

# Cornerways Fostering Services

Cornerways Fostering Services Ltd

Alpha B, Smallmead House, Smallmead, Horley, Surrey RH6 9LW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this independent fostering agency**

Cornerways Fostering Services Limited is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The service is part of a larger organisation in the area consisting of two children's homes, specialising in the therapeutic care of girls and a separately registered school. The independent fostering agency aims to provide short-term, long-term, emergency, respite and parent and child foster placements.

At the time of this inspection the fostering service had 23 carer households providing care for 19 children and young people.

**Inspection dates:** 6 to 10 November 2017

**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:** 25 July 2014

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Managers and staff work collaboratively to make the best use of agency resources and the skills and strengths of each team member.
- Managers, staff and foster carers are child-focused and aspire for those in their care to achieve the best they can.
- Children feel safe and valued by their foster carers and the agency staff. They build strong relationships and develop secure attachments and a sense of belonging.
- Foster carers benefit from comprehensive support and training that equip them to provide good care for children.
- Foster carers understand how children's life experiences and trauma can be expressed through behaviour. Children learn how to express their feelings safely through foster carers' informed responses. As a result, children increasingly participate and sustain involvement in the activities and groups of their choice.
- 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 independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The manager's monitoring reports are insufficiently evaluative and do not include the low-level behaviour management measures used by carers.
- There is some drift in appraisals and in the recording of supervision of social workers.
- The panel does not demonstrate a sound quality assurance function so as to improve the service. The chair prepares annual panel reports but these lack critical evaluation.
- Relevant documents do not specifically explore all the identified risk factors or how these will be minimised and managed. They are not routinely updated when circumstances change.

## 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, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement   | Due date |
|---|----------|
| <p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. In particular, the use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35(1)(3) and Schedule 6(8))</p> | 14/01/18 |

### Recommendations

- Foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. (national minimum standards 4.2) In particular, ensure that the relevant documents explore all the identified risk factors, how these will be minimised and managed and that they are updated when circumstances change.
- A written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (national minimum standards 24.5)
- All staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for. (national minimum standards 24.6)
- Fostering panels are intended as multi-disciplinary bodies with a considerable element of independence from the fostering service. This independence means that they cannot themselves make decisions, which are the responsibility of the fostering service, but instead make recommendations in relation to their statutory functions listed below. Decisions are made by the fostering service, through its decision-maker, after taking into account the panel's recommendations (and any recommendation by the independent review mechanism (IRM) – see the section below on IRM). Panels thereby play an important quality assurance role, providing

objectivity and having the ability to challenge practice which is felt to fall short of the Regulations or national minimum standards, or not to be in the interests of children. Panels are required to give regular feedback to the fostering service. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, paragraph 5.2)

- Children have access, which is appropriate to their age and understanding, to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns. Children know their rights to advocacy, how to access an advocate and how to contact the children's rights director. (national minimum standards 1.5) In particular, improve the role of the agency in supporting children to access an advocate.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children flourish in families that meet their needs. The agency matching of children with foster carers is well thought through and, due to supervising social workers' excellent knowledge of carers, matches are generally very positive. A placing social worker described matching as 'perfect for the children placed'. Placement stability is strong and short breaks with designated foster carers play a significant part in this achievement.

Children describe themselves as, and feel themselves to be, part of their foster families. This is evident in their use of positive, affectionate language when talking about who they live with. Children develop trusting relationships with carers, their families and friends. Foster carers are child-focused and provide children with good-quality support through the ups and downs arising from the impact of their life experiences and traumas.

Children benefit from well-managed transitions. Children who experience planned moves appreciate the opportunity to meet and visit foster families before moving in. They also like the written family profile which they receive as part of their introduction. Supervising social workers are actively involved in the moving-in process. For example, they lead direct group work with the whole family, exploring their mutual views on living together. This provides a secure basis for future work, as birth children of foster carers are supported and encouraged to understand that their thoughts and opinions hold the same weight as other family members.

Foster carers actively champion the cause for children living with them. As a result, children enjoy successful promotion of their friendships and their meetings with family members, in line with their care plans. Foster carers understand the significance of apparently small things for children and strive to ensure that others do too, through effective information sharing. Children know how to complain and are confident that there is someone in the agency they could share any worries or concerns with. Children's access to advocacy is not yet established in the agency.

Children talk animatedly about the wide range of activities that support their interests as well as those that give them new experiences and opportunities, including holidays at home and abroad. These effectively contribute to the development of children's self-esteem.

Foster carers value education and successfully communicate this to the children so that they engage effectively and make good progress from their starting points. Some children have become regular school attenders after prolonged non-attendance.

Children enjoy good support from foster carers to ensure that their health needs are well met. Foster carers are knowledgeable about the physical and mental health needs of children and successfully pursue the resources necessary to meet children's

needs.

Foster carers have a good understanding of their role in equipping children with the skills they will need as adults. They encourage children and young people to learn self-care skills according to their age and ability. This includes an understanding of boundaries, so that the family can live together. Children learn and are learning how to self-regulate so that they find other ways of expressing their wishes and feelings, rather than through behaviour. Foster carers have the skills to support those placed with them to become calm and settle when angry and anxious. This includes young parents placed with their children. Foster carers strive to achieve a balance between keeping children and young people safe and developing and practising their knowledge and understanding about risk. This equips children and young people for the future and enables them to keep safe when in the community.

