

Aim High Fostering Services Ltd

Finchley House, 707 High Road, London N12 0BT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted on 7 October 2016 with the aim to provide a full range of fostering services. The agency had its first placement on 29 August 2017. At the time of the agency's first inspection, it had three foster carers and three children in placement.

**Inspection dates:** 11 to 15 December 2017

**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 **requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** N/A

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** N/A

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The agency has developed a culture of positive relationships and high aspirations for children and young people.
- Good planning and good matching have enabled children and young people to settle quickly in their placements.
- In a relatively short period of time, all children and young people have begun to make good progress in many areas of their lives.
- Children and young people experience a good family life.
- Children and young people receive good-quality care and individualised support from nurturing and skilled foster carers.
- All children and young people said that they felt listened to and that they were given choices.
- All children and young people are in education. They have good school attendance and engage well in their learning.
- Children and young people engage in a wide range of recreational, social and learning activities and develop their interests, talents and social skills.
- All children and young people have developed safer and more constructive behaviours.
- There have been no significant safeguarding incidents since the agency started providing the fostering service.
- The collaborative nature of the agency's risk management practices contributes to their effectiveness.
- There have been no placement breakdowns.
- The agency supports its foster carers very well.
- The agency is resourced appropriately for its current level of operation and future developments.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The assessments of prospective foster carers have not always been quality assured effectively.
- The minutes of the fostering panels do not always capture clearly the reasons for the recommendations that were made.
- The decisions made by the agency decision-maker are not always recorded to show the process.
- The agency's letter of approval that one foster carer received does not capture fully the fostering panel's recommendations regarding necessary training.

- The agency has not recorded a basis for any of the matching decisions that were made.
- Some aspects of the induction of new foster carers have not been recorded.
- Staff supervision meetings have not been recorded.
- The leaders and managers do not pay close attention to quality assuring records relating to behaviour control measures, medication and staff recruitment.
- The agency does not have a written business continuity plan.

## 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>Meetings of fostering panel</p> <p>A fostering panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24(2))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that the reasons for the panel recommendations are recorded clearly and match the prospective foster carers' strengths that were identified during the panel meeting.</p>	01/04/2018
<p>Functions of fostering panel</p> <p>The fostering service provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable. (Regulation 25(3))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must implement a more effective and efficient process for quality assuring the assessments before prospective foster carers are presented to the panel.</p>	01/04/2018
<p>Case records relating to foster parents and others</p> <p>A fostering service provider must maintain a case record for each foster parent approved by them which must include copies of the documents specified in paragraph (2) and the</p>	01/04/2018

<p>information specified in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The documents referred to in paragraph (1) are—</p> <p>any recommendations made by the fostering panel. (Regulation 30(1)(2)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that the information in the letter that the agency sends to the foster carers to inform them that they have been approved match any recommendations given by the panel regarding training that they need to attend.</p>	
<p>Review of quality of care</p> <p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that the system for monitoring of the records of medication, behaviour control measures and staff recruitment files is more effective.</p>	01/04/2018

## Recommendations

- The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list must be sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. (national minimum standards, 14.8) In particular, the registered person should recruit an independent foster carer to join the fostering panel.
- The fostering service provider's decision-maker should make a considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. (national minimum standards, 14.9) In particular, the registered person should record their decisions more clearly.
- The fostering service should only suggest foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure that the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required.

(national minimum standards, 15.1) In particular, the registered person should keep records of the decision-making process in respect of matching.

- All new foster carers should receive an induction. (national minimum standards, 20.1) In particular, the registered person should keep records of all aspects of the induction of new foster carers, including individual coaching.
- A written record should be kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record should be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (national minimum standards, 24.5)
- The provider should have a business continuity plan, which staff understand and can access, which will include both provision of premises and safeguarding/back-up of records. (national minimum standards, 27.3)

## Inspection judgements

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

All children and young people experience a good family life within their foster families. They receive good-quality care and individualised support from nurturing and skilled foster carers.

The foster carers themselves are very well supported by the agency. There are positive, caring and supportive relationships all around, for everybody who works in this agency. The children and young people have thrived in this culture of positivity.

