

Time For Children

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number SC047163
Inspection date 11/12/2015
Inspector Sharon Payne
Type of inspection Full
Provision subtype

Setting address 1 Cambridge Park, LONDON, E11 2PU

Telephone number 020 8983 3811
Email admin@timeforchildren.org
Registered person Time For Children Limited
Registered Manager Anita Feculak
Responsible individual Nicholas Barnsby
Date of last inspection 06/02/2013

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

Time for Children is an independent fostering agency established in 1999. It is part of a group of companies owned by Futures for Children. The service specialises in providing short- and long-term placements for sibling groups. Time for Children prides itself on being small, friendly and like an extended family. At the time of this inspection there are 35 fostering households and 54 children fostered. The agency currently has foster carers all over London, Essex and Kent.

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 highly effective agency succeeds in providing children in stable, nurturing, life enriching placements. Children have strong attachments and feel part of a family. They benefit from good matching which takes into account their ethnicity and personal interests. They enjoy a broad range of social, educational, recreational and spiritual opportunities. The agency continues to provide children with swimming lessons and bikes. Health support efficiently addresses their physical, emotional and psychological needs. Children have good school attendance and are achieving educationally.

Foster carers and supervising social workers are strong advocates, tenaciously focusing on children's best interests. There is a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Children benefit from highly skilled, competent foster carers, who receive extensive support. Comprehensive training, regular support groups, respite and practical support contributes towards placement stability. Children benefit

from a fostering panel which comprises of experienced individuals, focused on promoting their welfare.

Children receive protection from the wide-ranging procedures and practices dedicated to safeguarding. This includes child protection, child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, behaviour management, bullying, social media and internet safety. The agency currently has no issues with children going missing. Children receive protection from the robust recruitment practices. The agency actively challenges poor practice and deregisters carers if necessary.

Children benefit from an efficiently run agency, which is continually evolving to meet their needs. A major strength of the agency is the visibility and approachability of senior leaders and managers. The new manager with support from a proactive senior leadership is driving standards upwards. The diverse staff team have a wealth of experience and appreciate the direction the agency is taking. Extensive new developments, purposeful action planning and a renewed vision contributes to a good quality service.

Shortfalls are minor and do not have a detrimental impact on children. Recommendations concentrate on strengthening practice. These relate to children influencing the development of the service, implementing an effective foster carer recruitment strategy and reporting concerns regarded as insignificant. The new manager should also enrol on a relevant leadership and management course.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendations:

the provider should ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account in developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)

the provider should implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted demands on the service (NMS 13.1)

the provider should ensure the manager has a level 5 leadership and management qualification (NMS 17.2)

the provider should report allegations to the local authority that on the face of it may appear relatively insignificant. (NMS 22.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children benefit from stable, nurturing placements, which enable them to lead enriching lives. A child states, 'I really enjoy living with my foster family and we make every day special no matter what we do. I love my foster family.' Another comments, 'Everybody's so nice to me. They have made me feel happier (and) more confident.' Foster carers take pride in children's 'positive changes' stating they are going from 'strength to strength'. A local authority confirms children have 'strong attachments', 'an excellent life' and 'could not be receiving better care'. There is a strong focus on permanency, which includes moving on to adoption, securing long-term placements or alternate arrangements.

Children are flourishing and have a sense of security and belonging. They feel part of the family, highlighting they are treated like the carers own children. Prior to moving in, they see their foster family's profile. This helps to familiarise them and alleviate any anxieties they may have. Children benefit from good matching which takes into account their ethnicity and personal interests. They comment on the 'calm atmosphere in the house' and the fact they are 'very happy living here'. Their photographs are on display on walls among other family members. There is an example of children being a pageboy and bridesmaids at a foster carer's wedding.

Children are able to maintain an ongoing connection with their foster families after they leave. Several keep in touch through social media, visit on an ad hoc basis or return for festive holidays. This also extends to appreciative birth parents who occasionally contact foster carers to give an update or ask for advice. A foster carer states 'you grieve when they leave' as they are 'part of your family'. Foster carers' birth children also identify the positive aspects; one feels it is a chance to make 'new long lasting friendships'. Another enjoys keeping children 'happy and making sure they feel comfortable in my home'. Another wished for the foster child 'to stay with us forever' stating 'it makes the family'.

