

# Brighter Futures Foster Care

Warlies Park House, Horseshoe Hill, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 3SL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Brighter Futures Foster Care is an independent fostering agency based in Waltham Abbey in Essex. The agency covers Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Middlesex, Wembley and Lincolnshire.

This small fostering agency merged with the National Fostering Group in August 2018. It retains its individual registration. The agency provides short-term, long-term, respite, parent-and-child, emergency and disability placements.

The manager has been registered since January 2019.

**Inspection dates:** 13 to 17 January 2020

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

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

**Date of last inspection:** 27 June 2016

**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 agency is having a very positive impact on the experiences and outcomes of children. For some children, the outcomes are very good indeed. There is careful decision-making about which children can live with which carers.

Children have very stable and mostly long-term placements, which give them a sense of stability and permanence. In several cases, carers are looking after a child along with the child's brothers and sisters, enabling them to continue living together. A placing social worker said that their child is very settled in the placement with her brother, is doing really well and is making progress.

Children have high-quality childhood and family experiences because they are living with their carers. These experiences include attending community groups, being involved in charity fundraising, getting part-time jobs, spending quality time with their carers and going on holiday. Some children have been on holidays that they are likely to remember for the rest of their lives.

There are strong and positive relationships between carers and children, carers and the agency and the agency and other professionals. Some external professionals made very positive comments about the carers and agency staff. These relationships help children to feel valued and settled.

Children make very good progress in education. Carers encourage and support children in their education, including further education and university. A specialist education team in the organisation helps carers and supervising social workers to make sure that children get the education services that they need. One child, who is in further education, said that the course is helping her to work towards getting her dream job.

Carers and agency staff work very well with health services, including specialist services such as the diabetes nurse. This helps to make sure that children get the health support that they need and that their health needs are met well.

Carers and agency staff listen to children. Supervising social workers regularly see children alone. The agency seeks children's views as part of the carers' annual reviews, and the issues that they raise are followed through thoroughly. Some children have been able to influence their plans, such as when and how they see their families.

Carers and agency staff help children to see their families in a planned and positive way, even when the children are placed some distance from their home area.

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

Carers help to keep children safe. They have clear and regularly updated risk assessments which supervising social workers discuss with them. These plans identify the risks and the ways in which they can be reduced or managed.

Supervising social workers and carers help children to take age-appropriate risks, such as spending time in the community with friends and using social media. In this way, children develop independence and learn about keeping themselves safe.

Carers follow agreed protocols and take appropriate action when children go missing. The carers understand about safeguarding and child exploitation, so they can recognise the warning signs and instigate action to protect the children.

The managers challenge other agencies if they think that the agencies are not taking appropriate action to protect children. The managers have good working relationships with others, such as designated officers, and follow safeguarding procedures.

Children feel safe in their carers' homes. The good relationships that children have with their carers are a protective factor, as the children are more likely to be able to discuss their worries. One child said, 'I am part of the family and safe and loved, and they help me'. Another child said that one of the good things is 'having a family and feeling safe'.

Managers make sure that there are appropriate recruitment checks on agency staff, panel members and independent workers. This helps to reduce the chances of anyone working for the agency who may pose a risk to children.

There is an effective foster panel and a very well-experienced panel chair. They scrutinise carer assessments and reviews and identify areas that need clarification. However, the panel minutes do not always show that these areas have been followed through. Overall, the experience and rigour of the panel helps to protect children, but not having clear records of the outcomes of questions does limit this.

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

The registered manager has had a very significant, positive impact on the quality of the service. Carers and agency staff spoke very positively about how the manager has developed the agency and supported them through the merger with a larger fostering agency.

Agency staff value the registered manager very highly and are inspired by her. One agency staff member said, 'She has galvanised us all'. Another agency staff member said, 'I cannot praise her enough, she is fantastic'.

The manager uses team discussion and reflection to help the whole team to learn from things that have not gone as well as they could. For example, reviewing one case has helped supervising social workers to be very clear about their role. As well

as providing much-valued support for carers, the social workers are clear and open about the expectations of carers.

Managers have very high expectations for children. They prioritise children's needs and strive for good outcomes.

Supervising social workers carry out detailed supervision with carers and, in turn, are supervised by their managers. The managers have a detailed understanding of the children, and their progress, challenges and issues are shared across the agency. Although the manager and agency staff value the carers highly, it is children who are at the centre of their work.

The agency has a diverse work group that brings understanding and expertise to the team. This diversity helps to provide clear role models. Children's diversity needs are met extremely well. For example, one child has had a copy of the children's guide provided in braille, and supervising social workers discuss with carers how they can meet children's cultural needs and what resources are available to help them with this.

Carers and agency staff said that training has improved significantly since the merger, as there are wider resources to draw on. They described the training as being of an exceptional quality and range. Individual training is provided for some carers, who need it when waiting for planned training courses would not be good enough to meet children's unexpected needs.

Since taking up her post, the registered manager has gained a thorough understanding of the agency's strengths and the areas in which it needs to develop. She has prioritised areas of improvement. She is currently overseeing several areas of development, including looking at how carers' own children can be more involved in and recognised by the agency.

One area which needs further development is recording. Most records are clear and would provide children with a good understanding of their time in care and the reasons why decisions were made. However, some records are entered onto the electronic system quite late or contain some incorrect information. The impact of this is limited, but it does prevent this area being as strong as other areas of practice.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The panel chair ensures that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (National Minimum Standards 14.7)
- Staff and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files. There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. (National Minimum Standards 26.2)

In particular, ensure that all records are accurate and timely.

## **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:** SC476965

**Registered provider:** Brighter Futures Foster Care Limited

**Registered provider address:** Frays Court, 71 Cowley Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 2AE

**Responsible individual:** Oluremi Johnson

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## **Inspectors**

Clive Lucas, social care inspector

Trish Palmer, social care inspector



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