

# The Foster Care Charity

The Foster Care Charity

Penny Hall, The Haysfield, Spring Lane North, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 1GF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency was previously registered as The Foster Care Co-operative, which was a non-profitable organisation. In August 2023, the agency registered as a charity.

The fostering service offers several types of placements for children. These include emergency and unplanned placements, respite placements, long-term placements, specialist placements for children with disabilities, and parent and child placements.

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2023.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was supporting 65 fostering households and 100 children.

### Inspection dates: 10 to 14 June 2024

**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:** not previously inspected

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

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

Children are making good progress from their starting points because of the warm and nurturing care they receive from their foster carers. Carers are committed to the children, and the children have developed trusting and meaningful relationships with them as a result. One child said that their foster carers cared for him as if he was their own son. The nurturing approach of carers helps children to feel secure.

Foster carers support children to feel that they belong. Many of the children have lived with their foster carers for several years. Over a quarter of the children live with their brothers and sisters. A small number of children also benefit from living with their carers until they reach adulthood. With the agency's support, one fostering family has adopted three siblings, and another fostering family has become special guardians for children. This enhances permanency for children.

Children are well prepared to move to their foster family and receive a warm welcome on arrival. Before children move into their foster home, they receive a detailed welcome guide and are provided with a memory box to store mementos of their time with their foster carers.

Over the last 12 months a high number of foster placements have ended in an unplanned way. When children experience endings, the registered manager and foster carers do their utmost to ensure that they work with the placing local authority to achieve a positive move. After each ending, the agency carries out reflective learning to explore reasons around the ending and plan how to prevent future endings. As a result of this practice, care planning for children has been developed.

Supervising social workers are responsible for a small number of fostering families. This means that foster carers receive a high level of support. Warm, welcoming and knowledgeable managers and staff respond well to people who are considering fostering. This approach puts potential foster parents at ease and helps them to feel that they are part of a well-established family-focused agency.

Children's health needs are sensitively promoted by the agency. Foster carers ensure that all children have access to local health services. Children with complex health needs are supported by their foster carers to receive the specialist help they require. The agency works closely with health professionals and is proactive in ensuring that the children's emotional well-being is promoted. For example, the agency commissions a therapist who delivers specialist training and offers regular sessions for individual foster families.

Children are supported with their education. Their learning needs are well promoted by foster carers and the agency's staff. The agency's staff are proactive in ensuring that the children receive the specialist help and support they require. For example,

the agency employs an education specialist who delivers training and information-sharing sessions for foster carers. They also attend children's education meetings to provide additional support for children with their education.

The agency works hard to ensure that the children's voices are heard. Children participate in carers' annual reviews and supervision sessions. The children's forum is a good way of supporting children to have their say about the functions of the agency. Children's attendance at the forum is an area for development. Therefore, the children's representative is looking at creative ways of increasing their participation.

Foster carers gave overwhelmingly positive feedback to inspectors about the support they receive from the agency. They value the expertise of their supervising social worker. Carers told inspectors that there is always someone who they can speak to if they have concerns.

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

Children said that they feel safe living with their foster carers. They have formed trusting relationships with them and feel that they can talk to them as needed. One child informed the inspectors that they like living with their foster carers as they feel safe.

Foster carers and supervising social workers have a good understanding of children's risks and vulnerabilities. Foster carers attend training to help them understand and support children's safety.

Risk assessments relating to the children are thorough and regularly reviewed. They are individualised and provide clear guidance to foster parents. This reduces risk to the children and promotes age-appropriate independence.

Children rarely go missing from home. When they do, they experience well-coordinated responses from their foster carers and the agency. Foster carers understand the missing-from-home policies and implement these protocols to support children to return home safely.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure and protect the children from harm. They provide comfortable and welcoming environments in which the children feel safe and can grow and develop. Supervising social workers make unannounced visits, and health and safety checks are carried out each year to ensure that foster carers' homes remain safe.

The recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members is thorough, and there is clear management oversight of all recruitment. This helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

Safeguarding incidents are rare. When they arise, the registered manager ensures that children's welfare and well-being are paramount. This includes providing

additional support to children and their carers. However, there have been occasions when the agency has missed opportunities to provide support to one child following safeguarding incidents in their home.

