

# Team Fostering

Team Fostering

Unit 6, Hedley Court, Orion Business Park, North Shields, Tyne and Wear NE29 7ST  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Team Fostering is a not-for-profit independent fostering agency. The company is limited by guarantee. It has two branches, one of which, Team Fostering North East, is the subject of this report. It was established in 2001 and operates from an office in North Tyneside, with further premises in Middlesbrough. The other, separately registered, branches are based in Sheffield, Leeds and Papplewick.

At the time of the inspection, the North East branch was providing services to 138 children and young people, of whom nine were placed under staying-put arrangements. It had 89 approved fostering families, and it had recruited five fostering households since April 2018. The agency provides short-term, long-term and short-break placements, including parent and child placements and placements for children with complex needs.

**Inspection dates:** 29 October to 2 November 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of last inspection:** 14 March 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- It provides foster carers with very high levels of support, supervision, guidance and management. This enables carers to provide nurturing and stable homes for children and young people.
- The agency provides an extensive, high-quality programme of training to committed carers, who understand children's and young people's complex needs.
- The agency creatively engages with children and young people through their well-established participation groups (the Teamies and Team Fantastic). They make a significant contribution to the development of the service.
- The children, young people and foster carers take part in a wide range of activities organised by the agency. They come together and share positive experiences with each other, forming positive friendships with other fostered children and the wider fostering family.
- The staff team is highly motivated and led by a very positive and committed leadership team that adheres to the values and behaviours promoted by the service as laid out in the statement of purpose.
- Foster carer recruitment is based upon excellent communication and effective, timely responses, thus preparing applicants thoroughly from day one.
- The children's and young people's safety is well assured by the agency's rigorous practices. This is further evident in an extremely competent and professional fostering panel and agency decision-making process.
- The agency's management is highly visible and effective at both strategic and operational levels. Leadership reports are extremely positive and forward thinking, incorporating the views of children, young people, foster carers and staff from all levels and positions within the service, creating a team ethos.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Safe care plans need to be consistently personalised to the children in placement, ensuring and promoting their understanding and acceptance in the fostering family.
- The agency needs to continue to use its escalation policy to ensure that respective local authorities provide pathway plans for young people in a timely manner as per their statutory responsibilities.

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

### **Recommendations**

#### ■ 11: Preparation for a placement

The service has and implements clear procedures for introducing children into the foster care placement, to the foster carer and to others living in the household. They help children understand what to expect from living in the foster home. Foster carers explain everyday household rules and expectations to children. The safe care plan for the household should be personalised for the child or children placed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 11.1 and 11.4)

#### ■ 12: Promoting independence

The fostering service ensures there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes accessing a copy of the pathway plan for an "eligible" child and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 12.2 and 12.3)

## Inspection judgements

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

The agency achieves its commitment to providing the best outcomes for children and young people. It is extremely thorough in its practice and this helps to significantly enhance the quality of life of children and young people placed with their carers.

The children and young people are well prepared before they move into a fostering household. They are provided with excellent, child-friendly profiles of the foster carer's/carers' family to enable them to have an easier transition into the foster family. Introductions are well planned and although safe care plans enable children and young people to understand expectations and basic house rules for everyone in the home, they are not consistently personalised to the child or children placed. This diminishes their value to children when moving into placement.

Many children and young people thrive in their placements because the team around the child follows the ethos of the agency. The support and care provided to placements is rigorous and coordinated. There are high levels of contact with supervising social workers that enable foster carers to feel part of a team. This level of support helps to sustain placements. Additional multi-agency placement support meetings take place if the placements appear to be at risk.

Since the last inspection, the agency now benefits from case consultations with a clinical psychologist and workshops tailored to enhance greater understanding of trauma and behavioural responses of children and young people in placements. The theoretical model of practice embedded in everything that the agency does helps many children and young people to recover from their past experiences. One foster carer commented, 'The introduction of [the] clinical psychologist has been invaluable. His sessions are brilliant.' Analysis of data completed in March 2018 indicated that 64.8% of children and young people were in stable placements, many of whom had been with their carer/s over one year. Given the complexity of children's and young people's individual circumstances, this is excellent.

