

Orange Grove Fostercare

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC485778
Inspection date	23/10/2015
Inspector	Mrs Lynn O'Driscoll
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

Setting address	North West Office, Walnut Tree Business Centre, Suite 3, Northwich Road, Lower Stretton, Warrington, WA4 4PG
Telephone number	01925730435
Email	sclay@picscare.co.uk
Registered person	Orange Grove Fostercare Ltd
Registered manager	Miss Heather Sheridan
Responsible individual	Mrs Stephanie Clay
Date of last inspection	21 June 2012

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This Independent Fostering agency was re-registered in 2014. It followed a company restructure and change of companies house number, but no change to the delivery of services or strategic management.

Its main functions are to: recruit, train and assess foster carers; carefully match children with approved carers which meet their individual needs; and provide ongoing training and support to carers to develop their skills and maintain placements.

There are currently 39 children and young people in placements.

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: **Outstanding**

This agency demonstrates an exceptionally strong commitment to developing children and young people's individual potential. A high proportion benefit from long term, stable placements with their siblings. They are an integral part of the fostering family and have formed particularly strong, trusting attachments.

Consequently, they are all very happy, safe and secure and their experiences, outcomes and progress are outstanding from their individual starting points.

Children and young people's wishes and feelings are central to their day-to-day care and their individual needs are exceptionally well met. They contribute to staff

appraisals and their carer's reviews and influence agency developments and strategic thinking.

This agency has an excellent retention rate so children and young people are cared for by highly experienced carers who receive excellent support and targeted training. This effectively helps them to meet the unique and highly complex needs and personal preferences of the children and young people who live with them.

Carers feel valued as a fundamental part of the professional team working with each child. Effective partnership working with relevant agencies is firmly established to safeguard and protect the children and young people living in foster placements. The agency ensures carers are equipped with all the information about the children and young people prior to placement to ensure they can provide excellent care at all times in line with up-to-date care plans. Delegated authority is clear.

This is a particularly open and transparent agency who have demonstrated continuous improvements since the last inspection and have challenging plans in place to continue to develop.

There were no breaches of regulation at the last inspection and at this inspection.

Two recommendations are made. This is to ensure that the wording in the children's guides is age appropriate so they are meaningful documents. Also, that the agency ensures that the outcomes of independent return interviews after a young person has safely returned from going missing are shared with their carers to try to prevent a re-occurrence.

Recommendations

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

Ensure that the outcomes of independent return interviews, after a young person has safely returned from going missing, are shared with their carers to try to prevent a re-occurrence. (NMS 5)

Ensure that: all the information in the children's guides is written in age appropriate language or suitable alternative methods of communication so it is fully understood by each child; or, demonstrate that the foster carer explains it's contents in a way that is meaningful to that child (NMS 16)

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

All carers provide children and young people with a particularly child-friendly welcome brochure with photographs and descriptions of their foster family prior to admission. For planned placement these are highly personalised. These help children and young people to prepare for their move and gain an understanding of their future placement. Consequently, they can settle quicker.

100 per cent of the children and young people are very happy and settled in their current placement and many have expressed their wish to remain into adulthood. Comments include, 'I have told the guardian that I want to stay with my carers and I will tell the judge myself if I have to', 'I live in an amazing loving family who welcomed me into their home with open arms and I am a much happier person now', and, 'I was scared coming into care but everything is cool here and I am happy and feel great.'

Of the 39 children and young people currently placed with this agency, 31 benefit from the security of long term placements. This equates to 79.4 % which is 50% higher than national comparators. The longest current placement is 14 years. Ten have lived in their current placement for longer than five years. Three young adults have made a positive decision to remain in placement beyond their 18th birthday until they feel ready to move on to independence.

Over 50% of all placements are sibling groups. This includes three sibling groups of three. None are placed separately from their siblings against their care plan. One young person has lived with her carers and sibling for the last six years having previously had eight disruptions. Her sister was placed two years later after 5 disruptions. Comments from children and young people include, 'All is good here with my brother' and, 'I like living here with my sister and brother and I am now a star helper at school.'

