

# Caritas Independent Fostering Agency

Caritas Diocese of Salford

The Diocese of Salford, Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford Street, Salford M3 6DP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

- Caritas Independent Fostering Agency is based in Salford, Greater Manchester, and covers the North West of England.
- The agency was registered with Ofsted in July 2010.
- The service currently has eight approved foster carers.
- There are eight children and young people living with foster carers from the agency.
- The agency provides short-term, long-term, respite, parent-and-child and emergency placements.

**Inspection dates:** 23 to 27 April 2018

**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:** 6 July 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## 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.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b))	30/06/2018

### Recommendations

- Foster carers should demonstrate that the Training, support and development standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (National Minimum Standards 20.3)

## Inspection judgements

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

The vast majority of children and young people thrive. This is because they are very well supported by their foster carers and the agency. Children and young people benefit from reliable and consistent care that enables them to build meaningful lifelong attachments.

Carers offer loving and accepting environments where children and young people feel safe and develop a deep sense of belonging. Children and young people said:

- 'I trust my foster carers. They are brilliant and are like a mum and dad to me.'
- 'The foster carers have helped me so much. I wouldn't be where I am now if it wasn't for the support I've had. I have realised so much and I'm a much happier person now.'
- 'My foster carers go out of their way to make sure our needs are met. They are very nice people. They are the best, and if I could, I'd give them a platinum award for everything.'

Placement stability is a key strength of this agency. Some children and young people have been with their foster carers for several years, including those young people who have experienced placement disruption previously. One carer spoke of a child who has been with them since the age of nine. She is now nearly 18 years old and will be staying with her carers beyond her 18th birthday.

Effective matching results in a high number of stable placements. There is a clear process in place which actively involves supervising social workers and foster carers making a collective decision about the suitability of the match. The agency obtains as much information as possible from local authorities prior to making a placement decision. This has led to some very successful and long-standing placements.

Where possible, children and young people benefit from carefully planned transitions. Carers also demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of good transitions to their homes. For example, more often than not, children and young people are able to visit their foster families before they move. Children and young people also receive a welcome guide to the agency. This contains pertinent information about what to expect and who to contact if they want to make a complaint. This helps them to settle and alleviates any concerns or worries they may have.

Foster carers encourage children and young people to develop social skills through taking part in community-based activities. One young person was encouraged by her carer to get a part-time job at a local cafe and she now has aspirations to open up her own tea room. Another young person is an active volunteer. These opportunities help to broaden young people's experiences and assist them in gaining employment in the future.

All children and young people have appropriate educational placements, with many

achieving above expectations. Foster carers are excellent advocates and have high aspirations for the children and young people in their care. As a result, children and young people speak positively about education and are encouraged to look forward and be ambitious for their future.

The importance of promoting contact is fully endorsed by the agency. Foster carers work hard to develop good relationships with birth parents to ensure that children and young people experience positive relationships with their relatives. This helps children and young people to maintain a sense of family identity.

All children and young people have access to primary health care services that meet their individual health needs. Healthy routines are quickly established and foster carers place an emphasis on healthy diet, sleep and lifestyle. Foster carers successfully re-engage children and young people with health professionals and ensure that any concerns are quickly identified and addressed. As a result, children and young people enjoy improved health outcomes.

Children and young people have opportunities to express their views in a variety of ways. For example, children and young people contribute to their foster carer's annual reviews and to their own review meetings. Supervising social workers also see children and young people during their support visits. As a result, children and young people have a say about what is important to them in their day-to-day lives.

The vast majority of professionals and agencies spoken with during the inspection were positive about the agency, staff and managers. The children and young people are at the centre of all of the agency's practices and the team effectively advocates for them. This has led to improved outcomes for children and young people in many areas of their lives.

Foster carers benefit from well-structured support from the agency and their allocated supervising social workers. Overall, inspectors received positive comments during the inspection. Examples of these included:

- 'I am treated as a professional and we work as a team around the child.'
- 'The support we receive from our supervising social worker is excellent. I know someone is always at the end of the phone when we need them.'
- 'Everyone is approachable and friendly.'

