

Match Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number SC442843
Inspection date 23/11/2015
Inspector Hannah Bates
Type of inspection Full
Agency subtype

Setting address Severn House, 30-32 Ombersley Street West, Droitwich,
Worcestershire, WR9 8QZ

Telephone number 07905100337
Email carrie@matchfostercare.co.uk
Registered person Match Foster Care Limited
Registered manager Mrs Carrie Marsh
Responsible individual Mr Simon Marsh
Date of last inspection 22/02/2013

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a small independent fostering agency operated by a private organisation in Droitwich. It provides short and long-term, emergency and respite foster placements for children.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

This service provides good care to children and young people. Children and young people feel safe and are safe. Children and young people rarely go missing and when they do appropriate measures are taken to find them and to try to prevent future reoccurrences. Children and young people make excellent progress. They have access to in-house specialist support through an education worker, a registered nurse, family support workers who deliver life story work, and also psychological services.

Leadership within this agency is outstanding. The registered manager is innovative and committed to the children and young people. She strives to make sure that not only are their needs met, but they are safe. She is committed to improving the progress and experiences of children and young people and uses current research to guide practice and drive progress. The registered manager makes sure that everyone in the agency receives excellent training and which is relevant to children and young people's needs. This means that foster parents provide care which is informed and evidenced based.

Foster placements are stable. Matching is key within this agency to ensuring that children and young people have stable placements. As a result, they thrive within their foster families.

This service places children and young people at the core of everything that they do. They consult imaginatively with children and young people regularly and implement changes that they request wherever possible. Foster parents welcome children and young people warmly into their homes. A young person said: 'I feel loved and cared for'. They care for them and provide stability and nurture. Children and young people feel part of a wider fostering family. Foster parents recognise the importance of birth families and work with them and placing authorities to help children and young people with their identity.

The agency is continuously improving and has made progress since the last inspection. One requirement and recommendation have been raised from this inspection. These both relate to safe recruitment.

Areas of improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service. (Regulation 20 (2)(3))	04/03/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

Ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. (NMS 19.2)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children and young people make exceptional progress in this service. This is because the agency focuses on ensuring children and young people have the best matched foster placement, which in turn means there is very little placement disruption. For example, of the 56 children and young people placed at any point during 2014-15, there were only three unplanned endings. Children and young people are embraced into foster families. Foster parents said: 'Our foster children will be with us until they are adults; they are not going anywhere'. Bespoke and individual support packages help foster parents support their children and young people. Each young person has their own respite foster parents whom they stay with, viewing it as a 'holiday'.

Young people say they feel valued and listened to. A young person said: 'They are great - not being cheeky but they put the children first before anything else. That's their main priority.' The service has set up a children's council and the young people have helped to re-design the children and young people's guide. These young people have requested that their foster carers are referred to as foster parents. As a result of this request, the agency has amended all of their information to reflect this request. The children's council helps to recruit prospective foster parents, not only interviewing them, but also visiting them at their homes, to make sure that they are able to welcome a child into their home.

Young people feel empowered to speak out and share their experiences, encouraged by foster parents and social workers. They have taken part in a national advisory conference and spoken about their experiences of being a looked after child in foster care. One said 'I told them I wanted less people in my life with help from somebody who actually knows and understands what I actually need.' This is one area where the agency demonstrates its outstanding practice: currently trialling new methods of advocacy along with a large national charitable advocacy organisation. Foster parents are also strong advocates. They actively chase placing authorities for documents and decisions. They welcome children and young people into their families, and also give them the help they need to stay part of their birth families, supporting them with visits, meetings and communication. A young person said: 'I only found out I was moving to this placement the day before – everyone knew before me and I didn't get to say goodbye to my brother. I was upset when I first arrived and scared but my foster parents said this could be my home. My foster parents help me with my problems – I trust them and they support me'.

The agency recognises and respects the importance of young people's identity. They try to place young people with siblings wherever possible. They support young people to return home to birth parents where appropriate. The care provided to children and young people takes account of all of their needs, which in turn supports their overall well-being and outcomes.

Children and young people make exceptional progress across all areas of their development. The agency has established outstanding practice in supporting children's health, education and well-being, through employment of specialist staff. The education worker works directly with schools, as well as monitoring progress, ensuring that every child and young person reaches their full potential. She supports young people with strategies to concentrate with exams. She works directly with foster parents, helping them with strategies to support education at home, reading and learning informally. The registered nurse promotes children and young people's health: she monitors individual children and young people, provides direct work on sexual health, and works with foster parents about specific health needs.

Children and young people's risk taking behaviours decrease. They have access to specialist psychological services, such as counselling, as well as life story work. Young people start to work through traumatic past experiences which enables them to start to settle in their foster placements. The service has recently started a 'girls group,' with the focus being on supporting young women to discuss issues such as healthy lives, contraception and healthy relationships. Young women say they have enjoyed this. This range of tailored health, education and emotional input with children and young people is excellent.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The agency provides excellent quality of care to children and young people. Managers recruit foster parents who are able to offer a high level of care; stating that they 'do not accept just anyone' as foster parents. There is a rigorous recruitment process which includes a lengthy initial home visit. The agency uses the 'secure base model' within their assessments of prospective foster parents. They do not approve foster parents with specific numbers of children and young people that they can foster at any one time; instead they are approved as 'fit to foster'. This means that matching is based on the individual needs of children and young people and is child focused.

Approval of foster parents is robust. Panel members carefully consider comprehensive fostering assessments completed by qualified and skilled social workers. Panel members are experienced and diverse. They are carefully selected, although the agency does not consistently ensure that all documents relating to their primary qualifications are held on file. This does not directly impact on children and young people's welfare.

