

New Life Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Responsible individual	Kaneez Fatima Choudhry
Date of last inspection	18/06/2013

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Service information

Brief description of the service

The agency is a privately owned, independent fostering agency. It provides fostering services for looked after children and young people from 0 to 18 years of age and provides a full range of placements. Currently, there are five fostering households with six children and young people in placement.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

This is an improving service. Recent changes to the management structure have ensured strong management and staffing arrangements are now in place. The Registered Manager, staff team and foster carers have clear values and ethos and are committed to fostering. The manager has embedded a different way of working. She has brought about significant changes to working practices and delivery of service and has the leadership skills to continue to move the agency on in a positive way.

The agency's current inadequate judgement has seriously hampered their ability to demonstrate improvements to the quality of their service provision. Recent improvements have yet to be tested. They have been unable to recruit foster carers or place children in foster placements. Difficulties over the previous year resulting from changes in staff and management have meant that foster carers and children

have not always received the support they have needed. Local authorities have been reluctant to secure children's futures in long term placements. This has resulted in some children experiencing lack of security and drift in their care planning.

The Registered Manager over the last three months has developed good and effective working relationships with partner agencies. She has challenged professionals and brought about clear action to improve the experiences and outcomes for children in their care. The manager demonstrates clear vision for the development of the agency. She monitors the service and progress of children and has brought about significant changes to working practices to drive continuous improvement.

Children are safe and do not engage in risk taking behaviours. No children have gone missing from their foster placement. Safer caring plans and risk assessments are established to ensure children and young people are effectively supported and protected. Foster carers feel part of a team and are now benefiting from professional and supportive relationships with the agency. The views of both foster carers and children are sought and these are beginning to influence developments within the agency. The majority of children and young people are doing well at school and are accessing health services. Children and young people report that they are happy and secure in their placements and are positive about the care they receive. There are no breaches in regulation. Two recommendations have been made. These are with regard to foster carer training and support to young people approaching independence.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure training is available to foster carer to assist them in in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for (NMS 20.8)
- ensure there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. (NMS 12.3)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

The majority of children and young people placed within the agency are enjoying positive experiences in their foster placements. Children and young people spoken with report that they are happy in their placements and are positive about the care they receive. They feel safe and have developed secure attachments to their foster families. Some children and young people have been living in placements for many years which have yet to be made permanent and, as a consequence, are

experiencing drift in their care planning. This has been exacerbated by the agency's previous inadequate judgement. Since her employment the manager has been active in challenging placing authorities to secure placements and increase security for children and young people. This ensures their care plan is central to the making of permanent arrangements for the future. One placing manager commented, 'The focus on the child has been centre of their operation.'

Children and young people are experiencing positive outcomes in regard to their health and educational needs. They are having their health needs met as they are able to access the health resources they require. Foster carers ensure children and young people attend relevant health appointments and support them to lead healthy lifestyles. Children and young people access a wide range of social, voluntary and physical activities within the community. For example, one young person is an active member of a local charity fund raising organisation. Children and young people have regular school attendance and majority are making good personal educational progress. Foster carers support and encourage children's educational achievement by attending personal education plan (PEP) meetings and parents' evenings. As a result, children and young people are able to fulfil their educational potential and achieve their targets.

Delegated authority is obtained so that carers can make day-to-day decisions regarding health and basic care for the children and young people they care for. This helps ensure children and young people's experience of living in foster care is 'normalised'. Where appropriate, children and young people maintain positive contact with family members. This helps children and young people to have a positive self-view and understand their identity and heritage.

Young people over the age of 16 have pathway plans in place. Foster carers support young people on a day-to-day basis to develop basic independence skills, such as, cooking and budgeting. However, not all young people over 16 are in education, training or employment. The agency has not developed a structured approach to train and support foster carers caring for young people approaching adulthood. As a result, young people are not fully encouraged to reach their potential and achieve economic well-being.

