

Tutis Foster Care

Tutis Foster Care Ltd

13 Duke Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7ER

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is privately owned. It was registered in July 2015. At the time of this inspection, eight approved fostering households were providing foster placements for 12 children and young people.

The agency currently provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short-term
- long-term
- respite.

Inspection dates: 22 to 27 September 2017

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **Requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 29 January 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Many children are living in long-term placements in which they are able to thrive. They have a real sense of belonging.
- Young people placed with the agency are rarely involved in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home.
- All young people placed with the agency are attending school or college regularly.
- Despite the agency being in its infancy, one young person has been able to remain with her foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements.
- Children benefit from living alongside their brothers and sisters.
- Good-quality fostering assessments demonstrate that foster carers have the knowledge and skills to foster.
- Foster carers feel that they are part of a team. They feel well supported by the agency and by their peers.
- The small size of the agency means that all staff have good knowledge of the agency's foster carers and children placed. This helps them to provide effective support in an emergency.
- Staff effectively challenge placing authorities and are good advocates for children in placement.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Foster carers have not always completed mandatory training courses.
- Current staff recruitment practice does not comply with the principles of safer recruitment.
- Quality assurance and monitoring processes require further development.
- Feedback from stakeholders does not inform the development of the agency, as it is not included in internal review reports. Furthermore, these reports are not being sent to HMCI on completion.
- Documentation relating to matching and risk assessment is neither robust nor updated as required.

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>17: Support, training and information for foster parents</p> <p>Ensure that foster parents are provided with such training, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. Specifically behaviour management training, and support to complete the training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval. (Regulation 17(1))</p>	01/11/2017
<p>20: Fitness of workers</p> <p>Ensure that the fostering service provider does not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(1)(3))</p>	01/11/2017
<p>35: Review of quality of care</p> <p>Ensure that the system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals includes all the matters listed in the schedule; specifically evaluation of the use of any measures of control, or discipline; and that the system provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. In addition, that the HMCI is provided with a written report in respect of any review conducted. (Regulation 35(1)(2)(3))</p>	01/11/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. (National minimum standards 4.1)

Specifically, this includes more robust matching risk assessments; ensuring young people's risk assessments contain pertinent information and are kept up-to-date; and that pet assessments are completed on all pets in the fostering household.

- Ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file; and as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. (National minimum standards 22.7 and 22.8)
- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standards 25.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: Good

Children and young people living with the agency's foster carers are making good progress across all areas of their development. They all attend school or college regularly and are making good progress. Some have received additional private tuition to ensure that they maximise their potential. Consequently, some young people have achieved well in national examinations, illustrating their progress since coming to live in foster care. A comment on one school report read: 'There has been a marked improvement in (Name of the child)'s attitude, motivation and achievements.'

Children and young people also benefit from improvements in their health. Foster carers ensure that they register all children with health services. They attend regular check-ups with the dentist and optician. Agency staff are also aware of local resources and are able to identify additional input from those with appropriate expertise, when necessary, for example a visit to foster carers by a health professional with an autism specialism, following a diagnosis for a child in their care. This ensures that children and young people receive the input that they need in a timely manner.

Many children and young people are settled with their foster families in long-term fostering placements, allowing them to feel part of the family. This sense of belonging is helping them to thrive. One young person commented, 'I am really happy here and there is nothing I would change. My carers are the best parents anyone could wish for.' However, some emergency placements have resulted in unplanned endings and additional moves for children. The current matching documentation contains insufficient detail of concerns and of the strategies that need to be in place to resolve any challenges. This would ensure that foster carers are in the best position to care for the child.

Many children benefit from living alongside their brothers and sisters. One young person commented in feedback taken by the agency, 'It's great living with my foster carer and my two brothers.' Those who are unable to do so continue to enjoy regular contact with their brothers and sisters. Foster carers also promote children's contact with their parents, both by telephone and face to face. Foster carers appreciate the significance of these relationships for children, and do not undermine them. This helps children to maintain a sense of family identity.

