

Pride Fostering Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Muhammed Harunur Rashid
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Setting address	110 Butterfield, Great Marlings, Luton, LU2 8DL
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Telephone number	01582433775
Email	
Registered person	Pride Fostering Service Limited
Registered manager	Helen Jane Daly
Responsible individual	Muhammad Haneef
Date of last inspection	11/09/2009

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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

The Pride fostering agency is an independent fostering agency which is a subsidiary of the Sunbeam Fostering Group. The agency provides foster care to children from birth to 18 years with a particular focus on specialist placements including complex needs such as drug abuse, self-harming, challenging behaviour and persistent absconding. The agency provides short, bridging, respite and long-term placements.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is a good service with some aspects judged as outstanding. The general organisation around working practice is good and the fostering agency is functioning well. Good arrangements are in place for meeting children and young people's assessed health needs. The agency is proactive in ensuring children and young people's educational attainments are achieved. There are excellent systems in place for consulting children and young people in foster care.

Children and young people's individual needs are recognised and plans are in place to address them. The promotion of equality and diversity is good throughout the standards inspected. Staff and foster carers are well supported by the Registered Manager and the responsible individual, who are committed to promoting the welfare of children and young people and focusing improvement.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection since the fostering agency registered with Ofsted in September 2009.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young live in a healthy environment and their health care needs are well met. The fostering agency has sound policies and procedures in place to promote the health needs of children and young people in foster care. The agency works to obtain the resources required to promote and secure good outcomes for children and young people; for example, working in partnership with health professionals. A looked after children's nurse sits on the fostering panel and her role is to assess whether prospective foster carers have the knowledge and lifestyle to meet the health needs of foster children. This contributes to promoting best possible health outcomes for children in foster care. The fostering service has access to the

child and adolescent mental health service and social workers make referrals to this service for children who have mental health issues to ensure their needs in this area are met.

Children and young people enjoy healthy and nutritious meals at foster carers' homes. Foster carers encourage and support young people to attend local gyms to keep them physically active and fit. Foster carers accompany children and young people to various medical appointments and maintain records of all appointments they have attended. Foster carers attend health and safety and first aid training and have purchased first aid equipment and fire blankets to promote safety in the home.

Children and young people live in homes which are warm, well furnished, decorated and maintained to a good level of cleanliness and hygiene. Young people have their own bedroom which affords them a level of privacy; they can decorate these to reflect their individual personality.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people live in a family environment where competent foster carers provide them with a nurturing, stable and safe home. The fostering agency has comprehensive child protection and anti-bullying policies in place. Foster carers receive training on safer caring practices and safeguarding. This training covers areas, such as child protection, preventing allegations against foster carers, sexual exploitation and health and safety. The agency works with a number of local authorities in accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 and follows child protection procedures when safeguarding concerns arise. The fostering agency has a good relationship with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and makes safeguarding enquiries to them as appropriate. The local authority has carried out a safeguarding audit and has made no recommendations in order to improve practices to protect children and young people. Foster carers receive guidance and training for e-safety issues to protect young people from any potential abuses. Therefore, young people are kept safe and their welfare is promoted.

The fostering agency has a procedure for children missing from care and there are guidelines in place to follow for when a child goes missing from placement. The out-of-hours support service provide advice to foster carers in reporting incidents of children who are deemed to be missing from care. This service also welcomes children to talk to social workers on duty should they have any concerns. Children rarely go missing and, if they do, they return home quickly.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people enjoy excellent relationships in their placements. Foster carers are provided with extensive training and guidance in promoting relationships

and managing challenging behaviour. This helps foster carers to develop knowledge and skills in order to provide an inclusive environment and culture to promote positive behaviour. For example, a child came to a placement with no speech, eating concerns, not toilet trained and had an inappropriate attachment with her sister. In over a year the child's development has greatly improved and the child is now attending nursery and has made secure attachments with the carers. Children and young people have individual risk assessments and these outline strategies for foster carers to implement to keep young people safe. Foster carers allow children to make choices, to take appropriate risks and to learn from failures as part of their growing process. As a result, children and young people's socially acceptable behaviour has improved. Foster carers are fully aware that no corporal punishment can be used with any foster child under any circumstances. Young people enjoy their own bedrooms and foster carers respect their privacy and confidentiality as is consistent with good parenting.

Placement stability has had a clear impact on the 'enjoy and achieve' outcomes. Children and young people live in stable and nurturing placements and attend the same schools. As a result, their school attendance has improved and no child has been permanently excluded. This ensures children can maximise their opportunities to reach their potential. Foster carers actively take part in children's personal education plans. They encourage children to get involved in their own personal education plan. Foster carers help children and young people with homework to promote education. Children's support groups are activity based as part of their learning and development. Excellent support systems ensure that children's educational needs are well met.

A social worker from a local authority wrote to a supervising social worker stating that, a child who is in foster care presents as a very different child than when he was first in the placement. He appears to be much happier. Carers have a good understanding of his needs and manage this well.

Foster carers ensure that children and young people are engaged in hobbies and interests which boost self-esteem and learning development. Children and young people can participate in various activities within the home such as playing with age-appropriate toys, building blocks and enjoying playhouses. There is very good access to leisure and recreational opportunities for children and young people in the wider community. Leisure money is provided for all children and young people to ensure their easy access to this. Supervising social workers monitor this during supervisory visits and receive feedback from young people. The fostering agency also organises residential summer camps for young people to socialise, build relationships and to develop a sense of team work.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent arrangements for consulting children and young people and others involved with their care. The fostering agency consults children and young

people through care reviews, foster carer supervision visits, placement supervision visits and meetings with the children. Their feedback is taken into account to improve the fostering service. Complaints received from children are quickly investigated and responded to. The fostering agency has a policy on children and young people's participation and this outlines the importance of seeking children and young people's views. As a result, the fostering agency has made a number of changes in their service delivery; for example, they have adopted the children's handbook into a CD format to ensure greater accessibility and also displayed this on their website. Children and young people feel that they are listened to and they can contribute in their day-to-day lives.

