

Phoenix Fostering

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Phoenix Fostering, Queens Meadow, Wigmore, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 9UZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Ofsted registered this privately owned agency in 2007. It has 41 carers in 22 households. They look after 18 children. The vast majority of carers are approved for one child.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 January 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: 11 July 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children progress exceptionally well in this service.
- Children are safe and serious incidents occur rarely.
- The agency specialises in helping children with severe emotional difficulties by providing expert staff and a high level of resources.
- Staff engage and collaborate well with other agencies in the interests of individual children.
- Education is a high priority. The vast majority of children have good rates of attendance and show marked progress.
- Most children enjoy stability and a sense of belonging, having lived with their foster families for many years.
- Resilient and committed foster carers provide children with good standards of care.
- The agency deals with difficulties carefully and endeavours to learn from them.
- Senior personnel provide methodical leadership that is gradually improving the service.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Behaviour specialists do not review incidents of physical intervention with children and carers in a timely way.
- The agency does not make it clear to each carer what amount of training they are required to do. Furthermore, each carer does not have a personal development plan to help them to achieve this.
- The manager does not seek feedback from children and others consistently, and use feedback to develop the service.
- Recording systems are not consistently clear.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. (NMS 1.7)

This is with regard to gathering and using the views of children and others to benefit the agency as a whole.

- Ensure that the fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. (NMS 3.8)

Specifically, that the provider reviews the current policy to include guidance about the arrangements for de-briefing those involved in an incident of restraint.

- Ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. (NMS 20.5)

This is with reference to every carer, not just the main carer.

- Ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for. (NMS 24.6)

This includes the registered manager.

- Ensure that the registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. (NMS 25.8)

This is with regard to escalating concerns about local authorities promptly and effectively.

- Ensure that the fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files. (NMS 26.1)

This is with regard to ensuring that it is clear how managers review and audit electronic records, and when records are duplicated, which is the most up-to-date version.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points. The agency focuses firmly on helping children to progress. To this end, carers adapt their methods to meet children's individual needs. Carers show substantial resilience and provide children with stability and a sense of security.

Most children make planned moves to their carers, in line with the agency's policy. A few have transferred smoothly and successfully between carers within the agency. In either case, staff endeavour to match children accurately with foster care households. The long periods of time that some carers wait for a child reflect their caution, that of the agency and the desire to get matching right. The subsequent longevity of most placements indicates that the matching process is effective. Many children remain with their carers into adulthood. One young man said, 'I've got so many people around me, helping me. I'll stay here.'

The agency invests substantially in securing the right school for each child and supporting children to engage effectively in their learning. This support enables children to learn the value of education and make progress. One carer said, 'My foster son was unable to hear the word 'school' without throwing items and running away [because] his anxiety was so high. By being aware of what he feels and by working closely with an excellent school, he is now attending full time and applying himself to his work.' The agency's staff go into schools to train the teachers to better understand children's needs and behaviour. This gives children the best possible chance to succeed. Schools appreciate this exceptional practice. One headteacher said, 'It is only with the support of the agency that we are able to say we are making good progress. Despite some staff's initial reservations, we now have a fully supportive team that understands attachment theory and how to deal with children with these behavioural issues.' One young person was on the verge of permanent exclusion and later achieved 10 GCSE passes and two school awards.

The children enjoy good general health. The agency and the foster carers give careful consideration to children's emotional difficulties, which are substantial for many. The agency specialises in this area of care and children progress considerably. It ensures that children receive long-term therapy if they need it, whether or not the placing authority pays.

A team of family support workers provides nearly every child with long-term support on a weekly basis. This exemplary level of support helps children to thrive and develop long-term relationships with these workers. One local authority social worker said, 'The work he does with [my child] is priceless.' A teacher commented about another child, 'She considers the emotions of other people [now], and she's working hard to develop her tolerance [of them].'

Children enjoy wide-ranging experiences, often for the first time, such as holidays and staying at a hotel. They engage in local clubs, and get involved in their

communities. One boy is undertaking trials for the county cross-country running team. Another child has learned to relax and accept cuddles. Another learned to take herself to her bedroom instead of directing her anger at other people. One older boy said, 'It's sad [leaving your family]. It's a hard journey with random strangers [but] being in care has been amazing [for me].'

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

Children feel safe with their carers who protect them well. One said, 'My carers make sure I know the safety rules and how to look after myself.' Despite the high level of challenge and complexity presented by children's behaviour, carers successfully reduce the risks to a minimum. Very few serious incidents occur. For example, carers rarely call the police and there are very few incidents of children going missing or making allegations. When incidents do occur, the manager investigates each one thoroughly.

Carers benefit from bespoke training. This helps them to understand children's emotional needs and the reasons behind their challenging behaviour. A member of staff said, 'We offer [carers] a comprehensive training programme, which includes both basic training and a therapeutic model of working with traumatised children. [It] equips carers to keep children safe.'

