

Be My Family Fostering Agency

Be My Family Fostering Agency Ltd

11 St Albans Avenue, Feltham, Middlesex TW13 6RL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Be My Family is a privately owned, independent fostering agency. It provides a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent, respite and supported lodgings. It provides placements for children and young people with additional and complex needs, for brothers and sisters, and for parents with children. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 16 fostering households and 25 children and young people in placement. Of the children and young people in placement, 80% were unaccompanied asylum seekers. Additionally, three young adults were living with their foster families under 'staying put' arrangement. The agency has one supervising social worker.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 March 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: 29 September 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:

- The experiences of children and young people are at the centre of this fostering service.
- The agency is led and managed effectively and efficiently.
- The registered manager, staff and foster carers work effectively with partner agencies to safeguard children and young people and promote their welfare.
- The process for the recruitment of foster carers is thorough and the panel is effective.
- Foster carers receive good ongoing support, advice, information and training from the agency.
- Good matching of children and young people with foster families underpins the stability of placements.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is integral to all aspects of the service.
- The registered manager acts as a strong advocate for the rights of children and young people.
- Children and young people experience a good family life. They develop positive relationships with their foster carers.
- Children and young people receive care that supports good outcomes effectively.
- Clear and consistent boundaries contribute to children's and young people's good behaviours, positive engagement and safety.
- Strong partnerships with health services enable foster carers to protect and promote children's and young people's physical, mental and emotional health.
- All children and young people are in education. They attend their education facilities regularly and are making good progress in their learning.
- Children and young people have good opportunities to develop their interests and hobbies. They have friends and develop social and life skills.
- Foster carers and professionals who are external to this agency talk exceptionally positively about the quality of this fostering service and its impact on the lives of children and young people.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Staff and foster carers are not familiar with the written risk management plans for children and young people. The plans are not always updated to reflect changes.
- The records of health and safety checks do not always evidence that timely actions have been taken to ensure that the environment remains safe.
- The annual reviews of foster carers do not always include detailed information about the training attended.
- When young people are absent without authority or go missing, the agency's records are not always completed in a timely manner.

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

Recommendations

- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. (National minimum standards, 4.1)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that the supervising social worker and foster carers demonstrate a good working knowledge of the written risk management plans for young people and that those documents are reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

- Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home. (National minimum standards, 10.3)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that the agency's records show that all required health and safety checks are completed in a timely manner.

- The reviews of each carer's approval include an appraisal of performance against clear and consistent standards set by the agency, and consideration of training and development needs, which are documented in the review report. (National minimum standards, 20.6)

- The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. (National minimum standards, 25.2)

In particular, the registered person should ensure that clear records of all incidents when young people were absent without authority or were missing are completed in a timely manner.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

All the children and young people who contributed to the inspection talked positively about their experiences of foster care. They enjoy living with their foster families and had formed positive relationships with and grown attached to their carers. For example, some young people call their female foster carer 'Mum'. One young person wrote in the Ofsted online survey: 'I am very happy with my foster carers. I feel part of the family. They help me with everything. They treat me like their own children.' Another young person said: 'This is not a foster placement. It is my family.'

The agency ensures that foster carers have the information, guidance and support that they need in order to provide good care to children and young people. Good matching of children and young people with foster families supports placement stability. Foster carers talked at the inspection about their commitment never to give up on the children and young people in their care. The independent reviewing officer highlighted this agency's foster carers' tenacity as one of their main strengths.

Staff and foster carers are ambitious about what children and young people can

achieve. They make sure that children and young people receive the support that they need in order to make good progress in all areas of development. Staff and foster carers work effectively with other professionals to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people. They make sure that children's and young people's views, wishes and opinions are taken seriously. They act as strong advocates for children's and young people's rights. A member of the British Refugee Council gave an example in which the registered manager listened to the young person and 'provided a very sensible and out-of-the-box, long-term, effective solution.'

