

Tree House Care Fostering Solutions

Tree House Care Fostering Solutions Ltd
The Old Vicarage, 17 Heneage Road, Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire DN32 9DZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Tree House Care is an independent foster care agency. It provides foster care placements used by a number of placing authorities in a wide geographical area. A range of placements are provided, including short-term, long-term, respite and therapeutic care. The agency is responsible for the recruitment, training and support of foster carers. At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 64 children and young people with 55 carer households.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good

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: 11 July 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because

- Ambitious, aspirational, approachable and nurturing leaders and managers promote the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Many children and young people thrive and make exceptional progress.
- The agency uses research-based and other therapeutic approaches that inform the delivery of care and support to children, young people and foster carers.
- Children and young people experience stable family life and form extremely positive and trusting relationships with their foster carers. Placement stability is high and some young people continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday.
- Most children's and young people's sense of security increases with their foster carers over time. Risky behaviours significantly decrease as children and young people respond to good parenting routines and boundaries.
- Regular consultation with a consistent therapist helps foster carers to understand their foster children's behaviours and implement effective strategies.
- Children and young people are involved in a wide, diverse and fun range of activities that enrich their lives and challenge their resilience in so many ways.
- Foster carers' practice improves due to the high level of support from the agency, including a responsive out-of-hours service.
- Foster carers benefit from a range of high quality and bespoke training that improves their understanding and ability to care for and support the children and young people in their care.
- Leaders and managers use rigorous monitoring systems that highlight service developments, push forward improvements and enable learning from poor practice.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development

- Leaders and managers use learning from allegations against foster carers and other concerns to improve future practice, but there are no coherent written records that consistently confirm the discussions and learning points. Similarly, the outcome of investigations into complaints do not indicate whether the subject of the complaint is satisfied with the outcome.
- The report to the senior managers does not include information that shows how the agency satisfies itself that the service is achieving good outcomes for children and young people.

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

Recommendations

- The executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members: receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months; monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children; satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.
(National minimum standards, standard 25.7, page 51)

In particular, ensure that the report to senior managers indicates that the agency is satisfied that it is achieving good outcomes for children and young people.

- The registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. (National minimum standards, standard 25.8, page 51).

In particular, that a coherent record and learning points following allegations against foster carers and other concerns are consistently made to improve future practice and the outcome of complaint investigations indicate whether the complainant is satisfied with the outcome.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people enjoy significantly improved life experiences from some very disadvantaged beginnings. Many feel well cared for, safe and happy in stable and secure foster homes. Children and young people develop trusting relationships and very good attachments with their foster carers. Their positive experiences with their foster carers help them to thrive, and in a number of cases their progress is exceptional. Foster carers and professionals articulate children's and young people's progress in abundance. Typical comments include, 'They've been amazing from where they have come from,' and, 'Wow, what a fantastic year! [Name of child] has made excellent progress and shown great commitment to all learning tasks this year,' and, 'Well, he now talks about being a barrister [because they are well paid!]. He is starting to open up a little about his feelings, and he has cried in front of us... which is a huge leap forward! He has won and earned loads of awards at school because he IS clever, and he is starting to slowly accept and understand this might be right!'

The agency approach to caring for children and young people is research-informed, creative and innovative. It underpins the quality of care, support and protection that foster carers are expected to provide, thus optimising opportunities to transform children's and young people's lives. Therapeutic approaches support positive parenting effectively and motivate children and young people to reach their potential and integrate into family life. A young person said, '[Name of carer] has done an amazing job bringing me up.' A foster carer for a young person whose previous lifestyle placed her in risky situations said, 'She's thrived and thrived.'

Effective matching and careful planning help children and young people to settle and feel comfortable in their foster homes. They also help foster carers to feel sufficiently well informed to provide the best possible support and protection. Children and young people are shown their foster carers' profiles ahead of them moving into foster homes to familiarise themselves with their foster families. Children and young people enjoy high placement stability and longevity with the same foster carers, with the option of remaining in their placements after 18 years old. Such high placement stability has a remarkable impact on children's and young people's emotional health, which enables them to move seamlessly into adulthood.

Foster carers show high levels of commitment to help children and young people to retain their identity and bond with families and friends. Foster carers' respectful engagement with families includes them in their children's lives, even under challenging circumstances. A social worker said, '[Name of foster carers] are dedicated foster carers who go above and beyond the minimum requirements. They do their utmost to make [Name of child]'s mother still feel part of his life, and ensure that she is informed of health appointments, incidents and important milestones that (Name of child) achieves.'

