

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Limited
45 London Road, River, Dover, Kent CT17 0SG
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Limited is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The service is part of a larger organisation in the area consisting of children's homes and a separately registered school; it specialises in the therapeutic care of children and young people. The independent fostering agency aims to provide short-term, long-term, emergency and respite foster placements.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had 19 carer households providing care for 24 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 March 2018

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: 15 August 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children and young people benefit significantly from the care and support they receive while living with carers. They each make outstanding progress, developing essential life-enhancing skills that promote their resilience and equip them for adulthood.
- Staff and carers demonstrate a very good understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of children placed with the agency. They use this knowledge to manage risks to children effectively, taking their age and ability into account.
- The therapeutic approach that is followed by staff and carers is evident in every aspect of the agency's work with children and young people. They provide a child-centred approach to each aspect of support, focusing on the child's needs and wishes. Carers receive regular, specific support, which enables them to provide individualised care.
- Children and young people feel safe and valued by their carers and the agency staff. They build strong relationships and develop secure attachments and a sense of belonging.
- The registered manager has established a strong ethos of transparency and openness with clear lines of accountability and responsibility across the agency. All those working for the agency understand their roles in keeping children and young people safe. This includes providing each other with suitable challenge and voicing any concerns promptly.
- Managers, staff and foster carers are child focused. They aspire for those in their care to achieve the best they can. Each child's achievements, no matter how small, are celebrated.
- Children and young people develop and improve their confidence and emotional well-being through the intensive support and care. This enables them to develop positive skills and strategies which allow them to manage and express their emotions and feelings appropriately.
- Foster carers benefit from comprehensive support and training that equips them to develop their skills and provide a high standard of care for children.
- There are very well-established systems and processes for monitoring the work of the agency and driving improvement. Leaders and managers are very clear about their strengths and weakness, and there are plans in place to address areas of development.
- Leaders and managers have established a learning environment. They have strong links with academics and others who contribute to the development of research and practice. They provide education and advice to others outside of their organisation to improve and develop others' practice.

- Leaders and managers have developed a successful, carefully thought through and planned service called 'Stepping Stones' that specialises in supporting children and young people to transition positively from the care of a children's home to a family environment. Children and young people who experience this make outstanding progress.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development :

- Leaders and managers have developed good quality children's guides, providing helpful information and advice. However, they have not formulated a version that is more accessible to those who have impaired learning or understanding.
- Records of incidents of behaviour management are detailed and thorough with robust oversight and evaluation. However, the views of those applying the intervention or measure are not routinely recorded.
- The panel completes an annual quality assurance review of the service, but the most recent report did not detail the collective evaluation of the panel members' views of the quality of reports presented to panel.

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

Recommendations

- Foster carers receive support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour, and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour specifically to evidence the views and thoughts of carers post incident regarding how effective their interventions have been to manage behaviour. (Fostering Service NMS 3.7)
- Panel/s provide quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. (Fostering services NMS 14.2)
- Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible (Fostering Services NMS 16.3). Specifically, ensure that a format for those who have limited cognition and understanding is available.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people make outstanding progress while living with Channels and Choices foster carers. Each child receives a very high standard of child-focused individual care. They benefit from their experiences, opportunities and the time spent with good-quality, skilled and knowledgeable foster carers. Children and young people make outstanding progress and develop essential life-enhancing skills that enhance their future life chances.

The well-thought-out support and care, which is established prior to a child arriving with carers, promotes positive outcomes and placement stability. The agency matching of children with foster carers is carefully considered and, due to supervising social workers' excellent knowledge of carers, matches are very positive. The multi-disciplinary collaborative approach that is facilitated and instilled by staff and carers ensures that all parties work seamlessly and collectively to support children to achieve their best outcomes, no matter how small progress may be.

All of those working for the agency demonstrate and follow the clear therapeutic approach, which is evident in every aspect of the support offered to children and young people. Carers are fully engaged in the approach, and this is apparent through their practice and the ways in which they support children and young people. In times of high anxiety and challenge, the immediate support that is provided to children, young people and carers is effective, followed by a positive 'rupture and repair' approach. This level of support has a positive impact on placement stability, resulting in very few placement breakdowns.