The agency has a number of placements of children and young people with contact arrangements. Contacts take place in various contact centres. Foster carers understand the importance of contact for children and they record the outcomes of each event which takes place. Supervising social workers monitor contact arrangements during supervising visits, which ensures that children are able to maintain positive relationships with their parents.

Children and young people are given highly individualised and personalised care. Foster carers are familiar with the placement plans for children in their care. Foster carers support children to promote social and emotional development and enable them to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem. Children and young people are encouraged to exercise choice and independence in the clothes and personal requisites that they buy. Carers encourage and support children and young people to take part in the wider community. Young people enjoy participating in activities, such as, sports, drama and dancing groups.

The fostering support groups bring foster families together socially, with the positive outcome that foster children get to know each other and their carers in a supportive community. There is a clear policy in place to welcome children and young people into foster carers' homes and leave the homes in a planned and sensitive manner. Young people confirm that they feel loved and valued by the foster carers and their family members.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering agency ensures that foster carers complete targeted training to enable them to provide effective guidance and support to young people preparing to move into semi-independence or independent living. Foster carers start working with young people from the age of 14 years. They encourage and support young people to look after their personal space, choose and buy their own clothes, get involved in house shopping and to travel independently into the local community. These acquired skills enable young people to develop various skills and confidence for future independent living.

Allowances and expenses are paid to foster carers to enable them to support young

people to achieve best possible outcomes. Foster carers work closely with the local authority leaving care teams in developing pathway plans for young people. Foster carers support young people to open savings bank accounts and encourage them to save money into the accounts. Foster carers also support young people with applying for national insurance number cards which is essential when they look for employment.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The general organisation around working practices is good and the fostering service is functioning well. The fostering service has updated its Statement of Purpose in line with new regulations and national minimum standards. This document states the aims and objectives of the service. The fostering service has developed a children and young people's guide which provides information about the facilities which are available to them.

The fostering service has a clear management and staffing structure that ensures there are clear lines of accountability throughout the service. The fostering team manager and the responsible individual are well qualified and have several years of management experience in fostering services. This helps them to manage the functions of the fostering agency effectively and deliver positive outcomes for children.

Fostering staff receive regular supervision and ongoing support from their team manager. Caseloads are monitored and the service employs social workers who are registered with General Social Care Council. The staff team and fostering panel are well supported by the administrative staff who ensure that information relating to children and foster carers is easily accessible to conduct the functions of the agency.

The fostering agency recruits foster carers through various advertising methods according to the researched needs of children and young people. It carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers that cover all areas of competency needed to ensure children receive a good quality of care. Foster carers take part in pre-approval training and this informs them about what fostering entails to make a decision whether to pursue this career.

Good systems are in place for working with and supporting foster carers. Foster carers have access to regular support groups. The service provides 24 hour support for foster carers, and foster carers feel they can approach the agency any time they have a query or concern. Foster carers receive regular visits from their supervising social workers and written records of these visits are maintained so they feel supported in order to meet children's needs.

Ongoing training programmes are available for all foster carers which helps to ensure they are well equipped to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. Training needs are identified during foster carers' supervision and discussed

during the annual review process. The fostering service supports foster carers to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's training award to ensure that they are professionally qualified. There are systems in place to conduct foster carers' annual reviews to determine whether they are suitable to continue as foster carers and their household continues to be suitable.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Children and young people receive an individualised service, which is designed to meet their personal needs. Fostering staff and carers are recruited from a diverse array of cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds to ensure that they are able to provide a choice in matching processes. Foster carers support children and young people to make personal choices and to access community resources.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers are well monitored. Any complaints or allegations made are dealt with promptly and sensitively. This ensures that foster carers are supported and the appropriate outcome is reached to safeguard children and young people in placement.

Matching children with foster carers is carefully considered to ensure that children are placed with foster carers who have the necessary skills to meet foster children's needs. Where there are gaps in the matching process, the agency supports foster carers to obtain information and take action to address these gaps.

The composition of the fostering panel is correct. The fostering agency employs an independent chair. The panel consists of individuals with a wide range of knowledge and experience. This enables them to give all the issues full and proper consideration to promote good outcomes for children. Panel members attend regular training to ensure that they can effectively fulfil their roles. Detailed minutes are kept for the panel meetings held.

The fostering agency maintains individual paper files for each child and foster carers. All records are clear, up to date and securely stored in the office. Foster carers are clear about the expectations regarding record keeping. Foster carers demonstrate how they are keeping 'memorabilia' as a part of life story work for children and young people. This includes taking photographs and keeping souvenirs from trips and activities. This contributes to an understanding of the child's life and ensures they have their memories to look back on in the future.

Each carer has a foster care agreement in place and they are well supported by their supervising social workers through regular supervision in order to care properly for children in foster care. The fostering service maintains records of children's activities, incidents, achievements, allegations and abuse for safeguarding and monitoring purposes and to improve practice.

The fostering service has clear procedures for monitoring and controlling their functions to ensure the quality of the service. This is achieved by having clear lines of communication, sound financial standing, robust financial procedures, and an

agreed charge for fostering services. The monitoring systems ensure that statutory checks, such as Criminal Records Bureau checks, medical, local authority checks and health and safety checks, are also completed within the required timescales to protect children and young people in foster care.

The management team advises that the fostering service is financially viable. Foster carers receive their monthly allowances on time, which enables them to budget for household expenditure and pay children's allowances on time.