

Foster Care Connect Limited Fostering Service

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Telephone: 01896 751999

Type of inspection:

Announced (short notice)

Completed on:

31 May 2019

Service provided by:

Foster Care Connect Limited

Service provider number:

SP2005007159

Service no:

CS2005086428

About the service

Foster Care Connect Fostering service has been registered with the Care Inspectorate since the Care Inspectorate was formed in 2011. It was previously registered with the Care Commission.

Foster Care Connect Ltd is an independent company based in the Scottish Borders. It provides a fostering and family placement service for children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years who are assessed as in need of alternative family care. The agency recruits and supports carer families in a wide geographic area to provide a range of fostering placements to children including, permanent, long term, interim and short break.

The service told us that during 2018, the service recruited two new fostering families. Two fostering families stopped fostering for various reasons meaning there was no change in overall fostering capacity. However the service told us during this inspection that they had a significant number of assessments ongoing and hoped to increase their overall capacity by the end of the year. As at 31 December 2018 a total of 13 foster carer households were looking after 16 children and young people.

The vision for the service is "to provide safe and loving home-based care for children and young people in Scotland who are not able to live with their own family. We strive to enable them to achieve and have the confidence to develop and grow healthy relationships at home, in their communities and into adult life."

As the findings of this inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, inspectors cannot assure the quality of experience for every service user.

What people told us

We spoke with 12 foster carers, comprising eight fostering families and two children and young people who were looked after by fostering families. A further two fostering families responded to an email requesting their views on their experience of using the service.

Generally foster carers were very happy with the quality of the service. They spoke particularly about the very good levels of support and learning and development opportunities within the service.

Foster carers told us:

"They are open, they welcome our views and they offer advice."

"Training is very good - it's interesting and individualised."

"It was a breath of fresh air coming to work for Foster Care Connect."

We observed positive nurturing relationships between foster carers and the children they were looking after and heard about a range of positive outcomes for children and young people using the service.

Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self assessment in advance of the inspection. We looked at the development plan and spoke with the management team about the agency. This demonstrated their priorities for development and how they were monitoring the quality of the provision within the agency.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	4 - Good
Quality of management and leadership	4 - Good

Quality of care and support

Findings from the inspection

At the last inspection we noted some areas for improvement in risk management. We saw that in response to this the service had begun to implement a risk based approach to meeting children's needs and more individualised safer caring plans for children and young people. Although it is too early to indicate whether this would allow for a greater understanding of needs and the potential for a reduction in placement breakdowns, we assessed that the approach would certainly direct assessment around how carers would meet children's needs and care for them safely. We thought that assessments to consider the suitability of potential foster carers were generally of a good quality. The service knew their carers well and this supported decision making in terms of their capacity to manage often quite complex situations. In addition, research was planned to consider improving placement stability for children and young people using the service. Learning from this, would be used to inform practice and could be shared more widely within the fostering community.

Foster carers had a good understanding of how to keep children safe: they had completed training in child protection, first aid and safer caring. Protective factors such as regular visiting patterns, including unannounced visits, were in place. We were impressed at the level of advocacy we saw for children in terms of protection and planning. As a result we assessed that children were safe and protected from harm and abuse.

Children and young people using the service had their health needs met. We saw that health concerns had been addressed with good access to primary healthcare services and in some cases more specialised health care services such as Speech and Language Therapy and Mental Health services. Children were encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles, eating well and being active.

Some carers told us about alternative services they had used such as relaxation classes and learning about Mindfulness. Carers benefitted from the regular Wellbeing meetings which were seen as a safe space to discuss issues and receive support.

All young people were supported to attend education or work and to reach their potential. Foster carers and staff were ambitious for children and wanted them to be the best they could be. This supported children to develop greater levels of self esteem.

Foster carers spoke very fondly of children. We observed close, nurturing relationships between foster carers and the children for whom they were caring. Children looked to their foster carers for reassurance and this was readily given. This helped children to feel loved within their home environments. We were impressed with the level of advocacy, individualised learning and development and creative thinking around meeting children's needs. The service were aware of the need to address with foster carers the requirement for greater reflection on learning and the production of progress reports, which could better inform outcomes for children and young people using the service. Progress reports also serve not only to inform social workers but also as a record for children in later years to help them make sense of parts of their history. We discussed with the service how carer supervision could provide a regular record of issues discussed including greater carer reflection and the production of progress reports.

Regular commissioning meetings supported good communication with local authorities and supported good levels of partnership working.

Foster carers and young people felt respected and told us that the service listened to their views. An investment in IT equipment supported safer levels of communication although this was still embedding at the time of the inspection. The availability of the manager and the provider, regular meetings and activity days supported good opportunities for carer and young people to feedback their views. In addition the service were currently planning to improve participation opportunities through the establishment of further groups for children and young people.

In conclusion we saw that there were major strengths in this service which clearly outweighed any areas identified for improvement. This has informed the grade of very good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of staffing

Findings from the inspection

People should be cared for by staff who are competent and receive training that is relevant to their needs. This helps ensure that people feel valued and receive appropriate support.