The views of children and young people are gained by foster carers and supervising social workers during visits to the home. They are aware of how to make a complaint and are able to express their wishes and feelings to influence their day-to-day care. Children and young people are beginning to influence developments within the agency. For example, they have been involved in developing the agency's children and young people's guides.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

The agency has not recruited or assessed any new foster carers since the last inspection. The agency has also not matched or placed any child or young person

with foster carers. As a result, many of the functions of the agency, such as, the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and the effectiveness of matching children and young people to foster families have not been able to be tested. The agency has, however, developed its recruitment strategy and reviewed policies and procedures around the recruitment, assessment and supervision of foster carers. There is also a good mix of ethnicity and diversity among the current foster carers to meet a diverse range of placements.

All carers have either completed or are currently undertaking the Training Development Standards. The agency has developed a training programme for foster carers covering core training requirements. A broad training programme has yet to be developed, although some training around areas, such as, internet safety is being delivered through workshops conducted during foster carer support groups.

The agency's fostering panel and agency decision maker make timely and appropriate decisions which promote the welfare of children in foster care. The robustness of the fostering panel and the decision making process has been further strengthened following the employment of an experienced agency decision maker, panel advisor and minute taker.

The manager has developed good partnership working with foster carers and placing social workers. Foster carers feel part of a team and are now benefiting from professional and supportive relationships with the agency. Foster carers receive regular supervision and are beginning to help influence developments within the agency through discussions held during foster carer support groups. As a result, foster carers now feel more positive about the agency. One foster carer commented, 'I feel a lot happier as they are more consistent and more professional now'. Another stated, 'Since the new manager we have seen massive changes.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

There is a strong focus of safeguarding within the agency which is now embedded in policy and procedure. The recruitment and vetting procedures in place for staff and panel members are thorough and robust. This helps to safeguard children and young people by helping to prevent unsuitable people from living and working with them.

The manager has developed an open culture within the agency which supports the reporting of any concerns. She has developed positive working relationships with local authorities and other agencies. This proactive partnership work, in line with multi agency protocols, helps ensure the safety of children and young people.

Children and young people feel safe in their fostering households and are safe. Robust safe caring plans and risk assessments are established to ensure children and young people are effectively supported and protected. Children and young people do not engage in risk taking behaviours and have not gone missing from their foster families. The manager has rewritten safeguarding and missing from home policies

and have had these ratified by their Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Staff and foster carers receive safer caring and safeguarding training which is supplemented by written guidance in the foster carers handbook. This ensures they are fully aware of their reporting and recording responsibilities should children or young people engage in risk taking activities or make any allegations of abuse. Unannounced visits are conducted on an annual basis and health and safety risk assessments are completed. These ensure the standard of accommodation is safe and promote the welfare of children and young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency was made inadequate at its last inspection in June 2013 and compliance notices were issued. All compliance notices and requirements have been met. Since the last inspection the agency has undergone significant changes in staff and management. The current Registered Manager has been in place since March 2014 and has considerable experience within the fostering environment. Changes to the management team have ensured strong management and staffing arrangements are now in place. There is now a wealth of experience and knowledge within the agency to deliver a good quality service. All those employed by the agency have training and development pathways in place and receive a good level of support and supervision. One member of staff has commented, 'I feel the agency is committed to development.'

The manager demonstrates clear vision for the development of the agency and for the children placed with foster carers. In the three months since employment the manager has reviewed and rewritten all policies and procedures. She has developed effective working relationships with placing authorities and Local Safeguarding Children Boards. This has resulted in improvements and developments to the care planning for children and young people. Placing social workers and commissioning officers all comment positively about the changes and working relationships with the agency. One placing social worker stated, 'I feel things have turned around. We have really been working closely with the agency.' Another stated, 'I am very happy with agency. They are now doing a good job. There has been a real change since the new manager.'

The agency has a Statement of Purpose and three children's guides to reflect differing age groups. These accurately reflect the operation of the service and together with the Foster Carers' Charter ensure all understand the aims and objectives of the agency. Although the last year has been a difficult time for the agency it continues to be financially viable. It has sufficient funding to continue to fulfil its Statement of Purpose for the next 12 months.

The agency has a complaints procedure in place and has received one complaint from an ex member of staff. The complaint has been fully investigated and the outcome clearly recorded.

The manager has developed detailed action plans, development plans and robust monitoring systems to monitor all areas of the agency's operation and practice. These have brought about significant changes to working practices and delivery of service and continue to drive the agency forward to deliver good quality of care.

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, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.