

# Sunbeam Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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**

Sunbeam Fostering is an independent fostering agency. Foster carers are recruited, trained, assessed, reviewed and supervised by the agency's supervising social workers. The agency provides a range of foster placements for children from birth to 17 years who are unable to live within their birth families.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The agency provides outstanding standards of care in all outcome areas. The strength of the service provided is that it focuses on the needs of the children in order to achieve successful outcomes. This is reflected in the range of placements offered, excellent matching of children and carers and outstanding support and training provided for carers. The agency engages children in planning and decision making both for their day-to-day living and their future lives. Children's emotional and psychological needs are well met, and excellent support is provided promote excellent educational outcomes for children. Children are supported in developing the skills they need to make a successful transition into adulthood.

There is strong leadership and management of the service with excellent systems in place to monitor the quality of the service. Staff at all levels within the agency are committed to the continuous improvement of the service provided. All files seen had detailed placement plans and health care plans. The foster carers and supervising social workers had a very good knowledge of children's needs and how those needs are to be met. The foster care agreement issued to all new foster carers reflect the recent changes in legislation.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There were no actions or recommendations made at the last inspection.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted to an exceptionally high standard; and where they are able to access services to meet their individual health needs. The health and well-being of all children are promoted through in-depth assessments, training and continuing supervision of foster carers. Practice is focused with a clear direction and

children are actively encouraged to participate in decisions about their health.

The assessment of prospective carers includes an assessment of their attitude to a healthy lifestyle and how they will promote this with children, and of the range of leisure activities undertaken as a family. Children after and foster carers are supported by the agency in specific areas of health promotion, such as giving up smoking. The matching process includes any special skills held by foster carers in meeting individual children medical needs. Specialist training to meet specifically identified medical needs can be arranged prior to or shortly after placement; foster carers say that this is always made available in a timely manner.

Children learn to value their health. For example, healthy eating is actively encouraged through a nutritious diet which includes fresh fruit and vegetables. Foster carers encourages children to engage in food preparation. As a result children establish a link between healthy eating and good health, while learning a new skill. This helps children to develop a healthy lifestyle.

Supervising social workers showed that they strive for excellence through evaluative and reflective practice. This is evident from the supportive work undertaken with foster carers and children in placement. Health matters related to children are carefully considered during the initial matching of the child's placement and in the subsequent support offered to foster carers. All children are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician.

Foster carers work with specialist support from educational psychologists, play therapists and counsellors to meet the individual needs of children. This is underpinned by the fostering project's excellent training programme that includes training on the effects of attachment difficulties in the emotional well-being of children, child protection, the importance of the role of foster carers in promoting the physical, emotional, and sexual health of the children in their care, first aid, and the provision of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

All children have access to activities to promote their health. Children participate in activities such as football, cricket, swimming, dance and drama, climbing, netball, volleyball and horse-riding. The agency regularly provide social events for children and foster carers. Children with specific interests and hobbies are actively encouraged to pursue these.

Appropriate medical consents for children are obtained as part of the placement planning process which reduces any delay in gaining emergency treatment. All carers receive training in first aid, and any accidents, injuries or medical interventions are recorded by carers, along with any medicines taken by children. The agency is proactive in pursuing any gaps in medical information.

Robust assessments on the homes of foster carers and a thorough matching process ensure that foster carers' homes are able to meet the needs of children. The agency is always striving to ensure the further development of good practice in the promotion of good health outcomes. There are good systems in place for the

supervising social workers to regularly monitor developments in children's placements, including any health needs.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

The safety of children is very well promoted by the agency. All foster carers and staff receive regular safeguarding training that is reviewed and updated regularly and all staff and carers have received refresher safeguarding training within the last 12 months. Children say that foster carers help to promote their safety by giving them good advice about how to keep themselves safe. This includes keeping safe when using the internet and mobile telephones. Foster carers are very aware of their role in promoting the safety of children and work jointly, as part of the team, to ensure children's safety. This work is reinforced by supervising social workers and in the regular carers' meetings and support groups.

All children have detailed individual risk assessments which are reviewed and updated in line with any changing needs. Children are supported, in consultation with the agency and placing social workers, in taking controlled risks as part of taking more responsibility for themselves thus gaining greater independence.

The safeguarding policy and procedures ensures that prompt referrals to the local safeguarding team are made. The agency has strong contacts with the local authority designated officer. The team of supervising social workers, managers and directors are very experienced practitioners in the area of child protection and all hold a social work qualification which gives an added expertise to the care and protection of children placed with this agency.

Relationships between carers and children are consistently open and honest and children are encouraged to discuss personal issues that may have an impact on their safety, including bullying and issues arising from differences in race or culture. Foster carers are very clear about procedures for reporting any safeguarding concerns to the agency or the local authority. There is good out of hours support, and all carers spoken with confirmed that this is an excellent service for them.