They all benefit from highly individualised care which best meets their unique needs and personal preferences. This enables them to reach their full potential.

There are ample opportunities for all the children and young people to express their wishes and feelings about their day-to day care. They are also actively involved in the continual development of the service including assessments and preparation training for new fostering families. Recently they helped to produce a contact leaflet about all the social work staff which has already been effectively used. In February birth and looked after children took part in a graffiti workshop. The artwork produced was used to create the new recruitment posters and leaflets. All these experiences

demonstrably increase confidences and self-esteem.

Children and young people exercise a genuine choice about contact arrangements with their birth families in line with any legal directions, which is actively promoted and facilitated by their foster carers. A mixture of intense emotions and behaviours that often follow are handled extremely well by their carer. A birth mum said, 'I feel so involved in my son's care now. I talk to his carer every day and we update each other. All the progress my son has made has been with this carer. She is very good and helped us to have contact again after ten years. It makes me feel reassured that he is safe and happy.'

An independent reviewing officer wrote, 'These two boys are now happy and safe but they were worried about their other two younger brothers so their carer arranged and facilitated nightly phone contact and twice weekly direct contact with them which was fantastic.'

All the children and young people accessing this service are receiving appropriate education and additional support as required, that best meets their assessed needs. Their attendance is excellent. Some carers have provided daily transport of significant distances to sustain attendance until a more local school is found. Consequently, many are making outstanding progress from their individual starting points. For example, one five year old now has a reading age of eight. One young person said, 'In the past some pupils were quite mean to me. This has all changed. I have just got star of the week and I have joined the debating club and football training' and, 'I am now the school's Spanish ambassador.'

One young person was initially in a school for pupils with special educational needs. He progressed to mainstream and is now preparing for GCSE's. He is expected to achieve at least a grade C in all subjects. Another young person who had not been to school at all up to the age of eight is now preparing to go to college.

A social worker wrote, 'My young person has done exceptionally well educationally. She needed individual support in school for several years. Initially she couldn't stay in a class for a sustained period. She gained GCSE's and is now at college. Consequently, she is more reassured and confident in herself and has a strong sense of belonging.'

Extracts from school reports read, 'His carers are doing a fantastic job in meeting his needs. This pupil has made huge progress socially and independently and his approach to education has changed' and, 'I cannot speak highly enough of these carers. The lines of communication are excellent. It is a privilege to work alongside them. They are making such a difference. It is obvious that he is very happy and settled in this placement and is responding incredibly well to the caring and nurturing environment they have created. He is now accessing new activities and experiences. Consequently, he is developing in confidence and performed in a dance and sung in

the school choir. He is also an enthusiastic member of the cross country club and the judo club.'

Children and young people's health and well-being is actively promoted. They are all registered with health professionals and benefit from routine checks and annual health assessments. This agency also ensures specialist services are provided in a timely manner to meet more complex needs.

An outstanding feature of this service is the additional support they provide to children, young people and carers to maintain placements. Consequently, many have made significant progress in respect to their physical and emotional health needs from their baseline assessments. Examples include improved: eating and sleeping routines; concentration; ability to play appropriately; verbal communication and motor skills. Many have achieved a healthy weight. Others have benefitted from improved eyesight and one child's hearing has been restored. Cannabis use for one young person has completely stopped. Consequently, his physical and emotional well-being and his challenging behaviours have all improved.

Children and young people really enjoy taking part in a wide range of stimulating, challenging and meaningful activities. They are fully involved in all of the fostering family events and holidays and in a wide variety of clubs within the local community. This gives them a strong sense of belonging. Individual interests and talents are actively encouraged and supported which serves to further increase their competencies and confidence. Examples include equestrian care, show jumping, skiing, maths, drama, fishing and a wide variety of musical genres.

