

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 emergency, short-term, long-term, and short-break placements, including parent and child placements.

The branch has 74 approved fostering families. At the time of the on-site visit, the Yorkshire and East Midlands branch provided services to 94 children and young people. The agency has nine young people 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 December 2020.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 March 2022

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: 26 February 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Good matching of children with their fostering families provides children with stability and consistent care. This enhances children's day-to-day experiences, helping them to settle with their foster families. There are very few placement breakdowns. The agency supports a learning culture. They review and reflect on practice to improve outcomes for the children. A child said:

'Team Fostering makes you feel like you are involved and a part of something. It is by far the best fostering agency. I have been in other foster placements, but this is the best. The agency celebrates individuals and their achievements. There is so much support and activities for children to get involved with. I feel like I belong to something good.'

Children are supported to make good and, in some cases, excellent progress in their health and education. The agency's education and support service helps children and their foster families on a daily basis. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the full national lockdowns when they arranged and attended meetings in schools to address any areas of concern, or in establishing additional support required at home. They provided educational materials and targeted support to address bespoke issues such as bullying. They also involved the children in volunteering experiences and residential weekends, and empowered the children to actively review the agency's children's guides and welcome packs to make these more inclusive. Children meet throughout the year and take part in the agency's 'Life skills group' and 'Project listen group'. This supports the children to gain confidence, develop their self-esteem and improve their emotional well-being alongside their peers and supportive adults.

The agency benefits from case consultations with a clinical psychologist. The psychologist provides support to the fostering families so that the fostering families can gain a greater understanding of the children's trauma and behavioural responses. This support upskills the carers and staff so that they can support the children to recover from their past experiences through therapeutic parenting.

Participation of staff, carers and children is very good. The agency continually reviews the ways it can improve the participation and the outcomes for their fostering families. Feedback from a wide range of carers is highly positive about the agency and the support that they provide to fostering families. A carer said:

'They genuinely care about us and the children. I have no regrets joining the agency. They are fantastic. We feel so included. From the very top in senior managers, they get to know the carers and the children. We do not feel like another number, but feel valued and appreciated for the role that we play.'

The agency supports children to have well-planned family time. However, this is not consistent. For example, one child recently placed with new carers did not have an agreed family time plan with the local authority and the agency. This means that the carers were not able to effectively support the child. This potentially leaves children unsettled and emotionally at harm.

Children in the main make good progress and the agency, carers and children celebrate together. However, the current system in place to enable progress to be recorded and tracked is not always analytical or evaluated. This limits its effectiveness as a monitoring tool, and does not help the children to see the progress that they have made.

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

Children's risks are known and understood by the agency and the carers. Individual risk assessments for children are regularly reviewed and updated. They are clear and uncomplicated. The foster family safer care plans are significant in uniqueness to the setting. This ensures that they are individualised to children and their carers, with the emphasis on respect, boundaries and expectations for all.

Children are better protected because of the care and support that they receive from their nurturing carers. Carers are suitably trained to help them to keep the children increasingly safe. A child said:

'They saved my life! You really could not ask for better carers than them. [Name of carer] was the one who was there for me to open up. He was there to comfort me and to reassure me that he is there when I was ready to speak.'

Incidents of children going missing-from-care are rare. On occasions when the children are missing from care, the carers and the agency follow the child's missing-from-care protocol to aid with the child's safe return. The agency reports all incidents to the child's placing local authority and to the police. They ensure that the children can speak to an independent adult on their return home. This helps to improve and update children's safety plans. Children are better protected because their carers have clear guidance on how to reduce children's risks in this area.

Carers receive suitable training and know how to manage children's behaviour appropriately. Children receive support from their carers, who have the skills to recognise and respond to their needs, particularly when children are in crisis. On the rare occasions that children require their carers to physically hold them, this is done to protect the child's safety and welfare. The agency has clear guidance for carers to follow, which includes reporting the matter to the agency. The relevant professionals are notified. Children become increasingly safer because of the training that staff and carers receive in behaviour management and the managers review of this practice.

The agency regularly reviews the carers' practice to ensure that it is safe, and that it promotes the welfare of the children. A fostering panel considers a range of relevant information to make a recommendation regarding the terms and conditions for the approval of foster carers. The agency decision maker's deliberations of the panel business are appraised and documented. However, the agency's documents do not provide a clear timeline of when panel minutes are finalised and when they are then passed to the agency decision maker for a decision. The inspectors were unable to identify how decisions regarding the approval of carers are made in a timely manner.

The agency has an effective system to complete background checks for both carers and staff. Suitable checks are completed and verified. Safe recruitment of staff ensures that only suitable individuals work in the agency to support its functions of delivering care and support to improve children's outcomes.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is experienced and suitably qualified for the role. She has a clear vision for the service and a focus on a learning environment. This vision is shared by an effective leadership team. They show a commitment throughout the agency to providing a child-focused service. This has helped to maintain and enhance relationships with the children, their carers and a range of professionals. This has been very apparent during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic through positive and proactive communication between all parties.

Regular team meetings provide opportunities for leaders and managers to share the agency's business ideas and developments with the staff. There is a clear agenda set. A recap on tasks actioned from the previous meeting ensures that the organisation does not delay plans and developments. Safeguarding matters are discussed in line with all areas of practice, including recruitment of staff and carers. Reflective discussions in team meetings provide a consistent approach to how the agency supports foster families and improves outcomes for children.

The manager and the leadership team understand the agency's strengths and areas that need to improve. They take decisive action and create a positive learning culture in the agency. The manager and her team have taken positive steps in reviewing training, group supervision, support groups for carers, in particular accessible training, and the resources available for all their carers in equality and diversity. This has been evident in supporting fostering families from diverse cultures and in meeting the diverse needs of children placed. However, there is a shortfall in the ethnic diversity of the foster panel membership. This limits its overall competence in making informed recommendations to support children from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

The manager and her team have been proactive in developing an escalation process. This ensures that the children's documentation is received from the child's placing local authority quickly. The manager also promptly requests that the appropriate meetings are held to consider the children's education and health needs when

required. This ongoing improvement process will support the service to continue to meet the children's needs.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the ethnic diversity of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 31, 14.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has a clear audit system in place to reflect how the provider's decision maker makes a considered decision in seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 31, 14.9)
- The registered person should ensure that any information about a 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. In particular, when recording and evaluating the progress that the children make. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that their foster carers are supported to explain the child's care plan, and any changes to those plans, to the child. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 60, 31.5)

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

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Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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