

Fostering People Too Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Kristen Judd
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Setting address	Braintree Enterprise Centre, 46 Springwood Drive, BRAINTREE, Essex, CM7 2YN
Telephone number	01376 329 460
Email	peter@fosteringpeopletoo.org.uk
Registered person	Fostering People Too Limited
Registered manager	Peter John Russell Turner
Responsible individual	Bridget Betts
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

- Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
- Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
- Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
- Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Fostering People Too is an independent fostering agency which recruits and supports foster carers in Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, and North and East London. The agency occupies premises on the outskirts of Braintree.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

The service provides outstanding care for children and exceeds many of the national minimum standards. There is a minor shortfall in regard to clarifying the relevant checks to be undertaken during the unannounced visits to carers' homes. This does not impact on the of quality of care.

The health and care needs of the children placed in foster homes are very well met by foster carers who provide them with safe and caring environments. Children have extremely positive relationships with their carers. They are actively supported to achieve their potential, both socially and educationally.

Supervising social workers provide a very high level of support to carers. There is a commitment to ensure that foster carers are trained to develop their skills in order to provide the best possible care for children. The stability of the placements is based on a matching process that is very thorough and well planned.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Services are child focused and meet individual needs extremely well. The agency positively considers applicants to become foster carers irrespective of cultural, religious or sexual orientation.

The organisation is professionally managed to ensure that the functions of the agency are efficiently and effectively carried out. Carers, social workers, and independent reviewing officers are all extremely positive about the agency, foster carers and the care provided to children.

Improvements since the last inspection

There was one requirement made at the previous inspection in regard to the panel memberships. This issue has been addressed. There is a central list for the fostering panel which provides clear information about the expertise of individual members.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service promotes children's physical, emotional and psychological health. Foster carers are provided with clear guidance and training in health, administering medication and first aid. Children are all registered with relevant health services such as doctors, opticians, dentists and other specialist health services as required. Arrangements for medical consents are clear at the outset of the placement. The fostering service pays very good attention to the emotional well-being of children in placement. There is excellent evidence of effective working between staff, foster carers and external mental health specialists, such as the child and adolescent mental health services. Foster carers demonstrate an excellent awareness of their role and responsibility in ensuring children's medical and health care needs are well met.

The suitability of foster homes is assessed during the thorough assessment process for prospective carers. Their foster care placements provide a suitable physical environment for children in their care. Children are happy and comfortable in their surroundings. All children have their own bedrooms unless arrangements are otherwise negotiated with the placing authority. The fostering service has efficient systems in place that ensure that each foster care household undergoes an annual health and safety check. This is very well evidenced on files. However, these visits are not always unannounced.

Carers encourage young people to take part in physical activities and interests that are appropriate to their age and needs. The promotion of healthy eating and lifestyles ensures children are able to develop positive lifestyles and emotional well-being.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children's safety and welfare are very well promoted by the agency. Foster carers receive safeguarding training to ensure they are well aware of their role and responsibility to support and safeguard children. There is an excellent range of training, support and information about safe caring and there are written plans for this in place. These arrangements provide important safeguards for children.

There is effective partnership working with regard to child protection enquiries and good liaison with involved professionals including the Local Authority Designated Officer. Where incidents of a child protection nature occur, the service effectively and consistently acts in accordance with agreed safeguarding protocols to ensure children's safety remains the primary objective.

Foster carers are fully aware of the need to alert the agency to any significant events; the organisation has effective systems to ensure bodies, such as the host

and local authority, the police and Ofsted are promptly and appropriately informed of significant events. Children who go missing are protected. There is a policy and procedure in place if children go missing from care. Carers are aware of the procedure to follow and report that they are confident that they would respond appropriately in the event of this happening.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children receive excellent support, which is responsive to their individual needs. Children thrive within their foster homes and enjoy warm, nurturing and supportive relationships with their foster family. Carers have training in managing positive behaviours and are effective in promoting this in children. Supervising social workers meet regularly with carers to discuss any issues relating to young people in placement. Carers say that they get the information available to the fostering service about children's backgrounds, so that they can understand any behaviours that they may display. Children receive exceptional care based on strong structured boundaries. This impacts positively on their behaviour and helps them develop good social skills. Fostering households are inclusive and actively welcome children, regarding them as members of their own family. One social worker commented: 'Children have flourished in their current placement and continue to progress.'

Children are supported to achieve very well in school and to experience a wide range of leisure activities. The agency promotes the educational development of children and young people in placement. Foster carers are very clear about their roles and responsibilities in addressing the educational needs of children in their care. They are proactive in putting in place strategies to support children to achieve positive outcomes in education. Carers liaise closely with schools, and attend meetings when required. Children clearly benefit from the fostering service's support to promote their educational success.

