

Unity Foster Care

Unity Foster Care Ltd

First Floor, 4340 The Pentagon, Park Approach, Thorpe Park, Leeds LS15 8GB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Unity Foster Care is an independent fostering agency. Its head office is based in Leeds, West Yorkshire. A range of placements are provided, including long-term, short-term, emergency, respite and parent and child fostering placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 94 children with 78 fostering families.

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 7 August 2017 to carry out a full inspection. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 1 and 5 November 2021

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 **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 7 August 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Most children receive high-quality, individualised care that promotes their diverse needs and allows them to thrive in their foster homes. Foster carers help children to feel at home when they move in with them. Children are given ample information in age-appropriate formats and languages, making it easier for them to fully grasp what to expect when they move into their foster homes.

Stable care and stability is offered to children by their foster carers, which is a strength of this agency. As a result, most children are settled. This includes children who have lived with their foster families for several years. Children may remain living with their foster carers should they wish to beyond their 18th birthday. As a result of being treated as members of the family, the foster children form lasting attachments to their foster carers and birth children. One child commented that their privacy is respected, and they have the freedom to explore their own interests and have been taught life skills. Other children said:

- 'I am excited that I am living here.'
- 'They care for me. We do activities together and sometimes play games.'
- 'I feel loved and wanted and I am happy.'

Children are making good educational progress. Children whose first language is not English have developed their speech and language due to the support provided. Foster carers ensure that barriers are overcome so that the children's education is not disrupted. Foster carers advocate for the children effectively. As a result, the children are encouraged to aim high and work towards achieving their goals.

All children have access to primary and specialist healthcare. Foster carers support children to attend health appointments. Children are helped to develop a healthy lifestyle and routines that improve their health outcomes. Through engagement with specialist health professionals, most children are better able to manage their emotions. As a result of the trauma-informed care training, foster carers are parenting the children and managing their behaviour more effectively.

Children's talents, interests and hobbies are actively encouraged. The children's achievements are celebrated, which increases their confidence and self-esteem.

Participation between the agency and its foster carers is strong. The agency has engaged the whole fostering household in a range of activities during the coronavirus pandemic. Children have entered and won competitions. The afternoon tea, and Halloween celebrations held recently, were also very successful events. Furthermore, foster families have learned about some of the inequalities in society. These activities keep foster families connected and offer new experiences.

Children's wishes and feelings are listened to and respected. For example, listening to children has led to some children moving back to their birth families successfully. The agency has co-operated with the local authority to ensure that the children make the positive transition home. Supervising social worker visits to foster homes give children a chance to talk about their day-to-day care and plans. A mobile phone application that has been designed to help children express their thoughts and opinions provides another method for children to express themselves.

Children benefit from seeing their foster carers develop positive relationships with their parents. The children spend time with their families, which reinforces their sense of identity. A parent described the relationship with their child's foster carer as 'amazing' and described the foster carer as 'family'.

The application pack for prospective foster carers consists of a box containing tea, coffee, biscuits, and pens. These creative touches show that potential foster carers are valued by the agency from the start of the recruitment process.

Prospective foster carers praise the support and guidance that they received during the assessment process. Typical comments regarding the assessment process indicates a timely, thorough and well-informed process. As a result of the improved quality assurance systems, the prospective foster carer assessments help panel to make well-informed recommendations.

Foster carers rate the support from the agency highly. Comments from foster carers included:

- 'I couldn't do it without the support'; 'It's the support that gets you through.'
- 'We have found the agency to be more like a family. We are fully supported and given plenty of training.'
- 'Loved it. It is everything that I wanted to do.'
- 'I would not hesitate to recommend them to anyone I might meet in the future who has an interest in fostering.'

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

Children report feeling a high sense of safety in their foster families. Children can identify trusted adults to talk to if they have any concerns.

Foster carers understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences, trauma and attachment difficulties on children's lives. In addition to providing routines and boundaries, foster carers are engaged in behaviour management training that helps children who may be struggling when their behaviour becomes dysregulated.

Most foster carers understand their responsibilities to report any safeguarding concerns to the agency. This is reinforced by the safeguarding training that foster carers receive. No children are known to be subject to child exploitation.

Most foster carers are responsive to ensuring that children are kept safe. Foster carers understand the risks and vulnerabilities of the children they care for. However, not all of the children's written risk assessments include all of the assessed risks, or provide clear guidance on how foster carers are expected to manage and mitigate the risks.