Children and young people benefit from opportunities to develop age and ability appropriate life skills to prepare them for future successful independent living. One young person said, 'I can now prepare my own meals and I know about healthy living. I do rugby, football and basketball to stay fit', 'I like baking' and, 'My foster dad is a builder so I have learned lots of practical skills for when I get my own home.'

Four young people have recently successfully moved on into independence with the full assurance of continued support for as long as they need it. One young person now has a career in the army, but stays with his previous carer when on leave. Another recently returned for a short period after a relationship breakdown until she built up her emotional resilience again.

This agency serves 22 placing authorities who are all consistently very impressed with the exceptional progress their children and young people are making in their current placements. Comments include, 'My young person has been in a solo placement due to the complexity of her needs for nine years. Recently her outstanding carers were approved for other children with her endorsement. This alone demonstrates the progress made. She is secure in her relationships and

genuinely feels like she is their child. She speaks glowingly about them and their wider family. This is significant progress given her initial attachment difficulties', 'The carer's management of the diverse needs and personalities of the three children is commendable. They ensure that everyone feels safe and secure and an equal part of the fostering household whilst promoting their identity within birth families. They have shown how a right placement can turn children's lives around' and, 'These are excellent carers, provide exceptional care and are strong advocates. They are very in tune with, and sensitive to, the children's individual needs and in supporting them to achieve their individual goals. It is clear that they are loved. Consequently, they are now healthy, confident and outgoing young people who value and respect others because they have been valued.'

One young person who previously had multiple disruptions due to highly challenging behaviours is now happy and settled in a long term placement of seven years to date. She has gained in confidence, maturity and emotional resilience. She said, 'I am very happy here with my amazing carers and intend to stay here way beyond my 18th birthday. They have helped me so much. I am now at college, taking driving lessons and enjoy overnight stays with my friends.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

This service has a particularly good retention rate, so children and young people benefit from being exceptionally well cared for by highly experienced carers. Of the 29 current carers, 11 have been with this agency for over six years. This includes 4 carers of 11 years, one of 10, three of eight and three of six years. Two sets of carers have resigned as they have now adopted the children they fostered and want to devote all their time to bringing them up.

This service ensures a sufficient number of carers with a particular wide age range and with a variety of relevant skills and experiences to meet the unique needs of children and young people requiring foster placements. Examples include, education, health, careers, residential child care, learning disabilities, housing and the prison service.

This team moved offices since the last inspection specifically to attract a more ethnically diverse mix of carers. Also, to complement the work of the national recruitment team, a recent new development is the appointment of local recruitment officer. Her role is to raise the profile of this relatively small agency and to target specific local needs. These currently include, solo placements to meet some

extremely challenging needs, sibling groups and parent and child placements.

A local authority commissioner said, 'A key strength of this agency is their response to a placement request. They provide high quality information and are extremely flexible in meeting needs.'

Supervising social workers know their foster carers exceptionally well, including their individual strengths, and can therefore make excellent matches, based on sound judgements. Detailed matching documentation demonstrates that there is robust gatekeeping. This includes clear evidence that they consider the needs of children already in placement and the views of their social workers. The matching processes are highly effective demonstrated by the impressive longevity of placements.

This agency ensures carers receive as much information as is available about the child prior to placement to ensure they can provide appropriate care. Indeed, the highly effective escalation process has ensured that they have 100% of the statutory documentation in place from placing authorities and it is up-to-date and comprehensive.

Children and young people benefit from appropriately gradual and sensitive introductions to their new fosters homes at their pace. One young person planned exactly how she wanted her first day to be and who should be there. She said, 'It was perfect and I have now helped to redecorate my bedroom in my choices.'

This agency supports it's carers to a very high standard. Data presented demonstrates that carers have at least two unannounced visits a year and more if deemed necessary. Another significant development since the last inspection is the establishment of a support worker. She is loved by the children and young people she works with, and highly valued by their carers and her colleagues.

