

St. Christopher's Fellowship

St Christopher's Fellowship
102 High Street, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6JW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

St Christopher's is a children's charity that provides a variety of services across England and the Isle of Man, including fostering and children's homes. This agency offers respite, emergency, task-centred fostering, long term, solo and parent and child placements. As at 31 March 2017, the agency had 30 children and young people in placements and 24 children and young people who left placement during 2016–17. As at 31 March 2017, the service had 24 fostering households, with 37 approved individual foster carers offering 48 fostering places. The service has no households that exclusively provide short breaks.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 July 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

inadequate

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 2 December 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- Children and young people's files do not contain enough relevant information.
- Risk assessments do not fully document important information, which would enable foster carers to keep children, young people and others safe.
- The registered manager does not always ensure that she takes appropriate action after safeguarding incidents. There is a lack of learning from safeguarding incidents.
- Recording is poor. It is not documented what action the fostering agency takes to support children and young people's progress, or when there are concerns around their risk-taking behaviours.
- Children and young people do not always receive good enough, individualised care. Their religious and cultural needs are not always matched in their placements.
- Foster carers do not receive the specific training that they need prior to children and young people moving in.
- The agency does not monitor, support or encourage foster carers to regularly attend training.
- The agency does not always share referral information with foster carers prior to the placing of children and young people.
- The registered manager does not escalate her concerns when children and young people do not get the services that they need to support their emotional well-being.
- Management monitoring and oversight is poor. The registered manager does not ensure that she monitors the quality of support foster carers, children and young people receive from the agency. She does not seek children and young people's views regarding the agency, or after complaints have been resolved.
- Quality assurance is inadequate. The registered manager does not ensure that children and young people's case records contain all relevant information. The registered manager does not make sure that she tracks the progress of children and young people.
- Supervisions are poor. The registered manager does not take enough action to improve supervising social workers' practice.
- Complaints are not investigated transparently.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Some children and young people make progress.
- Foster carers enable some children and young people to have positive experiences in their placements.
- Children and young people attend their education placements.
- The fostering agency has started running groups for children and young people, such as Lego groups, drama groups and arts and craft groups. Children, young people and foster carers speak positively about these groups.
- Other professionals, including some designated officers, provide positive feedback regarding their communication with this fostering agency.
- The majority of foster carers describe a supportive fostering agency.
- The fostering agency benefits from a rigorous panel and a robust agency decision-maker. The process of assessing potential foster carers is robust.

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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))	11/09/2017
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11 (b) (i) and (ii))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1) (a))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must ensure that each child has access to such medical, dental, nursing, psychological and psychiatric advice, treatment and other services as the child may require. (Regulation 15 (2) (b))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16 (2) (a))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1) (a))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations.	11/09/2017

(Regulation 17 (3))	
Subject to paragraph (7), the registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must establish a written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children placed by the agency, and by foster parents approved by the agency. (Regulation 18 (1))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (b))	11/09/2017
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4) (a))	11/09/2017
The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 35 (1) (a))	11/09/2017
The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1) (b))	11/09/2017
The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report. (Regulation 35 (2))	11/09/2017
The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (3))	11/09/2017

Recommendations

- 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. (NMS 1.2)
- Ensure that children receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of progress. (NMS 1.6)
- Ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. (NMS 2.1)
- Ensure that there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with

disabilities and special educational needs. (NMS 12.3)

- Ensure that the role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer. (NMS 21.7)
- Ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegation made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. The information is retained on the confidential file, even after someone leaves the organisation, until the person reaches normal retirement age, or for ten years if this is longer. (NMS 22.7)
- 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. (NMS 25.2)
- Ensure that 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 that the registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. (NMS 25.8)
- 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. (NMS 26.5)
- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 26.6)
- Ensure that the registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. (NMS 29.1)
- Ensure that children are assisted to secure an independent advocate to support them in providing their views, wishes and feelings to statutory reviews. (NMS 31.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The manager's monitoring of children and young people's progress and outcomes is not good enough. As a result, children and young people's files are missing important information, such as medical assessments, personal education plans, looked after children review minutes and local authority care plans. Supervising social workers do not actively chase placing authorities for these documents and so important information is missing from children and young people's files. Some children and young people's medical assessments are overdue. The registered manager does not ensure that children and young people have individual health or education plans. It is unclear what actions foster carers take to support children and young people's progress because documents are poorly recorded. Foster carers' supervisions do not monitor or track the progress of children and young people sufficiently, and so it is unclear whether children and young people are reaching their full potential.