Engagement with foster families is outstanding. Foster families report a level of support that they have not previously experienced with other agencies. The agency's retention of foster parents is high. Foster parents know their supervising social worker and feel supported. A foster parent said: 'There is nothing the agency won't do for you. It's a family run business'. Another foster parent said: 'The agency is supportive and friendly; nothing is too much for them. I am happy with everything

that they have done. They have gone above and beyond'. Supervising social workers provide monthly formal supervisions to their foster parents as well as more frequent informal support. Supervisions provide time for foster parents and supervising social workers to look at implementing training into practice, as well as focusing on any emerging issues. The agency provides activities and clubs for children and young people throughout the holidays. The emphasis is on enabling children and young people to have new experiences and to have fun. Everyone attends an annual ball: an opportunity to enjoy a sumptuous evening of dressing up and celebrating. There is a very strong sense of a fostering community, and being part of something bigger.

Partnership working with placing authorities is another strength of the agency. Regular, informed communication with placing authorities drives collaborative partnership working. They recommend and advise local authorities in respect of any additional support which a child or young person may need and then they put this into place. An independent reviewing officer said: 'The agency included us all in what was going on.'

The agency is innovative in how they care for children and young people. They are currently trialling a Department for Education project, providing all of the social work input to both foster parents and the children and young people. Children and young people say that they welcome this as it means that they see less professionals. The agency are committed to listening and responding to children and young people's requests.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

This service keeps young people safe. Foster parents complete regular safeguarding training, as well as training relating to child sexual exploitation. The registered manager is now introducing training specific to young males who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation. The registered manager and supervising social workers have excellent knowledge of how to keep young people safe. They work in partnership with placing authorities as well as local authority designated officers when any concerns arise. The registered manager ensures that concerns are referred appropriately and that specific support is offered to children and young people, as well as foster parents, where there are any safeguarding concerns.

Children and young people's risk taking behaviours reduce. The registered manager provides foster parents with individual training and support around children and young people's complex needs in order for foster parents to support young people to reduce their risk taking behaviours. Missing incidents are rare and when they do occur, all relevant professionals are informed. Foster parents work proactively and talk to young people to help them reduce any risk taking behaviours. A social worker said; 'Both of the foster parents I have worked with are very professional. They are able to put in boundaries but also maintain relationships. They have made my young

person's life a lot better; their behaviour has improved and whereas they were high risk of child sexual exploitation, this has now reduced'.

The registered manager sees safeguarding as paramount to the well-being of children and young people in her agency. However, the agency has not obtained evidence of full and satisfactory information about some consultants engaged to work directly with children and young people. They have relied on previous checks through the national health service, without verification.

Where needed, the agency provides extra support and training to foster parents to enable them to develop. Supervising social workers make regular unannounced visits to children and young people in placement. They take them out of their placements on day trips and activities which provides children and young people with privacy so they have the opportunity to talk to supervising social workers and family support workers about any concerns they may have. Family support workers work closely with foster parents to enable them to understand the reasons why children and young people display the behaviours that they do. This means that foster parents have a greater understanding of the reasons why children and young people place themselves at risk and how they can prevent this from happening. A young person said: 'I just became a new me. I think it was the agency that helped me. They helped me boost up my confidence more. I feel safe and looked after.'

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Leadership and management of this service is excellent. Managers inspire their team. The registered manager prioritises the well-being and welfare of children and young people and foster parents have a high level of confidence and trust in her leadership. The registered manager is innovative, incorporating research and new government initiatives into the running of the agency, as well as everyday practice of foster parents. She drives and improves experiences and outcomes for children and young people because she listens so closely and is extremely concerned about their happiness and the detail of their daily lives.

Training is outstanding. Both foster parents and social workers enjoy a varied and well planned training programme. They train together which allows foster parents and social workers the opportunities to discuss and implement their learnings into everyday care provided to children and young people. The registered manager sources training which is pivotal to children and young people's needs, such as around foetal alcohol syndrome, brain development and attachment. Foster parents' nurturing care is based on a firm body of experience and best practice.

A strong and robust management team monitor the progress of children and young people. They support this progress through offering foster carers individual support and training around behaviour management. The provider has recently recruited an

education worker and a registered nurse who focus on these specific areas and drive improvement for children and young people. There is a stable staff team in place. A family support worker said: 'This is a lovely place and I wanted to work for them. I had a warm feeling as soon as walked in; everyone who works in the agency is friendly'. Social workers know all of the foster parents and all of the children and young people within the service. Foster parents say that they feel incredibly well supported by everyone. Social workers have reduced caseloads so they can offer the foster parents the support they may need and when they need it; they are able to respond to crisis situations effectively. A supervising social worker said: 'We are transparent with our foster parents. It is part of the relationship we build with them. We bring things up early on and we don't wait for it to become an issue'.

The management team review any safeguarding issues. They work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that children and young people are safe in their foster homes. Incidents of children and young people going missing are low. This is due to the agency pre-empting any additional support needed to support children and young people with their foster parents. The registered manager is proactive rather than reactive, which means children and young people become increasingly safe.

Placement stability is outstanding. The registered manager has recruited a qualified social worker in the role of placements coordinator. This supports proper, robust assessments around matching at the point of referral, which in turn increases placement stability. This supports their emotional well-being and progress. A commissioner for a Local Authority said: 'My experiences of the agency are very, very positive. They are a good partner for us. If we are struggling to find a suitable placement, we will talk to the registered manager; she'll be honest with us'.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.