

Help me Grow Fostering Services

Help Me Grow Fostering Services Ltd
Anerley Town Hall, Anerley Road, Anerley, London SE20 8BD
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in London. The agency's aim is to recruit, supervise and support foster carers in meeting the needs of children looked after by local authorities. It provides short-term, long-term, sibling group, remand, and parent and child placements. It is currently providing placements for 38 children and young people within 22 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 June 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 August 2015

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 and young people make good progress from their challenging starting points.

- Children and young people build positive relationships with foster carers who are finely attuned to their needs and provide individualised care to meet those needs.
- Children and young people stated they feel safe and can identify trusted adults who they can talk to, including their carer.
- Foster carers deliver culturally sensitive support to children and young people, who grow in confidence.
- Leaders and managers lead by example and model good practice to staff and foster carers. They are passionate about making a difference in the lives of children and young people.
- Staff said they feel well supported by their leaders and managers. They are challenged to make a positive impact on children and young people.
- Foster carers, staff and managers work effectively with other professionals to promote children's well-being.

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 fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel.</p> <p>(Regulation 23 (7))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that there is a health professional on the panel.</p>	15/08/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that all foster carers adhere to the agency's behavioural management policy which includes de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 3.8)
- Ensure that children and young people are offered independent return home interviews when they go missing, and effectively utilise the aggregate information to help reduce missing episodes. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 5.7)
- Ensure that risk assessments are detailed. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 4.5)
- Ensure that matching assessments are detailed. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 15.2)
- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the foster panel and decision maker need in order to make an objective approval decision. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 13.7)
- Ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account in developing the fostering service. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 1.7)

In particular, ensure that the views of the children and young people are considered for staff appraisals.

- Ensure that the fostering service has a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carers into legal adulthood, and that any such decisions are agreed with foster carers at a placement meeting and are detailed in a child's placement plan. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 12.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people make good progress from often challenging starting points. They improve in their physical health and self-care skills. They also experience emotional stability. An independent reviewing officer stated that she has been 'very impressed by the fosterer carer and the support' for the children, who are 'very settled'.

Children and young people access specialist services, such as the child and adolescent mental health services, to support issues that are more complex. They build positive relationships with peers and adults. A social worker described another foster carer as doing 'an amazing job' and observed 'significant changes' with the child since being in their care.

Children and young people experience a warm welcome by the agency and its carers. They are offered a range of activities and are helped to integrate into the fostering household and local community. Many live in secure, long-term placements. Newly placed children and young people experience routine early on in their stays. They are helped, as much as possible, to feel like they belong.

Children and young people attend school or other kinds of educational provision. School professionals indicate that children and young people have good attendance and achieve academically. Appropriate resources are identified where children and young people need extra support to meet their expected levels of attainment. Clear and timely communication from the agency, along with carers and professionals working from the same plan, help children and young people to experience positive outcomes in their education.

Monthly youth group meetings are well attended by the children and young people, who have a say in the things that matter to them. Their wishes and feelings are solicited for activities, foster carers' annual reviews and other aspects of the service.

The agency and its carers understand what is important to the children and young people. Cultural and gender identities are well supported. Consequently, children and young people grow in confidence and self-awareness.

The quality of assessments of prospective foster carers is comprehensive. However, there is room for improvement in a small number of assessments that contain

limited analysis of the applicant's fostering capacity.

Children and young people maintain contact with their families, which is well supported by the foster carers. They experience positive times with their parents and other members of their families.

Young people are supported to develop their independent living skills. Some young people have successfully transitioned from their foster placements to supported living accommodation. However, one young person experienced a delay in getting his accommodation. Although he was able to 'stay put' for the time being, this arrangement was not planned. There is room for improvement in avoiding drift in placement plans and proactively assessing young people to see if they are appropriate for 'staying put' arrangements.

The agency carefully matches referrals with suitable carers. Matching assessments are informed by a good understanding of the child or young person's needs and what is required to properly support them. Commissioning officers described the agency's matching process as 'thorough' and there is evidence of good matching outcomes. However, the quality of the matching assessments in the written form is not always robust. Information sharing between the agency, placing authorities and foster carers ensures that services to meet the children's needs are in place.

Foster carers understand and meet the needs of each individual child within the sibling group. Where possible siblings are placed together. However, in one case, after a thorough assessment was undertaken by professionals, the siblings were separated with appropriate contact arrangements in place and with a clear plan to review the placement and care plans. Extensive direct work with the children has taken place to ensure their safeguarding and emotional well-being.

Foster carers receive training in life-story work which, in turn, benefits children and young people by helping them to understand their past and experiences of loss and transitions.

The agency provides good parent and child placements. Parents learn about the stages of child development and how to look after their babies. Parents are also assessed on their ability to occupy a caring role in their babies' lives. Babies are kept safe. They are healthy and are stimulated. They benefit from routines.

Since the last inspection, the agency has had a few short-term remand placements that have provided the young people with stability and support to help reduce re-offending.