Children and young people engage in individual plans of therapy and support that are child led. They build strong, positive relationships of trust with carers, therapists and staff from the agency. Children and young people develop strategies which allow them to explore their previous experiences and traumas while learning how to express their thoughts, feelings and behaviours safely. This has a positive impact on their emotional well-being, resilience, confidence, self-esteem and future life chances. Children enjoy good support from foster carers to ensure that their health needs are met well. Foster carers are knowledgeable about the physical and mental health needs of children, and they successfully pursue the resources necessary to meet children's needs. Children and young people's emotional health and well-being are greatly improved through the therapeutic approach and therapy they engage in.

The agency and carers regularly seek children's views and wishes. They offer a variety of opportunities to children and young people to share their views about the care and plans that involve them. Children and young people are involved in the recruitment and training of carers and meet with staff at reviews and visits. The agency responds to requests made by children and young people. These are apparent in how the agency welcomes those arriving with foster carers for the first

time.

Foster carers actively champion the cause of the children who live with them. They understand the significance of seemingly small things for children and strive to ensure that others do too, through effective information sharing. Staff consider children's and young people's wishes, feelings and choices in the initial stages of matching. They see the importance and significance of a child's journey and the child's need to make sense of it while understanding what the future holds. Children and young people said that they feel included and are part of the family.

Each child knows who to speak to if they are worried or upset or have a complaint. The children's guide are very informative and helpful with lots of useful information; however, the agency does not have a format for children who have lower cognitive function or ability.

Children and young people talk positively about their experiences and the opportunities afforded to them. They benefit from the wide range of activities which they engage in. Children and young people have developed new skills and have had positive achievements. A child has learned to ride a bike and to swim, another has accessed a social activity independently and a third has learned to use public transport independently. Activities and hobbies are actively encouraged in order to assist children and young people to develop essential life skills, confidence and self-esteem. They are encouraged to take age-appropriate risks, and they learn through making choices and having new experiences.

Foster carers see the value in education, training and employment, and they communicate this to children and young people. Staff and foster carers are swift to respond to situations in which provision is insufficient; carers advocate on behalf of children and young people to source appropriate provision. Young people are encouraged and supported to attend and engage with education and employment opportunities. Foster carers have been creative and innovative in developing child-centred plans that meet individual needs, wishes and interests. A young person is engaged in an apprenticeship, which they sought with lots of encouragement and support from their foster carers. The young person is achieving outstanding personal success.

Leaders and managers have developed their 'Stepping Stones' programme, which supports and prepares children and young people to transition from a children's home to a family environment. These are well-planned transitions, which have had positive outcomes. A commissioner of the service commented that it was the 'best thought-through plan and transition' they have ever witnessed, having a 'positive impact on the child and enabling them to feel safe and secure very quickly as they [have] been able to develop relationships with carers'. Young people who approach adulthood are supported to explore and consider their opportunities while they develop essential life and social skills.

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

The managers and staff embed safeguarding in all aspects of their work. The recruitment, assessment, supervision and training of foster carers are done with a focus on safeguarding children. Agency staff undertake unannounced visits to foster carers and provide a range of opportunities for children to talk with them alone.

Children and young people feel safe living with their foster carers and have adults they can trust and confide in. They are confident in raising concerns and talking to others about their worries and anxieties.

All staff and foster carers have a good understanding and awareness of risk and the required responses and actions. They are swift to identify and act to manage and minimise risk. Leaders and managers respond swiftly, and make referrals to other professionals when required. Records provide clarity and detail about concerns and actions with a good-quality evidence trail from instigation to outcome. Leaders and managers have formed effective relationships with others outside of the agency, including the Local Safeguarding Children Board and statutory agencies.

Managers, staff and foster carers have a good understanding of risk and effectively implement measures to reduce it. They talk knowledgeably about the measures and strategies that are in place to manage and minimise risk. They intend to review the risk assessment document to make it more user friendly and plan to include all of the proactive strategies that are used.

Children and young people receive education and advice from foster carers about risks and the impact of risk-taking behaviours. Carers spend time sourcing and seeking education and advice to prepare and educate children and young people. They use their learning from professional websites and other materials to inform discussions with young people, for example to ensure that they use the internet safely.

Foster carers' training focuses on de-escalation, crisis intervention and promoting positive behaviour. It also encourages foster carers to look behind the behaviour to work out what the child is communicating and to respond in the light of this. Staff source training and provide tailored support for foster carers faced with behaviour that significantly challenges them. Practical support includes day and overnight care provided by agency respite carers and, on occasion, staff. This enables foster carers to continue to care for children who communicate distress and trauma through their behaviour. The use of physical intervention is very rare.

