

New Routes Fostering

Father Hudson's Society

Father Hudson's Society, Coventry Road, Coleshill, Birmingham B46 3FG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

New Routes Fostering is a small voluntary fostering project that has been operating since 1992. It is run by Father Hudson's Society, and is based in Coleshill. Father Hudson's Society is a social care agency of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, and is a registered charity. The fostering project recruits carers within a 30-mile radius of the Coleshill office, and in Birmingham city centre.

The agency undertakes recruitment, assessment, approval, support and training of foster carers who provide fostering placements for children placed by a number of local authorities. A range of placement types are provided, including short- and long-term placements, and placement for permanence.

Currently 19 fostering households provide placements for 25 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 January 2018

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: 24 February 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children have good relationships with their foster carers.
- Children enjoy living with, and feeling part of the foster carers' families.
- The agency helps to make sure that all foster carers are committed to caring for the children placed with them, and are well supported.
- The majority of the children live in long-term, stable foster care placements that they view as their homes.
- The assessment process for foster carers is in-depth and thoroughly scrutinised by the decision-making panel.
- The agency staff and foster carers have the children's best interests at the centre of their practice.
- A dynamic panel is formed from a range of different professional backgrounds, whose decisions are child focussed.
- Staff are offered a variety of training courses by the agency.
- Staff and foster carers provide a strong response to the protection of children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation.
- Supervising social workers provide good and effective supervision for the foster carers.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Some parts of the agency's monitoring does not always identify areas for improvement, in consultation with placing authorities.
- The children do not receive age-appropriate information about their foster carers before moving into their foster carers' homes.
- On one occasion in 2015, although information was shared with the placing authority's social worker, the agency did not inform the designated officer in a timely manner.
- Children's records are not all up to date.
- Not all foster carers access the training that is offered by the agency in order to help them to improve their skills.

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 |
|---|------------|
| The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authorities. (Regulation 35(1)(b)(3)) | 29/06/2018 |

Recommendations

- Ensure that, unless an emergency placement make it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. (National Minimum Standards 11.3)
- Ensure foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service (National Minimum Standards 20.4). In particular, this is with regard to foster carers completing training courses identified to their individual needs and that of the child in placement.
- Ensure allegations against people that work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the LADO. This includes allegations that on the face of it may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police or Children and Family Services. (National Minimum Standards 22.6)
- Ensure records are clear, up to date and contribute to an understanding of the child's life (National Minimum Standards 26). In particular, this relates to individual children's risk assessments, safe caring documents and daily recordings.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children build good relationships with their foster carers. Children who participated in this inspection all confirmed that they are treated as 'part of the family'. They all feel valued and respected, and have warm and nurturing relationships with their foster carers, who welcome them into their lives. Children could not identify anything that their foster carers could do better. As a result of these positive relationships, children are happy and are making good progress in all aspects of their development.

Foster carers speak positively regarding the agency, and see the support they receive as a particular strength. Supervising social workers and the management team equally value the resilient and skilled foster carers. They are passionate about the shared ethos of the agency, and the benefits for the carers and the children. The majority of children attend school. When a child is not attending school, this is because no school placement was identified at the start of the placement. The carers and the agency, consistently challenge the placing authorities to identify suitable schools. Some children make substantial progress from their individual starting points. This progress is due to the support children receive from their foster carers to attend school. This includes ensuring that children receive support with their homework and when required have access to personal tuition. One carer described a child's educational progress, saying, 'She has come on leaps and bounds.' The carer also acknowledged how hard the child has worked to catch up on missed education. The children receive praise for their efforts, are happy to go to school, and recognise their achievements. This recognition is because the carers and agency praise them and celebrate these.

Children's health improves, as they understand the importance of attending health appointments. Children who have in the past lived on a poor diet are now eating healthily. Children speak positively about their foster carers' cooking. One child said, 'Wow, her cooking is fantastic.' Some foster carers work in close partnership with external agencies to support children's emotional needs. Carers understand the importance of physical activity, and encourage children to engage in this by combining activities with their interests.

