

Horizon Fostering Services

Horizon Fostering Services Ltd
Kingsbury House, 468 Church Lane, Kingsbury, London NW9 8UA
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. It aims to meet a range of placement needs for children, including sibling groups and parents with children. It is currently providing placements for 39 children within 32 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 May 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 **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 9 November 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children thrive within stable, nurturing placements. All make progress in relation to their starting points, some significantly. All children are in education and several are exceeding expectations. They are able to maximise their potential, growing in confidence and their capabilities.
- Children receive high-quality care from a wide range of culturally diverse foster carers. They are made to feel part of a family and, as a result, build trusting relationships with their foster families.
- Placing social workers express their great satisfaction with the quality of care. Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers work in partnership with local authorities. The quality of professional relationships ensures the best possible all-round support to children.
- The agency provides good parent and child placements. Babies benefit from the introduction of good routines and the ability to meet their developmental milestones. Parents learn effective childcare and how to become self-responsible, making positive changes to their lifestyle and outlook.
- Foster carers are well prepared for their role, through training and ongoing support. Foster carers strongly advocate for children's needs. There is a good focus on the children's physical and emotional health and social development.
- Children benefit from the agency's methodical safeguarding arrangements. The risks to children are assessed prior to and throughout their placement. There are low-level episodes of children going missing. The agency actively requests meetings to form a strategy and protective team around a child.
- The agency has made significant progress since the last inspection. Leaders and managers show an ambitious vision dedicated to improving the life chances of children. The decision by senior leaders and managers to visit all households is commendable.
- Leaders and managers provide additional resources to support placements and individual foster carers. Examples are assisting with interest-free loans, therapeutic counselling sessions, funding educational tuition, language courses, gym membership and transport costs.
- This is an inclusive, supportive working environment, where staff views are valued. Staff are suitably qualified, dedicated and competent. They benefit from effective supervision, appraisals, relevant training and a good work-life balance.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The quality of assessments and management oversight of cases presented to the foster panel is not robust. Assessments do not always address pertinent issues.
- Prospective foster carers do not always receive clear details of the assessment process, the stages, content and possible timescales.

- There is an issue with older children not being motivated to fully address their independent living skills. The guidance provided from the agency is limited and a more structured approach would benefit older children.
- The agency has a very small number of carers who have not completed the necessary vocational training. This is despite offers of additional support and one-to-one tuition. There is also a need for newly approved foster carers to have first aid training. Leaders and managers are currently addressing these issues.
- Regulation 35 reports do not fully comply with regulations. The information within the business plan and consultation feedback must inform service monitoring reports.

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
The fostering service provider must provide foster carers with such training as appears necessary in the interests of the children placed with them; this relates specifically to first aid training and Training, Support and Development Standards training. (Regulation 17(1))	01 September 2017
The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system must provide for consultation with foster carers, children and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(1)(b) & (3))	01 September 2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that children are supported to:
 - establish positive and appropriate relationships; develop positive self-esteem; develop practical independence skills and financial capability, knowledge and skills. (NMS 12.1)
- 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 needs in order to make an objective approval decision. (NMS 13.7)
- Ensure that the assessment process sets out clearly the stages and content of the selection process and, where possible, timescales involved; the information to be given to applicants. (NMS 13.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children thrive in stable, nurturing placements. Children state that they are 'happy', and they 'like living here'. All make progress in relation to their starting points, some significantly. They are able to maximise their potential, growing in confidence and their capabilities. Placing social workers express their satisfaction with the quality of care. Foster carers express their pride in children's personal achievements.

Foster carers encourage older children to develop their independent living skills. There is an issue with older children not being motivated to fully address this area of work. An example being budgeting. However, the guidance provided from the agency is limited and a more structured approach would benefit older children. Supervising social workers actively work with placing social workers to help with the transition into adult life. Foster carers also help with job and college applications.

The quality of assessments and management oversight of cases presented to the foster panel is not robust. Assessments do not always address pertinent issues. A panel member highlights that assessments 'could have been more elaborate and more analytical'. The fostering panel appropriately defers decision-making. This ensures that applicants have the skills and experiences to meet the needs of children. However, applicants do not always receive clear details of the assessment process, the stages, content and possible timescales.

Children enjoy being part of a family and participating in family events and holidays. They make positive attachments, building trusting relationships with their foster carers and their extended family. A placing social worker confirms that a foster carer treats their child 'as her own son'. Another placing social worker commended a 'person-centred carer who selflessly puts the young person first'.

