

# 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 and Papplewick.

At the time of the on-site visit, the North East branch provided service to 105 children. Fifty-one children are placed long-term and 54 short-term. The branch also provides 12 'staying put' arrangements. These are arrangements that enable young people over the age of 18 years to remain living with their foster carers. The branch has 80 approved fostering families. The agency provides short-term, long-term and short-break placements, including parent and child placements and placements for children with complex needs.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 29 April 2016.

### Inspection dates: 30 January to 3 February 2023

**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:** 29 October 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Most children develop a sense of permanence in stable and secure fostering families. Children are carefully matched with foster carers who have the necessary skills and qualities to meet their needs. The agency has a high percentage of children settled in long-term fostering family placements, which provide them with the stability that supports them to make progress.

There is a clear process in place for assessments of prospective foster carers. They are undertaken in a timely way. Assessments are of a high quality, and carers' strengths as well as vulnerabilities are appropriately explored and evaluated. New foster carers spoke positively about the in-depth process, the quality of the assessor and the thoroughness of the quality assurance process followed by the agency's fostering panel. This helps to ensure that foster carers are appropriately assessed for children.

Children are embraced into their fostering families. The agency works well with the children's social workers. This ensures that a sensitive, careful and well-planned approach is followed to support the child's move into the foster carer's home. Children and their social workers receive the foster families' child-centred profile. The social workers receive an additional detailed version that highlights the skills of the foster carers, as well as a short synopsis of their experience and background. This allows all parties to have a balanced picture and be able to make an informed choice.

Effective professional relationships between foster carers, supervising social workers, children's social workers and other members of the children's care team ensure that the children receive good-quality care. The agency is proactive. Its staff address any issues as they arise, and they ensure that support is readily available. Foster carers were complimentary about the support that they receive and confirmed that there was always someone available to help from the agency.

Children take part in a range of activities. These include seasonal parties at Christmas, Easter and Halloween. These events continued to be held during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were held in person, but virtually when restrictions were in place. Children and their fostering families have also attended pantomimes and visited theme parks. Children from the agency's consultation groups 'Teamies' and 'Team Fantastic' spoke about how the team-building activities that they do, including canoeing and archery, help them with building their confidence and self-esteem.

Foster carers and the supervising social workers value the accessibility and experience that is provided by the clinical psychologist. The provision of monthly sessions and online resources, inclusive of webinars and one-to-one consultations with foster carers, is a real strength of the agency. Foster carers spoken with used comments such as 'he relates to us', 'he speaks in layman's terms' and 'he is very thought provoking'. This represented their positive views on the consultations

provided and on the webinars available to foster carers and the staff. As a result, the children are provided with care from a skilled and a professionally informed workforce.

Children are supported to make good progress in their health and education. Foster carers spoke about the additional support that they were provided with during the COVID lockdown periods. They referred to online activities, quizzes, and educational and enjoyable resources for the children. A foster carer described the support as being above and beyond. One example provided was how a member of the agency took turns with the foster carers to stay with a child every day at school. Another foster carer spoke about the tenacity of the member of staff acting as an advocate for the child that made the difference. As a result, the child in question moved school and is doing well.

The progress that children make in terms of their health, well-being and education is monitored via an electronic tracker system. However, this system is not being used effectively. There is evidence of one child's report being 'copied and pasted' into another child's report, and progress cannot always be evaluated as targets are not clearly set. This is not helpful to enable the children, or the care team, to see how progress has been achieved in line with the child's set targets.

Children's cultural and identity needs are met by their foster carers. They are either of the same culture or are proactive in increasing their own knowledge and awareness of specific cultures. The tenacity and passion shown by foster carers enable the children to enjoy and understand many aspects of their culture. However, the role of the agency in supporting the foster carers is not always clear. There is minimal priority given to culture and identity in some children's placement meetings, children's risk assessments and the agency progress tracker. This means the agency cannot be assured that what they are doing is effective.

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

The children spoken to say that they feel safe. Fostering families welcome the children into their homes. Foster carers receive training in recognising and understanding childhood trauma. This supportive and therapeutic approach helps the children to settle and make progress from their starting points.

Individual safe care policies provide the foster carer and the children with guidance and expectations on how to keep safe in the home. Foster carers understand their safeguarding responsibilities. As a result, they consistently ensure that the safeguarding procedures are followed. This promotes the children's overall safe care and well-being.

Foster carers ensure that the safety and welfare of the children living with them is their priority. When allegations or complaints are made against foster carers, they are immediately investigated by the agency and appropriate action taken. However, one example was not recorded and tracked on the manager's log. The lack of an effective system in place for tracking allegations means that the manager cannot be

assured that she has the appropriate oversight of each stage of the investigation or of the outcomes for the children.

