

Capstone Foster Care (South East) Limited

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Unit 2, Greenbox, Westonhall Road, Stoke Prior, Worcestershire, B60 4AL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency was registered in 2016. Its registered office is near Droitwich and covers the West and East Midlands region. It provides a range of fostering placements, including short term, long term and for sibling groups. At the time of the inspection there were 63 fostering households caring for 84 children. The current manager registered with Ofsted in September 2021.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 November 2024

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 29 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points because of the nurturing and consistent care they receive from their foster carers. Children speak passionately about their foster carers and were keen to share their positive views with the inspectors. Children recorded videos and drew pictures which depicted their positive views about where they live. One child spoke very fondly of their foster carers and discussed that they are his family. Another child told inspectors that he values living with his sibling and wants to remain living with his foster carers until he lives independently.

Permanence for children is a strength of the agency, and many of the children live with their carers in long term arrangements. A high number of foster carers have obtained Special Guardianship Orders or gone on to adopt the children they cared for. Over a quarter of children live alongside their siblings, and on one occasion, foster carers changed their approval to enable siblings to live together. Children are very much considered to be part of their carers' families, and this helps them feel highly valued and form lasting bonds.

All children attend education, with carers and the agency placing a high priority on this as part of children's routines. Highly effective monitoring is in place that assists staff to have very good oversight of children's attendance and attainment and take steps to support improvement where needed. As a result, children have flourished in school and a significant number are achieving in line with the national average at key stage 2. For some children, the targeted support has helped them to embrace education, successfully complete exams and move on to the next stage of their educational journey.

Agency staff have a good understanding of children's health needs. Children are helped and encouraged to attend routine appointments. When necessary, the agency have sought and provided specialist health training to ensure that carers can meet children's complex health needs, for example epilepsy and diabetes. Staff have also been trained alongside carers to ensure that they can provide effective oversight and support for children's care.

Children enjoy a range of opportunities and activities with their foster carers including day trips, holidays and family events. In addition, the agency is highly effective in creating social events to bring children together. They provide exciting activities including trips to local theme parks, summer fun days and Christmas parties. Children have enjoyed new experiences and developed new friendship groups as a result. The agency recognises that some children find social activities difficult, therefore they make a significant effort to provide activities tailored to their needs and interests. For one child, the agency provides cinema experiences for them and their carers as an alternative. This ensures that all children can benefit from experiences that enrich their lives.

There is highly effective care planning for children. The agency has dedicated staff who carefully consider arrangements for children to live with their carers. Comprehensive assessments are completed to consider the child's needs and carers' ability to meet those needs. Children are provided with information through child friendly guides to help them understand their journey into foster care. In addition, the agency provides children with welcome boxes tailored to their individual interests, and these help children feel valued.

Foster carers speak extremely positively about their involvement with the agency right from the start, through the assessment process and preparation for their role. Feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Carers build excellent working relationships with their supervising social workers and feel very well supported. They also appreciate the senior managers' support and the child centred approach throughout the agency.

Children's voices are at the heart of the agency's work. Children consistently give feedback for carer annual reviews and are present during supervision visits where they chat with the supervising social worker. The agency consistently reviews how they can engage with children to continually meet their needs. Some children are part of the youth council, and they have recently highlighted their right to privacy in carer records. This has already been taken on board by leaders and managers, and they are now considering the best way to make changes.

Children develop very positive relationships with agency staff and feel connected. Children shared very positive views about the agency. One child told inspectors that the agency "keep children safe, and we love having them by our side". Another shared that the supervising social worker is "smart and kind." These positive comments demonstrate that children feel very well cared for and supported.

The agency support children towards independence extremely well. They have developed their own evidence-based independence programme which is bespoke for each child. Dedicated children's champions support children to work through the programme and identify where support needs to be targeted. One child needed support to learn how to plan weekly shopping, so a target was set for her to go shopping with her carer to develop her skills. The structured programme helps equip children with the skills they need when they move on as young adults.

Leaders and managers are committed to enhancing the lives of children once they reach adulthood. The agency have established a care leavers trust which provides grants to young people to support them with expensive items including driving lessons and laptops. This support is not just available to young people who have lived with the agency's carers but is open to all care leavers and therefore enhances the life chances of a much wider cohort of young people.

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

Children's well-being and safety is a priority for the agency. Managers, staff and carers have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities to safeguard

children. There have been rare occasions where foster carers have delayed in reporting incidents or concerns, however, these are isolated incidents and managers have taken prompt and effective action to address this with the carers.

