

Kindercare Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Kindercare Fostering service is an independent fostering agency, based in South Bromley, Kent. In December 2011, the service became part of the National Fostering Agency Group as a partner agency. Its trading name is Care Administration & Management Services Limited.

The fostering service's mission statement and aim is 'to deliver outstanding fostering services to children, young people, foster carers and local authorities.' The service currently offers a range of placements. This includes short to long-term placements, respite, emergency, bridging and parent and child placements. The fostering service undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of foster carers.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service has 75 approved foster caring households with 84 children and young people in placement.

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**

The service provides good quality of care and the outcomes for children and young people are excellent. Looked after children, including those who have complex needs, receive safe, personalised care that meets their needs. The work of the service's outreach team in particular, promotes young people's social interaction, increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

The fostering service maintains successful and stable foster placements. Children and young people, including several sibling groups, have their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Unplanned endings are rare. As a result, children and young people thrive in secure placements, enjoying relationships that are nurturing and positive. The service pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity.

The protection of children and young people is central to all the fostering agency does. There are effective systems in place to ensure children are safe. Staff conduct thorough assessments of foster carer's skills, and complete updated risk assessments and safer care plans. This promotes children and young people's well-being and helps protect them from harm and abuse.

The recruitment of foster carers is effective and this results in a good range of diverse foster care placements. This is in line with the aims and objectives of the fostering service's statement of purpose. The preparation of potential foster carers is sound.

The fostering service produces comprehensive foster carer assessments. There has been a noted improvement in the quality of assessments in recent years. Assessments are comprehensive, analytical and evidenced based, completed within specified timescales.

Foster carers are valued members of the team and contribute well to the planning and decision-making process in relation to children and young people's care planning. The service has an effective matching process in place. There is strong partnership working between staff of the fostering team, foster carers, the placing authority and other involved professionals. The fostering service involves children, young people and foster carers in the service's continual development.

Leadership and management of the fostering service is strong. The registered manager is an experienced, qualified social worker who has extensive experience of managing fostering services previously. Managers ensure that updated key policies are in place, foster carers' training has improved significantly and the fostering panel operates effectively.

Some shortfalls are noted. These relate to the quality of some key records, ensuring a consistent the level of support is offered to some foster carers who live a distance from the office, the development of adult protection policies, amendment] to one of the children's guides and consistency in notifying Ofsted of key events.

Areas of improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure the registered person must without delay notify Ofsted of events indicated in column 1 of Schedule 7. (Regulation 36(1))	01/04/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- Ensure each approved foster carer, particularly those living some distance away, have regular supervisory visits with their supervising social worker. (NMS 21.8)
- Ensure written minutes of panel meetings are sufficiently detailed and cover key issues and views expressed by panel members. (NMS 14.7)
- Ensure the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. Ensure safe care policies and risk assessments in particular are appropriately detailed, updated and clearly identify any known or anticipated risks to children. (NMS 4.5)
- Consider implementing adult protection policies to safeguard parents and children in placement together with foster carers. (NMS 25.3)
- Ensure that all foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice and child protection. (NMS 4.7)
- Ensure Children's Guides are revised to include the contact details of Ofsted. (NMS 16.4)

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Young people benefit significantly from the service's strong focus on promoting progress and positive experiences for looked after children. As a result, their outcomes are excellent. Children and young people receive personalised care, tailored, often innovatively, to meet individual needs. Foster carers share sound relationships with those they care for and are fully committed to supporting them to meet their full potential. Similarly, children and young people feel loved and exceptionally well cared for by their foster carers. They have a very strong sense of belonging. A young person told the inspector, 'My (foster) family is my world. They've done everything for me. I am their family.' Routinely, young people who are care leavers remain very much a part of their former foster families; many visit frequently and continue to seek emotional and practical support. This is indication of the strength of feeling and belonging some children and young people have for their foster carers.