Supervising social workers get to know children well and this encourages the children to be involved in the agency and to have their say. One placing social worker told the inspector, 'The foster carer advocates for [child's name] very well.' The agency seeks children's views through carers' annual reviews and questionnaires. This consultation has resulted in changes being made. For example, the children's newsletter now contains quizzes and puzzles, as well as celebrating their achievements and birthdays.

Foster carers encourage children to be involved in both family and community-based activities, such as family gatherings, holidays, faith-based activities, football, cheerleading and day trips out. These activities help the children to feel part of the

family, enjoy themselves and improve their social skills. The agency provides activity days, including a recent trip to a trampoline centre, which was an overwhelming success. Children's views, including those of the foster carers' birth children, are sought about planning future events. These activities provide the children with an opportunity to broaden their horizons, enhance their interests and open up interest to new skills. Other events include 'stranger danger' and 'mindfulness' workshops, which develop children's personal safety and emotional well-being.

Some foster carers use the electronic system to record information for the children about their experiences. However, other foster carers continue to make written records and some information contained in these is limited, particularly when the child has been placed for a length of time. The agency recognise that they are in a period of transition to move towards a paperless system and there is training being put in place for carers.

Foster carers support the children to maintain contact with their birth families, in line with their care plans and wishes. This support helps children to maintain their identities and their relationships with important people. When required, foster carers supervise family contact sessions, including providing transport and feeding back to professionals any concerns that they may have. This helps to plan for and to amend any care plans or risk assessments designed to keep children safe.

Children are encouraged to meet their prospective foster carers when possible and have input into their moves into the foster carers' homes. Children are provided with a guide about the service and what they can expect from their foster carers. However, although information about the foster carers is sent to the placing authorities, this is not provided in a child-friendly format. Therefore, children have little knowledge about their foster carers before they meet them.

A number of foster carers have been with the agency for many years, and bring a wealth of knowledge and understanding to the role. They feel supported by the agency. One foster carer said, 'I have always found them very supportive. I haven't needed support recently, but previous placements, when I was not too sure, they were there for me. The agency is proactive in accessing other specialist services so that foster carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of each child. This approach encourages the foster carers to understand and learn about the impact of each child's needs and background.

Foster carers receive regular supervision. Supervision notes demonstrate that the supervising social workers discuss the children's progress; any support required and details any further actions. There are routine discussions and communication about how to meet the unique needs of each child. This approach ensures that knowledge about an individual child is shared between the agency and the foster carer.

Foster carers support the children to learn independence skills, as appropriate to their ages and abilities. These include tidying their bedrooms, spending and saving pocket money, cooking meals, travelling on public transport and developing social skills. These skills mean that children develop confidence before they move into the community. For some children, their carers have advocated strongly for them to

remain in placement, especially when placing authorities have wanted to move them just before they take exams.

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

Children say they feel safe in their foster placements. They speak warmly and enthusiastically about the care they receive. There have been no complaints from the children, who confirm they know how to make a complaint. Children are provided with contact numbers through an informative children's guide. Different versions of the guide are adapted to reflect children's ages and abilities.

The agency provides training for the foster carers on managing challenging behaviour and safe handling. Physical intervention has not been used since the last inspection. There is a clear expectation that any such incidents will be recorded and reported to the agency as a matter of urgency. The majority of behavioural incidents are well managed by foster carers, using de-escalation and using their good relationships with children. The supervising social workers swiftly offer support to foster carers in crisis. The safe caring household policy identifies potential risks, and the action required to reduce these. However, not all of these policies are up to date, or include all known potential risks. As a result, this fails to ensure that the foster carers have a full understanding of the potential issues, and the actions required to minimise these risks.

The panel minutes are of an exceptional standard, and clearly demonstrate the rationale for their recommendations. The panel members give meaningful feedback to the agency about the quality of the detailed written reports. This process ensures that there are high levels of scrutiny and professional curiosity regarding all assessments and reviews presented to panel. This practice ensures that the agency decision-maker only approves the most suitable individuals.

All allegations are referred to the designated officer. However, in one instance in 2015, although the information was shared with the placing authority's social worker, the agency did not inform the designated officer in a timely manner.

