reasons for the termination to the foster carers. Reviews of approval are not always thorough, do not always acknowledge changes to approval category and consequently have made recommendations based on inaccurate approval categories. The panel has had recent training but has not yet fulfilled its quality assurance function of advising on the conduct of assessment, monitoring the effectiveness of review procedures and giving advice and making recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the fostering service.

While these matters indicate a lack of expertise in the essential functions of a fostering agency, there is no evidence to suggest that these procedural shortfalls have impacted on the quality of care for children. Despite the shortfalls in process, the agency is confident that only suitable people do become foster carers and that any information missing from applications, is complete before children are placed.

The agency's central placements team gathers information about children's needs and provides foster carers with all available placing authority documentation and talks to them directly about likely matches. The majority of children are clearly doing very well in stable placements that provide them with care that closely matches their needs and where foster carers provide positive and constructive responses. Foster carers support children to follow their religion, attend religious school, and learn the Qu'oran.

However, it is not always clear in all cases that the needs of children are matched with the skills and proven abilities of foster carers. There have been gaps in the training and acquisition of skills for some foster carers. For example, foster carers have not routinely achieved training in positive behaviour management, administration of medication and child health, yet care for children with those needs. Foster carers have had to occasionally restrain children; yet do not have training in physical intervention or diffusion techniques. This contradicts the agency's behaviour management policy.

The agency does, however, offer a range of training, delivered in groups, online and

individually by fostering social workers who are trained to deliver key courses. One foster carer reported, 'lots of training given and offered to us and I feel this has helped me in my first year of fostering to become more confident.' Despite the wide geographical area covered by this agency, foster carers have frequent visits and the out-of-hours service works effectively to provide responsive support. The agency has made great strides to improve the number of fostering households achieving the Training, Support and Development Standards within timescales and the majority of those who are eligible, have now completed this award.

Foster carers speak of a rigorous preparation process and assessment and say they feel respected and part of the team supporting the child. Fostering social workers supervise foster carers with a strong monthly focus on outcomes for children to ensure that they are cared for in line with their individual placement plan and care plan. The agency takes steps to chase missing documentation, but is not always successful, particularly in obtaining local authority or parental devolved consent for foster carers to make decisions about children's everyday lives. They produce their own documentation for medical consent and placement planning if necessary. Children of foster carers and foster children take part in lively, creative group activities and outings run by the agency with the aim of developing mutual support. This promotes a shared, inclusive experience.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Staff and foster carers take safeguarding responsibilities seriously and carers confirm clear messages, through training and supervision, about whistle blowing and their duty to report suspicions of abuse. Foster carers have a clear understanding and care effectively for children, bearing in mind the potential impact on children and young people from their previous experience of neglect or abuse. The Registered Manager works with safeguarding authorities across a wide geographical area where there are allegations or concerns, and foster carers get independent support through any investigation. The agency takes action to terminate the approval of foster carers where there have been concerns about their ability to keep children safe, or about the quality of the care offered and has made appropriate referrals to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. However, while panel considers the continuing suitability of foster carers after the investigation is complete, the agency does not provide the foster carer with a copy of a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against them.

Recruitment and vetting of panel members and independent assessors is not rigorous. While every adult working with the agency has a Criminal Records Bureau check, and social work staff are generally recruited according to legislation, the service cannot demonstrate from written records that it consistently follows good recruitment practice. Verification of references is not evidentially robust and gaps in employment are not investigated.

The agency makes twice yearly unannounced checks on foster homes to make sure

they are safe and suitable for children. An associated professional commented that foster homes are, 'very well appointed and extremely suitable to place children.' However, procedures and documentation to support household safety are confusing. There are four different types of risk assessment document, none of which gives a complete picture of how to reduce risks in foster homes, whether in the environment, or risks in children's behaviour. For example, there is not a robust record that checks, such as for gas safety, are complete before children move into foster homes. Accidents to children in foster care are rare, but the agency does not have a record of its own response where there have been accidents to children, to ensure proper prevention and monitoring.

Fostering social workers describe safe practice and foster carers are trained in promoting safe care. However, the household safer care plan does not always relate to individual children in placement, and does not include essential information such as how to safely manage prescribed, controlled medication. Safer care plans do not always contain information about how foster carers should respond when young people who are likely to, go missing from home. Some young people have gone missing from foster placements, usually for short periods. Where this has happened, the agency has, however, worked with placing authorities and there is a document ready to give police about each child, to assist with their search. Children and young people say that they feel safe in their foster homes with their foster families, and are not bullied. One placing authority was positive that, 'child protection concerns and processes are fully understood by carers and they have good levels of support and training', and other stakeholders shared this confident view of children's safety with their agency.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

The agency has expanded rapidly since it began operating in the region in 2010 and registered in March 2011. The number of foster carers has nearly trebled and the number of children placed has increased even more dramatically. It now operates from two bases, the registered office in the Midlands, and a staffed resource centre in Worksop that supports foster families in the North. However, the agency has not recruited foster carers who are able to fulfil the aims of the service contained within the Statement of Purpose which describes a very wide range of placements. For example, placements for children needing specialist disability trained carers, remand placements, or intensive assessment placements. The Statement of Purpose is not sufficiently clear about what foster placements and additional support the agency in Coventry can actually offer.

Leaders and managers express ambition for children and young people who are fostered. An independent reviewing officer commented: 'the agency has a clear vision of how the outcomes for children should be achieved and work hard so that children and foster carers have a good understanding of this.' While managers monitor all areas of the service, this has not proved effective in identifying the

regulatory breaches found here. The child's voice is insufficiently embedded in the operation of the service. The agency has a range of consultation processes and clearly responds to the views of foster carers; these are included in development plans. It consults formally with children and young people, but gives them no formal response. It does not reflect their views and those of people significant to them in the formal quality review.

The service is well resourced and the registered provider invests in the workforce. In addition, the agency provides residential accommodation for some staff adjacent to the registered office. The agency has employed an increasing number of social work and trainee staff, as well as independent assessors, in response to the growing fostering service. It has recently strengthened the senior management tier around the Registered Manager to support this growth. The agency provides a good structure and support for professional development. Unqualified staff are supported to achieve social work qualifications and it is possible for administrative workers to become qualified social workers. The agency assists staff to gain assessment skills through workshops and in-house training and more skilled, qualified staff supervise those with less experience. Staff are enthusiastic and thoughtful, they share a range of skills and a willing attitude to do the best for children.

Foster carers are part of the team around the child and have the respect of key professionals. People feel proud to work for the organisation. One foster said, 'After more than 25 years of fostering, we feel well qualified to judge perfection.' There are effective partnerships with placing authorities. An associated professional described the agency as: 'by far the best agency I have worked with. The communication is excellent, the foster carers know what is expected of them and the overall management of the supervising social workers is good and appropriate.' This teamwork supports effective corporate parenting.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

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 independent fostering agencies.