Staff and foster carers focus on post-incident reflection to improve and sustain relationships through the 'rupture and repair' approach. Specific work is completed and facilitated by staff to explore, review and develop understanding about behaviours and its causes. Foster carers are educated and supported to develop insight about the impact of their response to behaviour and to consider the child's perspective. Foster carers record behaviour management measures and the child's view of the measure, though currently they do not record the foster carers' views or evaluation of how effective their intervention was. This misses an opportunity to

further reflect on their practice and strategies used.

Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers respond positively and assertively to incidents of missing. They manage episodes through a collaborative approach of reporting, seeking and referral to others. Young people who have been missing from care previously have reduced or eradicated this behaviour. Children and young people are welcomed back and foster carers ensure that they are safe and well.

Safer recruitment procedures are fully applied to ensure that only those deemed suitable work for the agency.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The experienced, insightful and suitably qualified manager effectively leads and works in partnership with the small team. The team's information sharing is of a very high standard so that foster carers have confidence that whoever answers their call knows them, their family and their current circumstances. Foster carers described close working relationships with staff and with others who are involved in children and young people's care. One stated, 'I feel that they treat us as professionals, fully include us and engage openly with us about all aspects to collectively support children and young people.'

Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers inspire and aspire for each child in their care. They advocate on behalf of each child and young person to help them to achieve their best. They drive and lead the agency forward to achieve the aims, objectives and high standards through effective, transparent and honest working relationships. Leaders and managers gain the views of children, young people, foster carers and others outside to improve and develop their service.

The manager leads and supports the team to collectively review and reflect on practice and to develop and inform future interventions and support mechanisms through a non-judgemental approach. A foster carer stated, 'We are supported to explore and develop positive ways to support and guide children and young people.' Highly skilled, motivated, positive and dedicated foster carers are all engaged in this reflective review and development approach to their individual practice, which achieves highly positive relationships between them and the children and young people in their care.

Leaders and managers utilise a wide variety of effective systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of care provided to children and young people. The manager has met the recommendations of the last inspection. The senior management team monitors the work of the agency through regular review meetings. Managers keep essential aspects of the agency under review and take effective action when necessary. They regularly review the agency's development plan, which details the agency's weaknesses, and actions to improve them are identified. Senior managers detail their goals and aspirations with clarity about when aims will be achieved.

The manager has knowledge of each child and has formed very good relationships with children, young people and foster carers. The infrastructure of the agency

provides support when needed to foster carers, and responses to foster carers in times of challenge are swift, which enables them to feel safe, protected and supported to meet their responsibilities. Foster carers are very well supported by the agency through regular supervision, support groups and good-quality contact with the agency. They feel valued. The supervision recording format supports foster carers in evidencing their work and so directly contributes to their timely achievement of the development standards for foster carers.

An experienced chair, who through training has developed the skills of panel members, leads the established panel. Panel members have actively improved the quality of their analysis and evidence of exploration and the recommendation process. This is evidenced through the quality of panel questioning and minutes. Panel members are thorough in their analysis of assessments and annual reviews. The quality assurance function of panel is well evidenced. The chair prepares annual panel reports, but the most recent one lacked evidence of any analysis of the feedback questionnaires completed by panel members.

The agency has developed an innovative and creative programme that actively supports and prepares children and young people to transition into a family setting from a children's home environment. The programme is held in high regard by placing authorities; one local authority social worker said, 'The Stepping Stones programme is defying previous thoughts that such traumatised children could not be rehabilitated back into a family. The agency, through their child-focused, clear positive support, care and planning have rehabilitated children back into family settings with very positive outcomes achieved.' The quality of professional relationships with all stakeholders is a real strength of the agency. The joint working approach is evident throughout all aspects of the agency's support and plans. Commissioners, in particular, are very complimentary about their engagement, and the flexible and child-focused approach.

The agency works alongside others, sharing its practice and experiences with others to promote and improve the practice, knowledge and insight of others who are working in the sector.

Staff are well supported through regular and effective case management and clinical supervision, appraisals, team meetings and reflective learning sessions. Staff have access to a wide variety of training appropriate to their roles and reflective of the needs of the children and young people that their foster carers support. Staff and foster carers often train together, and all talk positively about the value of this. Staff are encouraged to develop professionally, exploring areas of personal interest that will also support the development of the agency. Good-quality safeguarding training that is accessed by all staff, foster carers and panel members ensures that all are well informed about local and national themes and risk factors.

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: SC463937

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