There are some children who go missing from the home. However these children are protected by an agreed protocol between the agency, the police and the host authority as well as the placing authority. This protocol is known and understood by all carers. Carers know how to respond when a child is absent from their placement including who to contact should they need advice. Carers are aware of, and do not exceed, the limits of their authority to prevent a child from leaving the home. The numbers of children missing from home are very small and all return after a short period. The agency has robust systems for monitoring any absences and strategies for reducing the number of incidents, including thorough follow up by supervising social workers.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers support and encourage children in their care to achieve well at school, participate in family life and engage in activities which promote and develop their inter-personal skills and build relationships. Children enjoy very good relationships with their foster family and interact appropriately with others. Foster carers offer very positive and stable environments and this ensures that children feel safe and comfortable in their placements. As a result they develop a strong sense of self and belonging in their placement.

Foster carers value the on-going support and training they receive from the agency. They report that this input has enabled them to work successfully in addressing the behavioural and underlying emotional needs of children. Feedback from placing social workers indicated that some children have made significant progress since being placed within this agency. Foster carers describe their training and supervision as excellent. The agency has strong links with external specialist services, enabling the emotional needs of the children to be met; this has a positive impact on behaviour management. Behaviour is managed in a highly individualised manner and takes into account differences based on race, culture, age and understanding. Practice in this area is outstanding and this has a direct impact on the stability of placements which is an area of significant strength.

Children are supported in participating in a wide range of leisure activities. Children's personal preferences are also considered, when making matching decisions, to ensure that the family lifestyle is able to meet the leisure activity needs of children. The company also funds a range of activities, including sponsoring employees to undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Award in order that they become leaders and facilitate the programme for children placed with the agency.

The agency has excellent systems in place to promote the education of children. All children looked after by the agency have an individual educational programme. Foster carers are very aware of the importance of good educational attendance and attainment by children. Carers liaise positively with schools and are strong advocates for children as and when the need arises. Personal education plans are in place. Children's educational achievements are celebrated and rewarded. The agency's approach ensures that children make the most of their educational opportunities.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The opportunities available for children to express their views include regular face-to-face discussions with the supervising social worker, review meetings, formal questionnaires and informal participation in social events. One foster carer summed this up: 'They regularly ask children their views and always attend reviews and other meetings. They also produce a newsletter informing children of things that affect

them.' Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care. They are helped to understand why it may not be possible to always act upon their wishes.

Children are cared for in line with their placement plan. Supervising social workers are proactive in encouraging full participation of the foster carer and the child in agreeing the contents of the placement plan. Children have their needs met in relation to their gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, language and identity. Children know how to obtain support and how to make a complaint. Children have a positive self-view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

The matching process gives careful consideration to placing children with foster carers who have relevant training and experience to support children with specific care needs including children with a range of complex behavioural needs. Foster carers support children in their dietary choices, both in terms of particular restrictions arising from adherence to religious observance, and in relation to particular likes and dislikes.

Children are able to make a positive contribution to the foster home and their wider community. Foster carers provide different opportunities for children to participate in a range of activities. Children benefit because foster carers carefully explain the importance of adhering to appropriate routines, such as helping with household chores, study and bedtime routines. Children are additionally benefiting because the importance of play, hobbies and interests are actively encouraged and developed. Where appropriate children are encouraged to join the local youth clubs. This helps to develop social skills and enhance self-esteem.

Children are extremely well supported by foster carers to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. Foster carers have an excellent understanding about the importance of contact, and the feelings the children may have about their family ties. Foster carers demonstrate an understanding of the effects of separation, attachment and past experiences on the child's behaviour, and can respond sensitively to both protect and support the child where necessary. The agency is proactive in offering contact arrangements and contact supervisors to the placing authorities.

Children succeed in their placements because of the meticulous attention to detail given to preparing a child and a foster carer for a new placement. Not all placements are planned, however, all children are welcomed into the home in a sensitive manner and the same attention is paid to transitions from the foster home when they are ready to move on.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers receive excellent levels of support and guidance to effectively assist children to move into adulthood. Training for foster carers in relation to promoting independence is comprehensive and relevant, this enables foster carers to provide children with the help they need. Children are supported and encouraged to develop skills for life and further education and work is promoted. They and their foster carers are involved in compiling and implementing pathway and transition plans.

The service is aware of the difficulties experienced by children upon leaving care. This aspect of service provision is keenly targeted within the organisation's development plan. A good number of children remain with their foster carers beyond leaving care age as supported living placements. Children are assured that the service and their foster carers value and care about them beyond leaving care age. Children confirm that they receive excellent levels of support.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The fostering agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service. The responsible individual, Registered Manager, financial director, service managers and quality assurance manager are highly experienced social workers with a vast background in the fostering field and family placement work. Their depth, breadth, knowledge and experience mean that supervising social work staff are provided with a high calibre of management expertise.