Another strength of the agency is the importance it gives to 'the voice of a child'. All children and young people said that they felt listened to and were given choices. The leaders, managers and foster carers have an excellent understanding of children and young people's needs and potential barriers to their engagement and progress. The leaders, managers and foster carers know how to communicate with children and young people in ways that enable them to express themselves and become engaged.

The agency's good knowledge of their foster carers and robust matching have resulted in the children and young people being placed with foster carers who can meet their needs and enable their good progress. The placement officers said that the agency asked appropriate questions and provided foster carers who matched the needs of the children or young people well. This is particularly significant as placing authorities had struggled to find appropriate placements for these children and young people due to their complex needs and behaviours, and a history of placement breakdowns.

All children and young people told the inspector that they were happy living with their foster carers. One of them said, 'It's just like having a normal family. They are nice people and always talk to me. My room, food, friends... Everything is good and I like everything about it.'

Good planning ensures that the children and young people have had a positive start to their new lives in their new foster families. They had opportunities to visit their foster carers and get to know them before moving in. The agency has developed photographic profiles for their foster carers to make the introductions smoother. One young person said how the first time that she saw her foster carer, she 'really liked her'. Another child's social worker said, 'The child took to his foster carers like a duck to water' and added, 'The carers have a way about them that the child responded to instantly.' One foster carer said that they could not have wished for a better match. She described how the child's eyes lit up when he arrived and they bonded straight away.

All children and young people have settled really well in their placements. In a relatively short period of time, they have begun to make good progress in many areas of their lives. All professionals agree that the placements have been very

successful. All children and young people said that they would like to stay living with their foster families until they are ready to live independently. One young person said, 'I didn't know that it was possible for my life to be going so well.'

All children and young people are engaging well in their education and attend their schools regularly. They are motivated to achieve and are focused on making good progress in their learning. The agency and the foster carers attend parents' evenings and other meetings organised by the teachers. They support wholeheartedly the ambitions and dreams that the children and young people have about their future lives.

Children and young people have good opportunities to engage in a wide range of recreational, social and learning activities. These help to develop their interests, talents and social skills. These are some of the activities that the children and young people have engaged in: ice-skating, playing tennis, playing piano, rapping, horse-riding, looking after a cat and walking a dog. One young person has become very much involved in community youth work as a youth leader.

One young person said, 'This is the first time I want to help and get more involved with the family. They are nice to me and I want to make it easier for them. I realised that you only get from the relationships what you put into them.' The caring relationships within this foster family have had a positive impact on the young person's engagement, empathy and relationship-building skills.

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

Arrangements put in place by the agency are effective in safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare. There have been no significant safeguarding incidents since the agency started providing the fostering service.

Comprehensive protocols, policies and procedures provide foster carers with clear guidance on how to respond to a wide range of safeguarding concerns. Foster carers know what constitutes safe fostering practice. They are confident in identifying concerns and responding to them in ways that provide the best possible protection for children and young people, and anybody else involved.

All children and young people said that they felt safe. Despite living with their foster families for a relatively short period of time, they have developed a sense of safety and trust. Each of them said that if anything worried them, they would talk about it with their foster carers. They also knew that there were other professionals that they could turn to if they had any questions, complaints, worries or concerns. Children and young people were clear that it was their right to be safe, protected and supported. They also commented that they would have no hesitation asking for help and protection, if they felt that they needed additional support.

Since being placed with this agency, children and young people develop safer and more constructive behaviours. The challenging behaviours that they used to engage in have either stopped or significantly reduced in their intensity and frequency. There have been no incidents of children and young people self-harming, going

missing or attacking others; although those types of incidents were a concern in the previous placements for some of them. One young person said, 'Having the right people around me helped me with my emotions.'

The collaborative nature of the agency's risk management practices plays a significant part in their effectiveness. There is good partnership working between the agency and the placing authorities and other services, such as the police, education and health. The foster carers are aware of the placing authority's risk assessments for each child or young person and are able to implement good safeguarding strategies consistently in their daily lives. Their help and protection have had a positive impact on the safety and welfare of children and young people. One young person talked articulately about keeping safe in real-life situations and online.

