

Clifford House Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Date of last inspection | 26/09/2011 |

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Clifford House is a service which began in 1993 and became a limited company in 2010. Clifford House offer mainstream and specialist foster carers who offer a variety of fostering placements which includes, short term, long-term, emergency, bridging, remand, unaccompanied minors seeking asylum and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection they have 57 approved foster carers with 75 children and young people placed.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Children and young people have their individual needs met to a high standard. They are making good progress with their foster families and for some the progress is exceptional. Placement stability is good because the agency ensures careful matching of children and young people to foster carers. Bespoke packages of support for young people and their carers underpins placement stability.

There has been a planned drive to recruit foster carers since the last inspection which has led to a rapid growth in the numbers of foster carers and children placed. Despite this, the quality of assessments and support given to foster carers remains consistently high. The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is extremely thorough focusing on the needs of children and young people. Foster carers benefit

from highly professional and supportive relationships with management and staff.

There is a strong focus on participation both with foster carers and young people. The views of foster carers and young people are instrumental in influencing developments within the agency. They are active in the running of the agency. They lead and participate in training events and forums. Training is extensive and underpinned by theoretical research. The agency has developed strong links with local authorities and other agencies to disseminate good practice.

Safeguarding is at the centre of the agency's thinking and is informed by research and development. Children and young people feel safe and secure in their foster placements. Although a small number of children and young people engage in risk taking behaviours, such as going missing, these instances are rigorously monitored and tracked. Comprehensive risk assessments covering all areas of risk taking activities are regularly reviewed and updated.

The fostering service has a highly effective ambitious management team. They demonstrate clear vision for the development of the agency and for improving the outcomes of the children and young people placed with them. Management systems are robust. These overview and evaluate the effectiveness of the agency. Excellent tracking systems monitor young people's progress and are used to inform service provision. Placing social workers are extremely complementary about the agency and have fed back comments such as 'Care is excellent', 'They are very proactive in meeting children's needs' and 'My young person is excelling.'

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are making good progress with their foster families. Some are making exceptional progress. Placement stability is good with very few placements ending in an unplanned way. Children and young people feel safe and develop secure attachments to their carers. This is because the agency ensures careful matching of children and young people to foster carers. As a result, they are able to progress and develop in confidence and self-esteem. One young person felt her foster family was the 'best place she has lived.'

Children and young people attend school regularly and make good educational progress. Some young people who historically have struggled in school have made significant progress since they have been living with their foster carers. Young people's behaviour is managed effectively as resources and training are given to foster carers around attachment and therapy.

Children and young people are in good health and are having their health needs well met. This is because they are supported to access the health resources they require, including specialist health professionals. They also have opportunities to take part in a wide range of recreational activities. This allows children and young people to experience a full and rewarding childhood.

Children and young people have positive contact with family members during their time in foster care. This is supported and encouraged by their foster carers.

Children and young people have a strong voice within the agency and their wishes and feelings are paramount. Foster carers and supervising social workers support and listen to them. Children's and young people's voices are also heard through their statutory reviews and foster carer annual reviews. As a result they are able to express their wishes and feelings and influence their day-to-day care.

Young people are encouraged to reach their potential and achieve economic well-being. The agency has developed a structured approach to support foster carers caring for young people approaching adulthood. As a result, foster carers are effectively able to support young people in developing basic independence skills.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Since the last inspection in 2011 there has been a rapid growth in the numbers of foster carers and children and young people placed with them. The quality of assessments and level of support given to foster carers remains very high. Written assessment reports are of an extremely good quality and analytical. Recruitment and assessment of foster carers is thorough and robust with a strong focus on the needs of children and young people. The agency has concentrated on recruiting a range of foster carers who reflect the backgrounds of the children and young people they care for.

Foster carers are given an excellent degree of support from supervising social workers and the learning and development manager who offer bespoke individual support sessions to foster carers and their families. As a result, they are able to meet the specific and often challenging needs of children and young people. Feedback from foster carers regarding the support and level of training they receive has been consistently positive. One foster carer commented, 'The training has been good to excellent and the therapeutic support given to us has been at times invaluable.' Another foster carer stated 'they treat me with respect. Support and training is amazing.'

