

The Children's Family Trust

Hanbury Court, Harris Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove,
Worcestershire B60 4DJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is a registered charity. It is one of four regional agencies that are currently registered with Ofsted. The agency provides short-term, emergency, long-term and respite placements. The agency also supports children on 'staying put' arrangements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 54 approved fostering households and 81 children living with foster carers.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since January 2021 and is currently working towards a leadership and management diploma at level 5.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 October 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 13 August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children flourish. They develop a strong sense of identity and experience a wide range of positive personal achievements. This is because of the nurturing care that they receive from their foster carers. As a result, the children experience enjoyable childhoods, benefit from excellent parenting, and have a wide range of opportunities to develop their self-esteem and emotional resilience.

Managers and the staff give excellent attention to the matching process. They work in close partnership with the foster carers and professionals to ensure that they can meet the needs of the children before they move into their foster home. Any additional actions or training needs identified to further support the foster carers are addressed in a timely manner. This contributes to well-informed decisions being made about the foster carers' abilities to meet the needs of the children. As a result, the children settle quickly into their new home and grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.

The agency promotes the importance of positive family relationships. Some foster families support brothers and sisters to live together in stable homes. All the foster carers help the children to have safe contact with people who are important to them, in line with their local authority care plans. This enables the children to maintain strong family links.

The agency ensures that all children's health needs are prioritised and consistently met. Some foster carers provide care for children with complex health needs and who require regular access to specialist health services. Foster carers work in close partnership with health professionals to ensure that the children's health plans are followed and that all possible actions are taken to give children excellent care and meet their specific needs. Foster carers are sensitive, caring and resilient in their approach, including for those children with end-of-life plans.

The agency ensures that the children understand the importance of education and learning. For some children, this means having access to appropriate assessments that enable them to access specialist support and services. One supervising social worker told the inspector about a child who had low school attendance. The child's foster carer worked closely with the supervising social worker to advocate strongly on his behalf to address this issue. The child was successfully supported back into full-time education. He completed his GCSE and is now engaging in a full-time college course. As a result of staff and foster carers' tenacity, all children are making excellent educational progress from their starting points.

The agency hosts a wide range of seasonal and school holiday events for the foster carer households. All the children, including birth children, can join a two-night activity holiday once a year. This is supported by the agency's registered manager and staff team. These events are well attended and enjoyed by all. A garden club

and youth club are being set up and there are plans for next year's activity holiday to take place over three nights. Foster carers and staff are proud of their children's personal achievements, such as making friends, participating in hobbies and joining clubs. They celebrate these in a range of ways, including nominating the children, including birth children, for achievement awards. Children are given a certificate and a financial award for learning to ride a bicycle, excelling at school or doing well in a club. These experiences and acknowledgments help to boost the children's confidence and growing sense of self.

The agency supports the children to develop independence skills appropriate to their age and understanding. The registered manager, staff and foster carers take ownership of the well-being of every child open to the agency, and this commitment continues even once the children leave and become adults. For example, the agency funds 10 driving lessons, which is in addition to the driving lessons which are funded by children's local authorities. The agency also provides additional funding to foster carers, to enable them to afford to provide 'staying put' arrangements. When needed, they have acted as guarantors for a young adult requiring accommodation to attend university.

The views of children and foster carers are highly valued by managers and staff. There are clear and accessible complaints procedures and regular consultation. Foster carers speak highly of the support they receive from supervising social workers and support workers. They enjoy opportunities to meet peers and join training and reflective fostering sessions. As a result, foster carers feel that the agency is inclusive.

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

Leaders and managers provide a range of safe, secure and enduring foster placements that successfully meet the assessed needs of the children and promote and safeguard their welfare.

Children feel safe living with their foster carers and state that they have positive relationships with their foster families and supporting staff. Foster carers and staff have excellent knowledge of the potential risks to the children and follow established procedures to keep them safe. Safer care plans and risk assessments are thorough and regularly reviewed. They are individualised and provide clear guidance to foster carers. This reduces risks to the children and promotes age-appropriate independence.

The registered manager's and staff team's response to significant incidents and safeguarding concerns involving the children and foster carers is robust and effective. There is close partnership working with external agencies. There are established systems that allow effective tracking of the progress of incidents and referrals. There are systems in place that support the safety and rights of the children and foster carers. Foster carers are supported during any allegations or investigations and, where appropriate, attend sessions with a psychotherapist to

support them on conclusion of an investigation. Where appropriate, the registered manager will challenge the practice of external agencies and advocate on behalf of the children and foster carers to ensure safe outcomes.