Foster carers felt supported and valued, evidenced through the positive consistent relationships they enjoyed with staff within the service. We noted high morale and a clear focus on improving practice existed within the service.

However, the service had struggled to recruit qualified social work staff and this meant that much of the work of a supervising social worker had been shared between the management team. Whilst foster carers knew there was a shortage of staff, they felt that staff were focussed on supporting children and foster carers. We assessed that the staff vacancy had impacted on the completion of case notes and the opportunity to drive forward improvements, although there had been significant overall improvement in the service since the last inspection. The service recognised the need to actively recruit not least due to the numbers of assessments of foster carers currently ongoing.

Children and young people knew the staff who supported their carers and who also advocated for them with local authorities in relation to planning and supporting stability in their lives. We saw evidence of continuing relationships with children and young people who had moved on from the service.

Safe recruitment policies and procedures were followed ensuring that staff were appropriately qualified and registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

Staff worked well together and with other agencies. They told us they had good opportunities to access training and reflect on their practice through regular supervision. They were supported in this by their managers. Following on from the last inspection, the service had identified core mandatory training for staff working with foster carers, children and young people and we saw evidence that this had been implemented. An appraisal system was planned but not yet implemented. Appraisal affords staff opportunities for regular review and planning in relation to performance and development.

In conclusion, we noted there were important strengths in relation to staffing which outweighed any areas for improvement. However the service needs to take action in respect of the issues identified for improvement to provide consistency in terms of the quality of staffing. This has informed the grade of good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 4 – good

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

The management team of the service was well known to foster carers who told us that they could telephone and speak with them about any of their concerns or issues. Throughout our inspection we noted a clear management vision of relationship based care and a consideration of practice informed by a knowledge of the impact of trauma. This supported a nurturing level of care within the service.

Some systems were in place to provide an overview of key performance areas but these were sometimes difficult to navigate and would benefit from being more streamlined.

Regular good quality staff supervision monitored the quality of work undertaken by staff and opportunities to come together at team meetings provided for good team working and a consistency of approach for foster carers and for young people.

The development plan was ambitious and covered all areas of service development. We assessed that this could be improved by identifying where the key development came from, breaking down large outcomes into smaller actions and identifying clear responsibility and a timeframe for completion.

We thought the service could do more to communicate the progress of the service and future planning to foster carers by, for example, producing an annual review report which could include future developments planned. This would allow all foster carers to understand the pressures on the service, key successes and ongoing challenges. It would also allow foster carers to hold the service accountable as to how well, planned developments were delivered.

A fostering panel with a strong independent focus and a well defined agency decision maker role, monitored the work of the service and provided appropriate challenge. As a result we saw that the recommendation made at the time of the last inspection had been met. We noted that the service had planned for panel member appraisals which would identify individual and whole panel learning and development on an annual basis.

In conclusion we noted important strengths in relation to management and leadership but thought the service needed to take action in relation to the areas of improvement identified. This has informed the grade of good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 4 - good

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

Previous recommendations

Recommendation 1

The agency should adopt a risk management approach to new information or new situations.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care standard which states: "My care and support is provided in a planned and safe way, including if there is an emergency or unexpected event." (HSCS 4.14)

This recommendation was made on 12 July 2018.

Action taken on previous recommendation

The service were in the process of developing a risk based approach to matching. This was comprehensive and focussed on the needs of the child/young person and the skills and experience of the foster carer. We considered that appropriate action had been taken in respect of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The agency should ensure that staff learning and development takes account of core mandatory expectations.

This is to ensure that the quality of staffing is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard which states: "I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes."

This recommendation was made on 12 July 2018.

Action taken on previous recommendation

The service had identified core mandatory training for staff and we could see that this was being implemented with the two new staff who had started recently. We considered that the service had taken appropriate action in respect of this recommendation.

Recommendation 3

The fostering panel and Agency Decision Maker should provide more professional challenge of the work of the agency particularly where key competencies are not being met or statutory checks are not in place.

This is to ensure that the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard which states: I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes." (HSCS 4.19)

This recommendation was made on 12 July 2018.

Action taken on previous recommendation

The Chair of the Panel and Agency Decision Maker had changed since the last inspection. We attended a panel and read previous minutes of panels. We were satisfied that sufficient progress had been made in respect of this recommendation.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
17 May 2018	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 3 - Adequate Management and leadership 3 - Adequate
28 Apr 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 4 - Good
26 Jun 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good
10 Jul 2014	Unannounced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 3 - Adequate
15 Apr 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 2 - Weak

Date	Type	Gradings	
3 May 2012	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed Not assessed 4 - Good
26 Aug 2011	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	3 - Adequate Not assessed Not assessed 3 - Adequate
28 Oct 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed Not assessed Not assessed
9 Feb 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
11 Nov 2008	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 3 - Adequate 3 - Adequate

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