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

Children and young people say that they feel safe and secure in their foster families. Clear routines and boundaries instilled by foster carers, coupled with positive relationships within fostering households, help children and young people to self-regulate their behaviours. This enables them to develop socially acceptable behaviours, and helps them to learn to trust and feel settled in their day-to-day lives.

All children and young people have individual risk assessments and foster carers are

provided with this information. This means that foster carers are well informed about keeping children and young people safe and, where possible, eliminating risk.

Foster carers are appropriately trained in safeguarding and behaviour management. Recently enhanced attachment training has enabled carers to better understand how children and young people's previous life experiences affect their behaviour and safety. Training courses are facilitated on a regular basis and attendance rates are good. The foster carers' learning is further supplemented through a range of online courses. This ensures that carers continue to be well informed and able to respond effectively to safeguarding concerns.

There are relatively low incidences of children and young people going missing from home. However, on the rare occasions when children or young people have either been missing or had an unauthorised absence from their placement, it has been dealt with promptly and in line with agreed protocols.

The agency makes at least one unannounced visit to foster carers every year. Records of these visits demonstrate that supervising social workers seek out the views of children and young people about the care they receive. Equally, supervisory visits provide an appropriate degree of both challenge and support. This ensures that carers are working safely in the best interest of the children and young people in their care.

The agency is clear about its safeguarding responsibilities. The registered manager notifies appropriate bodies of any safeguarding concerns in a timely manner, which means that issues are swiftly addressed.

Vetting procedures for staff, panel members and foster carers are sufficiently robust. This ensures that as much as possible is done to help protect the children and young people from unsuitable adults.

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

The agency has had three different interim managers since the last inspection. In April 2017, a permanent manager was appointed. He is now registered with Ofsted. The registered manager is suitably qualified and brings enthusiasm, stability and visible leadership to the agency.

The responsible individual recognises that the agency has not grown as hoped since the last inspection. The recruitment of foster carers has been problematic and a number of long-standing carers have retired. Moving forward, the registered manager and responsible individual have a clear business and strategic plan for the agency. Their enthusiasm and commitment has helped inspire a new confidence in the service.

Staff confirm that they feel very well supported in their roles. They are helped and encouraged to expand their competence and confidence in all areas of work. Consequently, the staff remain motivated and well equipped for their roles.

Staff and panel members are suitably qualified, experienced and supervised. They have access to a rolling staff-training programme that provides a wide range of relevant training events which support them in their respective roles. Panel members are invited to attend any training events organised by the agency so that they can keep up to date with messages from research and changes in the sector.

Due to the low number of carers, the fostering panel has a limited number of opportunities to meet. That said, the panel gives close scrutiny to the cases presented. The central list of fostering panel members brings a range of experience and skills to the panel. The panel chair is independent of the agency, and is suitably qualified and experienced. This results in a very skilled and confident panel, who perform their roles very well.

The agency's decisions are made promptly, with the decision-maker clearly listing her reasons for reaching her decision.

Supervision, appraisal and performance management systems for staff are in place. The quality of these systems are effective and ensure that staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles.

Foster carers receive excellent levels of support, supervision and guidance and benefit from very good-quality training. However, not all carers have achieved the Training, support and development standards qualification within 12 months of approval.

The registered manager's quality assurance systems are underdeveloped. For example, progress reports and records of carer supervision and support visits are not easily accessible on the electronic recording system. This makes it difficult to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping. Furthermore, the use of trackers, to monitor progress of children and young people, is in its infancy and has yet to be fully embedded in practice. This is an area of further development for the agency.

Managers have taken action to address the requirements and recommendations raised at the last inspection. That said, weaknesses in monitoring make it difficult for the agency to evidence the good work undertaken by staff and foster carers.

## **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:** SC411748

**Registered provider:** Caritas Diocese of Salford

**Registered provider address:** The Diocese of Salford, Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford Street, Salford M3 6DP

**Responsible individual:** Mark Wiggin

**Registered manager:** Anthony Turner

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## **Inspectors**

Ceri Evans: social care inspector

Sarah Oldham: social care inspector





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