The registered manager appropriately implements auditing and reviewing procedures after all safeguarding concerns. Post-allegation reviews are detailed. They are taken to panel and the agency decision-maker and are shared with the local authority designated officer. The registered manager also commissions internal and external audits. These look at decision-making processes and identify areas for future learning and development. When actions are identified, changes are implemented and learning is shared with staff and foster carers. This enhances practice, informs processes and further promotes the safety of the children and foster carers. Lessons learned by staff in the different regions of the agency are shared with each other. This ensures that there are continual improvements and development to practice across all the regions that the agency operates.

The agency provides a wide range of internal resources to foster carers and the children. This includes support worker input, therapeutic approaches, group and 'team around the foster carer' psychotherapy sessions. This support is tailored to the needs of the children and foster families. For example, support worker input has enabled children not attending education to maintain their academic progress until they return to full-time education. The registered manager will also commission specialist external services to work directly with foster carers or children. This includes play therapy, bereavement counselling and collective psychotherapy.

Foster carers are skilled at supporting children who are at risk of exploitation, go missing from care or self-harm. In each case, the registered manager and staff team have acted appropriately and effectively to help foster carers to keep the children safe. Close working relationships with local authority social workers and specialist professionals, who provide training and regular supervision, ensure that children and foster carers receive the right support.

There are effective systems that support the recruitment of carers, staff and panel members. Procedures are regularly reviewed and developed. There is clear management oversight of recruitment, which helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager and staff team are committed to developing and supporting the foster carers to provide outstanding care that improves the lives of the children. The ethos of providing support to a child up to, and throughout, their adult life is at the heart of this agency.

The registered manager is passionate about the service. He has built an experienced and professional team of staff who are energised by his vision. Together, they have created a caring, reflective environment that is child focused.

The registered manager produces a range of reports that provide staff and leaders with a well-informed overview of the service. As a result, leaders, managers and the staff team are aware of areas of strength and areas for improvement. Development plans and strategies are resulting in improved outcomes for staff, foster carers and children. These plans are ambitious. They are informed by consultations with staff, foster carers and children, and they support the agency's continual development.

All foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards for foster care within their first year of fostering. Staff and the foster carers are provided with high-quality training opportunities. These are underpinned by therapeutic models of practice that continue to be developed. For example, all staff are trained in reflective fostering. This is now being gradually rolled out to all foster carers over a 10-module course. This model focuses on supporting the foster carers to understand and manage their own emotional responses to having children in their care. This is a psychoeducation approach that is aimed at improving the core components of secure attachment, including increasing foster carers' sensitivity and reflective capacity, developing reflective practice within the professional network, promoting collaboration around the child and with the eventual aim of helping to stabilise placements.

Staff and foster carers are well supported to develop their practice through a range of systems, including regular supervision sessions, annual appraisals, a therapeutic consultation day, support groups and therapeutic reflection groups. Staff feel valued by their manager and value the succession and progression opportunities he gives them.

The registered manager and staff provide permanency for children through recruiting and assessing a suitable and diverse range of families to meet the needs of the children. Social workers carry out comprehensive assessments that provide considered analysis around applicants' strengths and vulnerabilities. Research-informed practice supports social workers to make clear conclusions and recommendations. The robustness of assessments ensures that the panel and the agency decision-maker can make informed recommendations and decisions.

The panel chair and panel members provide considered independent scrutiny of the agency and contribute to the development of the agency's practice. The agency decision-maker makes reasoned decisions, with comprehensive qualifying determinations. The agency decision-maker, panel chair and agency's leaders meet regularly. Panel membership continues to be reviewed to ensure diversity and includes a good range of qualified and experienced professionals. Panel members have annual appraisals. Although panel members have access to the agency's training, each person on the central list has not recently had the opportunity to attend an annual joint training day with the fostering service's staff to keep abreast of relevant changes to the agency, legislation and guidance.

Two independent reviewing officers provide an additional level of scrutiny of the ongoing approval of foster carers. Foster carers' annual reviews are completed

within the necessary time frame and provide extensive information about the foster carers' and the children's experiences.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each person on the central list is given the opportunity to attend an annual joint training day with the fostering service's staff and has access to appropriate training and development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 48, paragraph 23.10)

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: SC034804

Registered provider: The Children's Family Trust

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Inspector

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector

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