

Fostering People Ltd

Fostering People Limited

Suite D, The Point, Welbeck Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7QW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency registered with Ofsted in 2003. It is owned by a private company. The agency provides a range of placements, including short- and long-term, parent and child, remand and emergency. The agency also provides services for disabled children, placements within a Mockingbird constellation and placements for children moving from residential care to foster care. There are currently 344 approved fostering households and 469 children placed with the agency.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 June 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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: 28 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are enabled to build positive and trusting relationships with their foster parents, who know them well. Children are supported in stable foster placements with foster parents who provide children with consistent care that promotes their welfare. Foster parents are so skilled that they can support children through the most difficult times and come through having developed stronger relationships. We have seen examples where foster parents have changed children's lives.

Foster parents are knowledgeable, compassionate, highly motivated and absolutely dedicated to the children they care for. We have spoken with and heard about foster parents who go above and beyond to ensure they know and meet children's needs and that children feel safe. Children can be children again. They are supported to grow in confidence, develop their interests and have enjoyable and exciting experiences. Foster parents take on challenges in their stride and are not fazed by the multiple demands of their role. Their ability to absorb children's emotions, respond to their behaviours, cope with distress and provide comfort is outstanding.

Children make fantastic progress. They have a sense of belonging with their foster parents as they are members of the family. Children are able to make progress in their own unique ways. They are supported to stay with foster parents post-18 with great success. We have seen many examples where children remain in contact with foster parents after they have left home. They become part of the extended family. They continue to be loved and cared for into adulthood. Children's life chances are significantly enhanced because of this.

Foster parents and staff proactively seek children's views. It is very clear that children are listened to. Children's social workers say that children have a better quality of life as a result of experiencing family life, pets, activities of their choice, holidays, hobbies and interests.

Diversity is celebrated and children are supported to understand their identities and their backgrounds. Children are able to integrate their heritage into their daily lives in ways that they choose and request. The agency and foster parents get the balance right in promoting identity and listening to children and families.

Foster parents work proactively with the team around the child to understand children's preferred ways of communication. They develop these to help children express themselves.

The agency and foster parents are confident in and committed to caring for children from larger families. This is valuable because it means that children can live with their brothers and sisters. The foster parents understand the importance of this for children and they work incredibly hard to ensure that siblings stay together. The use of the Mockingbird model has also enabled some children to become part of a

'fostering extended family'. This has helped to support stable placements and has helped children to feel a sense of belonging and make good friends.

Children are in very good health. There are a number of children with complex physical, emotional and mental health needs. Some children have ongoing conditions, and some health needs have been identified as a result of improved health monitoring. Foster parents have made an exceptional contribution to meeting those needs. For example, one very young baby was given emergency first aid and the social worker said that the response of the carer saved the baby's life. Other foster parents have undertaken extensive specialist training to ensure the children's quality of life. Foster parents work closely with other professionals to meet children's complex needs.

Children are well supported in their education. They are making very good progress considering their starting points. Foster parents and the agency value and promote education. Foster parents understand that children cannot learn effectively without considerable emotional support, and this is provided in abundance. Progress, however small, is acknowledged and reinforced, which helps children to build confidence so that they are motivated to learn and experience new activities. Children's achievements are celebrated by all in the organisation.

A dedicated referral team ensures that all referrals are reviewed and considered in a timely way. A robust matching process ensures that consideration is given to the needs of the children and the skills, experience and preferences of the foster parents. The agency ensures that key information is shared with foster parents prior to matching and that further information is followed up in post-placement meetings. This means that foster parents have the information they need to care for children.

The ongoing support provided for foster parents ensures that each placement match is given the best possible chance to succeed. Careful matching and consistent support mean that placements are successful overall. There are a relatively low number of unplanned endings, given the size of the service. In many instances, foster parents have said that they have been able to continue to care for children in the most difficult circumstances due to the amazing support they receive from the agency.

One social worker reported:

'All four children have made amazing progress in all areas, the foster parents are true representatives of the agency, they take everything in their stride and have gone all out for the children. Communication has been brilliant, they do what they say they are going to do, they deliver above and beyond what is expected.'

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

Children are safe. They have trusted relationships with their foster parents. They have adults who they can talk to and who are reliable.

Foster parents, with support from the agency, promote children's positive behaviours. Therapeutic parenting (PACE) is evident in foster parents' language and behaviour. It is instinctive for some of the more established foster parents. They use this effectively to help children manage their emotions and, over time, children learn to express themselves in healthier ways. There is an example where foster parents have supported a child through acute periods of emotional distress and kept her safe over a long period. Their care is commendable.

Foster parents understand the risks of exploitation well. There are examples where they have been able to reduce risk for children very effectively. This has had a significant impact on children's lives.

A social worker reported about a child at risk of going missing from care and of criminal exploitation: 'Risks for this child have reduced significantly since he has lived with the foster parents. The placement is stable, which again is significant progress for this child.'

The agency takes swift and effective action where children with a range of vulnerabilities are at increased risk of harm. Leaders and managers involve the appropriate agencies and professionals promptly.