All children and young people are registered with a general practitioner and have regular health checks. Foster carers work closely with the children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to promote the emotional welfare of children and young people. This includes the complex emotional needs of children and young people who have had traumatic experiences associated with being trafficked and/or exploited. In one case, CAMHS provided a safety plan for a young person and supported the foster carers in their role. They also provided therapy for the young person. As a result, the young person stopped self-harming. Another example of the agency's effective partnership with a health service is a case where there was a significant reduction in a young person's epileptic seizures.

The registered persons and foster carers work in effective partnership with education services. They make sure that children and young people receive all the additional support that they need. A virtual headteacher said that that education was very high on the list of priorities for this agency. All children and young people are currently in education. Their school attendance is good, with the majority of them achieving 100% attendance. Children and young people make good progress in their learning. One young person is at the top of his class in mathematics. Children's and young people's achievements are celebrated publically at the agency's end of year parties.

Children and young people have good opportunities to develop their interests and hobbies. The agency has arranged for one young person to have guitar lessons. Children and young people go to the gym and play various sports, including athletics, cricket, football, boxing, snooker and cycling. The activities help them to keep fit and relaxed. Children and young people enjoy their leisure time, and develop friendships and social skills.

Children and young people receive good support to develop their life skills, such as cooking, budgeting and maintaining a clean and safe environment. This independence work prepares them well for adulthood.

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

This agency provides safe care. A thorough process for the recruitment of foster carers and ongoing support contribute to this. Foster carers understand the reasons behind the lengthy approval process, regular visits and annual reviews of their fostering approval. The agency's panel reports that the quality of the assessments of prospective foster carers continues to improve. The panel chair described the recent assessments as highly analytical and reflective in content.

The agency's systems and procedures for safeguarding children and young people support good fostering practice. Foster carers have access to clear, written guidance and training on a wide range of safeguarding topics. This training helps them to develop the knowledge that they need to safeguard children and young people effectively. The training includes the issues of child protection, working in partnership to safeguard children, human trafficking and modern slavery, radicalisation and extremism, gangs, child sexual exploitation, psychoactive substances, anti-bullying, social media and female genital mutilation. Other training, such as in behaviour management, attachment and bonding, trauma and mental health, also helps foster carers to develop an understanding of children's and young people's needs, vulnerabilities and risks.

All children and young people who contributed to the inspection said that they felt safe in their foster homes and in the wider community. Some of them said that their unresolved citizenship status in Great Britain was the only thing that made them feel insecure. The agency ensures that children and young people receive good support in relation to this. Children and young people said that did not have any other worries. None of them reported experiencing bullying, intimidation or disrespect of any kind while being fostered.

Children and young people build close relationships with their foster families and feel protected by them. They said that if they had any worries, they would talk with their foster carers about it. If their concern was about their foster families, they would raise those concerns with their social workers. On the one occasion this occurred, the agency responded appropriately.

The agency's procedures for dealing with complaints, concerns and allegations against foster carers satisfy statutory requirements and follow good practice guidance. The registered persons work in close partnership with designated safeguarding officers and professionals from partner agencies to address any issues of concern. Training is provided to foster carers in dealing with allegations, including being the subject of an allegation. One foster carer who was the subject of an allegation in the past said that the fostering service provided them with good support at what was a difficult time. All investigations carried out in the last 12 months concluded that the allegations were unsubstantiated.

The agency has clear procedures for responding to incidents of children and young people being absent without authority or missing from care. Foster carers go to great lengths to stay in telephone contact with children and young people, persuade them to come back home or disclose their whereabouts. Clear reporting procedures and good communication between the agency, local authorities, schools and the police around those incidents enhance the safeguarding of children and young people. Agency records of meetings and feedback from professionals indicate that managers, staff and foster carers are actively involved in developing safeguarding strategies to protect children and young people.

