

Family Fostering

Family Fostering Limited

G9 Marlowe Innovation Centre, Marlowe Way, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 6FA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was registered in August 2014. It is privately owned and is based in Ramsgate, Kent. At the time of inspection, the agency provided support and supervision to 25 approved foster care households and 39 children in care. The provider states in the agency's statement of purpose its aim to provide safe, nurturing and loving homes to children. The agency provides emergency, respite, short-term and long-term placements.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since August 2014.

Inspection dates: 25 to 29 July 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 25 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children's well-being, security and emotional recovery are at the centre of this small friendly fostering agency. Children thrive and enjoy living with their fostering families. One parent said, 'My children seem happy and full of life and love.'

External professionals are enthusiastic about the child focus of the agency. One child's social worker said she could not envisage a better or more suitable home for her child. The agency staff purposefully build positive and collaborative relationships with external professionals and the key adults who are important in a child's life. This helps to ensure that the children get the resources and help that they need to succeed.

Children receive nurturing care. Many children make excellent progress, specifically in their personal, social and emotional development. For example, one child who had previously struggled to make friends is now a member of his school 'friendship squad', who help children to develop new friendships.

Children experience care that is responsive to their identity and culture. This starts at the initial matching stages and is extended throughout the children's journey with their foster carers.

Foster carers encourage children to lead full and active lives. Children enjoy a wide range of activities. These include social events and holidays with their foster families as well as activities suited to their interests and hobbies. As a result, children's self-confidence and self-esteem increase.

Foster carers support children to maintain and develop their relationships with their families in accordance with their care plans. For example, a foster carer took a video clip of two brothers on their first trip on a plane. This was sent to the supervising social worker who passed it on to the parent of the children. The supervising social worker recognised that this would help alleviate the parent's anxiety.

The managers and supervising social workers encourage foster carers from the start of their fostering journey to build lasting relationships with the children in their care. Many relationships with the children continue into adulthood through 'staying put' arrangements and/or ongoing emotional and practical support. The agency's continuing emphasis on relationships increases the children's sense of stability and provides the children with support and consistency in their early adult life.

Supervising social workers and foster carers understand the important supporting role they play in encouraging the children to reflect on and understand their life stories. Staff are proactive in encouraging foster carers to send photos of the children to the agency. These are collated into beautiful yearly photo books for the children. The pictures are also saved and sent regularly to the children's placing

authority. This means they are available for the children in adult life in the event of their childhood photos being lost.

There is a strong emphasis in the agency on supporting the children to achieve academic success by attending school. Practical measures include providing the children with individual tuition if required and sending personalised letters to recognise children's successes. This encourages children to recognise their strengths and abilities.

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

The staff and the foster carers have good relationships with other professionals. They work together effectively for the benefit of the children. Managers and supervising social workers know and follow procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of children. As a result, there is good coordination of interventions and sharing of information, which ensures good multi-agency partnership working that helps to protect children.

Supervising social workers have small caseloads and have time to build meaningful relationships with children. The trusted relationships that children develop help them to feel safe and to be confident to share any worries they may have.

Managers and the supervising social workers ensure that foster carers provide safe and comfortable homes for children. Supervising social workers carry out unannounced visits at least twice a year. One of these visits is carried out by a different supervising social worker to reduce the risk of complacency. Supervising social workers provide sensitive but honest challenge to the foster carers, ensuring the focus remains on the children's safety.

Fostering households all have up-to-date safer caring plans that set out household rules. The plans contain sensible guidance for the foster carers to follow, so that it is safe for everyone in the family. This is underpinned by detailed risk assessments.

The agency adapts safer care plans into a child-friendly format. This helps children to understand routines and expectations in the fostering family home. As a result, safe care becomes part of everyday life.

Supervising social workers and foster carers understand how to identify and manage risk. Risk assessments address the children's individual needs for protection and supervising social workers keep these up to date. However, risk assessments and safety plans do not consistently contain children's views. This is a missed opportunity to gather the views of children about their perception of presenting risks and their understanding of their vulnerabilities.

Foster carers provide the children with opportunities to take suitable age-appropriate risks to support their personal development. For example, when it is the right time, children are encouraged to walk to school independently.

There is a broad and relevant training programme available for foster carers. The attendance at training and the completion rate are excellent. However, a shortfall was found in relation to some foster carers who are caring for children with histories of problematic sexualised behaviour (PSB), as they have not received specific training. This has the potential to hinder the foster carers in providing safe environments to keep the children and others safe. This was addressed during the inspection and PSB training has been booked to take place imminently.

Children and foster carers have access to specialist help from in-house therapists who follow a trauma and attachment multi-agency model. Children's emotional health and well-being needs are identified early, and the children are provided with therapeutic interventions according to their needs. Consequently, children are able to better manage and express their feelings and emotions.

Recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that a high standard of safer recruitment is maintained. This reduces the risk of unsuitable adults being able to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager and responsible individual are directors of the organisation. They display a tenacious drive in their determination to improve the lives of children. Research-informed practice continues to develop from a strong and confident base, and includes ensuring that all children receive therapeutic life-story work.

Positive energy runs through this agency. The inspirational leaders know the children well. Their overarching aim is to provide the right supportive environment so that the foster carers and staff are equipped to give children the highest quality of care and stable and loving homes.

Foster carers enjoy supportive and professional relationships with the agency. They were unanimous in their praise for the emotional and practical support that they receive from the agency staff. One foster carer said, 'When becoming a foster carer, I knew there would be challenging days ahead of me, but I have never felt alone.' Another foster said, 'all social workers go the extra mile to make sure we are well informed, trained, and happy.'

The managers have developed several systems to capture the children's feedback and develop their understanding of the children's lived experience. This includes seeking feedback from the children after every short stay (which children call sleepovers) and the annual review survey. The registered manager and responsible individual write a personal letter back to each child and respond with what they have done to address any of the children's worries.

The agency's system for capturing 'niggles' is used and responded to effectively with the foster carers and children. This helps prevent low-level worries from developing into more serious problems. There have been two complaints since the last inspection. These were addressed by the managers quickly and appropriately.

The registered manager and responsible individual rigorously scrutinise the quality of care provided, to satisfy themselves that it meets their expectations. The quality assurance systems ensure that children receive care that exceeds good practice. For example, the managers ensure that children have bikes, have the skills to cycle, and that they can swim, in line with the children's age and ability.

Managers hold high expectations of the staff. The process of managing their performance is supportive and effective. Supervising social workers benefit from regular supervision, appraisal and excellent development opportunities. Staff meeting minutes and supervision records capture professional curiosity and demonstrate an open culture among staff and leaders.

The agency fostering panel members provide good safeguarding oversight and quality assurance to the agency. Scrutiny by the panel and the agency decision-maker means that foster carers are only approved if they have the right skills and values to provide safe and caring homes for children.

The learning ethos of this agency means that when things do go wrong, the staff are open to taking forward new learning to inform and improve future practice. Plans to develop the organisation are ambitious and support the agency's continual development.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice, including skills to care for children who may present with problematic sexualised behaviours. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.6)
- The registered person should ensure information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files and plans 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', 26.6)

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: SC477723

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Inspector

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

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