The agency has a strong ethos of keeping siblings together and the majority of placements enables this to happen. The agency has their own contact room. Foster carers creatively facilitate contact, inviting relatives to their home, arranging fun activities together or meeting up at a mutually convenient location. They also encourage children to purchase cards and presents for family at relevant times of the year. Children also receive support to maintain friendships by inviting friends to their home. They are also able to invite them to their birthday celebrations.

Children enjoy a broad range of social, educational, recreational and spiritual opportunities. A foster carer confirms that 'our job is to empower children'. Another wishes to inspire them to know their 'dreams and goals are achievable'. A child highlights that their foster carer 'aims for the best for me'. Children are pursuing their hobbies and interests, an example being participating in performing arts. There are improvements in their speech, reading and conversational skills. Children join guiding organisations and some are also undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh award.

Foster carers believe positively channelling children's talents instils self-confidence. Children have the opportunity to visit places of worship of their choice. There is a respect for religious traditions which includes daily prayer.

Children enjoy family holidays in the United Kingdom and abroad. They also benefit from new experiences such as visiting places of interest in the local area and further afield. Foster carers take photographs and keep memorabilia of significant events. This contributes to children's life storybooks. The agency continues to provide children with swimming lessons and bikes, or an alternate hobby which they are passionate about, for example, funding a course to be a DJ. They participate in a wide range of different sports, trampolining, yoga, judo, basketball, gym, karate and tennis.

Children have good school attendance and are achieving educationally. They pass their GCSEs and receive certificates and stickers in recognition of their efforts. A child states their foster carer has 'helped me academically, as I've achieved the level I wanted'. A foster carer stresses the need to change a child's 'mind-set' and give them 'ambitions and expectations'. There is effective liaison with virtual heads and active use of the pupil premium. Children receive extra tuition, music therapy and their own laptops. A school comments that a child is 'doing very well'.

Foster carers are strong advocates, they highlight they 'do what can, as if it was your own children'. Their perseverance enables children to get the special educational support they need. Children enhance their knowledge through visiting museums and joining the library. Foster carers instil rewards for working hard. They also help with time keeping, interview skills, job applications and helping older children find the right college course.

Children receive the necessary health support, which addresses their physical, emotional and psychological needs. They benefit from counselling support and good input from the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). Foster carers excel in their working relationships with CAMHS, for example, undertaking training sessions with them to learn strategies for managing behaviour. Children can also receive support from the agency's family support worker. The recent introduction of therapeutic services will also enhance their wellbeing.

Older children are able to make a successful transition into adulthood. A placing authority comments on their child 'developing good independence skills'. Foster carers encourage age appropriate independence through personal care, household tasks and cooking. Children learning to budget and gain confidence in money management. They are also able to remain in placements under 'Staying Put' arrangements.

Children share their views during foster carer's reviews. They also contribute to staff appraisals. The family support worker hopes to introduce children's groups. They also wish to build up a forum to enable children to influence service development to improve how children can be influential and make a meaningful contribution to developing the agency.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children benefit from a very loyal cohort of foster carers. The owner of the agency describes them as 'doing extraordinary things and passing them off as ordinary'. A child affirms foster carers 'look after us properly. They love us. They help us'. Social workers describe some foster carers as 'excellent', listing their skills such as being 'pro-active', 'welcoming' and 'going the extra mile'. An independent reviewing officer highlights they are 'very impressed' with the care. Foster carers state that they 'want to make a difference' in each child's life. They are highly skilled, competent individuals who embrace the professional nature of their role. The agency's foster carers includes those with external recognition from the Mayor of London.

The introduction of the placements team enables foster carers to discuss referrals. This is more effective as they can ensure their ability to meet children's presenting needs and consider the dynamics and impact on their family. There is good partnership working with children's social workers and involved professionals. Supervising social workers are also available to accompany them to meetings. This forms a multiagency team around the child which focuses on their best interests.

Foster carers benefit from a broad range of support. Structured supervisory visits and regular telephone calls ensures children are at the heart of all monitoring. Foster carer's find these visits 'helpful'. Some supervisory social workers notably share recognised theories with foster carers, which offers them valuable insight into children's behaviour. Foster carers on the whole feel they have a 'great relationship', with their supervising social worker, describing them as 'very supportive and understanding'. Foster carers meet regularly in their support groups, which includes a training element. Their informal peer networks provides additional encouragement and support. Quarterly newsletters enable them to keep updated on developments within the agency.

