

Team Fostering

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Unit 3 & 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 a not-for-profit independent fostering agency. This inspection was conducted at the Sheffield office, which covers the Yorkshire and East Midlands regions. The agency provides short-term, emergency, long-term, and permanent fostering homes. As an agency, it also offers placements for children with specific care needs, including unaccompanied children seeking sanctuary, parent and child placements, and homes for disabled children with additional needs.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 60 approved fostering households and 68 children placed with foster carers. The agency has 17 young people living with foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. This is an arrangement that enables care leavers to remain living with their foster carers when they turn 18.

The manager registered with Ofsted in March 2024.

Inspection dates: 27 to 31 January 2025

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: 7 March 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

There is careful consideration and planning by the agency before a child is welcomed into a new foster family. This supports children to move in with carers who can meet their needs. The dedicated foster carers know the children well. Children are treated as part of the family and made to feel included. As a result, children develop trusting relationships with foster carers and make good progress in their stable and secure fostering families.

Prospective foster carers receive a warm, welcoming response when they contact the agency. The agency keeps its recruitment activity under review and has developed a new recruitment strategy. This has resulted in an increase in enquiries to the agency and subsequently new foster carers have been recruited.

Children have access to good primary and specialist healthcare services. Placement stability for children is supported through carers having access to clinical support. In addition, the agency's family support service works alongside carers to provide them with support in meeting a child's needs. Foster carers can access specialist psychological services that support them and the children. They can be given strategies and assistance to ensure that children make progress with their emotional needs.

Most children are engaging in education. Foster carers and staff communicate effectively with education professionals to ensure that children achieve good outcomes. Children's hard work is celebrated and rewarded, no matter how small the achievement. Barriers to children's educational progress are discussed with education providers to seek suitable resolutions. A dedicated educational support team supports foster carers to ensure that children get the right education. This is a strength of the agency.

In the main, managers consult with foster carers and children, and their views help to influence service development. Children spoken to expressed that they feel appreciated and that their views are considered. For example, they are involved in interviewing staff and involved in organising activities. Children have opportunities to meet and make friends. This helps children to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Children are supported to develop their life skills. This prepares them well for their future. Plans to support children into adulthood are thoughtful and consider children's wishes. Some children have remained with carers until they reach adulthood. This means that older children can maintain relationships with foster carers, who can continue to support them through the transition to adulthood.

Children benefit from living with foster carers who feel supported and committed to meeting their needs. Most foster carers spoken to, together with written testimonies, are extremely positive about the personal support and accessibility of staff and management. They benefit from various support groups and events running throughout the year. One foster carer said, 'We feel valued by the agency and like that we are important to them. Management has always been proactive, involved and supportive of us.'

The agency supports children from diverse backgrounds. Children's cultural and identity needs are met by their foster carers. They are either from the same culture or are proactive in increasing their own knowledge and awareness of specific cultures. However, not all children who are non-English speaking, are appropriately supported to actively participate in fully understanding decisions about their lives.

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

Foster carers' assessment, recruitment, supervision, and training emphasise the importance of safeguarding and building safe environments for children. The fostering agency works to protect children from harm and abuse. Foster carers understand the risks for children and agree safety plans with children's social workers, fostering staff and safeguarding agencies. Children know that they can speak to foster carers if they have any worries or concerns, which contributes to a feeling of safety and security.

Any safeguarding concerns are promptly reported. Where appropriate, concerns are shared with safeguarding partners. Managers and staff reflect on the action taken to ensure that strategies to reduce harm to children remain effective. The registered manager has good oversight of safeguarding incidents.

Children rarely go missing from their fostering families. When this does happen, foster carers notify all the relevant professionals and follow the child's missing-from-home protocol to ensure the child's safe return home.

Foster carers are supported well through high levels of supervision from their agency social worker. The foster carers said that they benefit from the stability of the staff, and the widespread support that is offered from all levels of management in the agency. The fostering agency staff undertake two unannounced visits to foster homes in a year, as well as completing annual health and safety checks. This ensures that foster carers' homes are safe and secure.

Suitable recruitment and vetting of staff and foster carers minimise the opportunities for unsafe adults to expose children to risk. When there are concerns about a foster carer's conduct, the fostering service responds promptly to safeguard children.

Risk assessments are completed and reviewed regularly. However, a small number of risk assessments reviewed do not accurately show the level of risks in other documents. The manager recognises this shortfall and started to address this during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership and management of this agency is strong. There has been a change of manager since the last inspection. A new responsible individual and a new manager have implemented a series of positive changes and developments. The leadership team is instilling a learning culture and continually completing learning reviews to improve practice.

Leaders and managers are experienced and knowledgeable. They have clear aspirations for children and recognise what the children need to achieve the best outcomes. A strength of the agency is the consistency and stability of the staff team and foster carers. Foster carers said that they benefit from the family feel of the agency.

The fostering agency staff describe leaders and managers as visible and approachable. Fostering staff feel supported and listened to by leaders and managers. They benefit from regular team meetings, supervision, and peer support sessions to help them in their role.

The fostering service's preparation, support and training of foster carers is effective. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of the children. Foster carers are skilled in meeting children's identified needs. They receive a good range of training that helps them to provide safe, personalised care to children.

The agency's processes for foster carer visits, supervision and review are effective. Annual reviews of foster carers offer a clear and robust process for the appraisal of carers' performance over the year and a measure of ongoing suitability. The reviewing officer for foster carers is clear regarding their role to ensure that plans for children in foster care can be achieved.

The fostering agency's fostering panel is effective. The panel membership has improved to include people from diverse backgrounds. The consideration of reports is robust, and the fostering panel challenges the agency where appropriate.

Overall, the agency works well with other professionals including the commissioners. However, this is an area that could be strengthened to ensure that challenge is more robust in all instances. The leadership team accepts shortfalls identified during this inspection and has started to take steps to address them.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. Specifically, that risk assessments contain accurate information regarding the child's specific needs and vulnerabilities and clear strategies for the foster carers to follow. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.5)

- The registered person should ensure that they take action to address any issues of concern that they identify, or which are raised with them. In particular, they should ensure that concerns are escalated to the respective local authority. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 25.8)

- The registered person should ensure that the service has the facilities to work with children with communication difficulties or for whom English is not their first language. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.12)

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: SC060698

Registered provider: Team Fostering

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Evelyn Chafota, Social Care Inspector

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