Young people benefit from the fostering service's careful placement negotiation and placement start. They have access to creatively written and pictorial profiles of prospective families to help them settle into their new homes. Where placements are planned, introductions between young people and their prospective foster carers are sensitively co-ordinated. A local authority social worker's feedback to a foster carer states, 'I thank you for all the support you have provided A. I know it has been a lot of work, but you and your family have made a huge difference to A's life and I fully appreciate the care you have provided.'

Children and young people are cared for in accordance with written care plans. They feel well listened to and have opportunities to participate in placement decision-making. For example, they are encouraged to make choices about contact arrangements, recreational activities and whether or not to attend places of worship. They routinely attend their statutory reviews and most participate fully. This promotes their understanding of plans for their current and future care.

Children and young people have good opportunities to share their views, wishes and opinions. The fostering service continues to develop strategies to enhance the participation of looked after children in influencing the shape of the service. The service, for example, facilitates events and fun days to obtain feedback, distributes annual service questionnaires and invites young people to be involved in a number of initiatives such as developing questions to ask new foster care applicants.

Children and young people receive easy-read, informative information about making complaints and are aware of individuals and agencies they can approach if they have concerns. Children, young people and other stakeholders do not make complaints

frequently. When complaints are made, staff manage these well and in accordance with relevant policies.

Children and young people have good access to their brothers, sisters, other family members and friends when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering service's outreach team is instrumental in arrangements for contact. Staff manage these arrangements carefully and there is a strong focus on the impact and best interest of children. Staff of the outreach team, often already known to children, regularly supervise contact to ensure these encounters are safe. They provide written feedback to supervising social workers and the child's social worker to ensure both parties are aware of any emerging issues.

Children and young people's identity needs are very well met by the service and staff explore thoroughly issues of equality and diversity. For example, as required, young people have access to interpreting services; they are encouraged to practice and celebrate their chosen faith and placements are supportive in helping looked after children understand their backgrounds and events that have happened to them. As a result, they have a better understanding and develop pride in their heritage. Foster families offer expert and compassionate care for children living with disabilities and life limiting conditions. This promotes young people's independence and self-confidence and maximises their efforts to reach their full potential, despite their poor health.

The agency is very active in their promotion of educational achievement. This has a positive impact on children and young people who make good academic and vocational progress. School attendance is high and educational success noticeably improves as placements progress. Some young people go on to attend university. There are effective monitoring systems in place to chart educational issues and progress; the service is soon to introduce an 'education champion' to further promote and enhance children and young people's learning outcomes. The agency celebrates children and young people's academic and general achievements regularly and hosts an achievements award annually to encourage positive general development.

Children and young people benefit significantly from the input of the outreach service. For some young people, their progress and experiences are exceptional as a result of the involvement of this specialist team. Selected older young people participate in the team's transition programme, which promotes young people's independence. The programme is intensive and helps prepare young people for adulthood. They develop practical life skills such as budgeting, exploring careers options and how to complete job and housing applications.

Young people also have the opportunity to socialise with their peers, which for some, has proved challenging in the past. One young person told the inspector, 'The programme really, really helped build my self-confidence. I talk more now and others listen to me. I'm getting ready to move into my own place soon. I couldn't have done it without the outreach team.' The fostering service has clear 'Staying Put' policies to

support former looked after children remain in their existing foster care placement if both parties so wish.

Children and young people lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers promptly register them with primary care services, and they have LAC medical assessments completed annually and immunizations updated. Children and young people have good access to any required specialist services. These include a range of paediatric services, Great Ormond Street and other specialist hospitals to address complex and life-limiting conditions. Expectant mothers in parent and child placements routinely attend antenatal appointments and regularly meet with midwives following the birth of their children. All looked after children receive a health passport to help chart medical information while in placement and for use when they move on.