The agency approves foster carers on a basis of having safe attitudes and a strong capacity for meeting the needs of children and young people, and keeping them safe. In addition to covering the basics of safeguarding in the 'Skills to foster' training, the registered manager has provided individual coaching to foster carers on how to safeguard the individual children and young people in their care. This coaching was based on the children and young people's specific risk assessments and management plans.

Foster carers receive additional training on behaviour management; the traumatic impact of parental substance misuse and domestic violence on children and young people; and child abuse linked to spiritual and religious beliefs. Further awareness training has been scheduled on a number of safeguarding topics, such as the risk of child sexual exploitation, online safety and radicalisation and extremism.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

Leaders and managers have put their personal passions and considerable social work and fostering competencies into developing this agency. Each of three directors has fostered or adopted children. Children and young people are always uppermost in their minds and they have created a service that is strongly child-centred. One local authority social worker said about the leaders and managers, 'They have gone over and above to put the needs of the child at the heart of all our practices.'

The agency is committed to developing a culture of openness, transparency, learning and strong partnerships with other professions and services. All professionals who contributed to the inspection talked positively about the agency's ethos in terms of its commitment to children and young people and partnership working. One local authority social worker said, 'We are all on the same page. They always hear me out and work with me.' A social worker from another local authority said, 'I am very happy [with] how they are working with us.'

However, leaders and managers are still exploring the best ways to organise administrative systems and the records that are required to be kept by legislation. They have been learning fast from some administrative mistakes that have

happened. They have a clear improvement agenda and are working hard to achieve consistency of good fostering practices relating to keeping records. The requirements and good practice recommendations that are contained in this report are aligned fully with their attempts to achieve more effective and efficient management of the agency's records. These are some examples of the areas in which the agency requires further work in order to be able to show that good practices have been achieved consistently:

- The minutes of the fostering panels do not always capture clearly the reasons for the panel's recommendations.
- The decisions made by the agency decision-maker are not always recorded to evidence clearly the decision-making process.
- The agency's letter of approval of one foster carer did not capture fully the fostering panel's recommendations regarding training.
- The decisions around matching are not recorded.
- Some aspects of the induction of foster carers have not been recorded.
- Staff supervision meetings have not been recorded.

Leaders and managers have recently introduced a new data-recording system. The transfer of records has happened. However, leaders and managers are still learning how to use this system effectively. For example, they have not paid close enough attention to quality assuring records of behaviour control measures, medication and staff recruitment. Some minor inconsistencies were found at the inspection and were rectified straight away.

The agency's fostering panel is appropriate. The panel members bring diverse personal and professional experiences, such as from being in care themselves or working in social care, education or health services. The agency is still looking to appoint an independent foster carer to the panel.

The panel has played a significant part in developing the quality of the fostering agency, in particular, improving the quality of the assessments of prospective foster carers that the agency shared with the panel as ready to be considered for approval. There have been several occasions when the panel had to ask for more information from the agency before the assessments were complete.

The agency is resourced appropriately for now and for its future developments. The agency will move to larger offices and better facilities in January 2018. The information technology failure that happened during the inspection has highlighted a need for leaders and managers to formalise a robust business continuity plan.

There has been no negative impact of any of the weaknesses that were identified at this inspection on the children and young people's positive experiences and outcomes. The registered manager is currently supervising all three foster carers. She is a qualified social worker with many years of experience of working in the fostering arena. She is also an approved foster carer herself. The registered manager has an in-depth understanding of the fostering tasks, the support needed

by the foster carers and the progress that the children and young people are making in their placements.

All foster carers talked very positively about the agency's arrangements for the assessment and approval of foster carers and the ongoing support that they receive. These are some of the words that some of them used to describe the quality of support that they get from the agency: fantastic, brilliant, amazing and excellent. One foster carer said that they felt lucky to be a part of this agency.

## **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:** 1241499

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## **Inspector**

Seka Graovac, social care inspector



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