Children and young people feel part of their foster families. They are involved in the usual family activities and events, such as family days out and holidays. Young people's individual interests and talents are also actively encouraged. Examples include going to a youth club, dancing, swimming and playing a musical instrument. One young person commented: 'I can now ride a bike and swim, and I have been on my first holiday ever.' These are lifelong skills which also help to improve young people's self-esteem and confidence. Young people also receive support to gain work experience, and some have been on an organised volunteering trip abroad,

along with agency staff.

Agency practice is child centred. Children and young people receive a helpful profile of their foster family prior to meeting them, and introductory visits take place unless it is an emergency placement. Young people say that this helped to ease their anxieties prior to their move.

Foster carers and the agency celebrate children's progress and achievements. Agency staff mark such occasions by sending a card or gift. Staff are good advocates for young people. They will go out of their way to ensure positive outcomes for them. For example, one staff member travelled a considerable distance to source a passport for a child in an emergency, so that they could enjoy a family holiday with their foster carers, brothers and sisters. One young person has also been able to remain with her foster carer under 'staying put' arrangements. She is currently studying on a degree course at university. This young person expressed her thanks to the agency saying, 'I do not believe I would have achieved what I have without them.'

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers is good. The agency is in the process of updating its website and rebranding its service. Consequently, it has not been actively recruiting new foster carers. However, it has approved two new fostering families in the last 12 months, who had approached the agency because of word of mouth recommendation. Foster carers receive appropriate pre-approval training to ensure that they have a realistic view of the fostering task. Fostering assessment reports contain good analysis and evaluation, demonstrating the applicants' ability to care for children safely and competently. However, assessors only undertake pet assessments routinely on dogs in the home, and the risks posed by other family pets do not currently receive consideration or evaluation. This potentially puts children and young people at risk, as the agency is unaware of any protective factors in place.

Foster carers spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the support that they receive. Examples of their comments include:

- 'Staff are very professional at all times, keeping us up to date with all queries and questions.'
- 'I couldn't ask for a better team. They go above and beyond their duties as professionals.'
- 'We are proud to be part of such a dedicated team.'
- 'They are always there when you need them.'
- 'Communication with the fostering agency has been very effective. Everything was put in terms that we easily understood.'

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

Children and young people say that they feel safe and secure in their foster families. The agency has two children's guides to fostering so that children can receive essential information in the most appropriate format. These contain details about how they can raise any concerns or complaints. Supervising social workers ensure that they see children regularly so that they are able to monitor their progress. Children and young people spoken to during the inspection said that they were familiar with the agency staff and would be confident to contact them if they were unhappy about anything. Staff also undertake unannounced visits to foster carers annually so that they can be assured that children are receiving high-quality care when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit. However, records of these visits are of variable quality and sometimes contain limited information.

Young people rarely engage in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home. The agency has recently employed a support worker to undertake both individual and group work with young people. She is an experienced youth worker and is able to focus on specific issues for the young people in placement. Topics so far have included puberty and relationships. This type of personalised and interactive input gives young people the opportunity for non-judgemental discussion and equips them with the knowledge and skills that they may need when they face challenges in the future.

Each foster carer compiles their own safe caring policy. This outlines the rules and expectations for all those living in the family. Foster carers share this with the children and young people in their care, which reduces the potential for their actions to be misinterpreted.

Staff complete a risk assessment for each young person, and this outlines the specific risks pertinent to them. However, they do not always contain correct information at the time of placement or receive an update when new concerns have arisen. Moreover staff do not routinely share these with placing social workers, who would be able to identify the errors in these documents. Consequently, foster carers may not always be clear about the most appropriate preventative strategy to employ or the action that they should take in the event of an incident.

