

Voice Fostering Ltd

Voice Fostering Limited

595 Tanworth Lane, Shirley, Solihull B90 4JE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Voice Fostering Limited is a privately owned independent fostering agency that is registered as a limited company. The agency was registered with Ofsted on 1 August 2012.

The agency offers long-term, sibling and respite placements. At the time of this inspection, there were 21 fostering households caring for 40 children.

There is a permanent registered manager in post. The manager is qualified in social work and registered with Social Work England.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 February 2022

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: 22 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This fostering agency works tirelessly to ensure that children have exceptionally positive childhood experiences. The agency excels at providing highly individual support for foster carers. Professionals and foster carers describe this support as 'second to none'. In turn, highly skilled foster carers tailor their support to meet children's needs, no matter how complex these needs are. As a result, children make outstanding progress in all aspects of their lives.

The agency recruits foster carers who are committed to caring for children long term. Children grow up developing a sense of belonging in their foster families and know that they matter. As a result, children reaching the age of 18 remain living with their foster carers. This enhances their stability during their transition to adulthood, and means they continue to feel valued as a member of the family.

The agency and their foster carers are inspiring. They are committed to ensuring that children are able to remain with their siblings. As a result, the majority of children cared for by this agency live with their brothers and sisters. This means that children maintain a natural connection and a shared history. This informs children's sense of identity and helps them to grow up with positive emotional well-being.

The agency's matching of children's needs to foster carers is extremely thorough. The agency continuously reviews the matching process. This helps to identify areas that may require early intervention or additional support. For example, one family that fostered two siblings also had a younger birth child. The agency arranged for a support worker to help the birth child to prepare for the arrival of the foster children. This approach ensures that all children feel listened to and know that their feelings are important.

Foster carers provide children with bespoke care and support. They respond well to children's individual needs, in particular their identity and cultural needs. For example, foster carers ensure that children can attend their chosen place of worship. When one child celebrated an important religious festival, the child's parents, foster carers and supervising social worker attended the ceremony. These events contribute to children's life stories. As a result, they grow up with a positive sense of identity.

The agency highly values education. The responsible individual actively supports children to achieve the best possible education outcomes. This has enabled children to make progress from their starting points and, in some cases, to exceed their initial predictions for attainment. One child told the inspector, 'I did not go to school. I was very behind but I am now on track to pass my GCSEs.' The child said that this was because of the help and support of their foster carer and the agency.

Children are able to develop positive relationships outside the home. Foster carers help children to attend a variety of clubs, such as swimming and Brownies. In addition, the agency facilitates groups so that children can meet and socialise together, including birth children. One child said, 'It is helpful for me to be friends with other children who are fostered, and the sessions are lots of fun.' This helps children to interact socially with others and to widen and enrich their social experiences.

The agency ensures that children receive comprehensive therapeutic support to promote their emotional well-being. The agency accesses a variety of different therapies dependent on the needs of the children. This support has successfully helped children to form healthy attachments with their foster carers and to express and manage their emotions safely. Children spoke highly of the equine therapy and how caring for horses who have experienced trauma has helped them to reflect on and process their own experiences. The agency also commissions specialist support, including commissioning a child psychologist to work directly with the foster carers. This support helps children to learn how to regulate their emotions while navigating the trauma and loss they have experienced.

Managers and staff are exceptional advocates for children. They ensure that professionals listen to children's wishes and feelings and, if needed, will escalate them to the highest level. As a result, children feel listened to and valued.

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

Safeguarding practice throughout the fostering service is good. The agency is very prompt at acting on concerns about children's safety. On occasion, staff's decision-making is not always recorded clearly. However, this does not affect children's safety.

Children have up-to-date safer-care plans and individual risk assessments. These are unique to each child. They support foster carers and staff to manage risk effectively. As a result, children who have experienced high levels of trauma develop a sense of safety.

