

Lorimer Foster Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Caroline Jones
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Date of last inspection	17/09/2010

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Lorimer Foster Services is a privately-owned independent fostering agency, which was registered in July 2004. It provides placements with approved foster carers for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The range of placements include short term, long term, bridging, respite and emergency placements.

As of March 2013, the agency have 80 approved foster carers in 46 households offering 107 placements.

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: **requires improvement.**

The agency demonstrates a commitment to developing children and young people's individual potential. Children and young people feel safe, valued and part of the fostering family. Placement stability is relatively good at a rate of 7% unplanned endings, which is in line with the national comparator for all independent fostering agencies. The stability of placements promotes the progress achieved by young people. They comment: 'I feel part of the family, I like them, it's good, this is the best place.'

The agency works in partnership with other professionals to identify and address the

individual needs of children and young people. Furthermore, foster carers are subject to assessment, review, training and regular supervision processes. This enhances their skills in providing children and young people with the care they need to grow and develop into confident young adults. Foster carers are dedicated to their role, the majority of whom confirm high standards of satisfaction with the service.

The agency is growing steadily and there are a range of carers available from different backgrounds to meet the needs of children and young people. This helps to make positive matches and meets the aims of the agency’s Statement of Purpose. Processes are in place to follow initial enquiries and filter out unsuitable applicants at an early stage. Thorough assessments are completed within timescales to prevent delay to the foster carers. The fostering panel effectively undertakes its quality assurance function and makes clear recommendations to the agency decision maker regarding prospective applicants’ suitability.

The Registered Manager, responsible individual and team manager work together to lead and manage the service. The notably stable staff team feel very well supported and have a protected case load. This allows for good support to be provided to foster carers. Foster carers are extremely positive about their experiences within the agency. They comment: 'The staff go above their job, they are very supportive.'

There are four requirements and five recommendations made as part of this inspection. These include: monitoring systems and practices; notification of significant events and practice and protocols relating to children and young people who go missing. The nature of these shortfalls indicates that the service is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good fostering agency overall. While the agency requires improvement, there are no widespread or serious failures that have negatively impact upon the welfare and safety of children and young people to-date.

Areas for 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.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
35 (2011)	maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents and their placing authority (Regulation 35 (1) and (3))	24/06/2014
36 (2011)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or	24/06/2014

	bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table (Regulation 36(1))	
12 (2011)	ensure that the written policy that sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect is implemented (Regulation 12(1)(b))	24/06/2014
3 (2011)	ensure that a copy of the Statement of Purpose is provided to the Chief Inspector and is placed on the agency website. (Regulation 3(2))	24/06/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the decision-maker records a considered decision and takes account of all information available (NMS 14.9)
- ensure that written records where a child goes missing, detail action taken by the foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return any reasons given by the child for running away and any action taken in light of those reasons (NMS 5.10)
- ensure that all approved foster carers attain the training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3)
- ensure that where children are placed out of authority and go missing that protocols covering the authority responsible are available to foster carers (NMS 5.7)
- ensure that the children's guide to the fostering service is suitable for all children fostered through the agency. (NMS 1)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people live with their brothers and sisters in stable and well matched placements where this is in their best interests. This is the foundation for the good outcomes achieved by them. Children and young people feel safe and at ease living within the fostering family. They are growing in confidence and learning to take responsibility for their behaviour. They also make friendships with their peers locally, which helps them settle within their family life and community. A young person commented: 'I like it, I play out with my friends, it's home.'

Children and young people live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and social wellbeing is promoted. The whole family has access to health professionals to meet their needs. Plans are in place to support this along with signed consent forms for medical treatment to ensure that children and young people gain the treatment they need when they need it. They engage in physical and social activities including: football, swimming, family holidays, music, dance and after

school clubs. They pursue their individual interests and foster carers are active in ensuring these are fulfilled. These practices make sure that children and young people enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Children and young people attend school regularly and are achieving from their starting points. Although, tracking this is difficult due partly to the transition of agency information on to electronic systems. There are many examples of children and young people achieving in line with their peers and catching-up with their peers. A young person commented: I have settled down here, they are helping me get to university'. Additionally, 'staying put' arrangements are in place with local authorities to ensure young people remain in placement beyond eighteen years of age.

Children and young people are able to express their views through review meetings, with their social worker, foster carers, supervising social worker and participation worker. Children and young people have access to an independent advocacy via their responsible placing authority when there is a need. However, the agency has not yet implemented firm arrangements for capturing children and young people's views or opinions to influence or improve the services provided to them in foster care.

Children and young people remain in touch with their family where this is in their best interests. They see their brothers and sisters and foster carers fully support this. Any issues arising are handled sensitively by foster carers enabling them to develop emotional resilience, knowledge and understanding of their background. They remain connected to their family through these arrangements to ensure their identity remains in-tact.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has a strong approach to the recruitment and assessment of foster carers in line with their Statement of Purpose. The assessments, conducted by qualified social workers, provide an evaluative account of the prospective foster carers. The first annual reviews are referred to panel for consideration and generally give an informed account of the care provided within the review period. This ensures that they remain fit to undertake their role effectively.