Foster carers ensure children have access to an array of play and learning materials to encourage appropriate development. Children have good access to a range of leisure and recreational activities of their choosing. The fostering service supports children's participation in school and community-based activities. Children, carers and their families enjoy social occasions that are organised and facilitated by the fostering agency. These activities are greatly enjoyed by staff, carers and children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers support and encourage the children to develop their self-confidence. Children experience life in a family environment where they can exercise choices within reasonable and sensible limits. They are supported and encouraged by their foster carers to take an active part in their statutory reviews. Foster carers are fully aware of the child's care plan. They are able to make delegated decisions on the

same basis as a reasonable parent would, taking into account risks and the emotional maturity of the child.

The service has established an effective complaints system. Children have access to independent advocates if they so wish. This ensures their views and best interests are promoted. The children's guide provides a comprehensive summary of foster care. It contains relevant information about other adults who can be contacted if required. This is a well-designed, child-friendly document.

Children are able to maintain appropriate contact with their family members and significant others. Contact arrangements are very clear, constructive and safeguard children. Foster carers are fully aware of the expectation that they support and facilitate contact between children and their birth family members.

Children are welcomed into the foster home, and moves from the home are managed in a sensitive and planned way. The service undertakes careful matching of children and foster carers to help ensure appropriate and stable placements are maintained that can meet children's needs well. It is evident that this is normal practice within the fostering agency. Children are very settled in their foster homes and are clearly very happy.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service prepares young people well for adulthood. Foster carers are aware of their responsibility to prepare children to live independently and provide age-appropriate support to children in developing independence skills. They demonstrate practical work they have completed with children. This includes advising and guiding them on relationships, budgeting, and domestic skills. Carers support children in achieving their hopes and ambitions.

Foster carers often view children they formerly cared for as members of their own families and as a result are able to independently offer supported lodgings arrangements. Children benefit from and appreciate the opportunity to continue living in households in which they feel they are loved and belong to.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Overall the fostering service has excellent arrangements in place to support staff, foster carers and children.

The fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of looked after children seeking foster care placements. Foster carers spoken with confirm that the assessment process was thorough and explored their life experiences, skills and knowledge of caring for children, and included exploring

their views on equality and diversity. The pre-assessment training prepares them well for the challenges of fostering. Foster carers are provided with good information once approved. They have access to policies and procedures and a handbook which is relevant to the care and support that they provide to children in their care; these prepare carers well for the fostering task. Foster carer annual reviews are consistently held on an annual basis and more frequently if circumstances dictate. Staff provide comprehensive and relevant reports.

The constitution and practice of the fostering panel takes account of the new regulations. Applicants to become foster carers are always invited to attend the panel and are given the opportunity to present their views on the process. The agency decision maker considers all recommendations in a timely manner.

There is a Statement of Purpose and a children's guide, so that children, carers, parents, staff and placing social workers can be clear about the aims and objectives of the service. Children have their own age-appropriate guide which outlines what they can expect from the service.

The fostering service has a robust and effective matching process that enhances the potential for placement success. Case files evidence that all parties are fully consulted in an attempt to secure the best possible match for looked after children that meets their long-term needs. Children are well matched to their foster carers, and they are very settled and happy in their foster homes. Staff are skilled in identifying placement issues and seeking foster carers best equipped to meet identified needs.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable to work with children. It is managed effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of the children placed. The fostering service is run in an ethical and effective manner. The service is financially sound and they pride themselves on their efficiency. Staff are warm, people orientated and have an unquestionable heart for children. One professional commented: 'This is a highly professional, robust and effective service.' Another commented: 'This service communicates well and provides outstanding support for foster carers and also the children placed there.'

The manager has an excellent knowledge of childcare and fostering. Children benefit from a reflective and highly supportive service with dynamic leadership. Staff are well qualified, extremely experienced and passionate. They ensure that working practices, processes and systems are comprehensive and encourage good practice. The service appropriately notifies relevant parties of significant events.

The staff group are well qualified with extensive knowledge and experience in working with vulnerable children. Recruitment procedures are in place and ensure that all appropriate checks are undertaken. Copies of references in relation to panel members are all kept on the central file.

Foster carers receive excellent training which thoroughly equips them for their role; this includes the Children's Workforce Development Council training. Carers are able

to access advice and guidance as necessary, to ensure consistent high quality care is provided for the children. Carers are very positive about the ongoing training and regular supervision that they receive. Comments from carers include, 'there is a team approach which fosters warm, supportive relationships between staff, carers and children', and, 'supervision is delivered in a friendly manner but with clear direction when required'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The service works closely with children and carers to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and met. Carers say that the service is very good at responding to equality and diversity matters. Foster carers have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and know how to refer any issues or concerns to the agency. There are systems in place for managing financial viability, serious incidents, allegations, complaints and notifications to Ofsted. The service has received no concerns since registration.

The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its Statement of Purpose. Foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures, and the payments due to them are fair and paid in a timely way. Records are well maintained and clear, and contribute to a child's understanding of their life.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that foster homes are inspected annually, without appointment, to ensure they continue to meet the needs of foster children. (NMS 10.5)