

# 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 in the early stages of development. 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.

Currently there are 10 children accessing the fostering service and four fostering households.

**Inspection dates:** 13 to 16 August 2018

**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:** N/A

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** N/A

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children are well matched to their foster families.
- Children make good progress in all areas of their development.
- The assessments of foster carers are thorough and analytical.
- All those working for the agency are committed and child-focused.
- Foster carers feel well supported and prepared to care for children.
- The fostering panel provides a good level of independent challenge and scrutiny.
- The manager has good oversight and understanding of children's progress.
- The manager and staff work well in partnership with others to provide the best outcomes for children.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Foster carers and children are not actively involved in the direction and development of the agency.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures do not specify the action foster carers or staff should take if any allegations are made about the manager of the agency.
- Children's records are not always individual to each child or accessible to them should they want to access their files.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure 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, page 9, paragraph 1.7)
- Compile a children's guide appropriate to the age, understanding and communication needs of children who may be fostered by the service. (Volume 4, statutory guidance: Fostering Services, paragraph 4.3)
- Ensure the fostering service's safeguarding procedure is in line with government guidance and requirements, including the duty to refer information to statutory bodies. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 44, paragraph 22.2)  
This is in relation to ensuring that foster carers and staff know the steps to take should any concerns be about the managers of the agency.
- Ensure information about a child is recorded clearly and in a way that will be helpful when they access their files now or in the future. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 52, paragraph 26.6)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The assessments of foster carers are analytical and thorough. This helps ensure that foster carers are suitable to care for children.

Foster carers are well informed and trained to understand the fostering task. They say they feel well prepared and supported to care for children they have placed with them. One foster carer stated, 'I thought the Skills to Foster course was brilliant and honest... we have received fantastic support from the agency.'

Foster carers build positive and nurturing relationships with children and consider them to be part of their family. This ethos is strongly promoted by the agency and enables children to develop in self-confidence and self-esteem.

Children are well matched to their foster families. Matching is clear and considered, matching children's needs with the skills and abilities of foster carers. When possible, introductions to new foster placements include visits to the foster home. This helps ensure the stability of placements as it helps children to settle in and feel part of the fostering family.

Children are making good progress in their foster homes. Foster carers ensure that children attend all routine health appointments and support them to lead healthy lifestyles. Children are also achieving well in their education. Attendance in school is good. Foster carers work closely with teachers to support children to help reduce any negative behaviour. As a result, children are making big improvements in school. One local authority social worker stated, 'I wish all my carers were as understanding of looked after children and their needs... [and were as] proactive in ensuring they are receiving the best services from all involved.'

Foster carers help children to develop their independence skills by encouraging them to get involved in daily household tasks. The agency has produced a formal independence work-pack for foster carers to use with children when this is needed.

Children engage in a multitude of activities within the local community, ranging from dancing and swimming to taekwondo and cricket. They also enjoy playing with friends in the local area and having meals out and holidays with their foster families.

Foster carers help children to maintain family links and sustain relationships that are important to them. Foster carers encourage children to have contact with birth families and often support multiple and complex contact arrangements.

The voice of the child is considered by the agency. Supervising social workers meet regularly with children to gain their views about their placement. However, the manager is aware that the agency needs to further develop ways to gather children's views to ensure their active involvement in the direction and development of the agency.

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

Children are safe in their foster homes. They do not regularly go missing. Foster carers understand the risks for children in their care and act swiftly when children go missing or there are other safeguarding concerns. Safer care plans and risk assessments are completed prior to placement and are regularly updated to inform foster carers' actions.

Safeguarding is embedded in foster carers' assessment, approval, training and supervisions. Foster carers receive a variety of safeguarding training in topics including radicalisation and child sexual abuse. The manager has also recently arranged for training about 'county lines' to be delivered to foster carers to help them to understand this concern. As a result, all foster carers are aware of the necessary steps to safeguard children in their care.

The agency has a variety of safeguarding and safer caring policies and procedures to help inform staff and foster carers' practice. These are informative but do not specify the action that staff should take if any allegations are made about the managers of the agency.

Good practice in the recruitment of staff and foster carers ensures that they are safe to work with children.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

This is a small agency, which is still in its infancy. Alongside the registered manager there is a supervising social worker, a part-time support worker and an administrator. In addition, the agency employs the services of two social workers to conduct the assessment of prospective foster carers. The manager and staff are child-focused and prioritise the needs of children.

The manager regularly monitors the functions of the agency. He has good oversight and understanding of children's progress through outcome trackers, which capture the achievements that they make. He has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and is aware of the agency's developmental needs.

The manager and staff work well in partnership with others and actively challenge other professionals when this is needed. For example, the manager and the supervising social worker successfully challenged a school over the inappropriate use of pupil premium funds for a child placed with foster carers. The manager also transported a child daily to and from a residential school trip. This allowed the child to participate in the experience alongside her peers. Foster carers, staff and placing social workers all speak positively about the agency.

Staff and independent assessors receive regular supervisions, which support their development.

The recruitment of foster carers is slow but steady. The focus is on growing the

agency at a rate which maintains good support to foster carers and children.

The agency is meeting the aims and objectives of its statement of purpose. There are two children's guides aimed at differing age groups, which inform children of what to expect when they are placed with foster carers. However, the guide devised for younger children is not age-appropriate and would be difficult for young children to understand.

Fostering panel members are diverse and provide a good level of independent scrutiny. This helps ensure that assessments are conducted to a high standard. They undergo training to help them fulfil their roles and responsibilities. The panel chair is experienced and knowledgeable and the agency decisions are timely.

Records are clear, although children's records are not always individual to each child placed or accessible to them should they want to access their files.

## **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 differences 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 whom 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:** 1249881

**Registered provider:** Focus Foster Care Ltd

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

**Responsible individual:** Christopher Aristidou

**Registered manager:** Kevin Reynolds

**Telephone number:** 024 7699 5675

## **Inspector**

Sue Young, social care inspector



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