

St Christopher's Fellowship

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The Courtyard, 102 High Street, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6JW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A large charity operates this agency. The charity is governed by a council of voluntary trustees. There are 29 carers in 21 households who look after 33 children.

Inspection dates: 1 to 5 October 2018

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: 10 July 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- There is strong and effective leadership.
- Leaders and managers have implemented a clear strategy to improve the service focusing on the organisation's core values.
- Children do well, and the agency can demonstrate this effectively.
- Children are kept safe, and staff address any difficulties thoroughly.
- Carers establish meaningful relationships with their foster children, which often sustain children's placements into adulthood.
- Staff feel supported and are looking forward optimistically.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The training and development of some carers is incomplete, and some carers are not sufficiently familiar with the health and safety guidelines for their homes. This increases the risks to children.
- Staff do not get as much information about children's histories as possible. This reduces their ability to contribute to comprehensive plans for them.

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 provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.</p> <p>(Regulation 8(1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This is with regard to ensuring that the office arrangements comply with fire safety guidance.</p>	26/11/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.</p> <p>(Regulation 17(1))</p> <p>This is with regard to all carers completing mandatory training within timescales and to ensuring that the training includes health and hygiene, and medicine administration.</p>	28/01/2019
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations.</p> <p>(Regulation 17(3))</p> <p>This is with regard to obtaining relevant background information before placements occur.</p>	19/11/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 10.3)
This is with regard to all carers reading and signing general and child-specific health and safety, risk assessment, and safe-care documents.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children's views make a difference to their households and to the agency. The regular social events are a highlight and children's participation is a high priority. A specialist member of staff contacts every child regularly to hear their views. Carers help children to lead full lives and try new experiences.

Nearly all children experience placements with well-matched carers who meet all of their needs, including those arising from their religious and cultural backgrounds. This applies equally to children from outside the area. One child said, 'My carer made me feel welcome and gave me positive thoughts. I can talk to her about anything.' Nevertheless, staff sometimes make insufficient efforts to understand children's histories, for example the reasons why earlier placements had broken down. This increases the risk of foster carers not being able to provide effective care.

The agency has excellent, and externally verified, ways of tracking children's progress. This provides children and carers with useful summaries of how well children are doing, including their attachment to their carers. The highlights are celebrated, and the difficulties are addressed. Other professionals confirmed that in the vast majority of cases, children do well. One local authority social worker reflected the views of most by saying: 'I cannot fault the agency. I and, in turn, our children, have had an excellent service from the agency. Their foster carers are always so positive about them, too.'

Carers advocate strongly for their foster children and arrange extra support, for example with their studies. The rates of school attendance are exceptionally high and exceed the national average for all children. Carers proficiently prepare children for adulthood. Some children choose to remain with their carers when they reach 18 years of age.

Foster carers acknowledged that the service has 'turned a corner'. The training of carers is a high priority. Despite the extra effort to address shortfalls, a small percentage of carers have not completed certain mandatory training courses, and some of their records are incomplete. Health and hygiene, and medicine administration training courses do not show clearly in the training programme, as necessary.

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

The agency protects children well and the organisation keeps individual children's risk levels under close scrutiny. Children feel safe in their foster homes. One wrote, 'Living here was the best thing ever. I never felt safe before.'

Few children go missing from foster placements or put themselves at risk in other ways. Placements rarely end unexpectedly. Staff liaise thoroughly with other

professionals and challenge them if necessary. The agency seeks to understand children's behaviour and the causes of allegations, for example by reviewing the facts and obtaining the views of the fostering panel. When necessary, foster carers attend extra training to improve their knowledge of issues, such as internet safety.

The office arrangements are not ideal, so alternative premises are being sought. The fire safety measures do not reflect the recommendations of a recent audit, including the use of door self-closures, removal of door wedges, and regular fire drills. As a result, this increases the risk to staff and visitors.

The agency supports its carers well. The difficulties identified at the last inspection caused a heightened rate of departure of foster households, but this has fallen to normal levels. The recruitment of new carers is mainly through word of mouth and new carers feel pleased with the service. However, it is not clear that each carer, in every household, is familiar with the health and safety, safe care, and risk assessment documents for their foster children. This increases the risk of carers acting inconsistently.

Carers show a good understanding of children's complex needs and adapt their support to help children recover.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

In July 2017, Ofsted judged the service to require improvement and found that leadership and management were inadequate. After this, the registered manager left, and the service manager took over to give continuity. She has implemented a thorough action plan and overseen marked improvements to the service, such as greater transparency, dealing fairly with any concerns, and listening to carers' and children's opinions. The manager is now overseeing a smooth merger with another agency.

The leadership team and the registered manager support the diverse staff team well. Consequently, the whole team has contributed to making the service more open and welcoming. Staff members attend or lead an ample number of training events, which update their skills. The manager is arranging training for staff about gangs, so that they are aware of the implications for carers and children.

There is a clear focus on the needs of each child, so they have the same or better opportunities as other children.

The service reflects its statement of purpose and is aligning itself with a clear and well-established theoretical model. One member of staff wrote, 'I like the charity's vision and mission and I believe in its values.'

A key reason for the improvement of the service is that there is now meaningful monitoring at all levels. Trustees are actively involved in the agency and the manager seeks and addresses the views of children and carers. This helps the team learn from events and improve the agency. One carer noted, '[The] organisation has transformed into a supportive, fair and transparent place... putting the welfare of the

children at the heart of all it does.'

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC458341

Registered provider: St Christopher's Fellowship

Registered provider address: 1 Putney High Street, London, Wandsworth SW15 1SZ

Responsible individual: Philip Townsend

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Inspector

David Morgan, social care inspector



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