There is a lack of accountability. It is unclear who is responsible for making sure that children and young people receive all the support and services that they need to make good progress. For example, some referrals to child and adolescent mental health services have not been followed up. When supervising social workers do not agree with the lack of therapeutic input there is a lack of challenge to placing authorities. The registered manager does not ensure that she strongly advocates for children and young people, or challenges placing authorities. Children and young people do not always have the opportunity to have independent advocates to challenge decisions which are made about their lives. There is a lack of focus on children and young people's voices, and they do not play an intrinsic role within the agency. For example, after children or young people make a complaint or raise a concern, the registered manager does not ensure that she seeks their feedback or enables them to understand what, if any, actions have been taken.

The registered manager does not always ensure that high quality support is provided to foster carers to help them to have a positive impact on children and young people. For example, when supervising social workers conduct visits to foster carers and children and young people, they do not always check children and young people's bedrooms to ensure that they are of an appropriate quality. They do not always arrange unannounced visits to foster placements.

Children and young people's individual needs are not promoted consistently. There is a lack of input for young people to help them develop their independence. This lack of input does not equip them with the necessary skills. Young people's files do not contain enough information regarding how foster carers can support young people to develop the skills that they need before moving into early adulthood.

Some children and young people are placed in transracial placements or with foster carers who are of a different religion to them. Matching documents do not make clear the rationale behind the decision-making in such instances. Nor do they explain how

foster carers will meet children and young people's needs. Children and young people do not always receive enough support or input to meet their cultural or religious needs. This does not promote their identity.

Overall, children and young people make some progress. Some children and young people are achieving in education. Children and young people have good attendance in school. Currently, all of the children and young people in the agency have educational placements. This is positive. Senior managers perform educational audits across the company. However, the recommendations have yet to filter down into practice within this agency. Some foster carers encourage children and young people to engage in extracurricular activities such as music lessons and dance classes. Foster carers include children and young people in their family. For example, they go on holiday to places such as Tenerife and Greece.

The agency has recently appointed a support worker. She has been pivotal in organising activities for children within the agency. Children's groups are a strength of this agency. The support worker has organised a drama group as well as a Lego group. The support worker is looking to complete a therapy course, which will allow her to offer this service to all children and young people within the agency. Children enjoy the groups and activities. While the majority of groups and activities are aimed at younger children, the support worker has recently sourced a climbing course for older children and young people. Foster carers and young people have been positive regarding this. While the registered manager seeks feedback about the groups, she does not consistently seek children and young people's feedback about other aspects of the service. This does not promote children and young people's involvement in the agency.

Support groups provide a forum for foster carers to meet to discuss training and feedback regarding the groups, or to share any other experiences or information. Foster carers enjoy attending the support groups. The support groups are not only for approved foster carers, but also those people who are going through the assessment process. Foster carers speak positively about the support that they receive from their supervising social workers: 'The staff are always here for you. They always have time for the kids and time for you.'

The registered manager has recently incorporated new training around mindfulness and stress management. Foster carers have the opportunity to attend training in areas such as behaviour management, looked after children's education and internet safety. They speak positively about the training opportunities, with one foster carer saying, 'Social pedagogy training was really good and made me think about how else I could do things. ASD training was fantastic.' However, there is a lack of monitoring, and little action is taken when foster carers do not attend training. It is not clear what actions the registered manager has taken to reach foster carers who are not as actively involved.