Comments from carers show that they receive excellent support from any member of the fostering team. Examples include, 'All the team know all the children so if my supervising social worker is not available I still get good advice and support' and, 'Extra support is always provided when needed and they run very good training courses. Even before a placement starts I can discuss anything that is bothering me. Nothing is seen as too small to talk about and they are dealt with in a respectful manner' and, 'This agency was highly recommended to me because of the support. My supervising social worker is amazing. She kept her phone on all weekend when the three children were placed.'

Carers confirm very good communication within the agency and are kept up to date with developments. They feel highly valued as an integral part of the professional team working with the child and are actively involved in care planning.

Carers also have the competence and confidence to be strong and effective advocates for the children and young people they care for. This ensures that

decisions made are always in their best interests. Examples include, education provision, contact arrangements and future placements. One carer relentlessly advocated for a child to get a clear medical diagnosis and therefore he received appropriate and timely specialist services to best meet his highly complex health needs.

Carers benefit from direct access to an education advisor who keeps them abreast of current legislation and empowers them to challenge, for example, exclusions and to ensure the correct use of the pupil premium. Recent successful examples include: additional tuition; speech and language therapy; and, laptops to aid individual learning needs. Carers know and understand the children's individual targets and actively support them to reach their full potential. Moreover, since the last inspection, the electronic tracking system is now being fully utilised, so progress made can be clearly demonstrated for each child. One head teacher said, 'These carers are really supportive and are super contributors to our nurture groups for our most vulnerable students.'

There are highly effective systems in place to ensure that all carers complete all their mandatory courses in a timely manner. There is only one couple who have not completed the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of approval due to unforeseen circumstances.

This service has also strengthened its' policy in regard to the training expectations of secondary carers and have introduced a wider range of training opportunities to meet a diversity of learning styles.

They provide a wide range of high quality courses run by extremely knowledgeable and experienced trainers who share their own vast personal and professional experiences. Carers were so impressed with the attachment training that this agency has commissioned this individual to facilitate reflect groups and provide individual telephone consultations. This demonstrates that carers' views are listened to and positively acted upon.

This service benefits from a robust and well-established panel with a good skills mix. It is well chaired by an independent and highly experienced individual who ensures all members fully contribute. He said their recent training proved very useful in strengthening their scrutiny of the assessments presented which are now of a consistently good quality. Panel papers are sent out in good time to ensure all members are fully prepared. The agency decision maker confirmed efficient processes to ensure he is able to make an informed decision within seven working days of each panel.

All of the above systems and processes, support and training have resulted in excellent stability rates. One carer said, 'They always provide amazing support and excellent training. One girl used to go missing and would make threats and

allegations. My supervising social worker stayed on duty for a whole month to make sure none of the information about her was lost so as to safeguard her and the rest of the household. Who else would do that? I cannot fault them' and, 'All the team are professional and show integrity and care to every member of the fostering family.'

Feedback from a wide range of placing authorities is consistently extremely positive about the outstanding quality of care provided by carers from this agency and the consequent stability and outcomes for children. Recent examples include, 'This carer is excellent and demonstrates an exceptional level of resilience which has been a key factor in placement stability', 'The emotional support and love they show to the child is exceptional and she is always telling me how happy she is there', 'I have known many carers but these really impress me. They have a particular strength in working with young children and these three siblings have all thrived in this placement. The communication received from the carers and their supervising social worker is insightful and very helpful in completing reports for court' and, 'These carers demonstrate an exceptional ability to develop good attachments. They provide the nurture needed to repair some of the children's early experiences.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

All the children and young people who contributed to this inspection confirmed that they feel very safe, happy and secure in their current placement and in their local communities. Two young people have felt comfortable enough to explore their sexuality. Comments include, 'I feel safe here and they help me to feel good about myself', 'My carers are great. They help me to understand my feelings and help me with my behaviours', 'They are my family now. We mess around and do fun things together. They listen to me and have helped me with my future and my past and how to keep safe', 'My foster family makes me feel welcome and safe and I now feel that I can face the world' and, 'My carers are amazing. They have really helped me. If it wasn't for them I don't know where I would be today.'

