

Lorimer Foster Services

Lorimer Foster Services Ltd
2a Carrington Lane, Sale, Cheshire M33 5ND
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Lorimer Foster Services Ltd is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The agency was registered in July 2004. It provides a range of foster placements for children and young people who are unable to live with their birth families.

The agency provides emergency, short-term, bridging, respite, long-term and parent and child placements. The agency currently has 36 approved fostering households, with 52 children in placement.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 August 2019

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: 13 August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency is child-centred and is focused on supporting children and young people to achieve positive outcomes. Children and young people spoke warmly about their carers. Comments included:

- 'I love everything here. My carers have done so much for me. They have been there when I needed to talk, and they've helped me through some tough times.'
- 'I'm in a much better place now. I am treated as part of the family and things are going well for me. I'm glad I came here. It's the right place for me to be.'

Children and young people make good progress in all aspects of their lives. They feel valued and respected. Because of this, they are thriving.

A number of children and young people benefit from stable long-term placements. This stability ensures that children and young people are able to make meaningful attachments with their fostering families, which in time supports their progress, emotional and physical development.

In the main, matching results in secure placements that are successful in meeting the needs of children and young people. There is a clear matching process in place and the placements manager has an in-depth knowledge of the approved foster carers and a strong working relationship with placing authorities. This ensures suitably matched placements and promotes stability for children and young people.

Staff at the agency work hard to ensure that all known information about the child or young person is thoroughly considered. As such, the rate of unplanned endings has reduced. This practice again demonstrates that the matching process is safe and effective.

Care planning is good, and supports children and young people to have a positive start to their lives in their new foster families. Many have opportunities to visit their foster carers and get to know them before moving in, and the agency has also recently developed welcome books for all their foster carers. This ensures that children and young people feel prepared for their initial introduction and helps them to settle quickly once placed.

Children and young people do well at school and attend regularly, and some overcome significant obstacles arising from their experiences. They have strong advocates in their foster carers, who recognise their strengths and offer challenge where it is required.

Children and young people's experience of education improves over time. Carers have high, yet realistic, aspirations for children and young people. Because of this,

children and young people feel better about their academic abilities and develop aspirations for their futures.

Carers support children and young people to have contact with their birth family, in line with the requests of the placing authority. Carers demonstrate good skills and empathy with respect to children's birth families. They take a child-centred approach to preparing children and young people to keep in positive contact with family, friends and those who are important to them.

Children and young people engage in a wide range of recreational, social and learning activities and develop their interests, talents and social skills. They are treated as part of the family and are provided with the same opportunities and experiences as any of their peers.

Foster carers proactively support the children and young people to develop the necessary skills in preparation for adulthood. They encourage children and young people to take age-appropriate risks, balancing risks with their growing independence, as a responsible parent would. Consequently, children and young people develop confidence and become more self-assured.

The agency regularly seeks the views of foster carers, children and young people. However, the agency is aware that greater efforts should be made to promote consultation and include the views of foster carers, children and young people in the continued development of the agency.

A number of carers have recently transferred to Lorimer from another agency. The transition from one agency to another went smoothly and was in keeping with regulation. The reassessment of these carers was thorough, balanced and evaluative in nature. This enabled the fostering panel to make recommendations based on clear information provided to them.

The composition of the fostering panel is good. There is a range of diverse experiences, ages, genders and backgrounds. Members of the panel are excellent gatekeepers and offer careful scrutiny of all applications to foster. Furthermore, the panel provides helpful feedback for the agency on the quality of reports and other matters. This helps the agency to continually develop and improve.

The process of decision-making following the panel's recommendations has improved. The decision-maker considers a full range of information to satisfy that recommendations are fair and based on evidence. Records are now maintained, and this clearly identifies the rationale for the decision.

Support for approved foster carers is good. Foster carers speak positively about the agency and the support they receive. Comments include:

- 'The staff are all lovely and friendly and I wouldn't change to go with any other firm. They are part of our lives and we are proud to be part of our agency.'
- 'The support and guidance from our supervising social worker is excellent and

makes our often challenging role far easier.'

- 'The agency is totally professional. We feel fully supported in our role and there is always someone there to help.'

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

Arrangements put in place by the agency are effective in safeguarding children and young people. Relationships between carers, children and young people are extremely positive. As such, children and young people develop trusting relationships with their carers and feel comfortable talking about things that worry them.