Children rarely go missing from their foster placements. If the children do go missing, swift and effective multi-agency action is taken to provide additional support for the children and foster carers. As a result, the majority of children do not go missing from home. Foster carers understand the importance of working in partnership with the police and other agencies in order to ensure that the children are found and returned safely and quickly.

The agency has provided age-appropriate workshops for all of the children to help to inform them about how to keep themselves safe on the internet and social media. However, only a few foster carers have completed the training that is available to them. This does not ensure that all foster carers are fully aware of how to effectively keep children safe when they are using electronic communication systems.

The agency operates a safe-recruitment process for all staff, foster panel members and foster carers. Thorough background checks ensure that only appropriate adults become foster carers or employed staff. This practice promotes the safety and welfare of the children.

The agency ensures that health and safety checks of foster carers' homes are completed before children are placed. Supervising social workers also undertake unannounced visits to carers to help ensure that children are being looked after safely.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The previous registered manager resigned. A new manager was recently appointed and registered with Ofsted in December 2017. She has over 14 years' experience in fostering services and is suitably qualified. The registered manager is focused, has high aspirations for children and is child centred. She has a good understanding of the agency's strengths and areas for improvement. The registered manager, along with a skilled staff team, support carers to ensure that children make progress from their starting points.

The carers speak highly of the agency. They made comments that included:

- 'They value my opinion. It is not just a case of you do it like this. I feel part of the team around the child.'
- 'They are marvellous. I see them every month. If your supervising social worker is not there when you call, there is always someone else there that supports you and the child.'
- 'If you have an issue over contact, or keeping children safe, you just mention it, and they will look to do training on that. Overall a great bunch of professionals.'
- 'They have been phenomenal in their support.'

Staff describe the registered manager as approachable, accessible and supportive. Training offered by the agency includes: 'Islam and the experience of being a British Muslim'; managing placement disruption; attachment and brain development; domestic abuse; impact on children in care; and foetal alcohol syndrome. This training is offered jointly with the carers so they learn together. The staff spoke enthusiastically with regard to the agency's response to their own professional development, with some staff being supported in completing their level 5 diploma in leadership and management, and others supported in their areas of expertise and interest. This all creates an environment where the staff feel valued and empowered.

All of the carers have attained their Training, Support and Development Standards. They are able to attend their own or joint training with the supervising social workers. Some foster carers develop their own expertise and knowledge through facilitating training for others. However, although some foster carers excel in

attending training, others attend few courses. The agency is aware of this shortfall, and has raised it in supervisions. Despite this, some foster carers continue to fail to attend. This shortfall does not ensure that all foster carers are able to fully support the children's needs.

The agency has a clear structure, role and accountability. The size of the service is a strength of the agency, as it means that managers and staff provide good-quality support for the foster carers. They receive regular reflective supervision and annual appraisals. Effective weekly handovers ensure that all staff are aware of any additional support a foster carer or child may need in the coming week. In addition, bi-monthly staff meetings are well organised. Staff are motivated and passionate about their roles and this supports the foster carers in meeting the children's needs.

There are sufficient systems in place to support the registered manager to monitor the service. The registered manager has a good understanding of some of the shortfalls identified during this inspection, and the improvements required. However, although some parts of the agency's monitoring does include consultation with placing authorities there is some minor gaps in this being evident in some reports.

The service works effectively with other agencies to help ensure that children's needs can be met. They have good, professional working relationships, and ensure that placing authorities receive the information required. When challenge is required, this is a strength of the service. This is because there is a clear structure in the agency regarding individual roles and responsibility, and this ensures challenge is made appropriately. For example, with regard to requests for paperwork, statutory visits for children and advocating on behalf of the children and carers where appropriate. This system ensures that the carers have the information they need, and are supported to meet the children's individual needs.

The recruitment of the staff and the panel members is positive. New supervising social workers say that the induction process is clear and helpful in enabling them to understand their role and the wider services available from the organisation, and that it gives them time to adjust after they have been working in other settings. They are provided with time to read the services policies, and meet the carers they will be assigned to.

The management ensure that all significant events are referred to the appropriate and required agencies. This process enables external agencies, including Ofsted, to monitor the incidents and the agency's response to them.

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 differences 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: SC034855

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Inspector

Natalie Burton, social care inspector



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