Foster carers receive ongoing training and development. The agency has a comprehensive training programme, which includes regional and online training. The agency offers training in various high quality venues, with a hot meal to enhance attendance. Foster carers appreciate the thought given to providing a pleasant learning environment. All foster carers have the appropriate vocational qualification, with the exception of several new carers. These individuals are currently completing the appropriate course. Foster carers supplement their knowledge through reading relevant books and researching items on the internet. They also proactively undertake external training and seminars.

Foster carers receive guidance from a comprehensive handbook. This clearly outlines relevant policies, procedures and best practice from recognised national

organisations. There is a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. There is good consideration of children who are in transracial placements. The policy explains the emotional consequences of identity and refers to research. It also highlights practical tips and consideration of an environment which promotes a positive identity.

The agency recognises that fostering can be a challenging task and they assist practically. A recent introduction is the educational and therapeutic support. Two drivers are available to help with transport, an example the school run. Respite is available if foster carers are unable to use their support networks. The family support workers undertake task centred work with children, which includes taking them out on social activities.

Children benefit from a multi-disciplinary fostering panel, consisting of competent and committed individuals. The expertise and professional experience of individuals ensures decision-making promotes the best interests of children. The highly experienced panel chair has approximately thirty years social care experience, twenty as a qualified social worker. The central list is fairly gender balanced and there is an acknowledgment of the need for greater cultural diversity. The agency are currently recruiting to the central list to address this issue. The fostering panel benefit from annual appraisals, forthcoming training and an individual handbook. The latter is extremely useful as it highlights protocols and research based guidance.

Improvements in the panel system ensures a closer link with the agency to contribute to quality assurance and information sharing. The agency decision maker is the owner of the agency; they carefully consider recommendations within required timescales. There has been limited foster carer recruitment activity due to a series of events within the agency. The wider organisation has a sound general recruitment plan which innovatively includes a digital approach. The agency has an incentive scheme to encourage foster carers to refer suitable applicants. Staff also use foster carers' existing networks to advertise for prospective carers. The agency recognises the need to implement their own strategy to meet the trends identified in referrals. They are aware of the continued need for diverse foster carers for sibling groups, teenagers and unaccompanied children.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children receive protection from the wide-ranging procedures and practices dedicated to safeguarding their welfare. There is a comprehensive risk management system. Each child has their own risk assessment which highlights concerning behaviours. Environmental and other hazards are subject to relevant assessments and each household has a safe care plan. Staff undertake health and safety checks and unannounced visits. There are also specific visits which ensures they can speak to a child on their own.

Foster carer training and accompanying guidance comprehensively addresses the wider aspects of safeguarding children. This includes child protection, child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, behaviour management, bullying, social media and internet safety. The agency currently has no issues with children going missing. In the past year there has been one case, where the agency were actively advocating for a residential placement. The foster carer was in receipt of daily support, including out of hours where necessary. Children benefit from foster carers' commitment to provide a home for them until a suitable alternative is available.

Foster carers educate children on the need to keep safe online. They benefit from an e-safety agreement, which they effectively tailor to each child. Where necessary, children benefit from individual work which offers practical advice to reduce dangers. Foster carers and staff actively address issues related to sexting. The family support worker also undertakes specific work in regards to self-esteem, sexual health and safe relationships. Foster carers are also aware of the risk levels and presenting behaviour associated with sexual exploitation.

The agency has a good awareness of the Government's 'Prevent' strategy. It includes the procedure to follow if they suspect a child at risk of racialisation and extremism. This clearly explains the vulnerability of children and what foster carers and staff should be alert to. Foster carers also receive expert guidance to address general and racist bullying.

Foster placements generally provide children with the stability they need to improve their behaviour. A social worker praises the 'clear boundaries and structure given to children which is important' stating 'they are responding positively'. Another social worker expresses they were 'pleasantly surprised with how settled' children are. They explain there are now 'fewer tantrums'. Foster carers receive ongoing training in relation to de-escalation and managing challenging behaviour. They describe recent training as 'excellent'.