Children and young people are supported to make excellent progress in their health and education. The agency has a dedicated education team that engages with children, young people and educational professionals to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved. The progress that children and young people make in terms of their health, well-being and education is monitored by a highly efficient electronic tracking system. This provides accurate information that is shared at meetings with respective local authorities and helps to direct further resources or actions. This ensures effective support to children and young people in their everyday lives.

The foster carers speak highly of the assessment and recruitment process, although exhaustive, they appreciate the sensitive and respectful way that they are treated by everyone in the agency. Assessments are thorough, addressing the applicants'

suitability, attitudes and competencies to foster. Foster carers transferring from another fostering service commented, 'It was like night and day coming across to Team. They were absolutely fabulous and amazing. I cannot find fault with them.'

Training resources are exceptional and ensure that foster carers are prepared for their roles. The agency focuses on maintaining a highly skilled workforce of staff and foster carers, both of whom are trained in the theoretical model of practice. The agency has introduced an interactive online support system called 'The support tree', which consists of foster carers providing peer support to each other. This offers a range of topics and links to information sites and experiences of foster carers that they share with one another to support the overall care of children and young people. This promotes resilience and supportive environments, encouraging, sustaining and strengthening placements.

The agency in consultation with respective children's and young people's support groups 'Teamies' and 'Team Fantastic' has developed a website for them. This website is monitored by the education and support service staff, and it also provides a blog. This enables children and young people to interact with each other, building friendships. There is an activity calendar and a dedicated area for life skills, as well as a welcome pack to download and pages that give information about being looked after by Team Fostering, to name just a few. There is an 'Ask Us' page where children and young people can leave comments, questions or feedback. This site is safe and secure, and the agency provides them with a 'business card' with individual login details. This site firmly focuses on the development of children and young people, promoting confidence, education and well-being.

The agency works well with local authorities to ensure that full information is always shared with foster carers. However, information pertaining to a young person's pathway plan has been an example where this has not always been provided in a timely manner. The agency has escalated its concerns appropriately and has ensured that the young person has been supported.

Nine young people are currently 'staying put' post-18 years. One young person commented, 'My carers are brilliant people and very caring. They always keep me safe.' Another young person made reference to the fantastic support provided by Team Fostering's two trust funds, from which he benefited in the form of a complete package of driving lessons. Many children and young people have received similar support on a range of things that have enriched their lives, strengthening their skills, knowledge and resilience for their futures.

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

Placement support meetings, professional skilled analysis of data in consultation with the clinical psychologist and information gained prior to matching children and young people with a foster family all support safe care proactively.

Foster carers are highly trained in understanding the effects of trauma on children and young people. They are provided with training resources that are imaginative

and informative. The agency provides safeguarding training in specific areas of concern associated with child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. It also provides additional learning materials in the form of DVDs associated with exploitation and worksheets that enable foster carers to reflect on their understanding and on safeguarding policies/procedures. Upon completion, they are assessed and receive a certificate. This promotes continuous learning, confidence and develops safe care environments for children and young people.

Allegations and complaints are meticulously investigated, while ensuring that the local authority and placing authorities are fully involved. Fostering procedures in place to safeguard children and young people from harm and potential harm are thorough. The agency takes appropriate action against individuals who it believes fall short of its expectations, inclusive of the reviewing and reassessment processes for foster carers. The fostering panel chair is vastly experienced and the analysis, evaluation and quality assurance processes that are carried out are of a high standard. The agency's decision-making process is equally as robust and is further enhanced by the dual role held by the quality standards and agency decision maker. The agency has also developed a peer group nationally as part of 'The fairer fostering partnership', a consortium of voluntary and not-for-profit fostering agencies. It is anticipated that this will further improve safe care outcomes for children and young people.

Training is mandatory for all foster carers in de-escalation techniques and physical intervention. The use of restraint is rarely required.

The agency works closely with foster carers, children, young people and all professionals involved in maintaining safe care. Foster carers are provided with the agency's missing from care policy and procedure, and those of the relevant local authorities, but children and young people are not always offered a return home interview. However, the agency uses its escalation policy and challenges respective local authorities appropriately. The multi-agency placement support meetings involve discussions with reference to any specific behaviour to ensure that missing from care risk assessments are in place and all strategies are explored to reduce the impact of potentially harmful behaviour. Data found on inspection highlights that missing from care episodes are monitored and children and young people are unlikely to go missing on a regular basis.