Panel is rigorous. The panel chair is very experienced in social care, and offers robust challenge to the organisation. Panel has high expectations regarding the quality of assessments of potential foster carers. This has been effective, as assessments are completed to a high standard. A well-organised and knowledgeable panel manager

supports the panel. The panel manager has equally high standards. This means that panel members receive paperwork in a timely way and there is no delay regarding the assessments of potential foster carers. The panel has recently introduced feedback consultation forms for recently approved foster carers to share their experiences. This is positive.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Managers and staff do not consistently promote children and young people's safety. Records lack detail. Some children and young people's risk assessments are not good enough, as they do not contain enough information about children and young people's risk-taking behaviours. This lack of information encompasses areas such as child sexual exploitation, sexually harmful behaviours or animal cruelty. When placing authority documents highlight significant risk-taking behaviours, the registered manager has not always considered this information or clearly documented it on children and young people's matching documents or risk assessments. On one occasion, a poorly matched placement could have potentially placed children at risk of significant harm.

Risk assessments do not always document the individual needs of children and young people. For example, some parent and baby risk assessments are not specific to this type of placement. They do not detail the individual needs of the parent or the baby. Nor do they describe how foster carers can promote their safety and well-being. Risk assessments do not always provide foster carers with enough information about how to keep children and young people safe. They do not detail what actions foster carers need to take to support individual children and young people's safety. After meetings are convened regarding children and young people's risk-taking behaviours, risk assessments are not always updated. Safe care documents lack individualisation and are poorly written.

Matching documents do not always take into consideration foster carers' training, experience or skills. For example, foster carers have not always had recent parent and child foster placement training prior to a parent and child placement. The agency has recently become part of a specialised foster carers' scheme. While this is in its infancy, managers have learned from this. Specifically, they have learned that foster carers have not always had the opportunity to have enough specialist training prior to accepting complex children and young people. The registered manager has not always taken into consideration foster carers' experience. On one occasion, this resulted in a foster carer being ill equipped to manage a young person's very complex behaviours.

The quality of foster carers' supervisions is poor. Supervising social workers do not always ensure that they follow up any safeguarding concerns or incidents with foster carers. For example, on one occasion a young person disclosed that she was being bullied at school. The agency did not ensure that the school was taking appropriate action to address this. There is ambiguity regarding the role of the placing authority social worker and the supervising social worker. For example, there is an over-reliance on the placing authority social worker to manage safeguarding incidents. When foster

carers have not followed safeguarding procedures and reported concerns to the agency's out-of-hours service, supervising social workers have been quick to provide foster carers with guidance as to the correct protocol.

Some foster carers are positive about the training and support that they receive from the agency. Some foster carers attend training regularly. However, the registered manager acknowledges that there are no real systems in place for monitoring foster carers who do attend training events and those foster carers who do not. Consequently, not all foster carers have received training in important areas such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. The registered manager has plans to improve the safeguarding training that foster carers attend. She has arranged for a designated officer from a local authority to attend safeguarding training.

The agency's response to safeguarding allegations is satisfactory. Children and young people's complaints and allegations are investigated. The registered manager ensures that referrals are made to placing authorities and the designated officers. A designated officer said, 'I have had a couple of allegations. Their approach has always been spot on; they are always keen to check things out with me, even the lower level allegations. I have always found a professional response that prioritises children's needs.'

Learning from safeguarding incidents and allegations is not yet embedded into the systems of the agency. For example, the registered manager does not always seek children and young people's views after investigations are concluded. There is a lack of reflection after investigations, and the registered manager does not discuss learning or practice issues to try to prevent future occurrences. After investigations are completed, the registered manager does not always clearly document her decision-making. For example, the registered manager did not refer a foster carer to the disclosure and barring service (despite this being an action for the register manager to consider from a multi-agency meeting). There is no documentation evidencing the rationale behind her decision-making.

The registered manager has introduced a monitoring form to support her in ensuring that she makes timely safeguarding notifications to Ofsted. While the registered manager reviews safeguarding incidents, she does not consistently monitor whether the identified actions have been taken with the foster carers, and what the quality of the follow-up work was like.

A strong and rigorous panel is in place. The panel chair is highly experienced in safeguarding. Panel members have rigorous oversight of the assessments of potential foster carers and reviews. After safeguarding allegations have been made, foster carers return to panel for an early review. The panel members challenge the agency when they do not feel that assessments are good enough, or when they have concerns. This demonstrates an independent and effective panel. On occasion, the agency decision-maker has not agreed with panel recommendations to register foster carers. Again, this demonstrates that the agency's systems for approving and reviewing foster carers are positive.