Children's and young people's culture and heritage are highly valued. Foster carers' keenness to learn about cultural diversity and difference improves their awareness and helps children and young people, irrespective of their level of understanding, to feel proud. Cooking cultural dishes, celebrating religious events, supporting attendance at places of worship and learning about religious norms and values are just some of the activities that foster carers promote to support children and young people. Similarly, children and young people who are exploring their sexual identity receive unconditional nurture and support.

Children and young people enjoy a range of diverse, fun and exhilarating activities that significantly challenge their resilience and enrich their lives. They excel in their chosen interests, showing talent and skill in activities such as horse-riding, a range of sports and air cadets, dancing and swimming. Foster carers actively encourage children and young people to have friends to visit them and fully embrace community life.

Children's and young people's confidence and sense of value improves due to the opportunities that they have to regularly speak up. A young person's feedback at the fostering panel positively informed her foster carers' annual review. Children's and young people's contributions to the agency's application for a tender resulted in a successful outcome. Foster carers act as positive advocates. A social worker said, 'I feel that they are very good advocates for her and they are able to challenge decisions in an appropriate manner and in the child's best interests.'

Children's and young people's achievements get consistent and considerable recognition and celebration by foster carers and the agency. Letters from the agency praising achievements and gift tokens bolster children's and young people's self-esteem and motivation to achieve. Specifically, children's and young people's educational attendance and attainment is commonly recognised and awarded. This is due to the excellent school attendance and progress made by children and young people, including those who have achieved 'gifted and talented' status. Remarkably, some children and young people are exceeding expectations, despite not being regular school attendees prior to moving in with their foster carers. They now have goals and ambitions for the future. A foster carer said, 'They've been amazing from where they have come from. [Name of child] has caught up with her education. They are all on par with their peers now.' Foster carers are aspirational for children's and young people's success. They represent as strong advocates in school and attend all relevant meetings.

Most children and young people stay healthy by attending primary and specialist health appointments. They enjoy a healthy lifestyle that is free from alcohol and substance misuse. Intuitive foster carers work effectively with other professionals to secure children's and young people's good health. This includes the excellent care that children with life-threatening health conditions receive. A social worker said, '[Name of foster carers] ensure all [Name of child]'s health, emotional, physical, developmental, social and basic needs are met to a very high standard.' Some children's and young people's deteriorating emotional and physical well-being has resulted in planned and unplanned endings in recognition of their changing needs and risks.

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

Young people rate their safety highly with their foster carers. They know how to complain and would talk to their foster carers if they had any worries. Young people said, 'I feel really safe – like big time,' and, 'I've always felt safe. I've never felt the need to worry. If I didn't feel safe, the first person that I would go to is [Name of foster carer].' Another young person rated her safety as, '10/10 definitely'. One social worker said, '[Name of child] is safer in the care of the foster carers.' Foster carers' own children have been very instrumental in safeguarding children when children have made disclosures to them and they have dealt with it well.

Most foster carers have a very sound understanding of risk. They understand how unsafe situations can have a negative impact on children's and young people's progress. Although children and young people are encouraged to take controlled risks to develop their confidence and resilience, more serious concerns, such as radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and missing from care incidents, have a high profile. Risk assessments and safe care plans identify risks and strategies that foster carers and other safeguarding professionals follow. This ensures that children and young people understand the dangers that their risky behaviours pose and allows them to make positive changes that protect their vulnerabilities. The significant decline of missing from care incidents is testament to the foster carers' investment in safeguarding children and young people.

Foster carers tackle bullying issues proactively to ensure the protection of children and young people from abusive situations. Their good grasp of e-safety helps them to monitor children's and young people's use of the internet. There are no suspicions that children and young people are engaged in radicalisation, extremism or child sexual exploitation. A young person reported to their foster carers and other professionals about their child sexual exploitation history, 'I don't want people thinking about me in that way, so I no longer want to be deemed child sexual exploitation and will turn it around.'

Foster carers' access to regular therapeutic consultations, training and use of reading material and resources helps them to understand how abuse and neglect has a negative impact on children's and young people's behaviours. Foster carers place a high value on these consultations. They say that the sessions help them to manage children's and young people's behaviours and reflect on their own responses. One foster carer said, 'I never shout, never punish, we talk about it.' Consequently, some very positive outcomes arise from the strategies implemented. Foster carers persist with children and young people without conditions or limits. With the agency and therapeutic support, they are helping children and young people to self-regulate and keep the number of physical interventions to a minimum.

The fostering agency share any concerns about the safety of children and young people with the local authority and the designated officer. This includes allegations made against foster carers' or concerns about their practice. All allegations are considered quickly if the child or young person needs to move placements. In the majority of cases, they have moved immediately or shortly after making an

allegation. Foster carers' access to independent support provides them with someone to talk to outside of the agency. The agency responds to foster carers who perform below the expected high standards. This includes more frequent visits, putting placements on hold, returning to the fostering panel for further scrutiny and de-registration. Some de-registered foster carers have been referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service due to poor and unsafe practice. Leaders and managers use learning from allegations against foster carers and other concerns to improve their practice and prevent further incidents. However, there is inconsistency with respect to the agency holding coherent written records to confirm the details of the discussions and the learning points.