The children and young people feel protected from harm and many develop positive relationships with their foster carers and wider family as highlighted in the stability of placements. The agency has a strong focus on safeguarding. The supervision of foster carers is often fortnightly. The agency carries out unannounced visits to the foster carer's/carers' home twice a year and children and young people are spoken to independently of their foster carers.

Children and young people are consulted on all aspects of their care and there are many avenues available to them to express their views and opinions in a safe way.

Staff and panel members' recruitment is thorough and is compliant with safe recruitment policies and procedure. The quality of panel training was reviewed on

inspection and covered serious case reviews, independent reviewing mechanisms, prospective foster carer assessments and the impact on fostering for birth children. It was also evident that the panel had received a comprehensive overview of the agency's theoretical model of practice, which further enhances safe care when reviewing practices and outcomes.

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

Leaders and managers provide a team approach that is highly valued throughout the service. The ethos is totally focused on developing the service continuously to ensure that children and young people receive a service of exceptional quality. The depth of development and innovations that the agency has either identified or implemented since the last inspection is a credit to everyone involved in the agency inclusive of children and young people. The responsible individual, registered manager and the quality standards manager were all new to the service at the last inspection. They all speak with a passion about the 'golden thread', in terms of promoting welfare of children, permanency, safeguarding, well-being and positive outcomes for children and young people.

There is very close collaboration between both aspects of the North East regional offices. This was evident during the inspection, when a Halloween party was held for children and young people and staff from both offices attended and supported fostering families to have a marvellous time. Children and young people often participate in the organisation of such events alongside staff and clearly enjoyed equally the dressing up and games that were played.

The exceptional working practices developed by the manager and the quality standards manager have ensured that the management, supervision and training of independent reviewing officers and panel members are often jointly attended. This develops a mutual understanding of one another's roles and enhances the quality assurance process. The quality standards manager additionally provided a guidance document for the independent reviewing officers to consider in their decision-making process. The intention being to drive up the quality of reviews and recommendations of both the panel and in the quality standards manager's role as the agency decision maker.

The fostering panel is chaired by an experienced former social work practitioner who also has a range of management experience at a senior level. The fostering panel is made up of members from a variety of backgrounds, enhancing decision-making processes from different perspectives. The panel chair empowers panel members to ask their questions, which are supported by questions from children and young people. The panel members receive documentation in good time before meetings. This enables information to be fully evaluated before making decisions. The minutes are thorough and are very well recorded, ensuring that the reasons for decisions are clear and precise.

During inspection, there were a number of monitoring reports shared throughout the service, ensuring that directors are aware of progress and areas for improvement, including financial viability. This helps to provide a comprehensive oversight of the

agency. The registered manager's annual review has been submitted to HMCI and was well written and of a high quality.

The agency's statement of purpose is comprehensive and highly accessible and available on the Team Fostering website. The website is colourful and informative, with access areas available for adults, children and young people. This is an area of strength that has included all involved in the service in its creative development.

The agency works currently within three fostering frameworks across the North East region. It regularly consults with local authorities. Meetings with commissioners also inform recruitment strategies. The commissioning officers commented, in general, that the agency engages well with local authorities and at local forums, as well as being very fair in any negotiations. It is clear that there is respect for the agency and what it provides to local authorities in terms of consistently safe and stable placements with highly trained foster carers.

The staff are well trained and everyone has a clear role and delivers a highly effective service. They receive regular supervision, and managers are always visible as well as senior management and directors. Foster carers were overwhelmingly positive about the service at both regional offices, especially when referring to support for the children and young people and training standards. One foster carer commented, 'Training is brilliant. One of the benefits of being with Team is that all staff are trained as well on the theoretical model of practice. It is an outstanding package of support, very interactive and not just bombarded by power point.'

## **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:** SC033433

**Registered provider:** Team Fostering

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## **Inspector**

Michael Dack: social care inspector



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