Overall, allegations are managed well. The registered manager takes swift action to ensure that children are safe. This includes making timely referrals to safeguarding agencies. Following an allegation, standards of care assessments and post-allegation reviews take place. However, the registered manager does not always ensure that the recommendations made are actioned. For example, a lack of a clear risk assessment resulted in a foster carer providing lone care for children when he should have been supervised.

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

Senior managers have been successful in transitioning the agency to becoming a charity. This considered process has been well managed. The changes in management and service development have helped to strengthen the agency. Senior managers lead a team of committed and enthusiastic staff and carers.

Senior managers know the agency's strengths and areas of development. They have effective monitoring systems in place. Management meetings, monthly reports and case audits help to identify shortfalls in practice.

Supervising social workers receive regular good-quality supervision. This supports staff to discuss their own professional development and to focus on supporting children to thrive and achieve stability with their foster families. In addition, staff receive specialist training such as Dyadic Developmental Practice that further enhances their practice. For example, several social workers have recently received specific therapeutic training.

Supervising social workers carry out timely assessments of potential foster carers. Midpoint reviews take place to ensure that there is no drift or delay. Assessments are thorough and analytical and provide clear recommendations about approval. This ensures that only suitable carers provide care for children.

All foster carers are subject to the annual review process. A reviewing officer provides a high level of scrutiny for the continued approval of foster carers. Clear reasons for recommendations are made and any concerns are taken to the next available panel for consideration.

The fostering panel provides a good level of independence to the quality assurance for the approval and re-approval of foster carers. Panel is timely and robust and provides a clear rationale for the recommendations made. This is supported by the agency decision-maker, who makes clear, timely and reasoned decisions and demonstrates a good level of reflection and consideration of the application and approval process.

The agency decision-maker is the registered manager. However, he ensures that he has the required level of independence and makes detailed and considered decisions promptly.

On occasions, there has been the need for foster carers to exceed their approved numbers. When this happens, the registered manager ensures that exemptions are in place. However, on one occasion, timely actions were not taken to ensure that an exemption was in place. This resulted in an unregulated placement for a short period which the child's local authority was not consulted about. This oversight has not impacted on the care the children receive, and steps are now in place to address this shortfall.

Overall, the agency has a good relationship with external professionals. However, there have been occasions whereby the agency has not communicated effectively with local authorities, which has resulted in complaints and concerns. The registered manager has taken action to address the concerns, and this has not impacted on the care that children receive.

## 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, The 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 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. (Regulation 8 (1)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person should ensure that all actions are regularly reviewed following an allegation.</p> <p>Additionally, the registered person should ensure that all children living in the fostering household are considered following a safeguarding incident.</p>   | 26 July 2024 |
| <p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>If, taking into account any recommendation made by the fostering panel, the fostering service provider are no longer satisfied that the foster parent or the foster parent’s household continue to be suitable, or that the terms of the approval are appropriate, they must (subject to paragraph (8))—</p> <p>in any case where the fostering service provider propose only to revise the terms of the foster parent’s approval—</p> <p>provide a statement setting out whether the fostering service provider considers that the foster parent or members of the foster parent’s household (including any children placed there) may have additional support needs as a result of the proposed revision and, if so, how those needs will be met, and</p> <p>request the foster parent’s agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms,</p> | 26 July 2024 |

advise the foster parent that, within 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination, the foster parent may—

submit any written representations that the foster parent wishes to make to the fostering service provider, or

apply to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent review panel of the qualifying determination.  
(Regulation 28 (1) (7) (aa)(i)(ii)(b)(i)(ii))

In particular, the registered person should ensure that there are appropriate processes in place for exemptions.

## Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that there is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker. The fostering service social workers should understand the role of the child's social worker and work with them effectively. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 43, paragraph 21.1)

## 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:** 2744403

**Registered provider:** The Foster Care Charity

**Registered provider address:** Penny Hall, The Haysfield, Spring Lane North,  
Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 1GF

**Responsible individual:** Sumerjit Ram

**Registered manager:** Steven Field

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## Inspectors

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector



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