The panel members have been recruited from a range of diverse backgrounds, knowledge and expertise, the majority are independent members including the chair. The decision maker is the Registered Manager, a senior member of the agency and decisions are made according to timescales. However, a detailed record of the reasons for reaching a decision is not captured to ensure a clear decision making process.

The preparation, support and training of foster carers is good. They participate in 'Skills to Foster' preparation training and further training programmes to enhance their knowledge of children living away from their birth families. Foster carers say they have benefited from the training programme. They comment: 'It helps us to

understand the child's situation and to understand their behaviour'. Consequently, foster carers are better equipped to care for children and young people. The majority of foster carers have achieved the training, support and development standards in foster care within a year of approval but not all.

Foster carers benefit from good structured support through home visits and supervision meetings. In addition supervising social workers telephone them regularly and there is a consistent out-of-hours service in operation. Foster carers are very happy with the agency. Foster carers comment: 'I am very pleased with the agency, we can contact the social workers at any time, the team manager is very approachable, very happy have no plans to leave.' These practices assist foster carers in providing quality care to children and young people.

Commissioners and social workers from placing authorities are complimentary about the care provided to children and young people. They cite good communication and quality of care as reasons for choosing the agency. The fostering agency works well with local authority partners to gain information about children and young people to inform care arrangements to meet their needs appropriately.

Children and young people attend their reviews and foster carers fully support them in contributing their views. Foster carers are committed to including children and young people within their family life and long-term arrangements are in place to provide permanence to young people. Partnership working is effective and foster carers understand their roles and accountabilities. They work with local authority social workers and supervising social workers within the agreed delegated authority. This ensures that timely decisions are made in the best interest of children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Children and young people communicate that they feel safe in their homes and in the wider community. They say that they do not experience difficulties with regards to bullying or intimidation of any form. They comment: 'It's good, I feel safe and cared about, I am staying here.' Children and young people also say that they would be comfortable and confident about expressing their views to someone if they were worried or concerned. They are clear that their foster carers listen to them and list others outside of the home that they can also talk.

There is a procedure in place to direct practice in relation to allegations against foster carers, however, this has not always been followed and promptly implemented to effectively protect children and young people against potential harm. For example, there has been a delay in contacting the local authority designated officer, which impacts on other responsible bodies abilities to discharge their safeguarding duties with children and young people. There are established procedures to allow for consideration by the fostering panel when the approval of foster carers requires further appraisal. Although, on occasion the report provided to panel did not provide

the correct information to allow for this scrutiny. This further demonstrates shortfalls in the quality assurance process, which can compromise safety.

There are incidents of children and young people going missing. However, records do not provide a full account of the incident, the response and details of the child or young person's return. Additionally, the knowledge and recording processes by the agency have become confused over the distinction between absent and missing. Despite this, foster carers report young people to the police in both instances to promote their safety.

The Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols are referred to in policies and procedures, although copies from different authorities are not available within the agency's electronic systems to ensure easy access for foster carers. Systems and processes are in place to manage risk taking behaviours once young people are placed. Foster carers fully understand their role in securing young people's safety and protection. While shortfalls are identified these are not widespread and have not had a significant negative impact upon the welfare of children and young people young people to-date.

Recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough and robustly applied for staff, foster carers and panel members to ensure their suitability in working with children and young people. Unannounced visits are undertaken annually and children and young people are seen without their foster carer, to gain their views.

The assessment, preparation, training and supervision of foster carers is good and emphasises safeguarding children and young people. Additionally, policies and procedures are in place to guide foster carers and supervising social workers in caring for children and young people safely. Foster carers confirm that they have an open attitude to disclosures and understand the impact of abuse upon young people's behaviour. Consequently, they are guided to respond to children and young people's changing needs for protection.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Many aspects of leadership and management are sound. There is a qualified, Registered Manager in post who is supported by a responsible individual and team manager. As a leadership and management team they communicate their intention, to deliver a quality service to children, young people and foster carers. Two of the three recommendations from previous inspection have been fully addressed, although the effectiveness of quality assurances remains a shortfall. A solid development plan is in place to improve practice further and sets the future direction of the agency.

Quality assurance systems are not to an acceptable standard. For example, monitoring and auditing by the management team is not robust resulting in some reports being inaccurate. Again, the quality of records completed by foster carers is

variable. In particular, recordings of young people missing from home do not provide a detailed account of the incident to ensure a robust response. The way in which the outcomes and experiences of children and young people are recorded makes it difficult to track and monitor their individual progress.

The fostering agency does not yet have a robust reporting procedure in place to ensure all significant events are notified to the appropriate authorities. Consequently, the effectiveness with which the regulatory body and the responsible authority are able to monitor the service is reduced. A number of events have occurred and not been notified accordingly.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are available, however, these are not easily accessible as they are not published on the agency's website. Also, the children's guide is not yet available in varying formats to ensure better access for children and young people with additional needs. The agency and the foster carers have adopted the Foster Carers' Charter to set the values of their work with children and young people.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service, 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.