

The Children's Family Trust

The Children's Family Trust

1A Brindley Way, Wakefield Business Park, Wakefield WF2 0XQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Children's Family Trust is a limited company and a registered charity. The agency provides fostering services across the Yorkshire and Humber region, offering long, short, emergency and respite placements. It currently has 28 children and young people in placement with 19 fostering households. The agency was registered in 2014. The manager was registered in June 2015.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 September 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: 22 February 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The children and young people are looked after by experienced and committed carers who understand their needs and include them in their family life. Their care provides children and young people with a wide range of experiences and activities which develop their skills and self-esteem.
- The foster carers receive excellent support from the agency staff to enable them

to cope with the challenges of fostering.

- The agency provides carers with a comprehensive training package which helps them to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. The agency supports carers to undertake specialist training where necessary.
- When children and young people go missing, the carers know what to do and act quickly to keep the children and young people safe.
- The fostering panel ensures that assessments and reviews of carers are thorough. They consider the information in the assessments carefully. This promotes safe and well-matched placements.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The most up-to-date information about children and young people is not always given to their carers. The agency staff are not effective in challenging placing authorities to secure this information.
- Allegations against carers do not always result in timely referrals to the designated officer.
- Arrangements to keep the children and young people safe while using the internet are not made sufficiently clear to foster carers.
- The way in which the agency records information about the care needs of the children and young people is fragmented and inconsistent.

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 ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up-to-date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17(3))	31/11/2018
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 take place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1)) Specifically, that the agency refers all allegations made about carers to the designated officer without delay.	31/11/2018

Recommendations

- Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside the household or when using the internet or social media. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 14, paragraph 4.4)
- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the services policy for the keeping and retention files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 52, paragraph 26.2)

Specifically, that records are organised in such a way that the information required by carers to ensure the safe and effective care of children is easily accessible.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency provides comprehensive support for all the children and young people placed. The carers' knowledge and commitment ensure that the children and young people make progress in every area of their lives.

All the children and young people are in education or training, with high attendance levels. The agency supports any children and young people who need help with improving their attainment, for example arranging a course in English for speakers of other languages for one young person, which has helped her to make better progress in school.

The agency rewards the achievements of children and young people through a trust fund. Children receive financial rewards for good exam results and others are supported with equipment needed for college.

Non-verbal children and young people are supported to actively participate in making choices about their day-to-day care and more complex decisions. The agency has funded one carer to learn British Sign Language (BSL) to promote communication with her foster child. The agency staff also ensure that there is a BSL interpreter present at this child's reviews and formal meetings. This has increased her sense of control over her life. She said, 'My foster mum learned to sign just because of me. I think that is amazing.'

Respite care is available to carers if it is needed to support the placement. However, the carers prefer to keep the children and young people within their families where possible. This enables the children and young people to receive consistent care and to feel part of the family.

The carers are well supported and trained to meet the complex health needs of the children and young people they care for.

The agency staff ensure that referrals are made for therapeutic help when appropriate. Carers and supervising social workers build strong partnerships with professionals. This enables well-coordinated support for children and young people who have mental health needs.

The comprehensive training programme has a therapeutic focus, with carers undertaking courses in mindfulness, the impact of trauma and promoting resilience. They also attend a further four days training in playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (PACE), and have access to individual consultations with the PACE trainer. The knowledge and strategies that the carers learn help them to meet the emotional needs of the children and young people more effectively.

Children and young people receive a warm welcome into placement and quickly

develop relationships with the agency's social workers, who offer a significant amount of support.

The agency is currently supporting one young person under 'staying put' arrangements. However, several of the young people who have transitioned on from their carers remain in contact with them. This is an indication of the strong attachments that are formed between them.

The children and young people take part in a good range of activities, outings and craft sessions which are arranged by the agency. The carers' own children are also included in these events to help promote family relationships. The views of all children and young people are sought during these events and are used by the agency to improve its service.

The agency employs an experienced participation worker to undertake both group and individual work, which helps support the children and young people to build their self-confidence. The children and young people feel valued through this work. There are plans for some of the children and young people to make a film sharing their feelings about when they first came to live with their carers. This will be used to help new children and young people coming into placement.

There have been no complaints from children and young people since the last inspection. They feel listened to and can raise any concerns informally. The agency has created age-appropriate welcome bags which presents information about how to complain in creative ways.

The agency staff place the well-being of the children and young people at the heart of their practice. They challenge placing authorities when they have concerns about future plans. In one case, this resulted in a slower, better-planned move back home, which led the local authority social worker to comment that 'they advocated for them as if they were their own'.