Unplanned endings are rare. The agency makes diligent efforts to stabilise placements, including extensive support for the foster carers. On the rare occasion that a placement breaks down, the agency imbeds the learning to help improve the service going forward.

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

Children and young people receive good help and protection from their foster carers and the agency staff and managers. Children and young people stated that they felt 'safe' in their foster placements and are able to identify trusted adults who they can talk to about any concerns, including their carers.

Foster carers and staff understand and adhere to the agency's child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. They are well aware of the children's vulnerabilities. Known and emerging risk factors are assessed and managed by foster carers and the agency. Children and young people have risk assessments in place that identify specific actions to mitigate the risks. However, the quality of risk assessments varies, with some being more detailed about vulnerabilities and mitigating strategies than others. Overall, children and young people experience a reduction in risks both inside and outside of their foster placements. This includes risks of child sexual exploitation being diminished for the young people identified to be at high risk.

Children and young people are supported to reduce their challenging behaviour. They benefit from foster carers who are attuned to their needs and understand the source of their difficulties. Foster carers utilise de-escalation techniques learned from training. The agency has a robust behavioural management policy designed to ensure best practice. However, there have been a couple of incidents, since the last inspection, where foster carers did not follow the agency's behavioural management policy. Although this did not result in any harm to the child, the agency needs to improve in ensuring that all foster carers work to the policy.

The majority of the children and young people rarely go missing from care. When a young person has gone missing, there has been a coordinated and consistent approach to missing episodes. Return home interviews are offered, although it is not always clear if the young people are routinely offered interviews with an independent person. There is room for improvement in keeping aggregate information obtained from return home interviews. Risk management meetings are convened to find ways to reduce the missing episodes.

Investigations into serious incidents or allegations of harm are shared with the appropriate agencies and are handled robustly in line with the statutory guidance. Allegations against foster carers are rare. One allegation of harm has been made since the last inspection. It was appropriately managed by the agency, which worked in partnership with the designated officer and other professionals.

Managers and staff work closely with foster carers to develop appropriate safe carer plans. Unannounced visits are routinely undertaken. The views of the children and young people about their placements are regularly obtained. This further promotes the safety of the children and young people.

Social workers, independent reviewing officers and the designated officer stated that they have no safeguarding concerns about the agency. Managers and staff, along with the foster carers, work together with the placing authorities and professionals to keep children and young people safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency's leaders and managers are highly experienced in fostering and meeting the needs of children and young people. The responsible individual oversees the agency's overall service delivery effectively and ensures that it fulfil the aims and objectives set out in its statement of purpose. The fostering service is financially viable. The responsible individual and the registered manager model the ethos of the agency through robust support for foster carers and staff. Leaders and managers share the same vision for the agency and are 'hands-on' in their approach to supporting children and young people. Consequently, children and young people experience positive outcomes.

Leaders and managers ensure that safe recruitment is in place. The agency is adequately staffed to meet the growing needs of the service. Foster carers have access to 24-hour support, which in turns helps the children and young people placed in their homes. Foster carers stated they benefit extensively from the support and training provided by the agency.

The agency's training plan covers the necessary areas of development for carers and staff. Foster carers complete the training, support and development standards within the 12-month timeframe following their initial approval.

Monthly support groups for foster carers are well attended. Foster carers stated they learn from one another in the sharing of good practice in caring for children and they enjoy the social events and other opportunities to meet collectively. Foster carers reported a close working relationship with the staff and managers in the interest of the children and young people. The agency regularly asks for the foster carers' feedback to help improve the service. Any concerns raised are appropriately handled by the leaders and managers.

Leaders and managers have high aspirations for their children and young people, which is mirrored by the foster carers. Their commitment to providing good-quality care is palpable. The dedication is also shared by the staff, who develop their practice through regular supervision and are challenged to make a positive impact on placement outcomes.

The central list of members of the fostering panel have a range of skills which includes social work, education and fostering. However, there is no health professional on the panel, although the agency has access to a physician. The panel chair has extensive experience in managing statutory services for children and young people and is clear about the role of the panel. The agency decision maker, who is a qualified social worker, has an extensive background in fostering. The fostering panel promotes safe and stable placements through robust challenge and scrutiny. This enables the agency to continually improve.

The managers' assessment of the agency's strengths and areas for improvement is thorough and underpinned by the national minimum standards. Managers have a monitoring system in place, which they are keen to develop into a continuous improvement tool. Leaders and managers have addressed all of the requirements

and all but one of the recommendations from the last inspection. The verbal and written feedback from children and young people is not yet a fully integrated part of staff appraisal.

Leaders and managers understand the importance of working together with others to achieve good outcomes for children and young people. The views of social workers and other professionals are largely very positive regarding the agency's partnership working.

Management, the staff team and foster carers are all dedicated to making a difference in the children's lives.

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: SC474737

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Inspector

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