

# Anchor Foster Care Services

1a Beresford Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4ES

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This organisation is a family-run, not-for-profit independent fostering agency. Anchor Foster Care Services covers a wide geographical area. It has a head office based in Gillingham, Kent, and another office in Castle Donington. The organisation offers a range of fostering placements to placing local authorities, including emergency, short and longer placements. Its stated aim is to work within the therapeutic approach of 'therapeutic crisis intervention for families'. The agency currently supports 69 fostering households, and these are providing care for 81 children and young people.

The manager was registered with Ofsted on 17 February 2014.

**Inspection dates:** 8 to 12 October 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be 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:** 28 November 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:

- Children make good progress while living with carers.
- Children feel safe, and they build secure relationships and bonds with carers.
- Leaders, managers and staff respond swiftly to concerns and allegations that arise. Appropriate referrals are made to other agencies and related records are detailed.
- Staff and carers demonstrate a very good understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of the children who are placed with the agency. They use this knowledge to manage the risks to children effectively, taking their age and ability into account.
- Foster carers benefit from comprehensive support and training that equip them to develop their skills and enable them to provide a high standard of care for children.
- The registered manager has established a positive culture and ethos in the agency, ensuring that staff are child focused and accountable for their practice.
- Leaders are clear about the agency's strengths and weaknesses, and they have developed appropriate plans for improvement.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Some documents relating to matching decisions do not evidence that all risks have been explored or that consideration has been given to how these risks will be managed or minimised.
- Some children's plans do not provide the specific, individual approaches and strategies to be followed and implemented to support foster carers in managing and reducing risk-taking behaviours.
- Panel has recently changed its systems and processes, although the impact is not yet embedded or seen consistently in all areas. There are variations in the quality of panel minutes, as the minutes do not all provide a robust evidence trail of matters raised, explored and discussed to enable conclusions and recommendations to be properly followed through.
- Staff have improved systems for gaining agreements for 'placing alongside', although inspectors found that one record lacked the evidence that this had been sought prior to a placement being made.
- Systems and process for safer recruitment lack the thoroughness and the level of detail that are required.
- Panel members have not all engaged in an annual appraisal process.

## 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 data-bbox="193 645 469 683">Fitness of workers</p> <p data-bbox="193 719 788 757">The fostering service provider must not–</p> <p data-bbox="193 792 1034 875">employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or</p> <p data-bbox="193 911 1099 1025">allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p data-bbox="193 1061 1129 1216">This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p> <p data-bbox="193 1252 1083 1335">For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person–</p> <p data-bbox="193 1370 1090 1408">is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p data-bbox="193 1444 1077 1559">and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p data-bbox="193 1594 1123 1787">(4) The fostering service provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that any person working for a fostering service who is not employed by the fostering service, and to whom paragraph (2) does not apply, is appropriately supervised while carrying out their duties. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b)(2)(3)(c)(4))</p>	<p data-bbox="1142 645 1326 683">01/12/2018</p>

## Recommendations

### ■ Promote positive identity and diversity

Foster carers meet children's individual needs as set out in the child's placement plan as part of the wider family context. ('Fostering services national minimum standards', 2.3)

### ■ Promoting positive behaviour

Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and abilities and Foster carers have positive strategies for effectively supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs. ('Fostering services national minimum standards', 3.4, 3.6)

### ■ Matching the child

Ensure where gaps in matching are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering services national minimum standards', 15.1)

### ■ Regulations 22 and 23 of the 2010 Regulations set out the conditions that must be complied with before a child is placed with a foster carer. The responsible authority must be satisfied that placement with foster carers is the best way to meet their duties under section 22C(5) and (6)(a) and (b) of the 1989 Act, and that the specific placement is the most appropriate having regard to all the circumstances. In making placements the responsible authorities should strive to keep siblings together where they wish to be together and this is consistent with their needs. The responsible authority is also under a duty, so far as reasonably practicable in all the circumstances, that the placement does not disrupt the child's education or training (Section 22C(7) and (8)(b)). This will all require careful pre-placement planning, including consideration of the impact on any children already living in the foster home. Consent to such a placement must be given by the fostering service provider and any other responsible authority with a child already placed with the foster carer. This will require consultation with the social worker of any other child placed in the foster home. ('The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, volume 4: Fostering services', paragraph 3.2)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children make good progress while living with their foster families. They benefit from the good relationships of trust that they develop with foster carers. Foster carers provide consistency, stability, security, support and a good quality of care to the children who live with them, and most children remain in placement for several years. Foster carers support and enable children to develop a wide variety of essential life skills that promote their future opportunities and equip them for adulthood.

The importance of education is embraced by all in the agency, and they advocate on children's behalf to identify education provisions. They provide additional support when an educational provision has not been sourced. Children for whom English is not the first language have benefited from additional education support and advice which have enabled them to access further education opportunities.

Staff regularly seek children's views, especially prior to the review of their care and on other occasions. Children can attend activities in which they can share their views with others. They also speak with staff when they visit them in their foster carers' homes. Children and young people know how to make a complaint. The children's guide informs them how to do this and what they can expect.

