

# Team Fostering

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Unit 3 and 4, Shepcote Office Village, Shepcote Lane, Sheffield S9 1TG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Team Fostering is an independent, 'not for profit', fostering agency. This inspection was conducted at the Sheffield office, which covers the Yorkshire and East Midlands regions. The agency undertakes assessment, approval and supervision of foster carers who provide emergency, short-term and permanent placements for children and young people. At the time of this inspection 84 approved fostering households were providing placements for 115 children and young people.

**Inspection dates:** 26 February to 2 March 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 19 July 2013

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The children and young people are making good progress from their starting points. They are all in education or training. Their health needs are being met, and they are benefiting emotionally from their placements.
- The children and young people are looked after by committed carers who understand their needs and receive a wide range of training to increase their knowledge and skills.
- Activities are organised, and the participation of the children, young people and carers is particularly strong. The agency creates opportunities for these activities whenever possible; they enable children and young people to learn new skills, meet others in the same position and develop resources to help others. The staff team works in a highly collaborative way, which ensures that each aspect of the agency's work is coordinated well, resulting in a good quality service to children, young people and carers.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development :

- Safeguarding practice around missing from care could be strengthened by supplying carers with guidance detailing individualised actions to be taken if a child or young person goes missing.
- The supervision of carers needs to reflect more discussion around the carers' ability to meet the needs of children and young people, offering a framework to assess the carers' performance and develop their competencies and skills.
- Leaders and managers need to monitor the quality of supervision given to foster carers by supervising social workers to ensure that poor practice is challenged and that this is reflected in the relevant records.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that foster carers know and implement what the fostering service and the responsible authority's policy is in relation to children going missing. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, paragraph 5.2, page 15)

Specifically, to prepare individualised missing risk assessments and procedures, agreed by the agency and responsible authority, and to provide these to carers.

- Ensure that meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise foster carers' work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, paragraph 21.8, page 43)

- Ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes ensuring the quality of the service. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, paragraph 25.1, page 50)

Specifically, to monitor the quality of supervision given to foster carers by supervising social workers and to ensure that it is recorded appropriately.

## Inspection judgements

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

The children and young people build trusting relationships with their carers due to well-planned introductions, the knowledge and skills of the carers and the support they receive from the agency.

The children and young people receive an informative, age-appropriate guide along with helpful leaflets, tailored to their individual circumstances prior to placement. The placement team ensures that children and young people receive up-to-date profiles of carers to help them prepare for their new placement. The team visits carers personally to gain an understanding of their strengths. The team then uses this knowledge to suggest appropriate matches to supervising social workers.

The children and young people are cared for by committed and knowledgeable carers who receive extensive support and training from the agency. Training in subjects such as attachment, foetal alcohol syndrome and autism is provided. Carers achieve the quality standards in their first 12 months of approval. Some carers are working with staff in a project that is looking at ways to make training more accessible to secondary carers who are in employment.

The agency and the carers view education as a priority for the children and young people. Children and young people have high attendance rates, with all being in some form of education or training. A dedicated education team works closely with any children and young people who experience difficulty in education. This team has successfully re-integrated a number of children and young people who were refusing to attend any education or placement. Where necessary, the agency challenges on behalf of the children and young people and works in partnership with the virtual school.

The agency staff and the carers have a good understanding of the health needs of the children and young people and ensure that all care required is obtained. Specialist referrals are made if necessary, for example for psychological therapy.

The progress of the children and young people in terms of their education, health and well-being is monitored regularly using an electronic tracking system. This ensures that any areas which are of concern are identified and addressed quickly.

Children and young people are involved in a range of participation activities. This is an outstanding feature of the agency's work. All children and young people have the opportunity to be involved in 'Project Listen'. This group has produced two excellent, high-quality DVDs, one explaining advocacy and one about 'feeling scared'. An annual 'celebration of achievement' event is held, and there is also an annual activity holiday. These activities enable children and young people to meet others in similar situations and have a voice in the work of the agency.

Targeted support is also available for individual children and young people, for example in the prevention and impact of bullying.

In order to develop young people's life skills, a 'leaving care' worker has been appointed. Young people prepare and eat meals together and undertake work around DIY, utility bills, internet safety, fire safety and first aid. The agency is currently working on an online resource that the young people can tap into when they have moved on.

The agency has also responded to the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people for whom it provides placements. They meet as a group and receive help and support relating to life in Britain. A specialist group, supported by the Refugee Council, also disseminates information and supports foster carers. These measures help young people to settle into an unfamiliar culture and help carers to meet their needs more effectively.

The carers say that they were warmly welcomed to the agency on application and were well supported through the exhaustive assessment process. All applications are considered by the panel within the statutory timescale, and all applicants have gone on to be registered as carers. The manager said that they work hard to 'weed out' applicants who would not be suitable at every stage of the assessment process, before they reach the panel stage. Sixteen new fostering households have been approved in the last year.

There have been four complaints in the last two years. These have been investigated methodically by the quality assurance manager; however, follow-up work with carers was not evidenced in one case.

Carers speak highly of the support they receive from the agency. One said: 'The name says it all; we are a team.' The carers receive supervision and reviews in line with statutory requirements. Some of the supervision records do not evidence work done to ensure that foster carers are meeting the needs of children and young people. In a few cases, inappropriate behaviour by carers was not followed up with them to help them develop their competencies and skills. A recommendation in respect of this is made.