Many carers are providing excellent care to children and young people with extremely complex needs and high levels of risk. An outstanding feature is that carers are effectively managing some highly challenging behaviours without resorting to physical interventions.

An independent reviewing officer's report concluded, 'This is an excellent placement. His carers are pro-active in meeting his highly complex needs, anxieties and

behaviours.' A clinical psychologist wrote about another child, 'She is clearly benefiting from the emotional warmth these carers offer and consequently aggressive outbursts in the home are now minimal.'

A strength of this service is that children and young people contribute to their own highly individualised safer caring plans in meaningful ways. For example, they can look after a bear and produce their own daily recordings. This has really helped some children's understanding. Consequently, one child wrote, 'My carers have helped me say please and thank you and to talk nicely because I did used to swear. I have also stopped play fighting so nobody gets hurt. I really like my hugs and story time when my carer strokes my head when I am going to sleep.' One young person wrote, 'I used to fight with my brother but I realise now that some of my reactions were over the top so I am able to walk away now and stay cool.' This is outstanding progress from his starting point.

Two siblings were placed in 2010 following a breakdown. The placing authority felt they could not live together but the carers insisted that they should be given the opportunity. They have both thrived through consistent boundaries and significant challenging behaviours have lessened in frequency and intensity.

Two supervising social workers are now trained to provide their new and accredited managing behaviour courses to carers. This was carefully designed to specifically focus on fostering. Another outstanding feature of this service is the fact that one young person has designed her own power point about her experiences in care which she delivers to carers and social workers as an integral part of the behaviour management training. She explained, 'I have lived in loads of placements, some good, others not so I produced a power point to get people to think about why looked after children behave in different ways.'

This agency benefits from highly experienced carers with the competence and confidence to enable children and young people to take age-appropriate risks as part of their natural development into adulthood. One young woman said, 'I am enjoying going out shopping and choosing my own clothes and to the cinema with my friends. We often have sleepovers.'

This agency has established strong collaborative working with a range of safeguarding agencies. The support worker in particular frequently works with children and young people to develop strategies to keep themselves safe when out in the community and online. The local police have also provided child sexual exploitation training to staff, carers and children and young people.

Consequently, for example, the risks of child sexual exploitation have demonstrably decreased and for others fire setting, assaults and bullying have ceased altogether. The appropriate use of restorative justice has also successfully avoided young people

gaining a criminal record.

The incidents of young people going missing have significantly decreased and effective protocols are in place with the local police and other relevant safeguarding agencies to protect the few who do. This agency is pro-active in ensuring timely independent return interviews take place and fully contribute to multi-agency strategy meetings to inform future care planning. However, they do not routinely receive the outcomes of these interviews from social workers.

The responsible individual sits on a local safeguarding children's board so she can ensure that this agency's policies are compatible and current challenges in keeping children and young people safe and good practice are shared.

Another significant new development since the last inspection is the establishment of an internal safeguarding panel comprised of designated officers across the organisation. All safeguarding concerns are scrutinised for patterns and trends and to explore any lessons learned seeking to constantly improve practice.

Carers subject to allegations confirm good support from the agency during this anxious time and say they are always kept up to date with progress and offered independent support during the investigation.

Children and young people know how to complain but none have chosen to exercise this right. Rather, they say they have lots of people within this agency that they can turn to if they have any concerns and they are always quickly sorted out. One young person said, 'It's a really good service. If I need any help I can speak to anyone at the office. I was upset after contact and the manager calmed me down then when I got back to the foster home my support worker was waiting for me.'

The recruitment and selection processes in place meet regulatory requirements to ensure a safe and competent workforce.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

This service remains financially viable. In fact, since the last inspection this organisation has gone into partnership with three other independent fostering providers. In particular, this has served to strengthen overall quality assurance and safeguarding processes whilst still retaining the feel of a local agency with local outstanding support and care.

