

# Sussex Fostering & Children's Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Sussex Fostering and Children's Services is an independent fostering agency which currently has 17 fostering households and 20 young people placed with families. Two new fostering households have been recruited in the previous year. The fostering service is privately owned. The range of services provided includes short-term, long-term and parent and child placements.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This is a good agency where young people make exceptional progress. Their needs are well met by highly effective and professional foster carers. Young people benefit from permanency with the fostering families they live with. They make good progress in education and lead healthy lifestyles. There are very low instances of placement breakdowns compared with national averages.

A real strength of this agency is the strong support offered to foster carers. Foster carers say, 'support is provided in a calm and measured way.' The robust package of support offered to foster carers includes high levels of contact with the agency and tailor-made training. This results in young people living in families that they feel part of and in which they thrive. Safeguarding is at the centre of all practice, so young people feel safe.

Leadership and management are strong. There is clear vision and ambition for young people. Staff share this vision and are highly motivated and influential in changing the lives of young people. There is good monitoring of the agency, driven by the young people's views. This contributes to the agency being effective in improving outcomes for young people. Effective joint working with partner agencies improves the care and progress of young people.

### **Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Young people make outstanding progress and benefit from stable and appropriate placements where permanence is achieved. They feel valued and welcomed into fostering households and this helps them to feel integral to family life.

There are excellent introductions to families. This supports smooth transitions to new homes and helps young people to make strong attachments to their foster carers. A social worker said of a young person, 'he is getting a sense of belonging and feeling part of the family.' Another social worker said, 'this is absolutely the right placement for him and is providing permanency.'

Young people strongly influence what is happening to them. They have many opportunities to express their views and wishes. A young person said, 'my foster carer always listens to me.' Agency staff say, 'we know the young people very well.'

Young people know what to do and who to turn to if they are unhappy or are being bullied. A number of young people benefit from being placed with their siblings and where this is not appropriate, they are supported to keep in touch with them. Young people make excellent progress with their emotional well-being. A foster carer said of a young person placed with them, 'he feels secure now and can make plans for the future.'

Young people are able to take responsibility for their behaviour and risk taking is identified and reduced. Young people make exceptional progress with school grades, making friendships and enjoying social activities. They learn to lead healthy lifestyles and benefit from effective psychological and therapeutic help.

### **Quality of service**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The central focus of this agency is the welfare and safety of young people. There is careful and thoughtful recruitment of carers. This means that young people are looked after by a range of foster carers who can meet their diverse needs. The matching process is highly professional and clearly child focussed. The high level of permanent placements is testament to good matching in this agency. A staff member said, 'good matching is the starting point of all good placements here. We look at

everything from all perspectives.'

The preparation and assessment of foster carers focuses on the needs of young people. It ensures that foster carers have an in-depth understanding of the young people placed with them. There is high quality and regular support to carers that promotes the welfare and safety of young people. Foster carers work effectively with the agency and with young people's social workers. Support focuses on the needs of young people and helps ensure that foster carers have a strong understanding of these needs. Agency staff demonstrate competency in providing such support. A foster carer said, 'Sussex fostering has always supported me when I have needed help...they have been very accommodating.' Another said, 'they have been very supportive in difficult times.'

Positive working relationships are established with significant family members in young people's lives. This promotes young people's well-being. Respite is used in the best interests of young people. It is based on individual needs and is sought from within foster carers' own families, or used as a means of preventing placement breakdown. This results in young people experiencing stability and feeling secure. Effective training is provided to foster carers, which means they respond sensitively to young people's needs. This includes training in sexuality and being a teenager. Training is highly individualised towards the specific needs of young people. As a result, placements are effective and stable. A foster carer said, 'we feel the training we have had is relevant to helping us meet children's and young people's needs'.

There is an effective fostering panel that promotes safe and stable placements. The panel provides an effective and rigorous quality assurance function. Panel members come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to the panel. This means that effective decisions are made that are led by young people's best interests. High quality relationships are shared with young people's social workers and independent reviewing officers. This ensures that care plans are reviewed as required and changing needs are well met.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding is at the centre of practices within the agency and young people benefit from effective safeguards. Young people feel safe and are safe. A young person said, 'I feel very safe all the time.' Young people know how to protect themselves and are enabled to take age appropriate risks. For example, support is provided to enable young people to walk home from school alone as they get older. Young people feel confident to raise concerns and know who to talk to if they are worried. This helps them to feel safe.

Placement plans identify actions required to protect young people. Close monitoring of placement plans ensures that young people are effectively supported and protected.

There is rigorous monitoring of incidents of young people going missing. The effective measures in place to keep young people safe mean that instances of young people who do go missing are rare.

Foster carers are effective in responding to disclosures of abuse. Their actions ensure that disclosures are responded to appropriately and effectively. This supports and protects young people. The agency shares strong and effective relationships with partner agencies, such as the police and health services. This helps to protect young people who engage in risk-taking behaviour. There is a strong focus on safeguarding which is threaded through the recruitment, assessment, preparation and support of foster carers. Safer care agreements are in place, which set out the arrangements for protecting young people within fostering households. Unannounced visits occur to fostering households and young people are seen alone. These arrangements promote safe care. There is rigorous checking of all staff members, foster carers and members of fostering households. This helps to prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm young people.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Leadership and management in this agency are strong. The agency is innovative and influential in changing the lives of young people. There is clear vision and ambition for young people. A foster carer said of the providers, 'vision is always on the child.' High quality relationships have been developed with placing authorities. The providers demonstrate integrity in their approach to running the agency and there is a continuous drive for improvement. Management meetings and strong working relationships support this.

This is a highly effective agency that is promoting excellent outcomes for young people. There are extremely high aspirations for all young people within the service. There are strong working relationships with placing authorities which results in a clear understanding about the needs of young people by those providing care.

Staff are highly enthusiastic, motivated and knowledgeable. They have a highly professional approach to work and benefit from excellent management support. Their training and supervision contributes to the effective running of the service. Working practices are reflective and are based on current and relevant research. Staff say, 'there is genuine care for young people and that's what makes this place good to work for,' and 'we genuinely are there for children and this is central to how we operate.'

Concerns are welcomed and used to improve the care provided for young people. A foster carer said, 'you can complain, they will listen and learn from us. It is an open environment.' There is good monitoring of service quality and safeguarding practices through annual review. Strong monitoring is built into day-to-day activities in the agency. The views of young people and other stakeholders inform review at all levels. This results in continuous improvements in outcomes for young people and in

service provision.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.