Carers are supported by a network of support groups including a 'knit and natter' group. One carer said: 'The support has been a godsend.' Each carer is allocated a number of days of 'respite' care, however this is not used unless necessary, with carers preferring to include the children and young people in family holidays and events. One young person told the inspector about his holidays in Florida and Ibiza.

Ten young people are currently 'staying put' post 18 years, with a further 17 due to do so in the coming year. The placing authority does not fund the agency for the supervision of 'staying put' arrangements, however the numbers demonstrate the security of the placements that these young people have received through the agency. There are also placements where carers are applying for special guardianship of their foster children. Although these carers will be no longer be

available to the agency, the agency encourages carers to do this in the best interests of the children.

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

The children and young people feel protected from harm. They say they can talk to their carers and they feel part of the family. The carers demonstrate a good level of understanding of the effects of trauma on children and young people and respond to situations with skill and sensitivity. They are supported by comprehensive safeguarding training in subjects such as bullying, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. One carer said that the training he had received about attachment had prompted him to research further, and he had 'learned so much' about the reasons for his foster children's behaviour.

All carers receive training in de-escalation techniques and physical intervention. The use of restraint is very rare.

The children and young people are protected by comprehensive safe-care plans. These set out clear expectations of the behaviour of everyone in the household. They identify individual risks and the measures to be taken to mitigate these. Carers are provided with the agency's missing from care policy and procedure, and those of the relevant local authorities, but do not receive specific, individual information regarding action to be taken if a particular child or young person goes missing. In one case, the carer followed the agency's policy but the local authority social worker was not in agreement with their actions. A specific reporting procedure for children at risk of going missing, agreed by all, would prevent this situation occurring again and would strengthen the protection of vulnerable children and young people. A recommendation is made with regard to this.

Sound systems prevent unsuitable candidates, who may present a risk of harm to children and young people, from being selected. These systems are used from the point of application for both agency staff and potential carers. The assessment and subsequent supervision of foster carers maintain a strong focus on safeguarding. Unannounced visits by agency staff to the homes of carers take place twice a year; children and young people are spoken to independently of their carers.

Allegations made against foster carers are carefully investigated. Children and young people are removed if necessary, and the agency takes appropriate action against individuals who it believes fall short of its expectations. There has been one referral to the independent review mechanism.

In order to keep children and young people safe, the agency provides opportunities for children and young people to explore internet safety. It also provides training to the foster carers. The agency has an intranet page for carers where it posts up-to-date information about potentially risky sites or 'crazes'.

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

The agency is well resourced and staffed. Different aspects of the service are split between a number of teams led by their own managers. They in turn are overseen by the manager. Because of close collaboration between each team, the children, young people and carers receive a good standard of service, with some particularly strong areas of work such as education, participation and matching.

The manager works with the quality assurance manager to ensure that the agency complies with regulations and that there is a robust response to complaints. This leads to sound practice which promotes the progress and safeguarding of children and young people.

The fostering panel is made up of members from a wide variety of backgrounds, such as health and therapy, and includes individuals who were looked after themselves as children. There is an appropriate number of qualified social workers on the panel. The diversity of the panel is limited, but the panel chair recognises this and the agency is committed to recruiting more members who reflect the make-up of the local community. The chair is very experienced and challenges the quality of assessment or lack of information when he feels it is necessary. The panel members receive documentation in good time before meetings, which ensures that they are fully appraised of information before making their recommendations. Minutes are clear and record the reasons for decisions made. The panel has active engagement with the agency and promotes safe and secure placements through its scrutiny.

The agency decision-maker demonstrates a thorough approach to her role, considering all the information available, and making challenges when appropriate. This ensures that decisions are made in the best interests of children and young people.

A child-centred referral and matching process is in place, which places strong emphasis on matching children and young people to the carer who can best meet their needs. The wishes and feelings of birth children and of sibling groups are considered before placement, as are their cultural needs. Because the agency recruits carers from diverse backgrounds, they have been able to place some unaccompanied minors with carers of the same nationality. This supports children and young people's sense of identity.

The agency's statement of purpose clearly outlines the aims of the service, and the manager is ensuring that care is delivered in line with the statements made.

The manager has taken steps to address the recommendations made at the last inspection, and all are met.

The manager has comprehensive monitoring systems in place which, for the most part, give an effective oversight of the work of the agency. However, these systems need to be able to assess quality in addition to compliance. The quality of the agency's work is strong in most areas, however there were deficits in the area of carer supervision which had not been addressed by managers. A recommendation

regarding this is made. The manager has produced a good-quality annual review report which has been submitted to HMCI.

Effective partnerships have been developed with placing local authorities. A commissioner said that communication between them is 'excellent'. A protocol is in place to escalate issues with authorities in order to ensure that the agency has the necessary information and documentation it needs to support the care of children and young people.

The agency has developed a set of 'values and behaviours' which it expects all those involved with it to embrace. These were developed in consultation with staff, children and young people, and carers. The manager is embedding these across all aspects of the organisation, including with external social workers who undertake foster care assessments. This innovation will promote good practice in the interests of children and young people across the service.

This agency exhibits a child-centred approach in all its work. Staff work together to provide a supportive and innovative approach to fostering. The carers spoken to are unanimous in their praise, all agreeing that they were glad they went with this agency, and that children and young people's life chances are improved by the care and support they receive.

## **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**

**Unique reference number:** SC060698

**Registered provider:** Team Fostering

**Registered provider address:** Unit 3 and 4, Shepcote Office Village, Shepcote Lane, Sheffield S9 1TG

**Responsible individual:** Jane Butler

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspector(s)**

Janet Black, social care inspector

Cath Sikakana, social care inspector



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