

Foster Care Solutions

Foster Care Solutions Limited

8 Lumley Court, Drum Industrial Estate, Chester le Street, County Durham DH2 1AN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Solutions is an independent fostering agency based in County Durham. It is part of the Futures for Children group, whose head office is in Maidstone, Kent.

Foster Care Solutions provides placements on an emergency, respite, short-term and long-term basis, including parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 28 fostering households providing care for 31 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 October 2024

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	good
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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: 7 February 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children live in fostering households that support them to make good progress. Most children experience a sense of stability and belonging. One child scored their carer 'nine out of 10'. Professionals say that since living with their foster carers, children's confidence has improved, and children's behaviours are more settled.

The manager delegates the task of considering if a foster carer can provide a child with the care required, to the agency's social workers. This lack of management oversight has resulted in some children moving in with foster carers who are unable to meet their needs. This has led to some children needing to move to an alternative home which contributes towards children experiencing instability in their care arrangements.

Foster carers support children to develop independence skills. This continues as foster carers maintain contact with the children into adulthood. One foster carer helped a child they had previously cared for to decorate their own flat and invited them to travel on holiday with them. This helps children to feel a sense of belonging and provides them with a wider support network as adults.

All foster carers are offered time away from their fostering role each year. The agency refers to this as 'short breaks' to reduce the stigma associated with the word 'respite'. However, many carers choose to relinquish this right, taking the children on holiday with them instead. This makes children feel part of the family unit.

Children's education needs are well met. All children are in education, employment, or training. Foster carers help children to identify their skills and talents to help them to achieve their potential. If a child feels a further education course is not suitable for them, foster carers support children to identify alternative options. This provides children with greater life opportunities, as well as a sense of control over their life choices.

Children have their voices heard through contributing to the annual reviews. They also contribute towards the development of the agency. For example, children have helped to develop the agency's Children's Charter and formulate questions for the recruitment process. However, the agency does not update children on the outcome of their input, so they do not know if their views have been listened to and had an impact on the development of the agency.

Foster carers and the agency's social workers value the importance of children's relationships with their families. Children receive support to spend time with their families and those important to them. Foster carers and the agency forge positive relationships with children's family members. This provides the opportunity for family members to give feedback about the care children receive and helps children to understand that the carers and the agency care about the child's family.

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

Allegations made regarding foster carers are responded to in a timely manner. Equally, the manager addresses quickly any concerns relating to standards of care. The relevant professionals are notified, and the necessary safeguarding steps are taken. This helps to keep children safe.

Foster carers receive training in attachment and trauma. The agency's social workers also have access to clinical supervisions, if they feel a foster carer requires additional guidance. This enables foster carers to use therapeutic approaches to support children when they are upset, and to implement strategies to keep children and others safe from harm.

Children rarely go missing from home. There have been three occasions when children have gone missing. The agency has a policy in place to support foster carers should this happen. This helps children to be located quickly.

Foster carers speak positively about the level of support they receive from the agency's social workers. This includes access to support outside of the agency's core working hours. Support groups are available for those who are new to fostering. These creatively help carers to complete their required training. Furthermore, the agency holds a support group called 'Men Who Foster', which is valued by those who attend.

The process for the assessment of prospective foster carers is thorough. The assessments are of a good quality. They are analysed and evaluated by the quality assurance process that is undertaken by the fostering panel. This helps to ensure that foster carers are appropriately assessed and that only those who are suitable are approved to become foster carers.

The fostering panel is thorough in its discussions, which are well documented. The agency decision-maker has suitable knowledge and experience for the role. The panel process helps with the safe recruitment of applicants to foster and ensures that most approved foster carers provide the right level of care to the children.

Agency staff and foster carers know and understand the risks to each child. However, not all children's known risks and vulnerabilities are consistently recorded in children's risk assessments and safer caring plans. Furthermore, one child does not have a documented risk assessment. This prevents foster carers from having a document they can refer to for support. This also prevents the manager from holding individuals to account who do not act in line with these documents.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager provides a supportive environment for the staff and the foster families. She is ambitious and understands the areas that could be

strengthened. She is keen to further develop and implement the therapeutic approach across the agency. A dedicated team of social workers and administrative staff show a strong commitment to the children and foster carers.

Foster carers and staff receive regular supervision sessions. The children are at the centre of these discussions. However, records of these sessions do not consistently reflect how the agency's social workers challenge foster carers about their practice, such as when recording does not meet the standards set out in the agency's policies. In addition, staff supervision records do not consistently reflect if tasks from a previous supervision session have been suitably addressed. These shortfalls prevent the manager from holding the supervisor and the supervisee accountable.

Team meetings are well attended by the staff and manager. Detailed discussions held about each fostering household allows the staff to have a good understanding about each child who is cared for by the agency.

Monitoring and auditing processes are available to assist the manager in ensuring that the agency's policies and procedures are followed. However, these systems are not consistently effective.

Not all foster carers and agency social workers document their decision-making, discussions, and actions about the child's journey well. Records are inconsistent in their detail, in their use of caring language and in capturing significant events. This prevents the manager from being assured that foster carers and agency social workers are consistently making safe and effective decisions. It also prevents children from having a clear picture of their time living with their foster carer if they choose to look at their records as adults. However, foster carers and their supervising social worker are in regular contact to discuss the children in their care. This helps the agency social workers to complete monthly reports that evaluate the children's progress and safety.

The manager does not have an effective system to ensure that a child's local authority social worker provides important documents in a timely manner. This is partly due to the escalation policy being interpreted differently by staff, and not consistently followed. This has resulted in unnecessary delay, which prevents foster carers from accessing essential information that may help them to keep a child safer, well, and to help them to plan for their future.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and</p> <p>before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given. (Regulation 11 (a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must consider National Minimum Standards 11.2, 15.1 and 15.2</p>	1 December 2024

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. Where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority, the registered person should develop an effective escalation policy referring to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 when contacting the placing authority. If necessary, escalate the matter to the Director of Children's Services. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)
- The registered provider should ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy. There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)
- The registered provider should ensure that records, entries, decisions and reasons are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. Information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read

their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5 and 26.6)

- The registered provider should ensure that the management of the service ensures all staff's work, and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.3)

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: SC413428

Registered provider: Foster Care Solutions Limited

Registered provider address: Futures for Children, The Masters House, College Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6YQ

Responsible individual: Nicholas Barnsby

Registered manager: Kelly Vasvary

Telephone number: 0191 4250095

Email address: nickbarnsby@futures-for-children.org

Inspectors

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector
Shirin Khan, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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