Children's risk assessments are completed when they are first placed with their fostering families. However, they do not routinely evaluate the known and competing risks and vulnerabilities of the children already living in the fostering families' home. When new risks emerge, these documents are not consistently updated to reflect the changes that children make. One example risk assessment reviewed by inspectors had been updated; however, no changes had been recorded in over four years. This does not reflect the children's changing needs. Furthermore, it does not identify how the child will be supported to be kept safe as there are no clear and up-to-date strategies when risk management is required.

When children go missing from their fostering families' homes, the agency's missing-from-home policies are followed. The agency keeps a suitable missing-from-home log. When children return, return home interviews are undertaken. However, when the agency does not receive any feedback from these meetings, this is not challenged. Therefore, the agency cannot be assured that it is aware of all known risks. This limits the effectiveness of any agreed strategies in place to safeguard children from the potential risk of harm while they are missing from home.

Safer recruitment processes are followed when foster carers and applicants are being assessed. This provides assurance that they are suitably vetted to provide care for children.

There is a clear monitoring and reviewing system in place that ensures the ongoing safety and well-being of children. There are regular reviews of the foster carers' health and safety checks, such as the Disclosure and Barring Service and medical checks, and at least yearly unannounced visits to the foster carers' homes. This provides the children with regular opportunities to express their views without their foster carers being present. As a result, children are increasingly safer.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the service. The registered manager is enthusiastic about her role, and she is committed to improving practice with a continual focus on the children.

The fostering panel is chaired by an experienced former social work practitioner who has held a range of senior management positions in local authority social work settings. The fostering panel membership is made up of a diverse group of experienced former and current practitioners from a range of professional backgrounds. The minutes from this panel reflect the effectiveness and efficiency of the quality assurance process undertaken. The role of this highly effective panel ensures that the children are safeguarded.

The management oversight and the management footprint have in some cases shown an inconsistent approach to the quality assurance process. There is a lack of

curiosity and routine sampling of case records to assess their quality and effectiveness, such as the supervision records of foster carers. This means that they are relying on the personal assessment provided by the supervising social worker in supervision sessions rather than the quality of the documents themselves.

Foster carers value the support and supervision that they receive from their supervising social worker. The opportunity to reflect on their practice is welcomed and embraced. However, some records lack detail and quality. They do not show that the supervising social worker has assured themselves that the foster carers are meeting the children's needs, and that they have considered the children's wishes and feelings. Additionally, the foster carer's performance is not always evaluated.

The foster carers are provided with a wealth of training available from the agency. They have completed all of the agency's mandatory training, and they are clear about their expectations to continually develop in order to meet the often complex and changing needs of the children. The agency supports this with signposting to additional training for foster carers to meet the specific individual needs of the children.

Foster carers enjoy the additional support that is generated from the foster carer support groups. The agency encourages their attendance and promotes the value of peer support and opportunities to learn together. This is also a valuable opportunity for foster carers to share their experience and skills.

The quality of the foster carers' records is not of a consistently good standard. While some records are of good quality and evaluative, others are brief and lack detail. Therefore, a consistent approach to ensuring that the child's journey is captured is not being fulfilled. This is not helpful for the children who want to access these records as part of their childhood memories.

Feedback from the agency's employees and, in particular, the supervising social workers is extremely positive. They express that they value the reflective and regular supervision sessions that they receive. However, this is not always documented in the foster families' and children's case files, which means the management team has not followed the agency's supervision policy. This management oversight does not enable the management team to be assured that any agreed actions from the supervision sessions have been addressed.

There is a lack of key documents in some children's case files. This means that the foster carers do not have all the necessary information to provide consistent care. Some records are missing, some are out of date and there is a lack of consistency in the staff's approach to requesting these documents from the children's placing local authority.

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

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) 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. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>In particular, the registered provider must ensure that the staff understand their responsibilities in ensuring that individual up-to-date risk assessments address any known vulnerabilities for each child effectively and set out what action the foster carers should take to address the risks.</p>	<p>17 March 2023</p>

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 2.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection. In particular, to ensure that the lack of sharing of information from respective local authorities following a child's return home interview from any missing-from-care episode is challenged. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.7)
- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer. Meetings should have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, considering the child's wishes and feelings, and offer a review of the carer's performance. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken, and decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.7)

- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff. The content of supervision should effectively and consistently record discussions that support case management. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 24.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- 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 there is a consistent approach to accessing children's documentation from the respective local authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.8)
- The registered person should ensure that entries in records, decisions, and reasons for them, are clearly expressed. In particular, ensure that children's experiences are recorded to a consistently good quality, and are reflective and helpful to a child who may wish to access them as a record of their life story. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that information about a child is recorded clearly and in a way that will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. In particular, ensure that when tracking children's progress there is a clear evaluation of the progress that children make from their starting points. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

## **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:** SC033433

**Registered provider:** Team Fostering

**Registered provider address:** 6 Hedley Court, Orion Business Park, North Shields, Tyne and Wear NE29 7ST

**Responsible individual:** Kathryn Hayes

**Registered manager:** Rachael Johnson

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## **Inspectors**

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector  
Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector



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