Prospective carers feel welcomed and valued by the agency. They appreciate the charitable status of the agency and the family-orientated support offered. Those spoken to during the inspection stated that the assessment process was rigorous, but they felt it was handled sensitively. Assessments are completed within the required timescale unless there are good reasons for a delay.

The carers benefit from exceptionally supportive relationships with the agency staff. The agency responds to events in the carers' own lives and provides them with extra support, for example by funding bereavement counselling. This helps to sustain placements during challenging times, providing additional security for the children and young people.

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

The children and young people feel safe with their foster carers and can speak to them about any concerns.

The carers and agency staff use information from placing authorities to inform their risk assessments and risk management plans. These plans are reviewed regularly and after any significant event. The carers demonstrate good understanding of the information in these plans. However, this information is recorded in a fragmented and inconsistent way across the records of the children and young people. This could result in important guidance being missed.

The extensive training that carers receive around attachment, trauma and de-escalation techniques informs the carers' insight into the behaviours that children and young people may display. The training allows them to support children and young people more effectively and respond to their behaviour with sensitivity. The use of physical intervention is infrequent. However, when it is used, the recording is fragmented and does not aid effective monitoring by the agency.

The majority of the children and young people do not go missing from their placements. For the small number who do so, the carers and agency staff are proactive in their response. The carers are knowledgeable about the guidance in the agency's safeguarding policy and they coordinate well with agency staff or the out of hours service. The children and young people are reported to the police appropriately in line with their individual risk assessments.

The carers are made aware of their responsibilities regarding internet safety in the agency's safe care policy. However, carers would benefit from more detailed guidance for some young people who have specific vulnerabilities. This will ensure that everyone connected with the care of these children and young people is alert to the potential risks.

Safe recruitment and monitoring of staff and carers protect the children and young people. The agency promotes safe care through unannounced visits, safer caring plans and annual health and safety checks. The children and young people have regular opportunities to speak to the agency social workers.

The agency acts swiftly to respond to allegations against carers. Appropriate action is taken, in partnership with placing authorities, to secure the immediate welfare of the children and young people. However, in two cases the agency did not inform the designated officer in a timely manner in line with their policy. No children or young people were placed at risk of harm because of this.

The agency responds appropriately to concerns about carers by bringing them back to the panel for review and oversight. Records of decisions are well documented.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The fostering agency was established in 2014. It is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced manager who has been registered since June 2015.

The manager has ensured that the recommendations made at the last inspection are

met.

The manager and staff team are committed to recruiting a range of foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children and young people. Robust quality assurance of assessments means that issues are ironed out quickly for potential carers prior to panel meetings. There have been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism since the last inspection.

Children and young people are matched well to their carers. The majority of children and young people have been with their carers for over a year or more. For some, this is the most stability they have had during their time in care.

In some cases, the carers do not receive the most recent care planning documentation relating to the children and young people. The systems in place to monitor when these documents are missing and the agency's challenge of placing authorities to obtain them is not always effective. This lack of oversight could have a negative impact, resulting in the breakdown of placements.

The agency is particularly committed to providing carers with training which helps them meet the needs of the children and young people more effectively. Personal development plans are produced alongside the carers to address the ongoing need for carers to continuously update their skills.

Regular and effective supervision enables reflective discussions about carers and the children and young people placed. In addition, informal discussions provide staff with the support, direction and guidance they need to continuously improve their practice. Regular team meetings underpin their learning and professional progress. The staff feel valued, which in turn increases their confidence as practitioners.

Foster carers receive regular formal supervision in addition to their annual reviews and day-to-day support. The evaluative discussions held with the supervising social workers are detailed and clearly identify the carer's strengths and areas for support. Carers value this and say the support they receive is excellent and all the staff are approachable. A carer said, 'As they are a small company, they really get to know us, and we get to know them.'

The manager actively seeks the views of carers, professionals, children and young people, as well as her staff. Their views are used to improve and enhance the service and the support it provides. Everyone who is consulted says that they feel involved and included. As a result, children and young people feel empowered and important, and value the opportunities they get to have their say.

The staff are strong advocates for children, young people and their carers. They support children and young people to settle into their placements and are swift to discuss any concerns with their placing authorities. Placements that are not working are ended positively, ensuring that children and young people experience minimal disruption to their lives.

The fostering panel's membership reflects is made up of people with varied expertise,

including health and education professionals. It also includes former children who were looked after and foster carers. Members receive a thorough induction and appropriate training. They are also able to join any of the training provided for carers. Panel members receive annual appraisals to ensure their continuing professional development. The panel adviser continues to refine the quality assurance process to ensure that the panel's contribution to improving the standard of care is as effective as possible.

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: SC477734

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Inspectors

Janet Black: social care inspector

Abigail Maspero: social care inspector.



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