

Pride Fostering Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Natalie Burton
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Pride fostering agency is a privately owned independent fostering agency, which is a subsidiary of the Sunbeam Fostering group. The agency is one of three fostering agencies registered with Ofsted. The agency was registered in September 2009, and provides a range of foster placements for children who are unable to live with their birth families.

The agency provides emergency, short term, bridging, respite, long term and parent and child placements. The agency is able to meet the needs of unaccompanied children from outside the UK.

There are currently 59 fostering households with 71 children placed.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

This child focused service offers a good quality service and ensures positive outcomes and experiences for children are achieved. Children and young people are very positive about their experience of care. One young person described the care they receive from their foster parent as 'excellent.'

All children make good progress within this agency, in all areas of their lives. They benefit from committed and dedicated foster carers who are effectively trained, and supported to meet the individual needs of children. A strength of the service is the effective arrangements used to retain good quality foster carers who can meet the

diverse range of children's needs.

Child protection arrangements are very strong and keep children safe. All children said they feel safe. Qualified, experienced social work staff and a well-organised fostering panel ensures that foster parent assessments are robust.

Foster carers feel that they are well supported in providing good quality, stable and safe placements for children and in promoting their positive development and encouraging them to make successful transitions into adulthood. They speak highly of the excellent training and support they receive, from extremely able supervising social workers.

All professionals spoke positively about the service, and the thoroughness of children's records. Foster placement breakdowns are unusual and children say they feel comfortable and part of their foster family. The agency works hard to gain the views and feelings of children and the whole foster family to improve the service.

Leadership and monitoring ensure the smooth running of the service, and continually drives improvement of the service. The dedicated registered manager and directors of the agency place children at the centre of their work. There are no recommendations and no breaches of regulations identified at this inspection.

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The children achieve good outcomes in their foster homes. They get on very well with their foster carers who respect their difference, culture and history. Children have good support to practice their faith and make links in their local community. They are cared for by people they come to know and trust. One young person identified that it was knowing that somebody cared about her that has helped her to make positive and significant changes to her life.

Children's views and feelings are actively sought on a regular basis by the manager, staff and foster carers, and these views influence their care. This is through encouragement and support to share their views through foster carer's reviews, visits to the foster home and in their statutory reviews. From this feedback, the agency has made changes to the service, such as through activities they provide. Children feel valued because they are listened to.

The children are made to feel welcome by their foster families. One foster carer reported she always likes to speak to the child before they come to live there. Foster children in placement and birth children are consulted about new admissions to their home. This means that the views of the whole family are taken on board. Through this process, children benefit from a positive welcome. Where possible, children are provided with a pen picture, providing them with information about the family they are going to live with. The children are very positive about their placements and the support they receive from their foster carers and the agency. This is because they are placed with foster carers who have the skills and backgrounds to provide care that is unique to children's needs. One child reported that through the foster carer's knowledge of them, that the foster carers respect their need to have some space to calm down. Another child said 'this is home.'

The children are placed with foster carers who can meet their social, emotional, psychological and physical needs. They are registered with a doctor; attend routine dental appointments, and opticians. Children learn to make healthy choices about smoking, sexual health, healthy eating and leisure activities. Some children are supported by their foster carers to attend the children and adolescent mental health services, where they can access the service to support their health needs. The children are supported to pursue active lifestyles with their foster families. They partake in leisure activities such as dancing, football and swimming. All children in placement for a year had been on holiday with their foster carers, where this was appropriate. Children learn to feel better about themselves, their appearance and so self-esteem improves.

Children do well at school, attend regularly and some overcome significant obstacles arising from their experiences. They have strong advocates in their foster carers who recognise their strengths and challenge where required. Their experience of

education improves, and they feel better about their academic abilities. Foster carers spoke of the good support from the service in meeting the educational needs of children.