Foster carers disclose information shared by children which helps in care proceedings. A social worker highlights the importance of foster carers 'working with us'. The agency has a robust child protection procedure and this includes promptly referring allegations to relevant parties. The agency actively challenges poor practice and de-registers carers if necessary. Leaders and managers efficiently handle complaints and decision making focuses on promoting the welfare of children.

There is good consideration of the support foster carers need if there is an allegation against them. This includes specific information such as the contact details for independent support. It also outlines the procedure and a flowchart to assist them with following the process. This eases anxiety and helps them feel more in control.

There was one issue where a supervising social worker did not highlight a concern raised by a foster child. Although all mechanisms are in place and safeguarding forms part of team and supervision meetings, there is a need for further work. Safeguarding requires further embedding and must be a way of thinking for all supervising social workers. Staff should report allegations that appear insignificant.

Recruitment practices comply with regulations. Applicants are subject to Warner interviews which probe their personal life, attitudes and motivations. This assists with establishing a fuller picture of the character of the applicant and their suitability to work with children.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children benefit from an efficiently run agency, which is continually evolving to meet their needs. Leaders, manager, foster carers and staff are ambitious for children working in unison to improve their outcomes. The agency is currently undergoing significant changes in order to modernise the service. Since the last inspection, the agency has changed ownership and management. Despite a reduction in the number of foster carers and several staff leaving, the agency continues to improve. It succeeds in providing a more responsive service which promotes contemporary social work thinking.

The agency has highly effective partnerships which include contracts with a significant number of London boroughs, Essex, Thurrock and other regions. A local authority highlights that the agency is their 'first point of call for siblings'. Feedback from placing authorities is appropriately positive and one authority 'looked forward to a continued working relationship'. The agency also engages in consultation and steering groups to influence the wider fostering arena. There are also key relationships with safeguarding personnel, virtual headteachers and the police.

The agency is very child centred and it successfully meets the organisational aim to be a 'flexible, caring and imaginative foster care service'. A foster carer states that this is 'a fantastic agency'. Staff express their pride in working for the agency. One highlights that it is 'a good place to work' and they 'like the direction the agency is going'. Although the agency is part of a larger organisation, it still maintains a family atmosphere. The statement of purpose comprehensively details the agency's aims and objectives. Children have their own vibrant, informative, interactive, age appropriate guides. They also have their own area on the agency's website.

A major strength of the agency is the visibility and approachability of senior leaders and managers. Foster carers and staff feel valued by the organisation. The new manager is a highly experienced social worker, who brings expertise and a modest dynamism to their role. This individual is currently sourcing a management course to meet required standards. Their manager's registration is also being progressed by Ofsted. The new manager with support from a proactive senior leadership are driving up standards. There is recognition of the turbulent time, despite which leaders and managers are instilling stability, confidence and hope. A foster carer describes the new manager as 'lovely' stating she 'does her best'.

The agency has a good history of compliance, effectively addressing the requirement and recommendations from the last inspection. They promptly notify Ofsted of significant events. Foster carers benefit from peer support groups and copies of relevant child placement plans. Older children are able to remain within their foster homes through the implementation of the 'Staying Put' policy. These developments within the service ultimately benefit children.

The agency has a diverse staff team of social workers and a family support worker. Their experience includes local authority and independent fostering, learning support, child protection, residential, youth work, youth offending, nursing and mentoring. Staff receive ongoing training to enhance their personal development. This includes post qualifying training and the agency sponsoring a staff member to undertake their social work qualification. Staff benefit from regular team and practice meetings, appraisals and reflective supervision. Staff receive regular updates on organisational, regulatory, legal and best practice updates. This enhances their knowledge of internal and wider issues within fostering, enabling them to work in a more informed manner.

Leaders and managers are introducing greater structure in the ways of working which results in a culture change and higher expectations. This promotes more consistent child focused practice. They are introducing new ways of working with foster carers. An example is using the mindfulness approach to reframe scenarios and establishing the importance of therapeutic parenting. The agency has a computerised recording system. They are currently in the midst of a pilot with foster carers. There is a growing understanding of the need to maintain robust records which are a meaningful reflection of children's lives.

The agency has a sound quality assurance system. Current practice evidences a competent evaluation of the quality of care and proposed service development. This includes relevant feedback from children, foster carers and placing authorities. The agency has a strong foundation to continue to build on; with the embedding of practice there is further capacity to improve. Extensive new developments, purposeful action planning and a renewed vision contributes to a good quality 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.