

# St Christopher's Fellowship

St Christopher's Fellowship

Kinder House, Lombard Street, West Bromwich B70 8SD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is operated by a large charity. The charity is governed by a council of trustees. There are 44 carers in 35 households who look after 33 children.

The registered manager left in February 2022. A manager has been appointed and has submitted her application to Ofsted and is waiting for her suitable person interview.

### Inspection dates: 12 to 16 September 2022

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| <b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account | <b>good</b> |
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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 |
|-------------------------------------------|------|

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 1 October 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

A key strength of the agency is providing children with opportunities to share their views and wishes on a range of issues, including the care they receive. The agency hosts regular social events which are popular with children and carers. In the summer, a trip to the beach was a particular highlight for children. The agency has developed a youth council and publishes regular newsletters. These forums allow children to feel part of the agency and valued. A group of children spoken to during the inspection told the inspector that they enjoy attending the events and activities and feel that their views are taken seriously and listened to.

Children receive a children's guide which is tailored to younger and older children. These guides also contain information written in several different languages for children whose first language is not English. This promotes inclusion. There is a strong focus on equality, diversity and inclusion which runs through the agency and is central to staff and carers' training and practice.

Children experience consistency and stability, and most live with their carers long term. More than half of the children live with their brothers and sisters. Carers are provided with relevant information about children's needs and past experiences to enable children to stay with their siblings whenever possible.

Supervising social workers know their carers and children well. They spend time with children to hear their views about the care they receive. Managers and supervising social workers regularly review and track children's progress in areas such as health, social skills and opportunities. This enables the agency to put in place early support for children and carers when needed. When children have specific health needs, carers receive additional training and support to help them to provide individualised care to children.

The agency and carers have high ambitions for children. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, children nationally have faced lots of challenges with their education. The agency commissioned an independent education review which showed that children they have placed with carers have continued to make progress in spite of the challenges they have faced. The agency is keen to learn from the audit to help it to track children's educational progress further. For example, the review highlighted that the agency needs to ensure that actions from personal education plans are captured more effectively in children's records. This will enable their staff and carers to ensure that children are getting the support that has been agreed. This work will be prioritised by the organisation's education lead.

Children who are new to a foster home feel welcomed. Children receive a welcome box, which contains toys, activities and the children's guide. There is careful planning and consideration given to ensure that children are well matched to their

carers. Due consideration is given to children's backgrounds, for example their faith and ethnicity, to ensure that carers have the skills and knowledge to meet the children's needs. The inspector spoke to a child who recently moved into their foster home. This child told the inspector that they are happy to be living with carers of the same faith and explained how the carers had helped them to feel welcome.

The agency has a manageable growth plan. This details its aims to increase capacity steadily and enhance the skills of the carers it recruits in line with current trends and patterns. In this regard, the agency is looking to recruit carers who can provide care for parents and children.

The assessment of foster carers is thorough. There is a strong focus on preparing carers to give them the right skills and knowledge to care for children and keep them safe. Carers complete mandatory training and have access to additional training and workshops to help them enhance their learning. For example, the agency has provided carers with learning events on the therapeutic approach of playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. However, when specific training is identified in a carer's assessment, this has not been actioned by the agency in a reasonable timeframe. This is a missed opportunity to upskill carers quickly when needed.

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

Good oversight by managers means that they track and review safeguarding matters well. This gives managers an insight into trends and patterns and they act on these when necessary. Children's safety is central to all decision-making processes.

There is a strong focus on promoting positive behaviours. Foster carers are well trained and this helps them to manage children's behaviours confidently. When additional support is needed, this is offered by the in-house therapist and family support worker. As a result, there is a low rate of placement breakdowns.

Managers implement robust procedures to manage allegations against foster carers. The agency considers all relevant information and ensures that foster carers who have been subject to an allegation have an early review, which is considered by the fostering panel. Decisions about carers' continued approval in these circumstances are carefully considered, as is any learning from what has happened.

The agency has undertaken a research project to gain a better understanding of children's use of the internet and what carers need to support the children to use this safely. Findings from this research have informed resources and training provided to children and carers to help promote children's safety.

Few children go missing from care. When they do, carers follow agreed missing-from-care protocols by ensuring that they inform relevant authorities as well as trying to maintain contact with the child and encouraging them to return home. When children return, they are welcomed home. Children are offered the opportunity to speak to someone independent about why they went missing.

However, information from these return home interviews is not always shared with the carers and the agency, so it is not used to inform children's safe care plans and risk assessments. In addition, when new or potential risks become apparent, these are not always captured in children's assessments. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that carers have guidance about how to manage key risks, to help them to keep children safe.

The agency ensures that safety checks of foster carers' homes are completed. However, it is not always clear about how any issues highlighted from these checks are followed up. For example, a child was able to access a carer's medication. Although additional training around the storage of medication was provided to carers, it is not clear how the agency assures itself that the carers have taken the learning on board and monitors how medication is being stored at home.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The manager knows the agency, children and carers well. Stable and consistent leadership helps to maintain good-quality standards of care for children. The manager has developed an action plan to further improve the service and is making good progress with this. As a result, carers and staff told the inspector that they feel that the manager listens to them and acts on feedback. For example, they stated that communication from managers has improved and they feel better informed.

The agency is well staffed to meet the needs of foster carers and children. Staff employed by the agency are suitably vetted and qualified.

Staff feel valued and are provided with regular training. Team meetings and additional reflective sessions with the in-house therapist add to staff's learning. Staff receive good-quality supervision sessions to help them to develop their knowledge and practice. Staff are committed to children and their carers. This was echoed by carers, who said that they feel that their supervising social workers support them and know their families well.

Overall, carers spoke positively about the agency. They told the inspector that they can see how things have improved since the current manager was appointed. They feel confident that the agency is going in the right direction. Skilled carers from diverse backgrounds with a range of skills meet the individual needs of children.

Senior leaders monitor the service regularly. This includes regular reporting to trustees on a range of matters, including safeguarding. This ensures strong accountability.

The agency has a clear complaints process. Children and others know how to make a complaint. Records seen during the inspection show that complaints are carefully considered. However, managers do not always follow complaints up with an acknowledgement letter, as stated in the agency's policy. In addition, it is not always clear how the agency informs complainants of the outcome of the complaint and

uses learning from complaints. Therefore, those making a complaint may not always understand how their complaint is being dealt with.

The fostering panel is robust. It carries out a thorough quality assurance function which helps to promote good-quality assessments, support and training for foster carers. However, it is not clear whether carers are informed orally of the agency decision-maker's decision within two working days. In addition, in two cases the carers had not been informed in writing about the outcome of their annual review when it was considered by the agency's decision-maker. This can leave carers feeling unclear about decisions with regards to their approval.

## 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        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (1)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that children's safer care plans and risk assessments are kept up to date and that any issues arising from health and safety checks of foster carers' homes are addressed and monitored as needed.</p> | 31 October 2022 |
| <p>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))</p> <p>This is in relation to ensuring that specific training identified for carers is completed in a timely way.</p>                                                                                                | 31 October 2022 |

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. Children should receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and be kept informed of progress. This is in relation to ensuring that all complainants receive acknowledgement letters and are formally informed of the outcome of their complaint. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 1.6)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision-maker's decision within two working days of the decision being made and that written confirmation is sent to them within five working days. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.10)

## **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:** SC458341

**Registered provider:** St Christopher's Fellowship

**Registered provider address:** 1 Putney High Street, London, Wandsworth SW15 1SZ

**Responsible individual:** Philip Townsend

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspector**

Shazana Jamal, Social Care Inspector

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