Some children recognise their previous behaviour was risky. They now come home on time, understand the risks to themselves, and no longer go missing. Others have made vast changes to their personal hygiene, school attendance and have reduced their challenging behaviour. This is because foster carers have excellent training, which they implement into their day to day care of the children. They take time to talk to children, provide options they can take and explain the dangers of their actions. Children are provided consistent and nurturing responses from foster carers. As a result, children feel valued, and their self-esteem and confidence improves. One young person said how the care of the foster carer had made her 'so much stronger.'

Young people are supported to acquire the skills they will need for the next stages of their adult life. They learn practical skills with their foster carers, such as budgeting, cooking, and social skills. Young people work through an independence life skills booklet with their foster carer and supervising social worker, identifying new targets to progress their independence. They are supported to get part time and full time jobs. They think about their futures positively, as they get ready for the next stage in their independence.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency delivers a consistently good quality of care to foster carers and children. Management and staff support carers and children in ways that exceed what they might expect. Foster carers spoke about the flexibility, motivation and wide ranging support they receive from the agency. For example, helping with school runs, contact arrangements, and sometimes just being on the end of a phone. One foster carer said they would be: 'lost without her supervising social worker. She is very knowledgeable.' It is through this commitment, and child centred approach that many foster carers have been with the agency for many years, and provided stability and security for many children. This support extends to the whole fostering family, and they equally value the views and feelings of children who foster.

Foster carers receive monthly formal supervision. In addition, they all spoke very positively about the out of hour's support the agency provides, and additional support either from telephone calls or face to face, and proactive and constructed responses when they are experiencing challenging incidents. Foster carers access an extensive and resourceful range of training that is a real strength of the agency. These courses are delivered in groups, on line, or from external providers. They cover areas such as, safer caring, working with children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism and dyspraxia, attachment, separation and loss, drug, alcohol and

sexual health, and mental health in young people. A number of foster carers said the training in unaccompanied children is excellent and informative in supporting them to provide care for the children. In addition, all carers have completed the Training, Support and Development standards within timescales.

Foster carers have the skills and backgrounds to provide care that is unique to children's needs. This is because the service provides successful matching of children to foster carers. The agency's placement team has an in-depth knowledge of their foster carers, and strong working relationships with placing authorities. This ensures the agency have all known information about the child to ensure that the matching with a foster carer is robust. Therefore children benefit from stable and successful placements. There are few unplanned endings, and where these have occurred, this has been due to reasons outside of the matching process.

The foster carers and children are clear about the decisions that foster carers can make regarding their everyday lives. This is because management ensure all placements have a meeting to discuss and agree levels of decision making. Children confirm that they are able to have their friends to visit and there are no unnecessarily delays in making decisions.

The foster carer's recruitment is robust. Qualified, thoughtful social workers complete detailed assessments of foster carers. Assessments are focused on consideration of the carers capacity to meet the needs of looked after children and to balance these appropriately with the needs of their own family. The process is thorough and comprehensive.

All fostering panel members on the central list have a good range of relevant experience and expertise to consider carers approvals and relevant annual reviews. The fostering panel fulfils a valuable gatekeeping function, both of the quality of reports and about the suitability of people to become foster carers. Records of recommendations and decisions making processes are robust. All foster carers spoken to reported that the assessment process is positive, many being approved within five months of their application.

The agency works with foster carers to develop their skills in positive parenting and child-focused solutions rather than restrictive approaches. Placing authorities appreciate the experienced support from fostering social workers, who suggest child-focused behavioural techniques. This gives new perspectives to how carers can work with children and helped to resolve some behavioural issues. Where on occasion, a child's challenging behaviour continues, and a different type of placement is identified for the child, the agency supports the foster carer to maintain the placement, until the right provision is identified. This can be through the support of respite, an additional assistant support worker, or spending time with the foster carer and child. Through this dedicated commitment of the carer, children continue to have stability and security until the right provision is found, and therefore additional placements moves are avoided.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The children say they feel safe. The agency makes sure children have good quality information in their guide to fostering, including other forms of independent support and advice and advocacy services.

Staff and foster carers take safeguarding responsibilities seriously and carers confirm clear messages, through training and supervision about their duty to report suspicions of abuse. This ensures they are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and how to refer any issues and concerns.

