

Diagrama Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Sharon Payne
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Provision subtype Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

Setting address 49 Russell Hill Road, PURLEY, Surrey, CR8 2XB

Telephone number 0208 6682181
Email dmcguire@diagrama.org
Registered person Diagrama Children's Services Limited
Registered manager Post Vacant
Responsible individual David McGuire
Date of last inspection N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Diagrama is a charitable independent fostering agency. The agency currently has 18 fostering households and 12 children placed with them. It provides a wide range of fostering opportunities for young people from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, short, medium and long term 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**

The agency provides a child-centred service within nurturing placements, which promote individual needs. Children benefit from good attachments, which enable them to thrive and maximise their potential. Placements are stable and this provides children with the confidence and resilience to have new aspirations for themselves. The agency offers a range of interventions to meet complex needs, including personalised therapeutic support. Children have good educational and health outcomes and they enjoy being part of a family.

The agency has inherited carers from two respective fostering agencies. Good work is being undertaken to ensure all carers meet the required skill level to enable them to work professionally and openly with the agency. The recruitment strategy is sound and the initial aim is to stabilise the current group of foster carers. The agency provides a wide range of training and support to foster carers. A highly skilled fostering panel and agency decision maker work effectively to promote the best interests of children.

Safeguarding arrangements are sound. The agency are not afraid to challenge placing authorities and tenaciously ensure the protection of children's welfare. The agency effectively manages child protection concerns. Foster carers and staff receive extensive training on safeguarding issues. Foster carers learn empathetic parenting which helps them think, feel communicate and behave in a manner which helps children feel safe. Improvements in staff and panel member recruitment helps to ensure unsuitable people do not have the opportunity to harm children.

There is an effective, flat management structure of suitably skilled individuals. Leaders and managers are visible and approachable, taking a personal interest in children, foster carers and staff. The new manager is highly responsive and is instrumental in driving the agency forward. The keen social work team, good support from the therapeutic team and multi-disciplinary working contributes to a cohesive child-focused service. There is an acknowledgement of the need to embed practice.

The agency has a creative vision and model of care, which encompasses social pedagogy. There is a strong foundation to build on and there is a good capacity to further improve. Shortfalls are minor and do not have a detrimental impact on children. These relate to care and control training, administration support, record keeping and involving children in the development of the service.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

the provider should take into account the wishes, feelings and views of children when developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)

the provider should ensure foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children (NMS 3.8)

the provider should ensure supervision records are signed by the supervisor and the member of staff (NMS 24.5)

the provider should have a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed (NMS 26.2)

the provider should have an efficient and robust administrative system. (NMS 27.1)

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

Judgement outcome:

Good

Children receive care from an agency which is centred on promoting their needs. They flourish within life enriching placements, which increase their self-esteem, confidence and give them a new way of being. Children state they are 'so happy' and 'everything is good in my forever home.' They are able to maximise their potential, through the nurturing of talents and consistent encouragement. A child confirmed they had 'changed a lot.' Social workers state they are 'very impressed with the care', describing it as 'excellent.'

Children benefit from stability and changed aspirations. They develop securely attached relationships with their foster carers. Children state that they 'love' their foster carers. Several children call their foster carers 'mum', 'dad', or 'aunty'. Several view their foster carer's older children as role models and they enjoy being part of an extended family. A child highlights that their foster carers are 'very caring and always there for me'. This gives them the security to positively take their place in the world and know they have a secure base to return to.

The agency excels in the range of therapeutic support available for children. This enables children to receive good health outcomes, which effectively meets their complex needs. Therapeutic interventions includes systemic psychotherapy and undertaking assessments to inform future care planning. They benefit from tailored support and multi-disciplinary working with the children and adolescent mental health services. Foster carers escort children to their general health and specialist appointments. Health improvements include management of incontinence, weight loss, regular exercise and eating a healthy balanced diet.

Children are achieve in their learning and development, taking into account their needs and starting points. All have good attendance and are in some form of education. Schools report children are making 'huge progress', have 'blossomed' and are 'keen to learn'. Foster carers advocate for them educationally, ensuring they receive the best possible education. The pupil premium is used to positively make a difference through tuition and others forms of assistance. Educational activities include book clubs and going to art galleries. Foster carers actively engage with virtual schools to maximise the educational input. Older children are in some form of further education, which includes attending college or university.

Children enjoy new experiences, which enable them to lead fulfilling lives. Wide ranging activities broaden their interests, building up their confidence, knowledge and social skills. They are members of scouting organisations and attend holiday and after school clubs. They enjoy attending concerts, expressing themselves in drama and dance classes. Engagement in sports

contributes to their healthy lifestyle, they enjoy swimming, astro-surfing, football, handball and basketball. Children also have their spiritual needs met through attending places of worship.