Recruitment and vetting practice is robust with referee checks on previous work with vulnerable people going back as far as practicable. It ensures the appointment of staff, foster carers and panel members only if they are safe and suitable to work with or care for children and young people.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leadership and management are strong, insightful, approachable and very nurturing. The directors and the responsible individual are very visible. They are supportive to the managers and everyone working for the agency.

The agency manager has registered with Ofsted since the last inspection. She is suitably qualified and experienced and shows professional and enabling leadership qualities. Following a thorough and well-coordinated handover with the previous registered manager, they continue to work together effectively. The registered manager's predecessor has maintained a good, child-centred service that places children and young people at the centre of service delivery and promotes the best possible outcomes for them.

A significant strength is the agency's commitment to the research-informed therapeutic approaches to caring for children and young people. This takes into account trauma and attachment. The therapeutic approach continues to develop throughout the organisation. This includes an impressive commitment from the directors, managers and the rest of the team, who are modelling behaviour that foster carers are trained to use when caring for children and young people. This maximises children's and young people's positive outcomes.

A newly appointed manager, who also has practitioner responsibilities, completes the second-tier management structure. Recent staff appointments ensure that the recruitment of prospective carers and their subsequent support provide a sufficient workforce that can meet the needs of children and young people. Staff feel valued by their managers and morale is strong. Manageable caseloads, regular supervision and access to good learning and development opportunities support the staff. Staff attend training with foster carers, which enables them to discuss their learning during supervisions. A good work-life balance and the delivery of high-quality support to foster carers comes from these interventions.

Similarly, the whole foster carer household is highly valued and their hard work gets

recognition and rewarded generously by the agency. Foster carers speak very highly about the quality of the support and training that they and their family receive. Foster carers reflect positively about the assessment process. One couple said, '[Name] also completed our Form F, the bible for all new foster carers. She completed it in a timely manner, non-judgemental and with masses of empathy and respect.' Foster carers also welcome the support groups and therapeutic consultations that help them to care for children and young people as well as they do. Foster carers said that the support is, 'Great' and 'Second to none' and 'Outstanding'. They said that the support outside of office hours, respite support, extra visits and therapeutic consultations have helped them to maintain placement stability. Additional support for foster carers includes a therapy pilot involving a small number of foster carers, which has helped them to deal with their own emotional conditions. This innovative approach is representative of how the agency listens and pushes boundaries if they think that it will benefit children's and young people's outcomes.

Leaders and managers understand the agency's strengths and weaknesses very well. This is because of the rigorous monitoring systems that keep everyone informed about service developments. Included are feedback, following consultations with children, foster carers and professionals, which underpins a realistic development plan. In addition, foster carers' monthly reports about children and young people, their training and any specific incidents feed into the reports to the senior managers. However, the report to the senior managers does not confirm satisfaction that the agency is achieving good outcomes for children and young people. Complaint outcomes and written clarification about foster carers' satisfaction with the outcome of their complaint do not exist. Despite these shortcomings, the agency presents as one that learns lessons from practice, carries out specific research-based pilots and implements new systems and models of working that intend to continually improve children's and young people's overall experiences and progress.

There are good collaborative working practices with other professionals. Children's and young people's independent reviewing officers and social workers speak positively about the progress of the placements and communication with the agency. One social worker said, '[Foster carer] and the agency consistently keep me informed of any relevant information they think I should be aware of.' Another social worker said, 'The fostering social worker is very good at following up what needs to be done and has recently done a number of risk assessments at the home,' and, 'I am impressed with the carers' approach and commitment to [Name of child] and feel that we work very well together.' Appropriate challenge from the agency takes place when partner agencies fail to deliver information in a timely manner.

The fostering panel has an experienced and competent panel chair. Panel members are committed, rigorous, challenging and effective in making recommendations to the agency decision-maker. This promotes safe and stable placements. The agency is aware of the need to make further appointments to ensure a more diverse central list of panel members.

The agency's statement of purpose is under review to ensure that it remains current.

Children's guides are age-appropriate, informative and the copies are accessible to children and young people with additional needs. This helps them to understand what to expect from the agency.

Action to address the recommendation from the last inspection relating to children and young people having information about foster carers prior to moving shows the agency's capacity to improve. Safeguarding notifications sent by the agency enable Ofsted to carry out its regulatory functions.

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 who 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: SC033189

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