Foster carers are provided with clear guidance on how to respond to a wide range of safeguarding concerns. Foster carers know what constitutes safe fostering practice. They are confident in identifying concerns and responding to them in ways that provide the best possible protection for children and young people.

The assessment of risk has improved since the last inspection. The agency now makes good use of up-to-date risk assessments and management plans. This ensures that appropriate action is taken to minimise risk.

Carers are trained in methods of safe caring, and understand the impact of abuse on children and young people.

The agency employs support workers who frequently work with children and young people to develop strategies to keep themselves safe. They undertake direct work on such areas as anger management, internet safety, healthy relationships and exploitation. This supports and educates those children and young people on key issues, and in many cases leads to increased placement stability.

A small number of children and young people go missing from their foster homes. Foster carers are aware of their responsibilities when incidents occur and are proactive in their efforts to reduce risk. Foster carers and agency staff work alongside the police and placing social workers in educating young people about the risks that they place themselves in when their whereabouts are unknown. In most cases, education and prevention work has helped reduce further episodes.

Greater effort is being made to obtain a return home interview for children and young people. When this has not always been successful, the manager has established protocols for escalating his concerns with the placing authority. This ensures that professionals are reminded of their responsibilities in helping to reduce future risk-taking behaviour.

In the main, the agency deals with allegations and complaints safely. Liaison takes place with other agencies and the welfare of the child or young person is clearly the priority. However, on at least one occasion the agency relied on a placing social worker to refer an allegation against a carer to the local authority designated officer. As such, the agency could not be sure that accurate information was passed on in a timely way. Consequently, there was significant drift and a delay in reaching an

outcome.

Good tracking systems are in place in respect of health and safety checks of fostering household. In addition, two unannounced visits to foster homes are undertaken each year. This ensures that foster homes are always safe places for children and young people to live.

Foster carers, panel members and agency staff are recruited safely and in accordance with regulation. This helps to ensure that only safe and suitable people work with, and have access to, children and young people

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. He has been managing the agency since 2009. He is supported by an experienced team manager, and, together, they provide good leadership and ensure that the focus of the agency is on promoting positive outcomes for children and young people.

This agency benefits from a qualified and highly experienced staff team. Staff report that they receive ongoing training and regular supervision. They also report that there is a strong sense of team-working within the agency. Comments include:

- 'I love working here at Lorimer. I feel welcome, listened to, and valued. The team get on well together and when decisions are made, we are all taken into consideration. We all have our say and have the opportunity to put ideas forward.'
- 'The team is very well established, and we are all striving for one thing: the best outcomes for every young person we care for. We all 'chip in' when needed, and there is a real "team" feel within the agency.'

The agency has positive relationships with those commissioning its services. They report that communication with staff is good and that feedback from children's social workers about the quality of foster placements is positive. Placing authority commissioning teams recognise that the agency and foster carers demonstrate commitment and 'stickability'. Because of this, many children who have had multiple moves benefit from long-term placements.

Ongoing professional development for staff and foster carers is good. Foster carers spoke about the high quality of the training, some saying that it has improved significantly since the last inspection.

All foster carers have completed their training, support and development (TSD) standards. This is an improvement on previous years, when a number of carers were overdue.

Leaders and managers maintain a thorough overview of the service and have good quality assurance systems in place. That said, currently there is no clear system to track the progress that children and young people make from the start of their

placement. This hinders the manager's ability to assess and evaluate the journey that children and young people make through their placements.

Following a requirement raised at the last inspection, the statement of purpose is now regularly reviewed and revised as necessary. This ensures that it is an accurate reflection of the aims and services provided by the agency. The children's guide has also been updated to ensure that the children and young people know exactly what services are on offer.

Leaders and managers have reflected and learned from previous inspection findings. For example, all the requirements raised at the last inspection have been suitably addressed and a number of improvements have been made. The service demonstrates an ongoing commitment for continual improvement.

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.

Recommendations

- Do more to obtain children's views on all aspects of their care. In particular, increase evidence of children's engagement in the agency ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 1.3)
- Ensure that allegations against people that work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the local authority designated officer. This relates to the service's making the referral directly and not through the placing authority. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 22.6)
- There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This specifically relates to having a robust system to assess and evaluate the progress children make from the start of their placement. ('Fostering Services National Minimum Standards', 25.1)

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: SC059742

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Inspector(s)

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Mark Kersh, social care inspector



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