The agency manages risk and safeguarding concerns very well. Children have individual risk assessments with clear measures in place to support carers in keeping them safe. These are kept under constant review which helps to manage changing risks. Where managers feel that children can no longer be kept safe, they work with placing authorities to help the children move on in a planned way. Some of these children have remained in contact with their carers and these important links will help children feel positive about their experiences in care.

Children can identify adults who they trust and can talk to about any worries or concerns they may have. The agency is creative in using the children's champions to help children to develop positive relationships with role models outside of the family. For example, staff identified that one child would benefit from a male role model, so the male children's champion took time to get to know the child which has helped them to have another male to talk to about any worries they may have.

Clear plans are in place to reduce the risk of children going missing and the number of incidents is very low considering the size of the agency. When children do go missing carers understand what actions to take and the agency responds promptly. Furthermore, the agency uses their children's champion to visit children to talk to them and try to understand the reason for the missing episode to reduce the risk of reoccurrence.

Managers respond to allegations about foster carers quickly and effectively. They work well with partner agencies to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place for all children affected. The registered manager's thorough investigations are considered by the fostering panel to ensure that there is independent review and oversight and where needed carers are de-registered and referred to the disclosure and barring service. This helps to ensure that only those people who are safe and suitable are able to care for children.

Safe recruitment practice is strong. Careful recruitment of foster carers and staff ensures that, so far as possible, the checks carried out mean that assures managers that suitable people work with children. Recruitment checks are thorough and meet the regulatory requirements.

Overall, the agency has effective training and monitoring systems in place to ensure safe medication practice. However, foster carers are not asked to record ongoing, routine medication given to children. Although this has not had an impact on children's health, it is not good practice. Managers have taken inspectors' feedback on board and changes will be made as part of a wider review of the medications policy to ensure that all medication is recorded.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is managed by an experienced, skilled manager who is highly respected by carers and staff alike. The manager previously worked as a supervising social worker for the agency and has a very good understanding of the needs of the fostering families and children. One staff member described the manager as a role model and said that they could not ask for a better manager. Similar feedback was received from all the staff who shared their views.

The responsible individual provides excellent oversight and support for the agency. She takes a hands-on approach and has positive relationships with staff, carers and children. She is ambitious and steers the agency forward to always provide the best care they can for children. Staff value her support and feel comfortable in seeking her advice if the registered manager is not present.

The leadership team has an excellent understanding the agency's strengths and areas for development. They have effective monitoring systems in place. This includes monthly monitoring and case file audits to help to identify any shortfalls in practice as soon as possible. They have also introduced extensive monitoring systems which help them to track children's progress, placement stability and risks.

The agency employs specialist clinical staff to enhance the support to foster carers and children. There is a clear structure for support depending on the child's needs. This support has enabled some children to overcome challenges and remain in their foster homes when the placements may otherwise have ended. One child joined their foster family after several previous placements ending in an unplanned way. The clinical team were involved from the referral stage and were able to secure funding for the clinical support that the family would need before the placement was agreed. This child has gone on to build positive relationships with their carers and has a stable home thanks to the high level of support provided.

Leaders and managers provide excellent care for children and are passionate about improving children's lives. They have invested heavily in training and development to enhance the therapeutic care that children receive. All staff have completed additional training with clinical colleagues, and foster carers have started to complete this too. New initiatives are based on research, including some completed by managers. The agency has introduced a full clinical support programme, an independence programme and are changing the language used in the agency to be more therapeutic in line with 'Language that Cares' research and guidance.

Management of the agency is shared across several teams who all work together to ensure that the agency is meeting its aims. For example, there is a recruitment and assessment manager and family arrangement team. All staff come together regularly to discuss the carers and children and there is a real sense of teamwork. Good collaboration means that all staff maintain a good understanding of family situations which enables the agency to respond quickly with whatever support is needed.

The agency's panel arrangements are robust. The fostering panel consists of appropriately qualified and experienced members who are equipped to make competent recommendations. This is supported by the Agency Decision Maker who makes clear, timely and reasoned decisions demonstrating a good level of reflection and consideration of all elements of the application and approval process. Feedback from panel meetings and the agency decision maker are used to consider whether improvements to assessments could be made.

Staff benefit from high quality, regular supervision with managers. Supervisions are reflective and demonstrate a high level of support to staff. There is a focus on staff wellbeing as well as work related discussions and there are several employee support programmes in place to help staff remain healthy and to help them feel valued at work. Feedback from staff was overwhelmingly positive about the support the agency provides to them.

The agency has a clear induction programme for staff to equip them with the key knowledge for their roles. Staff receive annual appraisals which take into account feedback from colleagues and carers. This helps the agency and staff to learn from practice.

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

Recommendations

- Foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement.
Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, 2011, (page 18 paragraph 6.11)

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: 1237336

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