Children receive support to keep in touch with their family and friends, providing it is in their best interests. Foster carers and staff are very child focused, listening to children and advocating on their behalf if contact is having a detrimental impact. Where children have limited contact with families, foster carers additionally advocate for more involvement. Foster carers sensitively manage gender identity, sexuality and issues related to personal relationships. This enables children to openly express their thoughts and feelings, be proud of who they are and learn what is socially acceptable.

Children learn the skills to take them into adulthood. Foster carers encourage them to take driving lessons, attend university and undertake voluntary work. Depending on their age, they assist with household tasks, hoovering, emptying the dishwasher, cleaning their rooms, doing their laundry, baking, preparing snacks and hot drinks. Older children learn to travel independently and manage their finances. Children are able to stay with their foster carers, as long as needed. Several young people are away at university. They still, however, have a base available at their foster carer's home.

Children share their views during supervisory visits and at foster carer reviews. They also influence their day-to-day care. Children understand how to complain. This information is available in the children's guide. This also details how to access an advocate and other helpful professionals and organisations. The agency acknowledges the need to further involve their children's participation officer, with eliciting children's views. This will enable children to have an impact on the on-going development of the agency.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome:

Good

Social workers describe foster carers as 'proactive' and 'very experienced.' Foster carers have been inherited from two separate agencies. There is a need to ensure that they all have the necessary skills to deliver the best possible care to children. The agency is undertaking good work to ensure all carers meet the required skill level and the ability to work professionally and openly with them. There is a precise analysis of their skills, strengths, areas of development, actions and timescales.

The agency has experienced foster carers who demonstrate a strong commitment to their role. Good annual reviews are able to measure strengths. Personal development plans outline their ongoing training and development needs. There is a desire for foster carers to assist with sculpting and developing the service into one, which fully meets their needs.

The recruitment strategy is sound and understands the need to stabilise the current foster carers. The agency is focusing on growing and fully supporting foster carers. They are working with partners, using social media and concentrating on having a greater on-line presence to reach their target group. They are hoping to recruit a broader range of foster carers able to meet the diverse needs of children.

The agency offers placements to children with complex needs and challenging behaviour and provides the necessary specialist support. Leaders and managers highlight the crucial importance of matching. The agency has a revised matching format to ensure the careful consideration of future placements. This will assist in maximising the likelihood of placement stability. The agency works closely in a multi-disciplinary manner to sensitively manage disruptions. This ensures children move in a planned co-ordinated way.

Foster carers receive good support, which takes into account their professional and personal needs. Foster carers highlight they have 'never had this much training'. They enjoy the flexibility of online training. Work to achieve the Training, Support and Development standards is in progress to ensure all foster carer meet the necessary requirements. All have a supervising social worker, who they describe as 'fantastic' and 'really supportive.' Some foster carers attribute the quality of the relationship with their supervising social worker as the reason for them staying with the agency. They highlight that it 'makes a difference when you have someone who gets you' and they are with them 'step by step.' Children also confirm this, saying the supervising social worker is 'nice.'

The manager, supervising social workers and therapeutic workers provide emotional support, as necessary. There are instances where this goes over and beyond, an example being supporting a placement move. Regular supervisory visits, telephone calls, email contact and respite care ensures foster carers feel well supported. Support groups also provide an opportunity for them to share their experiences and encourage each other. They enjoy seasonal meals out over the Christmas period. Children also enjoy their own meal and fun activity.

Children benefit from a fostering panel, which is committed, competent and focused on their needs. While the agency has had a limited number of assessments, annual reviews are of a good quality. The highly experienced panel chair has a good command of the task. Central list membership includes social workers and a wide range of expertise. Their analytical discussions enable them to make effective child-focused decisions.

Constructive feedback contributes to the agency's continued improvement. The agency decision maker is significantly skilled and meticulous. Approvals are comprehensively considered, highlighting the strengths of each applicant and areas for monitoring and further development. Training for members of the central list is imminent and their annual appraisals are in progress.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome:

Good

Children state that they 'feel safe'. There are no issues with children going missing, sexual exploitation, gang involvement or other risks outside of the home. The agency tenaciously advocates for children's best interests, even if it involves challenging the placing authority. An example of this is the need to source an alternate placement for a child to safeguard them and address their complex needs.

The agency effectively manages child protection concerns. They immediately refer allegations to the necessary local authority and are reassuringly clear about their practice. Where there is a need for internal investigation this is undertaken promptly. The agency appropriately uses standard of care meetings to ensure that decisions are focused on children's needs.

Foster carers and staff receive extensive training on safeguarding issues. This includes trauma, sexualised behaviours, prevent bullying, safe care and allegations, disclosures, children sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Foster carers are fully aware of the impact past abuse has on children's lives. They provide a safe and secure atmosphere where children are able to disclose former incidents. The agency ensures effective action is taken and children receive the necessary on-going support.

