

Be My Family Fostering Agency

Be My Family Fostering Agency Ltd

11 St Albans Avenue, Feltham, Middlesex TW13 6RL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Be My Family is a privately owned, independent fostering agency. It provides a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, short term, long term and permanency. It provides placements for children with additional and complex needs, for siblings and for parents with children. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 22 fostering households and 30 children in placement. Of the children in placement, the majority were unaccompanied asylum seekers. Additionally, many foster carers continue to care for children under a 'staying put' arrangement. The agency has three supervising social workers.

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.

We last visited this setting on 20 August 2020 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 March 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: 5 March 2018

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 cared for through this fostering agency make remarkable progress and go on to build secure, loving attachments to their foster carers. Foster carers talk about the children with pride and view their role caring for children as a privilege. Milestones for children are recognised and celebrated. For example, one child reported that their foster carer 'made a big fuss, and cooked a special meal,' because the child had done well in a maths mock exam. All children spoken to were very happy with their foster carers. They described them as kind and always wanting to help. One child described their foster carer as being there when it counted and supporting them through a bereavement. Children did not describe being in foster care but instead being part of a family.

Children are ambitious for their futures and from their starting points children go on to make tremendous achievements. Children's education is prioritised, and the supervising social workers ensure that regular professional meetings happen so that progress can be monitored and improved on. Foster carers help children with spellings and reading, they limit screen time and proactively help children's social workers to find the most suitable schools and colleges for children. Some children who have been at risk of exclusion are now thriving in school.

Children regularly attend activity clubs and have their own hobbies and interests. One child is part of their school's gifted programme and attends several clubs each week. When children do not know how to swim, foster carers prioritise swimming lessons. Children go on holiday with their foster carers and when this cannot happen children are cared for by a support carer who they know well. One parent and their child joined their foster carer on a holiday to Dubai.

Many foster carers continue to care for children after the age of 18 and this is supported by the fostering agency. Some young people have gone on to university and return to their foster homes during the holidays. Other children 'pop in' around college timetables and continue to be treated as one of the family.

Children's records are clear and they capture what is important for children. For example, letters from children's parents are saved in their parent's handwriting. Supervising social workers celebrate successes but also sensitively explain how children have come through challenging periods. Children's health needs are well documented. There is a strengths-based writing model in place for children.

The fostering agency works hard to build good relationships with children's families. For example, one supervising social worker was supported by their manager to undertake learning in systemic therapy. The supervising social worker used this knowledge to better support his foster carers in recognising the journey of children's parents. This has had a positive impact on children because they have been able to build attachments with their foster carers without feeling disloyal to their parents.

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

Before the decision is made to care for any new child, full consideration is given to the safety and well-being of any children already living with the foster carers. Initial risks for children and foster carers are well evaluated and foster carers are set action plans to improve their skills to better recognise children's risk-taking behaviours during the initial stages of placement.

Although some children have complex needs, these are well understood by the fostering agency. Foster carers set clear boundaries and expectations for children, which are well balanced alongside nurture, praise, patience and perseverance. Although foster carers go through challenging periods with children, they remain committed and are fully supported throughout. This approach is working as there have been no safeguarding notifications or placement disruptions since the last monitoring visit.

During the pandemic, supervising social workers have collaborated with children's social workers to ensure that children are seen regularly. Supervising social workers regularly spend time with children, children's bedrooms are routinely seen, and children's views are reflected on and recorded. Children know how to make a complaint. Prior to any child's looked after children's review, the supervising social worker spends time with the child to obtain their views. Foster carers produce a progress report for every child's review. All children spoken to by the inspector attend and contribute to their reviews.

Foster carer training is led by the needs of the children in their care. For example, foster carers have been supported to understand the risks for children who show signs of sexualised behaviour. When children have been missing from care, these episodes are well evaluated and the multi-agency safeguarding response is good. One supervising social worker has attended training that relates to safeguarding children in a digital world. This course enables her to better support her foster carers to recognise risks with social media platforms used by children.

Although the assessments of foster carers are of a good standard, the decision-making could be strengthened, and more evidence based. For example, when ex-partner references have not been available, it is not always clear to what extent efforts have been made to carry out these checks. Furthermore, although applicant's finances are reviewed, these are not well evaluated. There is no system in place to review finances at periodic foster carer annual reviews. Similarly, although references for prospective foster carers are undertaken, these are not well evaluated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager and the responsible individual go above and beyond to support their foster carers and supervising social workers. All fostering practice is centred around the needs, happiness and long-term outcomes for children. The

fostering agency has experienced stable management since its registration with Ofsted in 2009. The fostering team is passionate about their work and they make every effort to secure safe, stable and nurturing placements for children.

Foster carers gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about both their supervising social workers and the manager. Existing foster carers talk positively about the fostering agency, and this has led to most new fostering applications coming through on a word-of-mouth basis. The fostering agency is rich in diversity and there is a strong sense of everyone learning from each other's social and cultural expertise. Retention for the fostering agency is excellent and there have been no complaints since the last monitoring visit.

Foster carers receive regular supervision and training and can access support groups. Foster carers describe their supervising social workers as available, knowledgeable and say they are always there for them. The recording of supervision is excellent and demonstrates that reflective discussions take place. Actions are regularly set for both foster carers and the supervising social workers. Children's progress is continually tracked and monitored.

Feedback from wider professionals describe the fostering agency as 'impressive' and 'amazing'. Children's social workers describe the professionalism and communication of the fostering agency as excellent. Supervising social workers attend all meetings and contribute effectively.

The panel chair and the agency decision-maker are experienced and have a good safeguarding background. Panel minutes are clear and decision-making is timely. The central list is diverse in its make-up, with a mix of professional backgrounds.

Staff supervision and team meetings happen regularly and provide an opportunity for practice discussions and personal development. Staff are pragmatic and seek out peer support to enhance their own learning and development. The manager is ambitious for the development of his supervising social workers. For example, he agreed for one supervising social worker to attend a course to teach her how to have difficult conversations. This learning not only benefited the supervising social worker but also improved the communication within a child's professional network. This resulted in better outcomes for the child.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.8)

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: SC402560

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Inspector

Andi Lilley-Tams, Social Care Inspector

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