Most children who go missing or leave home unauthorised benefit from a well-coordinated response that involves the police and social care services. This helps to keep them safe.

Allegations against foster carers are dealt with appropriately by the agency. Through outcomes of the allegations, the agency has supported foster carers to improve how they care for children. However, a foster carer did not verbally notify the agency about a safeguarding issue, which has prevented the agency from acting sooner.

The agency social workers conduct at least two unannounced visits to every foster carer each year. Supervising social workers speak to foster carers and children, as well as checking the children's bedrooms to ensure that they continue to be suitable and safe. Health and safety checks conducted at foster carers' homes ensure that the premises continue to be safe environments for the children to live.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection in August 2017, the agency has grown and evolved significantly. The agency has relocated to new offices in Leeds and the North East in response to the growth of the service. The office in Leeds was found to be a welcoming, well-resourced, and pleasant environment for the staff to work in, and foster carers to visit.

A fostering manager was appointed in July 2020. They assist the registered manager with the day-to-day operation of the agency and the development plan for the next phase. The responsible individual and managers work together effectively to ensure that their ambitious visions and plans improve service delivery.

Panel is effective in providing sufficient scrutiny to make recommendations regarding the approval of foster carers. The independent panel chair is suitably qualified and experienced. The central list of panel members provides a sufficient and diverse range of experiences to the panel proceedings. Consistently positive feedback from independent panel members and foster carers indicates that the panel performs its role well.

The agency decision-making is prompt and the reasons for reaching the decisions are clear. Panel minutes provide a good account of panel proceedings. However, on a couple of occasions, information in the panel minutes has not been checked for accuracy.

Leaders and managers understand the strengths of the agency and areas for development. However, they have not identified all of the areas that can be

improved to ensure that all children's experiences are consistently positive. For example, not all matching considerations are included within the matching process to show how all children's needs will be met. This gap has contributed to unplanned endings and a subsequent safeguarding investigation. Vague information in another matching document makes it unclear how children's needs arising from their identity will be met by their foster carers. The buddying system has not been reviewed to ensure that foster carers have a buddy to seek peer advice and support as appropriate.

Despite the shortfalls, the leaders and managers understand the positive impact that fostering has on the children's experiences and outcomes. The children's records are good quality, and they are written in a way that will be beneficial to children now and when they get older. The recently implemented electronic system will take time to fully embed in practice.

Vetting procedures for staff and panel members are robust. The recruitment of a worker with the right expertise is helping to target suitable prospective foster carers to meet the needs of the children.

The staff are highly complementary regarding their association with the agency. Staff say that they feel valued and supported by managers. Staff say that they have caseloads that they can manage, and they have been supported when the demands of their work have become overwhelming. Staff report that they receive good, reflective supervision and training opportunities that help them to develop and fulfil their roles effectively.

Comments from staff included:

- 'I believe the management are very open and honest and have an open-door policy. This allows me to seek support and guidance within my role. Nothing is too little to answer.'
- 'The support is unbelievable.'
- 'I feel respected and have opportunities to develop.'
- I would recommend this agency 100%.'

Similarly, the feedback from professionals focuses on the strengths of the agency. They are satisfied with the quality of care that the children receive.

Managers have taken action to address the requirement and recommendation that was made at the last inspection. These relate to recruitment practices and showing the senior management board how the agency satisfies itself that it is achieving good outcomes for the children.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. This is linked to foster carers understanding their responsibility to communicate safeguarding incidents to the agency verbally and in a timely manner. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 4.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the management of the service ensures that all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures. This is linked to ensuring that panel minutes are consistently accurate, and the buddying system is clarified and implemented appropriately. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment by ensuring that risks for children are identified and assessed so as to provide clear guidance on how to manage and reduce the risks. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.8).

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: 1228523

Registered provider: Unity Foster Care Ltd

Registered provider address: First Floor, 4340 The Pentagon, Park Approach,
Thorpe Park, Leeds LS15 8GB

Responsible individual: Isma Almas

Registered manager: Jayne Ford

Telephone number: 07388 904006

Email address: jaynef@unityfostercare.co.uk

Inspectors

Jacqueline Malcolm, Social Care Inspector

Noel Cooper, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021