Carers receive excellent support from the agency's behavioural specialist who has completed a relevant degree with support from the agency. He focuses on each child's needs and produces personalised action plans. This means that each child receives bespoke care. For children who react negatively to any requests made of them, this means receiving help of a particular sort. For example, to avoid negative reactions from their foster child, one couple use phrases and signals rather than verbal demands. This is an appropriate use of specialist advice that helps the child at this stage in his development.

Work is underway to capture children's progress more succinctly. However, individual examples show that the vast majority of children make substantial progress. For example, one child has reduced damaging her bedroom from three times a month to once in three months. Another child requires his carers to restrain him less often. Furthermore, this child can now use public transport independently. One child used to get up several times a night but now sleeps through every night. Children learn to accept boundaries and begin to understand how their behaviour impacts on themselves and others. This understanding enables children to make progress. One said, 'Sometimes I say they aren't being fair but when I think about it afterwards I normally think that they were being fair.'

Supervising social workers, carers, family support workers and the behavioural specialist meet every six to eight weeks to review the effectiveness of the therapeutic packages. This important development serves to keep everyone's focus on the agreed targets. Local authority social workers may attend and the psychologist provides regular expert advice.

The carers understand when to use physical intervention. The behavioural specialist

has rolled out a training programme that explains positive behaviour support and the use of only two types of holds. This has substantially reduced the number of occasions that carers use physical intervention to help children regulate themselves. This helps to sustain and improve the relationships between carers and children and avoids the risk of further trauma. The behavioural specialist de-briefs carers and children after each incident. This is an important process although it does not always occur in a timely way. The provider recognises this and has agreed to take steps to update and review the promoting positive behaviour policy and procedure to include clearer guidance about the arrangements for de-briefing those involved in an incident of restraint.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The service accurately reflects its statement of purpose. The document clearly describes the theoretical basis of the service, such as attachment theory, positive behaviour support and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. It acknowledges the negative impact of trauma on children's brains and behaviour.

The last inspection was in 2014 and identified seven shortfalls. Since then, the company has improved by moving to more suitable premises, amending its leadership model, refining its focus on children's behaviour and managing with some changes in the staff team. Work on the shortfalls is advancing well but is not complete in all areas. The staff appraisal process operates reasonably well and is a key part of the agency's development planning. However, it does not always include the manager, as required, or make use of children's views. At the same time, the manager's own professional supervision briefly lapsed due to his supervisor's illness. This has been resolved and the manager is receiving supervision, which provides him with the opportunity to reflect on his practice and performance.

Since the last inspection, the manager has devised and implemented an annual development plan. This reflects clearly on the previous year and establishes useful targets for the next year, including staff training. However, these improvements have not gone far enough. For example, the agency does not adequately assess the developmental needs of all carers, specifically those who are not the main carer. This has led to gaps in the engagement of some carers in training, their annual reviews and other events. The foster carer training policy is not sufficiently clear about the minimum expectations.

Staff and panel members attend the training events that occur throughout the year. In addition, they attend events that are more specific to their needs, such as degree and diploma level courses. This substantial investment helps with staff retention and brings expertise to the agency. One supervising social worker is preparing to become the deputy manager. This important step will allow the manager to share some leadership tasks to prevent slippage and accommodate the growth of the service.

In most regards, carers receive excellent support and training opportunities. In feedback, carers overwhelmingly express their satisfaction. One said, '... we put a lot of hard work and effort into [our foster child] but without the constant support and

training that the agency gives us we would not be able to do our job as well as we do. We feel extremely privileged to work for such an excellent agency and hope that we do for many years to come.' To some extent, the frequent training events in the two hubs are opportunities for mutual support. However, the manager is reviewing the frequency of carer forums following their decline last year.

Ofsted registered the manager in 2012. He is suitably experienced and qualified. Following the last inspection, the directors confirmed his responsibility for overseeing the whole service. Consequently, the lines of accountability are clearer for all staff.

The manager has implemented improvements to the records. As a result, children's files summarise children's progress more clearly. Currently, staff are consolidating this work so there is consistency. This is important for children and other people who need an overview. The agency keeps handwritten and electronic records. It is not always clear which version is the most up to date. This has the potential to cause some confusion and may lead to information being missed. Furthermore, it is not always clear how the manager monitors the quality and accuracy of some electronic records.

The manager has a good understanding of his service, which he reflects in comprehensive monitoring reports. The senior team places particular importance on learning lessons from events, such as those arising from the involvement of the independent review mechanism.

Foster children and the sons and daughters of carers are actively involved in the agency. They sometimes contribute to training and they attend events. However, their contribution, and that of social workers, to the improvement of the agency as a whole is underdeveloped. A recommendation is raised to address this.

The agency is very well resourced. The social workers carry modest caseloads, a team of family support workers works directly with children and carers, there is a service development manager, good administrative support and a behavioural specialist. As the responsible individual said, 'We're trying to achieve something rather than make a huge profit.' Staff attend occasional meetings of the whole team and feel that communication is sufficiently effective. They liaise well with other professionals, although they do not challenge shortfalls in their performance as effectively as possible. This contributes to occasional delays in the receipt of documents, for example, which compromises children's progress and their rights.

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: SC357652

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