Every child or young person has a written risk management plan. However, there are some weaknesses in the agency's risk management practices, in particular in how evidence-based those practices are. The risk management plans have a low profile at

the fostering service. The supervising social worker was not aware of some of the plans. The agency does not always share risk management plans and safe care guidelines with foster carers. In addition, the plans are not always reviewed on a regular basis. For example, the risk assessment plan and safe care guidelines for a young person who was the victim of human trafficking have not been reviewed since 19 August 2015. This is despite changes in the safeguarding strategies used. Another risk management plan was not updated to show that a young mother was allowed to take her baby out unsupervised for up to two hours. However, the weaknesses in the records relating to the risk management have not had a negative impact on how children and young people are safeguarded or on their safeguarding outcomes.

Supervising social workers' visits focus on enabling foster carers to safeguard children and young people and to promote their welfare. Foster carers' clear and consistent boundaries contribute to children's and young people's good behaviours, positive engagement and safety. The fostering service helps children and young people to keep themselves safe. Examples include young people who are at risk of sexual abuse and young people who have been trafficked to this country for domestic exploitation.

The supervising social worker regularly sees children and young people on their own and checks their bedrooms. Annual health and safety checks ensure that the physical environment remains safe for everybody who lives there and for any visitors. However, the records of these visits do not always give clear timescales for any outstanding checks to be completed. For example, there has been no follow up on some checks, despite the agency's record stating in July 2017 that they were 'to be done soon'. This included testing the smoke alarms and the boiler. Occupational therapists visit foster carers who care for disabled children and young people to provide specialist assessment, advice and equipment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership and management of this agency have been stable since its registration with Ofsted in 2009. The registered manager is highly experienced and appropriately qualified. He manages the agency effectively and efficiently. The agency fulfils its statement of purpose. The registered persons are ambitious about the quality of the service that they provide. Their monitoring focuses on the agency's impact on the outcomes for children and young people.

The foster carers and professionals who are external to this agency talk exceptionally positively about the quality of this fostering service. The registered persons have secured a positive reputation within the fostering sector. To ensure that children and young people obtain the best possible service from everybody involved in their care, the registered manager is prepared to challenge professionals. This is done in a constructive manner. A placement officer said that the registered manager would not let go of any issues until they were resolved. They also said that the agency gave a reasonable notice period when a placement was not right. This helped to minimise any negative impact of ending the placement.

The registered persons have created a supportive working environment. The supervising social worker receives comprehensive supervision, support and guidance.

Annual reviews of individual staff performance take place within the required timeframe.

All foster carers who contributed to the inspection talked positively about their experience of being this agency's foster carers. Many described the agency as welcoming and supportive. Several said that the agency felt as if it was their extended family. One foster carer said that the agency was listening and helpful. For example, the agency has created a virtual community on social media following a suggestion from foster carers. Foster carer support groups take place regularly.

Foster carers' annual reviews always take place within the required timeframe. To strengthen monitoring of the quality of care, the registered persons have appointed an experienced independent social worker to carry out these reviews. This is a new development since the last inspection. The reviews show that the agency supports foster carers and placements effectively. The training offer is good, and includes both online and face-to-face training. However, the reviews do not always include information on the training that the foster carers have undertaken during the review period or an analysis of their training needs.

The agency's panel and an independent decision maker contribute to assuring the quality of this fostering service. The panel regularly asks questions relating to equality and diversity in all aspects. Assessments explore in detail the prospective foster carers' attitudes to various prejudices. Children and young people talked positively about their cultural background being respected. They receive good help to learn about the British way of life.

Good recording and monitoring systems are in place to help the registered persons to identify the agency's strengths and weaknesses. However, records of incidents relating to young people's being absent without authority or missing are not always completed in a timely manner. For example, some 'missing' episodes from January 2018 have still not been recorded fully. Inconsistent keeping of records undermines monitoring of trends and creates confusion.

Ofsted receives timely notification of significant events. The registered persons make sure that they keep Ofsted informed by sending regular updates on those events as necessary. This enables the regulator to monitor effectively between inspections.

The registered persons are aware of the areas of the service to be developed. A clear development plan is in place. The registered persons are taking proactive steps to increase the capacity of the agency by recruiting another social worker.

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 difference 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: SC402560

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Inspector(s)

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