Children and young people engage in a range of physical and social activities that are of their choosing. Routinely these include attendance at young clubs, sports activities, scouts, cadet training and drama programmes. The fostering agency distributes newsletters and arranges events for both looked after children and the birth children of foster carers. There are opportunities for the two groups to participate in joint activities. Many enjoy family holidays and celebrations with their foster families, which promotes their strong sense of belonging. The fostering service regularly facilitates exciting activity programmes during school holidays. These include Christmas festivities, Easter hunts, Halloween parties and trips to popular theme parks and city based beaches. Staff select older young people to participate in specialised activities to increase team-building skills, self-confidence and exploration of the outdoors. Participants receive awards in acknowledgement of acquired skills and achievements.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The fostering service provides good quality care and as a result, children and young people thrive in secure, stable placements. The recruitment of new foster carers is innovative and based on research of local authority need. Recruitment methods include organised community events, incentives to staff and existing foster carers and increased use of social media. The fostering service's recruitment strategies are effective.

The preparation, assessment, support and training of foster carers is good and very much focused on the needs of children and young people. Foster carers receive good information and training to prepare them for their fostering role and they enjoy the process. Qualified and experienced independent assessors complete comprehensive and analytical assessments that identify the competencies and strengths foster carers have or need to develop. The assessment process is effectively quality assured by an assigned senior member of the organisation. This ensures that staff complete assessments robustly and to a high standard.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively and benefits by having membership

drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective; information is available electronically and participants are encouraged to review and share their views with the panel chair prior to panel meetings for co-ordinated discussions. Panel minutes require further scrutiny as some records are insufficiently detailed.

The support of foster carers is excellent. Foster carers indicate that this is an improvement to recent years. Overwhelmingly, foster carers indicate that support from the agency is superb and that this is a clear strength of the service. A foster carer told the inspector, 'My supervising social worker is brilliant. I can't fault her; I don't think she sleeps because she's always there. In person or at the end of the telephone.' Another foster carer comments, 'I get regular supervisory visits. They make time to meet with the children, more so than some of the children's social workers!' Most foster carers interviewed echoed this sentiment. The inspection notes however for some foster carers living a significant distance for the office base, there are gaps in the frequency of supervisory visits. This is not to the benefit of children and young people in these placements.

Children, young people and foster carers benefit from an extensive quality-training programme for foster carers. An assigned training officer is now responsible for the development and implementation of a new training programme that meets well the needs of foster carers in order to provide safe and nurturing placements. The training programme is wide ranging in scope and is highly relevant to the role of the foster carer.

Increasingly, the fostering service receives referrals for children and young people affected by loss and trauma. Children and young people benefit from the fostering service's investment in specialist training to help foster carers and staff enhance their understanding of the impact attachment issues and loss have on the behaviour of some looked after children. This is in an effort to better equip foster carers to offer secure and successful placements to children and young people who exhibit challenging behaviour. The service has plans to enlist the services of a psychotherapist to support the service's existing therapeutic approach to care.

The service now offers online training. This is in an attempt to provide training to foster carers more flexibly. It is clear that there has been much progress in the development of training provided. There remains however, a small number of foster carers who are yet to complete key training, such as child protection training. This is not in the best interest of children and young people.

There is a formal matching process, supported by a dedicated referral officer to ensure appropriate matching. This process is robust and includes the recording of comprehensive background information to promote stable, successful placements that meet young people's needs. Foster carers are very much involved in this process.

Children and young people's placement plans are relevant and clear. Foster carers

and staff adhere to local authority care plans. This assists in exploring placement issues, promotes permanency and helps to minimise unnecessary placement drift.

Foster carers and staff of the fostering team work in effective collaboration with external professionals. This is important to establish placement objectives and determine collectively, how children and young people's needs are best met. Representatives of the local authorities are positive about the quality of care young people receive, and they indicate they are very satisfied with the level of communication and partnership working between staff of the fostering service and their local authority. A social worker's feedback of the service states, 'I have worked with Kindercare on a number of very complicated cases. I have always found their support most beneficial and helpful. Apart from their excellent professionalism, they are also very friendly, personable and approachable.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The fostering services protection of children and young people is robust; staff and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people is paramount. The service ensures that foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of the young people with whom they are working and are aware of the underlying causes of the behaviours they can exhibit.

Children and young people benefit from the fostering services clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. The service however, is yet to develop adult protection policies to address risk and safeguarding action to be taken in parent and child placements.

