

Little Acorns Fostering

Little Acorns Fostering Limited

Rook Tree Barn, Withersfield Road, Great Wrattling, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 7HD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Little Acorns Fostering is a privately owned independent fostering agency operating from one office based outside Haverhill in Suffolk. It was registered in January 2013.

The agency focuses on providing local placements for local children. The agency provides high acuity, emergency, short-term, bridging, respite, long-term, and parent and child placements.

At the time of inspection, the agency had 8 fostering households, providing care for 14 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in February 2013.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 July 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: 14 June 2021

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 strength of this agency is the meaningful and consistent level of support provided to its foster carers. Supervising social workers and the management team all know their fostering families well. Placement decision-making is good and allows most children to experience consistency and stability with their carers.

Foster carers said;

- I am a very happy foster carer.
- It feels like a family, and we love that it's small.
- We honestly felt from our first enquiry and meeting the team, everyone has been very approachable.

Children make good progress in all areas of their lives. One child's social worker said that she noted the difference since the child had been living with their foster family. The social worker said that they were a 'different child.' She attributed this to the child 'living in a safe and stable environment and feeling able to just play'.

Children feel listened to by their foster carers and the fostering agency staff. Children have changed their arrangements for visiting family members by speaking to their supervising social worker, who has advocated on their behalf.

Children are offered the option to remain with their foster carers into adulthood. When children do not wish to remain living with their foster carers, they are sensitively supported to move to independent living. Foster carers remain in contact with children after they have left their home. Foster carers keep photographs and souvenirs. They capture children's lived experiences and work with social workers to ensure that life-story work is meaningful.

Children attend school and enjoy their learning. They are encouraged to enjoy meaningful activities and hobbies, such as attending theatre schools, sports clubs and after school clubs. One child's foster carers came to watch them perform with their theatre group. This helps the children to build their emotional resilience, learn new skills and feel proud of themselves.

Prospective foster carers receive a warm, welcoming response when they contact the agency. The assessment process is well managed and takes place at a pace that applicants are comfortable with. One foster family said, 'Our experience with Little Acorns has been very positive, we have been treated with respect regarding our application to foster, we have been kept informed at all stages of the approval process.'

Communication between the agency and placing social workers is good. One placing social worker said of the supervising social worker, 'I wish all supervising social workers were like you.'

The agency celebrates children's individual achievements. They send children certificates for 'sitting through my hair cut' and 'completing my SATS'. Children are supported to walk to school alone and use public transport at a pace which is meaningful and considerate of their individual needs.

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

Supervising social workers spend time alone with children to help build and maintain positive relationships with them. Consequently, children have an additional trusted adult they can talk to about any worries. Supervising social workers provide children with direct support when needed. This includes advocating for a child who lost their job, talking to a child about their views, and modelling values of tolerance and inclusion.

Staff at the agency provide effective out-of-hours support to carers. Foster carers said that they appreciated that the agency staff would be there for them in moments of crisis. One foster carer said of their supervising social worker's support, 'I want everyone to know how important it was to have you on the other end of the phone when we were in crisis, it held me together. You never wavered in your support.'

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. There are clear procedures for foster carers to follow when this does occur.

Social workers undertake unannounced visits within timescales to visit child, and the premises. The manager has introduced a system when one unannounced visit will be undertaken by the non-allocated supervising social worker. This ensures that there is independent scrutiny of foster-carers' practice.

Children have trusted adults to talk to and they are able to share their concerns and worries with carers and/or professionals. Positive behaviour is modelled by carers. They use their experience, skills and training to manage children's behaviour safely when children are upset or distressed. As a result, no child has experienced a hold or any form of restraint since the last inspection.

Managers ensure that foster carers have the training they need to care for children safely. All foster carers have training in safeguarding, safer caring and first aid, in line with the agency's mandatory training requirements.

Risk assessments guide foster carers in how to keep children safe. These are generally updated after significant events. One foster carer was subject to several concerns from social workers and education. Staff and the manager responded immediately to the concerns. But these responses were reviewed individually and no link was made. The manager did not identify a potential pattern with the concerns. This was a missed opportunity to challenge and hold the carer accountable earlier.

The agency has a safeguarding policy that clearly outlines the procedure for escalating child protection concerns to the relevant professionals. However, on two occasions, the

manager has failed to report allegations to the local authority designated officer (LADO). The manager did liaise effectively with the child's social worker and other professionals. This reduces independent oversight. This requirement has been re-stated from the last inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by an appropriately qualified and experienced manager. She is tenacious in her support to foster carers and children. Foster carers feel supported and talk of the manager as 'having our backs' and being a strong advocate for them.

The manager has a good knowledge of the fostering households. She maintains an overview through participation groups and some direct work with children and foster carers. The manager's husband, who is a director, takes children out for day trips to museums and on outdoor activities. This helps children to build relationships with senior management and provides an additional level of oversight of the children.

Fostering panel members are suitably experienced and qualified. The panel list is diverse and includes a panel member who is care experienced. The fostering panel chair is suitably experienced and manages the meetings well, ensuring everyone's voice is heard when reaching recommendations. There is a positive relationship between the panel members and the agency staff, this aids continual improvement in practice.

Overall, foster carers said that they have supportive relationships with their supervising social workers. They are confident that if they need help, their queries and questions will be promptly responded to. They value the small size of the agency and the family feel.

Staff have developed good working relationships with children's social workers and independent reviewing officers. One social worker said, 'It's been easy working with the agency.' Professionals are equally complimentary about the agency. They said that the agency is 'responsive' and 'do their best for children'.

The manager holds the position of agency decision-maker. Staff are aware of the procedure to ensure that the manager can meet the requirements of both roles. However, on one occasion the manager signed off a report which she was decision-maker for. This generates a conflict and means that the oversight of the report is not objective.

Staff are highly complimentary about the support that they receive from the registered manager. They said, 'The environment here is positive, inspiring, and forward-thinking with children always at the centre of what is expected.' 'I am made to feel a valued member of the team'.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for— the prompt referral to the area authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child placed by the fostering service provider. Regulation 12 (3)(b)) In particular, the agency must ensure that allegations against people who work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the local authority designated officer (LADO).	30 August 2024

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. In particular, that concerns around foster carers are monitored thematically and appropriate action is taken to address cumulative or emerging patterns and concerns, rather than wait for an annual review of the carers ('Fostering services: national minimum standards 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider's fostering teams. In particular, that the agency decision maker (ADM) does not sign off Form F reports ('Fostering services: national minimum standards 13.7)

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: SC457688

Registered provider: Little Acorns Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Rook Tree Barn, Withersfield Road, Great Wrating, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 7HD

Responsible individual: Leonard Gelernter

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Inspector

Majella Russell, Social Care Inspector

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