Foster carers learn empathetic parenting which helps them think, feel, communicate and behave in a manner which helps children feel safe. This enables children to get closer emotionally and start to trust. Therapeutic support workers are able to provide and devise interventions to respond to presenting issues. Foster carers have to manage challenging behaviour, but not all have had positive care and control training. The provision of this training will contribute to placement stability and assist with coping in difficult situations. Generally, children's behaviour is improving due to the consistent application of boundaries, consequences and rewards.

Improvements in staff and panel member recruitment help to ensure unsuitable people do not have the opportunity to harm children. Competency based staff interviews and probation reviews meticulously focus on their suitability for the role. The agency has undertaken a review of recruitment, vetting and screening procedures to address past failings. The new robust procedures and significant changes in practice better safeguard children. This includes the upskilling of the human resources team, a complete review of documentation and safer recruitment training for the necessary employees. This will continue to be monitored in a future audit.

Fostering households have adequate safe caring policies. The agency monitors health and safety and environmental risks. There is a good understanding of internet safety and the need to have parental controls on computers and

other electronic devices. Written risk assessments outline the issues and the hazards which may have an impact on a child and others. Social workers thank the agency for forwarding risk assessments and safer caring plans. The organisation learns from their other regulated services. They are planning to introduce location risk assessments for fostering households. This will help foster carers to understanding imminent risks and inform the way they continue to safeguard children.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome:

Good

The agency is undergoing a period of stabilisation, due to the amalgamation of two former fostering agencies and the loss of key managers and staff. Within a relatively short period of time they have succeeded in building a strong foundation for future growth. A senior manager confirms the 'distance travelled is tremendous'. The agency know what needs to be done and describe themselves as being 'proactive'. A foster carer describes the transition as being a 'bumpy ride'. They feel the agency has 'come a long way' and 'Diagrama have shaken things up. They feel the agency is 'doing surprisingly well.'

The organisation uses a social pedagogy model and has the ethos that children need love and boundaries. Leaders and managers are ambitions for children to be 'best they can be.' The agency has a comprehensive statement of purpose, which is available on their informative website. This document details the agency's commitment to children and foster carers. Children benefit from their own guide, which outlines what they can expect from the fostering agency. The children's guide contains a wide range of useful information and Ofsted's details.

Children benefit from a flat management structure, which is responsive to their individual needs. Leaders and managers are highly visible, caring and approachable. They take a personal interest in children, foster carers and staff. The dynamic responsible individual has been instrumental in developing services in Europe and further afield. The management team share the inspiring vision and energy to emanate their good practice within fostering. There are innovative plans to offer a holistic service to children enabling them to transfer from residential to foster care and vica versa. This will be nestled within a framework of therapeutic support and permanency.

The service has been without a registered manager for over 26 weeks. The agency appointed the current manager shortly after the last registered manager left and this has resulted in a consistent management team. The lack of a registered manager has not had an adverse impact on the quality of service provider to children or foster carers. The manager is currently going through the registration process with Ofsted. This individual is suitably qualified and has relevant experience in managing other fostering agencies. Foster carers describe this individual as 'nice' and 'transparent.' Another professional comments on them being 'very knowledgeable' and highlights their 'sterling efforts' to move the agency forward. This professional comments on the 'phenomenal improvements', since then new manager has been in post.

The agency has strong partnerships with placing authorities, children and adolescent mental health services and other organisations. A commissioner describes the agency as being 'very helpful and 'professional'. They added that they would consider the agency for future placements. The manager influences the sector and promotes best and consistent practice though their involvement in a regional group for independent fostering agencies. There are also plans to build up brand awareness, highlighting their international success, ethos and philosophy.

Children benefit from a keen staff team, which includes qualified social workers. They express pride in the organisation's 'vision towards children.' Staff feel valued and well supported by the agency both personally and professionally. They receive regular general and reflective supervision. The latter involves a monthly consultation with a child psychotherapist. They can also enhance their knowledge through an extensive range of training and development opportunities.

The only staffing shortfall relates to the administrative support, which is insufficient for a fostering service. Administration should address specific tasks and be able to effectively meet current and future needs. Record keeping also requires more attention. The supervisor and staff member do not sign supervision records. There is a limited system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records. There are instances of exact dates not being available on risk assessments, typographical errors and a lack of clarity regarding incidents and action. Records detail a child's journey and they should provide an accurate and clear understanding of their life. These shortfalls are easily rectified and do not have a detrimental impact on children.

The agency has a sound quality assurance system, which involves regular management meetings and general monitoring. Detailed quarterly reports evaluate the quality of care and highlight the areas for further improvement. The service development plan addresses the agency's key objectives. The agency are starting to track and measure outcomes, to evidence the positive changes they are making in children's lives. Leaders and managers acknowledge the need to embed practice. The creative vision and model of

care is forward thinking. There is good capacity for further improvement and to make a substantial difference to the lives of children.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and 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.