Leadership and management of this fostering agency are outstanding. This is due to the ethos and underpinning values which meet the guiding principle of the agency to provide a high quality service. The importance of, and commitment to, providing services in which equality and diversity are promoted, underpins the agency's aims and objectives. The fostering agency has a clear statement on equality and diversity and anti-discriminatory practice. Diversity within the staff group, fostering households and the panel members show the agency's commitment to excellent outcomes for children.

The agency is very good at ensuring that prospective carers undergo rigorous and thorough assessments. All foster carers complete a pre-approval training programme and evidence is recorded as to how they meet the Children's Workforce Development Council's competencies for foster care. Foster carers say that they found the assessment challenging, but valuable in terms of their learning. All carers have detailed health and safety checks undertaken as part of their initial assessment, and all references are confirmed by follow up contacts. All statutory and local authority checks are completed prior to prospective carers being presented to panel. All

assessments are completed by experienced, qualified social workers who are registered with the General Social Care Council.

The fostering panel and decision-maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations and decisions in line with the objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care. The fostering agency has a panel that meet the requirements of the new standards and regulations. The independent chair, vice chair and the range of members have the appropriate experience and knowledge. There is an identified member of staff with responsibility for quality assurance. The necessary paperwork is sent out two weeks ahead of the panel meetings and this means that people have at least two weekends to read the associated paperwork. There is also a comprehensive quality assurance process in place that fully records how all aspects of decisions have been made and agreed upon.

Children, foster carers, staff and the placing authorities are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering agency and what services and facilities it provides. Information is available in the Statement of Purpose and welcome pack which is informative, clearly presented and user-friendly. Alternative means of communication includes the use of interpreters. The fostering agency operates within the remit of its Statement of Purpose.

The fostering agency actively seeks full information before approaches are made to foster carers. The planning around a child moving into a new placement is organised extremely well. This is a strength with regards to matching children to the right family, as a result this leads to stable placements and minimum of placement breakdowns. The agency makes a great effort to avoid unplanned endings to placements. When this does happen it is in unavoidable cases where there are risks to either the child or to other members of the household.

Foster carers described the agency as outstanding because of the support that is offered to carers. Also because the agency know exactly what they are doing and keep abreast of the changes taking place in the fostering standards, and ensure that carers are adequately trained to fulfil their role. All of the supervising social workers are qualified and a number have post-graduate qualifications.

Robust policies and procedures in the recruitment of staff and foster carers serve to safeguard children. Full checks are taken up for foster carers and others who may be involved in their care. Personal referees are interviewed in depth, including adult children. Systems are in place to ensure checks are regularly updated to maintain children's safety. Fostering social workers are suitably qualified to undertake the work and are encouraged to participate in general and post-qualifying training. Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively. A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs.

Children and foster carers receive a service from staff panel members and decision-makers who have the competence to meet their needs. All staff receive monthly

supervision including the management team, supervising social workers and the administration personnel. All staff receive an annual appraisal. Staff are fully supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children.

The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the agency to meet the objectives of its statement of purpose. The fostering project is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of its users. There is a comprehensive monitoring process. This ensures that the fostering agency is setting and delivering the priorities in line with meeting the needs of children in placement. The fostering service's offices and administrative systems are suitable for the service provided and are secure.

All significant events relating to the health and protection of children fostered by the service are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities. There is a clear process for managing the notification of significant events. These events are relatively low and reflect that placements are planned, stable and well matched. Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children and the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation. All allegations are recorded and dealt with appropriately by the agency and the according to safeguarding procedures.

Records maintained by the fostering agency are stored securely. Children's files are in good order and provide a clear and accountable record of the individual care receive. Placement plans are completed for all children and are shared with foster carers. The files are updated regularly, ensuring that information about children is current and provides a comprehensive overview of children's lives.

The fostering agency is financially sound and is a viable business. The finance manager oversees all financial income generated, payroll and procurement of services and resources. There is a clear business plan and budgets set and agreed on by the fostering agency to ensure that it is covering all costs. The service is delivered through comprehensive policies and procedures and very effective social work practice. The roles and responsibilities of the management team are clearly defined and the lines of accountability are clear which allows the service to achieve excellent outcomes for children. The monitoring of this is through the assessment, training and supervision of foster carers in addition to the annual evaluation of all aspects of the fostering agency. Payments to foster carers are fair and paid in a timely way. Payments are sufficient to meet the full costs of caring for each child placed. The system for making payments is efficient and ensures that foster carers are paid promptly and accurately. Foster carers are clear about the fostering project's payment structures and the payments due to them.