This service benefits from a strong leadership team and robust governance.

The registered manager is a fully qualified, highly experienced and child focussed individual. She has a particularly calm and reflective approach and is genuinely passionate about improving children's lives. She leads by example and is highly regarded by carers, her team and senior managers.

Carers, panel members and staff all say they feel genuinely listened to and involved in constantly developing the service. Examples include: revising the fee structure and amending the foster carer charter as a direct result of consultations with carers; and, having an agency representative at panel to keep members abreast of organisational and policy changes. A supervising social worker said, 'They have introduced a new assistant team manager role because we felt there were limited promotion opportunities. They invest in us. We feel listened to and valued.' All the team were involved in drawing up the current development plan so there is a strong sense of shared ownership and accountability

This agency benefits from qualified, experienced and very enthusiastic staff. In turn, they confirm high satisfaction with the range and quality of the training provided to continue to develop their individual skills and competencies. They also benefit from the expertise of an efficient administrator and regular, good quality supervision and ongoing support.

The five recommendations made at last inspection on 21 June 2012 have all been actioned. Consequently, children and young people have significantly more opportunities to positively contribute to the continual development of the service. This includes carer recruitment, assessment and training. Staff appraisals also now include their views. The documentation demonstrates a comprehensive and reflective process celebrating strengths and identifying areas to develop. Comments from young people show the excellent relationships established with the fostering team, for example, 'I feel safe here and would talk to my carer's supervising social worker if I didn't. She always listens to my views. I have always felt comfortable talking to her because she values my opinions and feelings' and, 'He listens to me. He gets me.'

The children's guide also includes young people's personal experiences. For example, 'I arrived feeling scared about most things. Eight months on and I feel more confident. I have returned to mainstream school, I am taking exams and I have joined a karate club. All in all my life in care has turned out alright.'

There are now effective arrangements in place for the two versions of the children's guide and other key documents to be translated into any required language and pictorially. Recent examples include Welsh and Polish. However, the current wording about internet safety in the guide for younger children is not age appropriate. This has been withdrawn from circulation until it is addressed.

Since the last inspection there are more robust systems in place to ensure all carers complete core courses in a timely manner and a wider range of advanced courses are available to equip carers to meet a diversity of complex needs.

The managers monitoring reports are now consistently detailed and evaluative. They include the views of children and young people in placement, carers and stakeholders and identify areas for continued development. In fact the wide range and effective use of the auditing and monitoring systems in place is now an outstanding feature of this service. In particular, outcomes monitoring is now firmly established which clearly demonstrates children and young people's sustained outstanding progress and identifies any specific support that is still required. Stringent monitoring also ensures that all required documentation is maintained at a consistently high standard.

Annual quality and performance data is consistently promptly submitted to Ofsted providing relevant, clear and evaluative information. The statement of purpose is regularly reviewed to ensure that it always accurately describes the aims and services provided by this agency.

Notifiable events are always forwarded to Ofsted in a timely manner. This service is also exceptionally good at providing relevant updates until a final outcome is reached. These demonstrate that appropriate action has been taken to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and young people in full collaboration with other relevant agencies.

There is a wealth of positive feedback available from external stakeholders. Examples include, 'This agency provides high quality carers, a very high standard of support to young people and excellent communication with partner agencies' and, 'These carers have gone beyond all expectations in providing excellent care and excellent communication with me. I highly rate this agency. It is clear to me that their structures work well and the support they provide to carers is evident', 'This is an outstanding agency. They think outside the box and are spontaneous in meeting needs and responding to crises' and, 'One strength of this service is the number of siblings living together. I am involved with many agencies and this one is particularly child centred. Their heart is genuinely for the children. This is demonstrated by their participation during training. It is also a very open organisation to any new ideas.'

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and 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.