

Focus Foster Care Ltd

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Rural Innovation Centre, Avenue H, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth CV8 2LG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Focus Fostering is a small independent fostering agency. The office is based in Kenilworth in Warwickshire. It registered with Ofsted in August 2017 and provides a range of fostering services, including respite, short-term, long-term and emergency care. There are 18 children placed by the fostering service and nine fostering households.

A manager is in post and is in the process of registering with Ofsted. The previous manager registered in 2017 and resigned from their post in May 2022.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 July 2022

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

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: good

Foster carers build positive relationships with children and provide them with stability and good-quality personalised care. Children make steady progress in all areas of their lives.

When children move into their foster homes, this is well considered and planned. When possible, children visit the foster families before moving in. The agency staff welcome children when they arrive and help them move to their new home. Two children's moves were so successful they had already made friends with other children in the area before they moved in.

Children are settled living with their foster families. A small number of children have experienced unplanned moves. These have been managed sensitively by the agency. Foster carers make these endings a positive experience, for example, writing letters to children, maintaining contact with new carers and sharing information with the child's new carers. The agency completes an end of placement review to consider learning to improve future practice.

Children and foster carers are well matched. This promotes placement stability. However, the evidence-based matching document does not always demonstrate the consideration of the impact of new children on existing household members. The impact of this on children is minimal due to being an administrative, rather than a practice, issue.

The agency and foster carers support children's education, health and emotional well-being. All children are in education, and this is reviewed and monitored well by foster carers and the agency. Foster carers and staff at the agency attend all children's personal education plan meetings. This means that the agency can progress any actions set, for example, when the supervising social worker sought additional tutoring for a child following a child's personal education planning meeting.

Foster carers ensure that children's health needs are met. Children attend all primary health appointments and have access to additional specialist services if needed. Some children have improved their dental hygiene and this has had a positive impact on their self-esteem.

Children's views are regularly gathered. This can be in preparation for annual reviews or when the supervising social worker visits the home. Children are encouraged to attend their child in care reviews and are supported by an advocate if needed. The well-being of children is at the centre of the agency's practice.

Children enjoy a variety of activities that promote their hobbies and interests, such as ballet, performing arts and going to Beaver Scouts. Children enjoy family holidays with foster families and enjoy activities to promote their culture and identity.

Prospective foster carers are well prepared before attending panel. They attend training in skills for fostering. One foster carer told inspectors she felt very prepared by the time they attended panel and described the assessing social worker as exceptional.

Foster carers help children maintain relationships with their families and people who are important to them. One foster carer has maintained communication with a child's previous foster family. Another carer continues to offer support and advice to children into adulthood.

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

The agency's response to safeguarding concerns is appropriate. Any allegations made are subject to post-allegation reviews that are presented to panel. Foster carers are well supported by the agency when allegations are made, with additional external support if required.

Assessments of prospective carers, including safeguarding checks, are carried out appropriately. Good arrangements are in place for the monitoring of safe home environments for children. Unannounced visits to carers take place at least annually.

Safer care plans and risk assessments are of a good quality. They are child-focused and provide foster carers with clear strategies to manage any potential risks. Foster carers and the agency know the children well. As a result, they are alert to emerging risks.

Foster carers have suitable training to equip them with the knowledge to keep children safe, including around online safety and child exploitation. One foster carer was able to intervene and support a child and took appropriate action when they identified concerns relating to online risks.

The agency is confident in challenging foster carers and having difficult discussions with them, while maintaining positive relationships. This challenge and accountability keep children increasingly safe.

Children currently with the agency do not go missing from home. The agency has a good understanding of protocols and the professionals they could work with should this be a risk. This knowledge enables them to give advice and guidance to foster carers.

Foster carers promote stability and routine for children. Clear guidance and boundaries mean that children receive predictable and consistent care.

The agency has enough staff to support foster carers and children. These staff, along with panel members, are safely recruited.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager has worked in the agency for many years and is in the process of registering with Ofsted. The responsible individual is also an important and consistent person for foster carers in their professional network. All staff in the agency know foster carers and children well. A foster carer described this 'as like a family'.

The manager and responsible individual are skilled and their practice is child-focused. They have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for development. For example, they are in the early stages of making plans to increase participation by foster carers and children. This will enable them to contribute to the development of the agency. The progression of this has been hindered due to the impact of COVID-19.

Foster carers are well supported by the agency. They have access to round-the-clock support, have regular supervision and are provided with continued advice, guidance and training. Foster carers recognise this support and find it invaluable. One foster carer identified support as an area for improvement. The agency is responsive to this and has identified additional support.

The agency's fostering panel operates effectively. Panel members are suitably qualified and experienced. Panel offers scrutiny when carers come to panel at every annual review. There is good professional challenge from the panel to the manager through feedback and quality assurance systems to help the agency to continue to develop the service.

Staff work in a supportive and reflective environment. They have opportunities to explore training in areas of interest that enhance their practice. Staff have regular supervision that helps inform practice and monitor the care provided to children. This is overseen at all levels, including by the manager and responsible individual. This means decision-making and progress of children and foster carers is regularly monitored and understood by all, and decisions are not made in isolation.

Overall, the agency has positive relationships with partner agencies, including social workers. The manager appropriately challenges others to ensure decisions are made in the best interests of children. One social worker told the inspectors, 'The agency always chases us to ensure they have the required information.' Another said, 'The agency is heavily involved in the care planning for the child.'

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 1.7)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)

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: 1249881

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Registered provider address: Hill Farm, Shawbury Lane, Shustoke, Coleshill, Birmingham B46 2RN

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Inspectors

Lisa O'Donovan, Social Care Inspector
Fiona Roche, Social Care Inspector

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