The organisation adopts a whole agency approach to learning and development by working in partnership with foster carers and young people. Foster carers are considered as part of the team around the child by managers and supervising social workers. They benefit from highly professional and supportive relationships with manager and staff. The views of foster carers are regularly sought and these influence developments within the agency. The emphasis on participation is high. Foster carers and young people influence the running of the agency through active involvement in training and children's forums. Currently the agency have three workshops in which foster carers are taking a lead: current E language used by young people; foetal alcohol syndrome and incontinence. Young people are also

actively included in the delivery of training. They are involved in skills to foster training, parent and child training and participating in forums and at conferences.

Training is underpinned by theoretical research and is highly organised. The agency has developed strong links with local authorities and other agencies to disseminate good practice. Developments in legislation are swiftly cascaded to staff and carers through newsletters, training events and on a one-to-one basis. This ensures foster carers are fully aware of current developments and issues to meet specific needs of the children and young people they care for. There has been a concerted effort to ensure all foster carers complete the Training, Development and Support Standards in a timely fashion.

The matching of children and young people to foster carers is robust including placements that are made in an emergency. There are clear systems to ensure that the needs of children are always assessed, documented and matched with the skills of carers.

The fostering panel is strong with a good degree of independence. Panel members are well qualified and have a high level of experience, skills and knowledge. The fostering panel carries out its quality assurance function to a high standard with excellent scrutiny of reports. Clear judgements and recommendations are made and the minutes of the meetings are comprehensive. These clearly inform the decision maker in the making of her decision to approve foster carers.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Safeguarding is at the centre of the agency's thinking and is informed by research and development. The recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers have a strong focus on safeguarding. All those working within the agency receive regular training in current safeguarding areas. Managers and supervising social workers are registered to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to access training. Foster carers are also able to access on-line courses provided by the LSCB. The agency has developed a training programme responsive to emerging practice, such as, child sexual exploitation and child trafficking. A safeguarding workshop has been delivered to the fostering panel members which has an emphasis on child sexual exploitation. Staff, panel members and foster carers have a robust understanding of the impact of abuse and their role in safeguarding children through working in partnership with local authorities.

Foster carers and staff are committed to developing positive relationships with children and young people to generate a culture of openness and trust. Children and young people feel safe and secure in their foster placements.

Children and young people are encouraged to take risks at an appropriate level to their age and understanding as they develop independent living skills. This includes seeing friends and having unsupervised time. Children and young people do not

frequently engage in risk taking behaviours. A small number of children have gone missing from their foster placement but these are for very short periods. Any instances of children and young people going missing or at risk of child sexual exploitation are rigorously monitored. The agency has developed comprehensive risk assessments covering all areas of risk taking activities which are regularly reviewed and updated. In addition the agency undertakes at least two unannounced visits a year to foster carers to ensure the safety and security of fostering households.

Thorough recruitment and vetting procedures are in place for staff, foster carers and panel members. This ensures as far as possible that unsuitable people have no access to vulnerable children, young people or their foster carers.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The fostering service has strong a management team who are inspirational and highly effective. They demonstrate clear vision for the development of the agency and for improving the outcomes of the children and young people placed with them. The Registered Manager and Registered Individual are qualified in social work and have a wealth of experience. The agency is well staffed and resourced. There are five supervising social workers who are well supervised and trained to enable them to effectively support foster carers. Management, staff team and foster carers have clear values and ethos and are committed to fostering. No requirements or recommendations were made at the last inspection.

There are strong management systems which overview and evaluate the effectiveness of the agency. Excellent tracking systems monitor young people's progress and are used to inform quarterly and annual reports. All incidents and outcomes of serious events are monitored. These are included in reports to the fostering panel and in quality assurance reports to senior management. Managers regularly track and monitor the progress of individual children and young people. These drive continuous improvement in the outcomes for children and young people and in the delivery of service provision

The agency considers itself a 'learning agency'. It has developed service provision through feedback from foster carers, looked after children and birth children via forums and activity events. The agency has a strategic plan which is reviewed annually and demonstrates a clear plan of service direction.

At the time of this inspection the agency is working in partnership with 28 placing authorities and are accredited to three regional frameworks. Managers, staff and foster carers have developed highly effective working relationships with placing social workers and commissioners which include joint visits to children and young people. One commissioner stated, 'The agency is one of the better providers we work with.' Placing social workers comment that, 'Communication is very good' and, 'Supervising social workers are very good and consistent.'

The Statement of Purpose and children's guide clearly inform stakeholders and young people about the agency and services they offer. The young people's forum is currently developing and revising the children's guide. The agency has an informative website where a range of policies and procedures are easily accessible by staff and foster carers. These along with the Foster Carers' Charter, ensure staff and foster carers clearly understand the aims and objectives of the service.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.