Robust internal investigations take place where needed and reports have essential detail. Leaders and managers have excellent oversight of the children who are at most risk of harm. This includes children who may go missing from care, those who may use self-harming behaviours, and children who are vulnerable to sexual and criminal exploitation. Leaders and managers meet regularly to review children's information, to understand the level of risk and to identify where new courses of action are required. The agency keeps children safe through careful monitoring and learning from incidents. The outcomes for these children are tracked.

Where there are concerns about foster parents, for example allegations of harm, managers respond quickly and effectively. They follow procedures, including reporting concerns to the responsible social worker and relevant local authority designated officer. Children's safety and well-being are at the centre of their decision-making. When the need arises, the panel process is used to consider and determine whether foster parents are safe to continue in their roles. This prevents children from being cared for by unsuitable adults.

The recruitment, assessment and training of foster parents are focused on keeping children safe and ensuring that foster parents have the necessary skills to meet children's needs. The agency exceeds the required level of unannounced visits to speak with foster parents and children. All areas of care are monitored closely. Children are observed and communicated with regularly and they have very good relationships with supervising social workers. This means that the supervising social workers know children exceptionally well.

Leaders and managers have established an excellent learning culture regarding contextual safeguarding and online safety. They understand how important this is for children's safety and recognise that they need to be forward-thinking to be ready for and respond to emerging risks and changes in practice. Leaders and managers have developed a range of excellent resources that are shared with prospective and approved foster parents. They keep abreast of research in practice and government guidance, which is used in learning and development events with staff and foster parents.

Leaders and managers understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. There are robust arrangements in place to ensure the safe recruitment of staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The manager is registered and has relevant qualifications and experience. This is a large agency and it is impressive that the manager knows the children, foster parents and staff so well.

Leaders and managers are motivated, confident and ambitious for children. They work closely with the social work teams and foster parents alike. They apply family values across the organisation. Their knowledge of the children is exceptional, and they have excellent oversight of children's progress. There are examples of innovative practice, such as establishing the Mockingbird model successfully. The agency is one of only three fostering agencies to have achieved this.

The culture of the agency is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children. The whole organisation is united by these values, which do not waver even when making the most difficult decisions for children. This means that children are always at the centre of their practice.

In every part of the service we have liaised with, the commitment to advocating for and consulting with children and young people jumps out. This underpins the service.

The fostering panel has an experienced chair and vice-chairs. Panel members bring a wide range of skills and knowledge and are representative. There are systems in place to ensure feedback to the panel chair, panel members, foster parents, assessors and staff following every fostering panel. Panels are well planned, well attended and support the quality assurance and safeguarding of foster placements.

Foster parents speak positively about the assessment and subsequent induction processes. They report that they feel supported by staff and other foster parents. Their views are listened to. One example is that the induction of foster parents has been developed as a result of feedback. Foster parents say that they know managers well and they feel valued and appreciated.

The agency commissions independent reviewing officers to undertake annual reviews of foster parents. This includes contributing to the auditing of records and

ensuring compliance with regulations and standards. Reviews take place within timescales and involve liaison with all professionals in the children's lives. They are thorough and the reports are detailed.

All staff are confident and motivated to do their best for children. This is reflected in the feedback from foster parents. Staff enjoy their work. This is evidenced by how long staff remain with the organisation and/or return to the agency. Foster parents and children benefit from the stability of staffing within the agency.

Staff report that they are well supported, feel safe and are listened to. They are positive about the quality of the supervision sessions and appraisals they receive. They benefit from a good range of training and take up specialisms that add value to their skills base. There is a comprehensive training package available to staff. This includes essential courses and courses tailored to children's specific needs.

Managers' oversight and monitoring are real strengths. This is evident from the referral process to the management of serious incidents and everything in between. Leaders and managers drive excellent practice not only in their own agency but also through challenging shortfalls or gaps within multi-agency work. Stability meetings have been particularly effective in maintaining children's placements and preventing children from having to experience changes of placements. Feedback from professionals is consistently positive, particularly regarding the level of commitment from the agency in putting children first.

Thoughtful analysis of data leads to practice improvements and developments, such as:

- work to ensure placements are meeting the needs of disabled children effectively
- work with children with the highest level of needs and risks
- action plans to enhance children's experiences where children may be placed with foster parents who are not a cultural and or identity match
- understanding of unplanned endings and the impact for children
- sustaining placements of brothers and/or sisters
- work to proactively support plans for children to stay with foster parents after age 18.

Foster parents and staff receive training that is underpinned by methodologies such as attachment, understanding of ACE's, PACE and therapeutic parenting. This means that across the service there is an understanding of what good and better-than-good parenting looks like. This supports nurturing care and stable placements.

Where there is a safeguarding concern, multi-agency strategy meetings and team around the child meetings are requested and convened in a timely way. Plans are agreed to mitigate risks and concerns.

Where there have been concerns about the quality of care or safe care, there is a considered and professional response. Meetings with foster parents consider working agreements and/or a return to panel. Foster parents and staff benefit from consultation with a therapist with specialist skills. Leaders are in the process of increasing this service across the regions.

Leaders and managers have high standards and hold partners to account where necessary. There is an escalation process in place that is utilised, for example, if there are delays in information-sharing.

Partnership working is excellent. Partners consulted with speak positively about the skills and commitment of foster parents and staff. Managers report appropriately and are diligent in updating the information shared with placing local authorities and Ofsted.

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

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