Children enjoy good support from foster carers, who ensure that their health needs are met. Carers explore the support offered to promote children's emotional and physical health.

Foster carers support children to engage in activities and hobbies and to develop their interests. Children are encouraged to meet up with friends and develop their social networks. Staff offer a variety of activities, clubs and experiences during school holidays which children attend, enjoy and use well to socialise with friends.

Foster carers and the staff at the agency support and facilitate the time that children spend with their family members, enabling children to maintain these important links.

Staff are able to evidence their considerations and rationale for matching, although these processes are variable in quality and do not consistently explore all the needs, risks and identified gaps. In the process, staff do not identify foster carers' gaps in knowledge and training needs. On one occasion, staff placed a child with carers without seeking the required 'placing alongside' agreement.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Staff and foster carers have a good knowledge and understanding of risk factors and what is required to manage and minimise them. They have been thorough in responding to concerns and allegations, and there is clear evidence of records, reports and referrals to others when required. Leaders and managers have carried out internal

investigations as these have become necessary, with foster carers and children supported through these processes. Staff act and implement actions to address the findings and outcomes.

The agency recruitment processes are neither thorough nor robust enough. During the inspection, several aspects were found to be absent from recruitment files. This included the lack of evidence for an application form being completed, the gaps in employment history not being explored and no overseas checks for those who have resided and worked abroad.

The children and young people spoken to said that they feel safe and have a trusted adult whom they can confide in. They have good relationships with foster carers and talk to them about worries, concerns and personal matters. Foster carers provide children with practical advice and information about the risks that they face. This promotes children's ability to make informed decisions.

Staff undertake basic agency risk assessments, placement plans and safer care plans to support foster carers in meeting the needs of those in their care. However, they do not detail all relevant practical information, strategies and information to enable foster carers to respond to children's needs and manage risk effectively.

Foster carers respond well to episodes of children going missing. They actively look for children when they do not return home. Carers request additional support, and they locate the children and young people and welcome them home. Foster carers follow the agency's general 'missing' policy and procedure, but children's plans do not include explicit guidance to help foster carers to manage specific episodes.

Foster carers are trained in the agency's preferred de-escalation approach, including techniques and breakaway strategies. Most carers know and understand the agency's therapeutic model, which guides and informs foster carers in how to manage behaviour. However, the agency has not yet implemented behaviour support plans to guide and advise foster carers in how to respond and react consistently to children's behaviour. Foster carers use sanctions and consequences to manage behaviour. In the main, these are recorded and are in line with the agency's agreed behaviour management policies and procedure.

The recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers are of variable quality. Carers are prepared well for their role and they access necessary training through the assessment process, although some reports seen by inspectors were variable in terms of the quality of information included. The agency decision-maker and the fostering panel have identified these weaknesses and appropriate steps have been taken to address the shortfalls. Leaders and managers have planned training to address and improve the quality assurance process.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The manager leads the agency effectively and has acted on the recommendations from the previous inspection. Senior leaders and managers are child focused, with a clear vision, aspiration and focus. They understand the agency's strengths and weaknesses,

and the agency's development plan includes the key areas for development along with the actions to be taken. The agency provides support to children and foster carers as described in its statement of purpose.

The agency operates from two locations. The biggest challenge for the agency is to ensure consistency and quality of service provision across the wide geographical area that it covers. Leaders have made recent changes to the agency's systems and practice to promote consistency of service provision. Managers continually review performance and the quality of service that the agency provides.

Staff and foster carers access a wide range of appropriate local training. Most members of staff and the majority of foster carers have been trained in the agency's preferred therapeutic approach, and those who have completed the training have found it to be beneficial and informative. The agency has previously struggled to ensure that foster carers undertake their required training, but this has improved recently.

Staff access regular effective supervision, and their practice is appraised at least annually. There have been several changes to the staffing of the agency since the previous inspection. Newly appointed staff engage in an induction and probation process which is supportive and informative.

Supervising social workers have manageable caseloads, and this enables them to provide regular and good-quality support to foster carers.

Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers collectively celebrate and recognise children's and young people's achievements. They are also quick to address new concerns that arise and changes in children's needs, requesting a review as required.

The panel process is increasingly stable, robust and consistent in its quality assurance role, although this is not yet fully embedded across all areas. Panel minutes do not consistently record all the discussions that take place. Leaders and managers are aware of this and have a plan in place to improve them. During the inspection, it became apparent that not all panel members had been appraised at least annually.

The agency has two decision-makers to avoid conflicts of interest. They work well together and have clear systems to ensure fully informed decision-making.

Leaders, managers and staff have developed positive working relationships with commissioners, who say that the agency thinks very carefully about all new referrals before accepting them.

## 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:** SC036598

**Registered provider:** Anchor Foster Care Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** 1a Beresford Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4ES

**Responsible individual:** Alistair Sutherland

**Registered manager:** Linda Shephard

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## **Inspector**

Amanda Maxwell, social care inspector



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