Foster carers demonstrate a considerable dedication to their role. An example of this is a foster family who are self-financing extensive building works to meet the accommodation needs of a sibling group. Foster carers are strong advocates for children. They diplomatically challenge decisions which they do not feel are in the child's best interests. A placing social worker confirms foster carers are 'working proactively to identify and meet' their child's needs.

Children receive high-quality care from foster carers. A placing social worker stated they were 'extremely impressed' by the foster carer's 'dedication, tolerance and co-operation'. They comment on the 'positive impact' on the child's 'life and future'. Supervising social workers also actively focus on children's needs and the promotion of their well-being. Close liaison and prompt requesting of meetings ensure that issues are efficiently managed.

The agency provides good parent and child placements. Babies benefit from the introduction of routines and the ability to meet their developmental milestones, in a family setting. A placing social worker highlights a parent feeling 'genuinely cared for'. Parents learn the importance of health and nutrition, stimulating their child and creating emotional warmth. Parents also have an opportunity for personal development, enrolling in college and improving their independent living skills.

Foster carers endeavour to instil self-belief in parents, an example being telling a parent they have 'the power to prove everybody wrong'. Parents learn to take more responsibility and make positive changes to their lifestyle and outlook.

A strength of the agency is the diversity of carers and the personal resilience they bring to their roles. The power to overcome adversity is inspiring and motivating. For example, many have experience of being in care and arriving in the country as a refugee. The latter is particularly encouraging for children seeking asylum. It enables them to receive survival skills, coping mechanisms, reassurance and practical assistance through the immigration process.

The majority of children are of a minority ethnic heritage. A foster carer highlighted the need to 'recognise, identity and culture'. A placing social worker praises a 'cultural match' which helped their child to settle quickly. Both speak Arabic and the local dialect. There is good attention to religious and cultural needs, thus enabling children to attend their places of worship, pray, follow traditions and dietary requirements. Children also have the opportunity to learn their parent's language of origin. Where there are gaps in the matching process, foster carers actively enhance their knowledge through research and relevant training.

All children are in education and several are exceeding expectations. A placing authority describes their child's educational progress as 'excellent'. A headteacher comments on another child's 'pleasing progress'. Leaders and managers are introducing a scheme to formally recognise children's achievements. Foster carers value education and strongly advocate for additional resources.

Children are physically and psychologically healthier. Contact with families and friends is appropriately managed. Delegated authority focuses on normalising children's experiences. Foster carers help children identify and pursue their talents and interests. Children are engaging in appropriate recreational and social activities. Children lead a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise. For example, going to the gym, yoga, playing basketball, football, cricket and cheerleading.

Consultation and social events provide an effective dialogue where children influence the agency. They contribute to the skills to foster training, foster carer reviews and the service development. Children enjoy the opportunity to meet together at the annual summer event, which also includes foster carers' birth children and other relatives.

Older children have the opportunity to remain with their carers into adulthood. Currently, three young people are living with their foster carers through 'Staying Put' arrangements. Others maintain their relationships once they move on, which provides young people with valued ongoing support. A placing authority commented on the 'Outstanding care, support and education,' which enabled their child to move into semi-independence.

Foster carers are well prepared for their role as a result of thorough training and ongoing support. In the event of an 'emergency', back-up carers move into the affected home if necessary to care for children. Alternatively, children can receive respite with another foster carer with the agency.

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

Children benefit from the agency's methodical safeguarding arrangements. The risks to children are assessed prior to and throughout their placement. Matching assessments extensively highlight the risks and safeguarding issues related to each child. Safe caring plans provide clear guidance to foster carers. The safeguarding of each child is a constant agenda item in both foster carer and the agency's social workers' supervision meetings. Team meetings also enable collective discussion of the safeguarding issues related to individual children.

Children feel safe and are able to disclose past histories of abuse or current issues. This enables involved professionals to actively address issues. A placing social worker highlights that foster carers 'provide stability in much needed times of difficulty. They are the best foster carers that I have worked with.' Another placing social worker stated that their child 'will not consider a different placement because she feels safe, listened to and valued'.

Children are prepared and supported to manage difficult situations and their own behaviour. For example, being helped to better manage their anger. Foster carers instil clear and consistent boundaries. A child stated that they are 'taught to do the right thing'. As a consequence, children learn to develop socially acceptable behaviour. A placing social worker described a foster carer as 'firm but fair'.

Safeguarding arrangements protect children. Fosters carers and staff benefit from a wide range of safeguarding training. Carers are prepared and supported to respond to children that may go missing from their homes or may be at risk of harm, exploitation, neglect, abuse, self-harm, bullying or radicalisation. Risks are identified and understood by foster carers, and well managed by all those involved with keeping children safe.

