

United Fostering Services Limited

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101 Lockhurst Lane, Coventry CV6 5SF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is owned by a small private company. The agency registered in June 2022. At the time of this inspection, the agency had four approved fostering households and was providing care to three children. The agency offers emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements and placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The manager registered with Ofsted at the same time as the agency, on 28 June 2022.

Inspection dates: 27 February to 3 March 2023

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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This agency registered with Ofsted in June 2022. Since then, they have approved four fostering households, with a further three assessments of potential foster carers underway. The agency has been accepting referrals since January 2023 and at the time of the inspection, foster carers were caring for three children.

Children's experiences are good. Foster carers provide children with nurture and support that helps them feel happy and settled. Even at this early stage, children are making good progress with many areas of their development. One professional said, 'I'm so impressed with the foster carer. The support around the child is exceptional.'

Matching of children and foster carers is careful and considered. This includes exploration of the foster carers' ability to provide care in line with the agency's therapeutic approach and the needs of all children in the household. When possible, children visit the fostering household prior to any move, and their views are central to the matching decision. Children's culture and religion are clearly identified at the point of referral. This results in culturally sensitive matches where children share religion and language with their foster carers.

The agency works well with other organisations. They have a good understanding of other professionals' responsibilities and ensure that meetings take place and information about children's plans is shared as required. As a result, foster carers are knowledgeable about children's needs and put in place the right support quickly. This includes helping children to stay in contact with the people who are important to them and progressing children's claims for asylum.

The agency's plans for children are underpinned by consultation between foster carers and the agency's therapist. The guidance helps foster carers to build secure attachment relationships with children based on the child's unique experiences and emotional needs. This includes getting alongside children to build trust, model independence skills and encourage children's talents and hobbies. Foster carers have bought musical instruments and found local clubs based on children's interests. These activities contribute to increasing children's self-esteem and confidence as well as allowing time for children to enjoy periods of mindfulness.

The agency employs an educational adviser who is persistent in challenging any delays in school admissions. The agency provides children waiting for a school placement with regular learning sessions. These sessions are individualised and have included helping children improve their English language skills and to prepare for new experiences such as health appointments.

Foster carers capture children's experiences in their daily recording. Records are clear and regularly shared with children's social workers. However, records are not accessible to children and do not reflect the agency's aim to embed therapeutic language.

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

The agency has not had any safeguarding incidents in the short time they have been caring for children. Managers have established weekly safeguarding meetings to ensure that they have dedicated time to review and monitor any concerns.

The agency ensures that foster carers have an awareness of the additional needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This includes resources to help foster carers understand children's journeys and to develop vigilance to potential external risks.

Children know their supervising social worker well. Social workers visit children most weeks and speak to them alone. While children have established positive relationships with their foster carers, this offers children another trusted adult to share any concerns with.

The agency makes sure children know how to share any worries or complaints. This information is provided in different formats and languages. Interpreters are used when needed, to ensure that children can share their views independently.

Managers have implemented appropriate health and safety checks and safer caring plans to reduce risks for everyone in the fostering household. Risk assessments are individual to children and provide more detailed guidance for foster carers on promoting the safety of the child they are caring for. Guidance to foster carers on responding to children's behaviour is based on the agency's therapeutic approach.

Recruitment practices are thorough for staff and foster carers. Assessments of potential foster carers are comprehensive. This includes helping to prepare foster carers' birth children for the realities of fostering and carefully exploring foster carers' support networks. The panel provides appropriate scrutiny that helps select suitable foster carers with the skills and resilience required to provide children with safety and stability.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by a committed manager, who is also the director. The manager has relevant social work and management experience in fostering services and training in therapeutic parenting. This is used to good effect to embed the aims of the statement of purpose in practice and to establish a child-centred culture.

The manager knows the children well. He is a good advocate for children, ensuring that their voices are heard in planning and decision-making meetings.

The agency provides a high level of support to foster carers, that helps them feel confident in their new roles. This includes regular supervision, visits to the children and a responsive out-of-hours service. The agency is in the process of employing a supervising social worker to maintain this high level of support as the agency grows.

The agency's training offer is comprehensive and reflects the approach to care the agency is taking. At the time of the inspection, the foster carers were newly approved and in the early stages of completing training courses. Foster carers learn about safer caring as part of their preparation training prior to being approved and further face-to-face training is arranged. However, not all members of the household have access to learning to help manage the risk of allegations.

Managers have purposefully grown the agency slowly. They have been successful in establishing the foundations and expectations of practice before recruiting more staff. Managers are focused on providing a diverse range of carers who reflect the local community. They are engaging with local community groups to encourage applicants from different faiths, ethnic and cultural backgrounds to reflect the needs of local children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children needing care.

Fostering panel members bring a range of experience and expertise. Managers are expanding this further with targeted recruitment for individuals with expertise in education and championing LGBTQ+. The fostering panel is supported by a panel adviser. Collectively, they provide effective quality assurance to enhance the good practices already in place. Panel minutes are generally clearly written. However, on one occasion, records did not evidence why panel were making an alternative approval range to the assessing social worker's recommendation.

Managers have implemented electronic recording systems and systems that support effective management oversight. Managers ensure that areas for improvement are addressed quickly. This includes managers taking action to meet the recommendations identified during this inspection.

Managers are invested in continual learning and development of good practice. The agency subscribes to a range of organisations which provide expert advice in fostering and therapeutic parenting models. This offers the agency and foster carers direct access to additional resources and support to enhance practice. Managers are active in research, and are currently contributing to studies into attachment styles.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the panel chair produces written minutes of panel meetings that are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for recommendations. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that appropriate training on safer caring is provided for all members of the foster household, including young people of sufficient age and understanding. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.9)
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children should be actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: 2672815

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Inspector

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

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