

Young People At Heart Limited

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Thames Enterprise Centre, Princess Margaret Road, East Tilbury, Essex RM18 8RH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Young People at Heart is an independent not-for-profit organisation, with three settings nationally. The agency offers a range of foster placements and has foster carers living in Essex, Suffolk and Kent.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 15 fostering. The agency was providing homes for 29 children and two young people staying put.

The manager registered with Ofsted in March 2024.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 February 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 November 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children experience warm, nurturing and stable care. As a result, children make very good progress from their starting points. The agency's ethos places children firmly at the centre of practice and this is reflected in the quality of care provided. Children are fully welcomed into fostering households. They participate in family routines, celebrations and holidays, including international trips. The agency funds activities such as cycling and swimming lessons, which supports children's health, confidence and sense of belonging.

Many carers welcome family groups and over half of all children have remained living with their foster families for more than three years. Some children have lived with their carers for more than ten years. This level of stability supports children to feel secure and develop trusting relationships.

Children consistently express positive views about the agency and their carers. Their views are gathered regularly through reviews, feedback tools and participation activities. Children's guides are well designed and age-appropriate, including versions for younger children, older children and those preparing to leave care.

Children's health and education needs are well supported. All children are in education, and their carers work closely with schools and health professionals to promote good outcomes. When access to services is delayed or provision is unsuitable, the agency advocates strongly on behalf of children. Children's emotional and mental health needs are identified promptly and, when necessary, additional support is sought from external professionals.

A broad range of social and recreational activities and events are provided for children. These include summer events, a Christmas pantomime trip, and a monthly drop in for teenagers. Positive achievements and special occasions are recognised to promote children's confidence and sense of achievement. Foster carers' own children are included, contributing to positive family experiences.

Foster carer assessments are generally of good quality. However, some assessments demonstrate insufficient professional curiosity in exploring carer's history or vulnerabilities. On occasion, this has contributed to gaps in matching children with their foster carers. Assessments should consistently reflect careful scrutiny of carer's suitability and capacity to meet the diverse needs of children.

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

Children are protected from harm and receive high-quality support to keep them safe. Carers demonstrate professionalism and strong commitment to children. Risks

are well understood and effectively managed. Individualised risk assessments offer clear, detailed guidance for carers and other professionals.

Children benefit from secure and trusting relationships with their carers. Some children refer to their carers in parental terms, reflecting the depth of attachment they have formed. One child has been adopted by their carers. These outcomes demonstrate the agency's success in promoting stability and permanence.

Placement planning is thorough and well considered. Transitions and introductions are managed sensitively, helping children settle quickly. Unplanned endings remain infrequent. The agency reviews all placement endings to identify learning and strengthen future practice.

A therapeutic approach is embedded across the service. Carers receive regular guidance from supervising social workers, input from a lead practitioner and access to quarterly clinics. A therapist provides direct work with children when required. Carers value this support, describing it as instrumental in helping them respond effectively to children's emotional and behavioural needs.

The work undertaken by the agency's social work assistants is a significant strength. They deliver therapeutic life-story work, support contact arrangements, provide practical assistance to carers and undertake direct work with children. This enhances the overall quality of support available and is a key factor in helping children to thrive and make positive progress with their carers.

Incidents, including missing episodes and use of restraint, are rare. When they occur, records are detailed, reflective and show clear management oversight. Carers receive excellent and effective support following incidents, which helps reduce risk, prevent escalation and promotes children's stability.

Although risks such as radicalisation, sexual exploitation and criminal activity are not prevalent among current placements, the manager demonstrates a strong understanding of these issues. Staff and carers receive relevant training and are prepared to respond should such concerns arise.

Fostering panel processes are a notable strength. The panel chair and agency decision-maker are highly experienced. Records reflect rigorous scrutiny, constructive challenge and clear reasoning. Panel administration is efficient and statutory timescales are consistently met. Carers report positive experiences of attending fostering panel.

Recruitment and selection procedures for staff and carers are robust and comply with safeguarding requirements.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The overall leadership of the agency is strong. The registered manager is highly committed to achieving positive outcomes for children and supporting carers and staff. The responsible individual shares this commitment, contributing to a culture of enthusiasm, ambition and child-centred practice.

The staff team is small but stable. Staff turnover is low. Staff changes are communicated promptly to carers, with suitable arrangements in place to ensure continuity. Although the agency experienced a period without a manager since the last inspection, this was mitigated effectively by coordinated support from other managers across the agency.

Supervising social workers are afforded low caseloads, enabling them to develop strong relationships with carers and understand the needs of children well. Social work assistants enhance capacity further, contributing to a highly supportive environment. Staff feel valued by managers and describe the agency as 'like a family'. Staff feedback has been entirely positive. Staff at the agency talk about feeling well supported by the manager especially.

Carers speak very positively about the agency. They describe staff as 'fantastic and amazing' praising the high-quality support, regular communication and relevant training provided.

Supervision sessions for both staff and carers are regular and reflective. Records show professional curiosity, appropriate challenge and a thorough understanding of children's needs. A wide range of training is offered, supporting carers to develop their skills. Carers also benefit from support groups and a monthly carer-led meeting attended by agency leaders.

Documentation across the agency is generally strong. Carer logs, assessments and incident reports are detailed and professional. The manager uses good monitoring and auditing arrangements to provide effective oversight of practice and outcomes. However, some concerns or complaints raised by children about their carers were noted but follow-up actions and managerial oversight were not clearly recorded. Procedures for responding to complaints or potential allegations require greater clarity and consistent managerial review.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's development needs. In particular, that assessments evidence good scrutiny and professional curiosity about prospective carers circumstances and histories, and about their capability and suitability to meet children's needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.6)
- The registered person should ensure there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. In particular, this includes oversight of possible incidents, allegations or complaints about the service, staff or carers, to ensure the quality of the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)

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: SC486913

Registered provider: Young People At Heart Limited

Registered provider address: 2 Spyglass Hill, Northampton NN4 0US

Responsible individual: Gary Cox

Registered manager: Mhairi MacDonald

Inspector

Daniel Rankin, Social Care Inspector

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