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

The managers and staff embed safeguarding practice into all aspects of their work. The recruitment, assessment, supervision and training of foster carers maintain a focus on safeguarding children. Agency staff undertake unannounced visits and also provide other opportunities for children to talk with them alone, for example, when providing planned day care to maintain the placement. Children say that they know their foster carers' social workers and are confident that they listen to them and take action if needed. These factors support children to feel and be safe.

Managers, staff and foster carers have a good understanding of risk and effectively implement measures to reduce it. They talk knowledgeably about the measures but these are not always reflected in the safe care risk assessments and/or safer care agreements. Some of these documents do not specifically explore all the identified risk factors and how these will be minimised and managed; nor are they always updated when circumstances change. Examples include giving no rationale for the use of a baby monitor or indication of when it should be used (in a parent and child placement) and no plan considering the implications of the purchase of a new laptop or smartphone.

Foster carers are aware of their role, in partnership with others, in keeping children safe. The agency prepares foster carers through training about the wide range of risks that the children they are looking after may have been exposed to or may be vulnerable to. There are few instances of young people going missing. When this does happen, foster carers are familiar with the procedures they need to follow and implement them in practice. This is also true of their actions in response to possible indicators of child sexual exploitation, self-harm and misuse of substances. Agency staff and foster carers take their responsibilities to safeguard children in their use of social media and the internet very seriously. Training underpins foster carers' vigilance and action in the light of concerns. They use their learning from professional websites to inform discussions with young people in order to equip them to use the internet safely.

Foster carers are dedicated advocates for the children in their care. They challenge any incidents of bullying or racism and assiduously follow up where they do not

consider that sufficient action has been taken, in school for example.

Staff used the theme of behaviour management in a series of foster carers' workshops in 2016. Foster carers' training focuses on de-escalation 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. Foster carers record low-level behaviour management measures in children's daily notes. Systems to enable effective management monitoring of such measures are not embedded. This misses an opportunity to identify potential patterns and trends.

Foster carers are familiar with the well-written and accessible policies and procedures that outline their responsibilities and actions in the light of any child protection concerns. As a result, their reporting is timely and agency staff act quickly to provide direct support to foster carers in addition to ensuring that statutory guidance is met. The manager makes referrals appropriately and works in partnership with placing authorities and designated safeguarding personnel. When necessary, prompt action is taken to ensure the safety and welfare of children placed. The agency provides or arranges support for foster carers who are subject to allegations.

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

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The experienced and suitably qualified manager leads the small team effectively. Their information sharing is of a high standard so that foster carers state confidently that whoever answers their call knows them, their family and current circumstances. All foster carers spoken with described close working. One said: 'While professional, it is more like a family than a workplace. I feel staff care; it is so much more than just a job for them.' Foster carers are unanimous in their praise for the quality and frequency of support and communication. One described it as 'always spot on'. They know that children are the focus of the agency and are impressed by the commitment and practice of staff in ensuring that they, as foster carers, are properly equipped to meet the needs of children.

The statement of purpose clearly outlines the aims and objectives of the agency. Staff deliver these through their nurturing, child-centred practice, using the 'oxygen mask' principle. Foster carers understand that this means they need to ensure that they, in partnership with staff, have and develop the necessary skills and resources to effectively care for the children placed with them.

Staff have a complementary range of knowledge and skills that they share to the benefit of their colleagues and foster carers. The complete team ethos plays to the

strengths of each team member. All those working for the agency are prepared to be flexible, including administrative staff, in the deployment of their skills and training. The high level of communication and information sharing is underpinned by monthly team and placement meetings, the minutes of which indicate reflective practice. Formal individual supervision is not always recorded. There has been some drift in undertaking appraisals in the last year.

The manager has met the recommendations of the last report. The senior management team monitors the work of the agency through quarterly meetings. It keeps essential aspects of the agency under review and takes effective action when necessary. This has included a robust, ethical approach to financial management so that good outcomes for children are prioritised, for example agency support for staying put arrangements. The management team has highlighted the need for an improved foster carers' recruitment strategy and this is planned for early next year. While the agency seeks feedback from others, it does not formally analyse the responses as a whole to inform strategies for the development of the service or how to improve the response rates, for foster carers' annual reviews for example.

The established panel, led by an experienced chair, is seeking new members to improve the diversity of background and experience in the light of recent resignations. The panel is thorough in its analysis of assessments and annual reviews. The quality assurance function of the panel is not well-evidenced. The chair prepares annual panel reports but these lack critical evaluation.

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.

Foster carers access a wide variety of good-quality informative training which they are able to apply in practice. One foster carer gave an example of attachment training and how an understanding of this has had a positive impact on their parenting. The additional information provided to carers, children and young people through the newsletters is practical, informative and helpful. The newsletters are child-friendly and consider a wide range of pertinent topics, research and information.

Professionals are very complimentary about the agency. One said: 'One of the best I've worked with. Staff are very involved with foster carers and know and support them well.' The staff team receives many positive comments and thanks from stakeholders. They are appreciative of the quality of the information provided, including foster carers' diary records and contributions to reviews. The manager confidently challenges placing authorities in the best interests of children; examples include chasing to ensure that children's reviews are timely and that the frequency of social workers' visits meets statutory requirements.

## **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:** SC059535

**Registered provider:** Cornerways Fostering Services Ltd

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**Responsible individual:** Vivianne Spence

**Registered manager:** Fiona Darlington-Black

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## **Inspector(s)**

Maire Atherton, social care inspector

Amanda Maxwell, social care inspector



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