The registered manager recognises that improvements need to be made to the

monitoring and oversight of safeguarding procedures, investigations and record-keeping. Both she and the organisation's head of fostering have started to take actions to rectify these shortfalls. Senior managers want to learn from safeguarding incidents and have made changes to the structure of how safeguarding incidents are monitored. The agency has recruited a safeguarding lead who will be completing safeguarding audits.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

There is a suitably qualified registered manager in post. She manages a small team consisting of two supervising social workers, a support worker and administration workers. There is currently a vacancy for one supervising social worker. The workload resulting from this vacancy has been managed through additional cases being allocated to supervising social workers and the registered manager.

Poor management oversight means that the registered manager has not been aware of key areas for development for the agency. There has been an over-reliance on knowing foster carers and supervising social workers, due to the small size of the agency. This means that there has been a lack of scrutiny of children and young people's files and the quality of the support that foster carers, children and young people receive. When the registered manager has identified practice issues in staff supervisions, she has not taken rigorous action to ensure that these are rectified. She does not drive forward improvement, and instead poor practice has been allowed to continue.

Staff supervisions are poor. The registered manager does not ensure that she enables staff to reflect on practice. She does not rigorously ensure that her staff team members are completing ongoing learning and training, or that they are implementing this into how they work with foster carers. A small minority of staff recruitment files do not contain all of the necessary information regarding the verification of qualifications or references. This demonstrates poor recruitment practice and poor management oversight. These shortfalls mean that the registered manager is failing to promote children and young people's welfare and progress. The registered manager has very little oversight of the agency, the quality of the support that is being delivered to foster carers, or the impact that this is having on children and young people.

A lack of quality assurance and monitoring of children and young people's outcomes mean that the registered manager is unable to see what progress children and young people make. Recording is poor. The registered manager has failed to ensure that she has notified Ofsted in a timely way about significant incidents. The registered manager does not quality-assure the support and input that foster carers receive. The registered manager has failed to complete any quality assurance or management monitoring for a significant period of time. She has not monitored children and young people's outcomes in respect of education, health or emotional well-being. For example, it is not recorded how many children and young people have tutors, or how many children and young people do extra-curricular activities. The registered manager has not ensured that paperwork is completed thoroughly to promote the safety and well-being of children and young people. This has led to poor matching and placement

decisions, which have potentially placed children and young people at risk.

The systems which are in place for monitoring outcomes for children and young people are ineffective in this agency. The registered manager does not follow the agency's procedures regarding chasing local authority paperwork or addressing foster carers who do not attend training. She does not ensure that staff follow the agency's procedures either. While the organisation on a wider scale has commissioned the input of specialist organisations such as the fostering network to complete reviews, the registered manager has failed to implement any of the recommendations from these reports.

Staffing has been inconsistent, and the agency has seen a reduction in the retention of foster carers. Leaders and managers have failed to scrutinise the recent changes in staffing. There is a lack of professional curiosity by the registered manager regarding the reasons for foster carers leaving, or for placing authorities moving children and young people out of the agency. Leaders and senior managers have commissioned services to look for patterns or trends in order to make changes to how the agency recruits and retains staff and foster carers. However, the registered manager does not promote a culture of openness or transparency, or one which is striving to learn from the experiences of foster carers, children and young people. The voice of the child is not fully evident within this service. For example, after children and young people have made complaints the registered manager does not ensure that she seeks their feedback regarding how the investigation was dealt with. The registered manager does not fully consult with children and young people about how they feel and what their experiences are within this agency. Learning is not translated into positive change.

Complaints are not investigated transparently, and they are not always evidence-based. There is a tendency to rely on 'knowing' staff and foster carers. This means that investigations lack rigour. The agency does not have a conflict of interest policy. There is no guidance for foster carers as to how they raise any issues independently of the friendships within the agency. When investigations have been completed, senior managers have failed to report the outcome to complainants. This does not support a culture of transparency, or one where foster carers and staff can provide professional challenge without fear of reprisal. Complaints are investigated in isolation from one another, and senior managers have failed to reflect on the common themes evidenced from complaints. Consequently, they have not made changes to the structure or culture of the agency.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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

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