The agency has had no complaints since it was registered. It liaises well with other safeguarding agencies in the event of any allegations against foster carers. However, it does not maintain a central record, making it difficult to view a clear investigation chronology. In addition, when the allegation investigation has concluded, it has not returned to the fostering panel in a timely manner, thus leaving a degree of uncertainty for the foster carers involved. Although, the foster carers confirm that staff have supported them during this interim period.

This inspection identified some shortfalls in relation to the safe recruitment of staff. References have not been taken from the individual's most recent employer, nor verification sought when an individual has previously worked with children of why this employment ended. This does not conform to the principles of safer recruitment. Managers took immediate action to address these shortfalls during the

inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: Requires improvement to be good

There has been a recent change of manager with day-to-day responsibility for the service. The former responsible individual is currently completing the formal registration process with Ofsted to become the registered manager. The previous registered manager also remains employed. They are both directors of the agency. The current manager has a wealth of experience in children's social care, including fostering. He has a level 4 management qualification and is currently completing a level 5 course. A small team of qualified social work staff undertakes the assessment and support of foster carers. They receive regular supervision and appraisal to support them in their roles. This also enables them to reflect on their practice.

Similarly, foster carers receive regular supportive supervision. The majority of foster carers complete their training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval. However, when they have not done so, agency staff do not appear to have prioritised discussion on this matter in foster carer supervision. The agency outlines to foster carers its expectations regarding post-approval training. However, prior to a very recent change to the agency's statement of purpose, there was a discrepancy between this document and the foster carer agreement that potentially led to confusion. Some foster carers have yet to complete core training modules such as managing difficult behaviour, despite this being raised at their annual review and recommended by the fostering panel. Additional training opportunities are made available to meet the specific needs of children placed. These include topics such as attachment and radicalisation.

The agency's central list of fostering panel members brings a range of experience, both professional and personal, to the panel. The panel chair is independent of the agency, and is suitably qualified and experienced. However, currently the agency requires all panel members to be present to be quorate. Consequently, managers are in the process of recruiting new panel members. The panel offers a suitable degree of scrutiny and challenge. The agency decision maker makes his decision promptly and lists his own reasons for reaching his decision clearly.

The agency's systems to monitor the outcomes of children from the point of placement are yet to be well established. The agency is in the process of introducing a new electronic system that may assist with this. Staff receive regular progress reports on children during foster carer supervision, and staff also discuss children's progress in their supervision with their line manager. Anecdotally, staff are able to give many examples of positive outcomes that children and young people have achieved. However, there is not yet a system in place to obtain a general overview of all children's progress, which will become more pertinent as the size of the agency grows. Also, managers' auditing has failed to address issues identified during this

inspection, such as missing documentation on case records, third-party information being logged incorrectly on a foster carer's record, no complete record of allegations and weaknesses in recruitment processes.

The registered manager prepares three-monthly internal monitoring reports on the operation of the agency. However, these do not currently include all the information required by regulation. In addition, managers do not send these reports to HMCI, as regulation requires. The preparation of these reports quarterly does ensure that the senior management team is kept abreast of the agency's current position.

Although managers took action to address the requirements and recommendations raised at the last inspection, not all have been sufficiently addressed. Consequently, one requirement, relating to sending the internal monitoring reports to HMCI, is repeated. In addition, one recommendation relating to the training of foster carers is escalated to a requirement at this inspection.

Stakeholders describe the communication from the agency as good. Managers provide effective challenge when this is necessary. One social worker commented: 'Communication with the agency has been good from my perspective, both by telephone and email. I also note that the carers had good rapport with the supervising social worker and vice versa, during my visits. Supervising social worker displays a good knowledge of the child and his needs.' However, social workers did comment that a recent change of staffing has resulted in them being unclear who the allocated supervising social worker is, currently.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC489594

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Responsible individual: Robin Lovegrove

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspector(s)

Mandy Williams, social care inspector

Lynn O'Driscoll, social care inspector



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