The registered manager works effectively with safeguarding authorities across a wide geographical area where there are allegations or concerns. There is appropriate and timely involvement of the local authority designated officer for safeguarding. Foster carers are provided with access to independence support, from Fostering Network, should they be subject to an allegation. The agency takes action to terminate the approval of foster carers where there have been concerns about their ability to keep children safe, or about the quality of care offered, and has made appropriate referrals following discussions with the Local Authority Designated Officer, to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. The agency maintains comprehensive and meticulous records of all allegations made, the action taken and the outcome of each investigation.

Foster carers understand safe care practice well. The safer care agreement is effectively implemented, in practice, in the fostering household. Annual health and safety checks are completed on all fostering households to ensure that the environment is safe for children. As a result children are well protected.

Very few young people go missing from their foster placements. Policies and procedures support carers to underpin practice to minimise risk. Some young people who used to go missing prior to their placement, have now stopped. This is because they feel cared for, valued and respected and understand the dangers they were placing themselves in. This is a huge achievement for some young people. On occasions when young people go missing, foster carers have appropriately followed agreed procedures and children return. In addition, the agency ensures that young people are spoken to by an independent person to provide an opportunity for them to discuss the reasons why they left the home. Foster carers have access to training on child sexual exploitation. Where placements are identified as a potential risk, foster carers attend the training.

The recruitment of foster carers, staff, panel members and independent assessors is rigorous. Every adult working with the agency has a Disclosure and Barring check, and are all recruited according to legislation. Therefore children benefit from the safeguards implemented by the agency to ensure unsuitable people do not gain

employment at the agency.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The registered manager has been in post since 2009, is a qualified social worker and has over fifteen years' experience of working with children and young people. This individual is extremely focused, effective and driven to continually improve the service for children. A number of foster carers and placing authorities remarked on the professionalism of the registered manager. All placing authorities were very complimentary of the service of the agency. One reported: 'good communication between you and our service has enabled to achieve good outcomes for children and young people.'

The children, foster carers and staff benefit from excellent leadership, delivering an effective service which meets the needs of those children. A consistent strength of the agency is their ethos of placing children at the centre of their work, in the decisions made and in meeting the diverse needs of the children. This is supported by feedback gained from foster carers who reported that the agency 'advocate for the children' and the agency is 'very child focused.' The organisation's structure further enhances the service provided to children, as all directors are social work qualified.

The agency has a comprehensive website that includes resourceful information for staff, professionals and foster carers, both current and prospective. The statement of purpose is also available on the website, and clearly identifies the aims and objectives of the fostering service and clarifies the nature of service provided. Children are provided with information in age appropriate guides and in a variety of languages. This informs children of what they can expect from the agency, and information they may need.

The staff team is diverse, speaking a remarkable number of languages. The agency has an all-encompassing approach, and celebrates a wide range of religious festivals and cultural events. Staff states the agency embraces their development to improve their skills and knowledge, through supervision, training, and accessing research. They were complimentary of all management, and the support the agency provides. One manager described how the staff are 'very passionate, and will bend over backwards to support foster carers.' This is supported by foster carers, with one foster carer stating how their supervising social worker is 'easily accessible, listens and will challenge them as carers when this is needed'.

The staffing levels are good, and staff possess the skills and experience necessary for looking after vulnerable children. The registered manager and senior management are passionate about the service they provide for children who are fostered. Partnership working and child-focused professionalism are clear strengths

of the service.

The agency is financially sound. Foster carers receive their payments on time, and if required are also able to request advance payments, in particular when they have a child placed in the middle of the month.

The agency has an effective system for notifying the appropriate authorities of significant events, and will ensure that they also provide updates and outcomes following these events. This ensures that all necessary professionals are kept up to date with all information.

The management have quality monitoring systems of the fostering service. The registered manager regularly monitors and analyses records held within the agency, and takes action to improve the service provided, from her analysis. The monitoring of these records is comprehensive, and assists the manager to continually drive to improve the service.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.