There is a co-ordinated, consistent approach to missing episodes. There is currently only one child who goes missing from their foster family home, primarily returning to their birth family. The placing authority express that they are 'amazed' that this young person has stayed with the foster carer, highlighting the decrease in missing episodes since being with the foster carer. A placing social worker confirmed that they are 'all aware of the concerns and on the same page'.

Within the agency, there is an appropriate appreciation that all children are at risk of exploitation. Staff rigorously monitor the vulnerability and risks of each child. Foster carers are very attentive and promptly report any concerns, and staff actively request strategy meetings. There are examples of effective responses to criminal activity, potential sexual exploitation and radicalisation and extremism.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This is an agency which has made significant progress since the last inspection. Foster carers describe the agency as being 'very family orientated'. Foster carers welcome being part of a small agency, where they are 'seen as an individual'. They highlight that 'nothing could be better'. Leaders, managers and all staff know each child. The decision by senior leaders and managers to visit all households is commendable. A placing authority describes the agency as 'good'. A social worker

states the agency is 'a lot better than others', highlighting that it is 'very responsive'.

Leaders and managers have effectively addressed the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. Leaders and managers prioritise meeting national minimum standards and regulations. There is more robust monitoring, which includes children's school attendance and promoting educational attainment. There are improvements in the fostering panel, the expertise and independence of panel members, their performance, observation and training. Children receive protection from effective risk management plans. The notification process to Ofsted is more efficient, and this includes suspected child sexual exploitation. Foster carers are better equipped for their role, through suitable training, appraisals and the regular supervision of social worker visits. Staff also routinely follow up with the responsible authority if there is a delay in receiving a care plan.

Leaders and managers show an ambitious vision. They want to improve the life chances of children and ensure high standards of care. Leaders and managers effectively prioritise needs with decision making, focusing on looking after children 'like your own'. A leader highlighted their aim for 'every child, to leave (their foster carers) a different child'. There are plans to introduce a therapeutic childcare model and a more efficient tracking system to measure progress.

Leaders and managers are highly experienced social workers and staff are dedicated and competent. The agency is achieving its stated aims and objectives. Leaders and managers provide additional resources to support placements and individual foster carers. Examples are assisting with interest-free loans, therapeutic counselling sessions, funding educational tuition, language courses, gym membership and transport costs.

The agency is an inclusive organisation which requests and values staff views. The team works together and is focused on the needs of children and supporting carers. Leaders and managers provide a supportive environment for staff through appraisals, structured inductions and training programmes. Social work staff benefit from regular individual supervision. These meetings consistently focus on the needs of the children in each placement.

Staff appreciate the good work-life balance and the caring and supportive management style. An example of this is the open door policy, which enables staff to receive clear guidance and direction. The agency also provides an opportunity for learning for social work students.

Leaders and managers recognise their strengths and are aware of the areas requiring development. Regulatory reports demonstrate basic service monitoring. The business plan focuses on improving the quality of care. Consultation is also undertaken with children, foster carers and placing authorities. Although collated, the business plan and consultation information is not included in the regulation 35 reports.

Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers work in partnership with local authorities. There is robust challenge to local authorities to provide the necessary documentation and resources to fully address the identified needs of children. The quality of professional relationships ensures the best possible all-round support to

children.

The agency provides a good representation of cultural diversity through their foster carers, staff, leaders and managers. This enables a strong promotion of equality, diversity and respect for differences.

The fostering panel effectively focuses on children's safety and well-being. Central list members have a range of expertise, which includes social work, health, education and fostering. The panel chair is an experienced social care consultant. The fostering panel demonstrates relevant challenge and provides constructive criticism. This enables the agency to continually improve. The agency appropriately de-registers unsuitable carers. Panel recommendations and the overall approval process ensures that decision making reflects children's best interests.

Children receive care from foster carers who have access to 24-hour support. Specific training helps to equip staff for their task. Foster carers also have the flexibility of online training. The agency has a very small number of carers who have not completed the necessary vocational training. This is despite offers of additional support and one-to-one tuition. There is also a need for newly approved foster carers to have first aid training. Leaders and managers are currently addressing these issues.

Foster carers meet collectively, enjoying network meetings and social events together. These meetings focus on children's needs, learning and support. Newsletters provide relevant information, including agency updates. Foster carers describe the agency as being 'very supportive' and their supervising social workers as 'amazing'.

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 who 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

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Inspector

Sharon Payne, social care inspector



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