Children and young people receive clear information about making complaints and have good opportunities to speak with staff of the service in private. Staff aim to complete at least two unannounced visits annually to foster carers' home to promote further the safety of placements.

Staff document family safe care policies and risk assessments to help keep young people safe and alert those working with them to actual or potential harm or risk. Some of these records are not sufficiently detailed or tailored to address specific risk-taking behaviour of individual young people.

Foster carers receive good written guidance and excellent training to keep children safe from harm and abuse. Managers of the fostering service monitor and have good overview and insight into all safeguarding occurrences. They take effective action to promote the protection of children and young people. The organisation's internal safeguarding forums vigorously monitors, evaluates and reports on all aspects of the organisation's safeguarding duties. In recent years, there has been a very strong focus on exploring issues of child sexual exploitation and its effective prevention. Staff and foster carers even more recently are due to receive information and training on radicalisation and the prevention of extremism.

The fostering service is proactive in ensuring there is effective partnership working with regard to child protection enquiries. There is purposeful and consistent liaison with involved professionals such as the LADO, the placing authority and the police. Staff attend and make valuable contributions to professional and strategy meetings that explore child protection issues. Where standard of care issues, incidents of a child protection nature or allegations feature, the service takes effective action in accordance with agreed safeguarding protocols. This is to ensure children and young people's safety remains the primary objective.

Children and young people do not regularly go missing and the frequency of young people being involved in sexual exploitation is low. When these occur, staff manage these incidents promptly and effectively, promoting the safety of children and young people. Foster carers are familiar with relevant safeguarding policies and protocols and strictly adhere to them. This also helps protect children and young people.

Staff manage allegations against foster carers promptly, effectively and sensitively. The agency demonstrates sound knowledge and practice regarding this aspect of safeguarding. Staff ensure effective communication with external agencies, which promotes the safety of children and young people, while providing appropriate support to foster carers.

The fostering service has sound systems in place for the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the service. These processes are comprehensive and confirm that staff and members of the central list are suitable to work with vulnerable children and young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The leadership and management of the fostering service is effective. Leaders of the service are ambitious for change, and many aspects of the fostering service's leadership and management are strong. The service has an ambitious, strategic plan in place to improve practice further and set the future direction and expansion of the fostering service.

The Registered Manager, who is relatively new in post, is a qualified social worker, highly skilled, and experienced to manage the service efficiently and with positive effect. The staff team and other managers are enthusiastic about new developments already taking shape as a result of the manager's appointment.

The staff team are appropriately qualified and extremely committed to providing good support to children, young people and their fostering families. They receive excellent support through effective and consistent training, supervision, appraisals and reflective practice. A staff member comments, 'There's a good level of support and regular supervision. When I first arrived, I was really out of my comfort zone, but the team were so supportive, I feel like I really belong'. Another team member

told the inspector, 'I love my job! I work with really good managers and colleagues – I can actually see the change and difference I'm making.'

The fostering service has extensive, effective monitoring systems in place for most aspects of the service's operation. These include for example, the tracking of individual children and young people's progress and outcomes, the review and revision of key policies and procedures and the review and evaluation of child protection issues. Managers however, do not consistently notify Ofsted of key events as specified in the regulations.

Managers complete quarterly overview reports to the organisation's senior managers and produce quality of care reports as required by the regulations. Leaders and managers have good insight into the quality of the operation and functioning of the fostering service. The service's premises and administrative mechanisms support the efficient operation of the fostering service.

Stakeholders and interested parties have access to clear and comprehensive information that outline well the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The Statement of Purpose is informative and explicit about what services and facilities the fostering service provides. Information available to children is creative and equally informative. The service has three children's guides, creatively written and illustrated for three specific age groups. The guide geared for the use of primary school aged children does not include the contact details of Ofsted as required.

The fostering agency is clearly very well organised, and is highly functional. Identified shortfalls do not impact negatively on the safety or welfare of looked after children. There are no unresolved actions from the previous inspection. The service has realistic plans in place to support its efforts to continue to offer quality care, ensure excellent outcomes for children and young people and enhance continued improvements to service provision.

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.