The assessment and support of foster carers focus on their ability to keep children safe. Foster carers help children to understand behaviours that may increase their risks. Foster carers talk through with the children the strategies they will use to help minimise these risks and to keep the children safe. At the same time, foster carers enable the children to take reasonable risks as part of their development, such as walking to and from school on their own.

Children are able to attend training sessions with their foster carers, particularly if they experience anxiety. One child and their foster carer attended a training course about internet safety. This child then redesigned the course and facilitated this with a group of younger children. As a result, they developed self-confidence and improved self-esteem while at the same time teaching other children how to stay safe.

When children make allegations, managers and staff take action to keep children safe. There is excellent partnership working between the manager and external professionals. Once investigations into allegations conclude, the manager informs the fostering panel. However, an in-depth review of the foster carer's approval is not always carried out by the panel, unless the foster carer is due their annual review. However, this has not had a detrimental impact on children's safety.

On one occasion, the manager did not inform Ofsted of an allegation. The manager took appropriate action to safeguard the child. However, this shortfall hindered Ofsted's ability to scrutinise the agency's safeguarding practice on this occasion.

There is a shortfall in the safe recruitment of staff. Although managers do contact staff's previous employers to establish whether there have been any safeguarding concerns, they do not verify the reasons why staff leave previous employers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is ambitious and inspirational. They lead a highly skilled and stable staff team. Managers have created a culture of positive and supportive relationships. The senior management team has a wealth of experience within it. Managers share their learning beyond the agency, for example meeting with managers from other fostering agencies to share best practice.

The registered manager receives clinical supervision from a highly qualified and experienced professional. This enhances their practice to better support foster carers and children.

Managers make excellent use of published research. They use learning from serious case reviews to improve staff practice. For example, the manager arranges 'practice groups' with staff to explore particular themes, such as being curious about an applicant's motivation or commitment during their assessment. This helps staff to identify any concern about an applicant's suitability early on.

Foster carers receive excellent training. They find training sessions valuable, in particular the opportunity to share their experiences with others. One foster carer told the inspector that the agency is 'exemplary in their care and understanding of both us the carers and the child in our care'. For foster carers who may struggle with their learning, staff provide one-to-one sessions to develop and embed the foster carer's understanding. Foster carers form support networks and meet on a regular basis to support one another. These opportunities support foster carers to reflect on and develop their skills so that they continue to provide exceptional care to children.

The agency is dynamic in its working. It works collaboratively with foster carers and children's teachers. For example, the therapeutic lead visits children in school to deliver therapy. They also work with teachers to help them understand the strategies they use, in particular to support children's emotional well-being. As a result, children receive continuity of care. This contributes to a positive learning environment.

There are comprehensive monitoring systems in place. A significant strength of the agency is the stability of placements. When there is an unplanned ending, albeit there are few, the agency reflects on why this has happened. They identify learning to minimise the chance of it happening again.

An independent reviewing officer undertakes timely and in-depth annual reviews of foster carers. Reviews provide excellent information about foster carers and the experiences of children to inform and enable decisions about foster carers' continued approval.

The fostering panel provides a high level of scrutiny and challenge. There is a high level of independence and diversity. The agency also has a children's panel which complements decision-making. Children design their own questions to ask applicants. They then have an opportunity to express their views about the applicant's suitability. This is, without question, an exceptional resource.

The agency's decision-maker provides clear, timely and reasoned decisions. This means that decision-making is without delay and in children's best interests.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or</p> <p>allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p>(Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that all staff who are employed by the agency are subject to the required recruitment checks.</p>	<p>25 March 2022</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that after an allegation has been made about a foster carer their approval is consistently reviewed by the fostering panel. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.8)
- The registered person should ensure that they notify the relevant persons of any significant events in accordance with regulation 36. In addition, ensure that managers and staff clearly record their decision-making and any action taken following a significant event. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 29.1 and 29.2)

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: SC451077

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Registered provider address: 595 Tanworth Lane, Shirley, Solihull B90 4JE

Responsible individual: Ian Staite

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Inspector

Sarah Berry, Social Care Inspector

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