

Fairways Care UK Ltd

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Stephanie Omosewverha
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Fairways Care (UK) Ltd Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency based in Southampton. It is part of the Fairways (UK) Ltd group that also provides residential placements. The fostering service is registered to provide placements for young people up to the age of 18 years. The young people are referred by local authorities across the southern counties. There are currently 23 carers registered with the agency but recruitment is on-going.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an announced key inspection of the service that assessed its performance against all the key national minimum standards for fostering services.

The agency provides outstanding outcomes for children and young people. The service is very child focused and aims to provide 'a continuum of care, assessing, identifying and implementing a variety of creative and flexible packages tailored around the needs of the child/young person.' Foster carers are given an exceptional level of support and training that ensures they give high quality care. The agency achieves excellent stability of placements through personal knowledge of foster carers skills and competencies ensuring the best match for children needing to be placed. This enables young people to make considerable progress during their time in foster care and one social worker commented, 'the agency and the particular worker I am involved with have been instrumental in supporting my client to develop and stabilise - they have undertaken more than expected or asked.'

The majority of foster carer's were full of praise for the agency, particularly the support and training they received. Comments received included, 'Fairways fostering agency are exceptional at all aspects of childcare and I wouldn't want to work for anyone else' and 'Fairways have never let us down. I am proud to work for them and my manager is always on hand as is all her fantastic staff.'

Young people were consulted as part of the this inspection and had the opportunity to complete surveys and some met the inspector individually during the inspection. Young people were positive about their care and told the inspector, 'Fairways are doing a great job looking after us', 'I love it where I am living', and '... and are the best foster carers in the world.'

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's health needs are well met in their placements with evidence of significant improvements to young people's physically and emotional well-being. Foster carers responsibilities for promoting health are clearly specified to ensure young people access the services they need. Young people's health needs are assessed prior to placement to ensure they are matched with a carer who can best meet their needs. Foster carers have good access to training to ensure they can continue to meet young people's needs, this includes mandatory first aid courses and any specialist courses that may be identified. The agency promotes a therapeutic ethos and is able to offer play therapy to young people, which has contributed to their overall well-being and young people highly praised this service. The agency is also able to access additional therapeutic support from a consultant psychiatrist, who is able to advise foster carers on different strategies of working with young people with complex emotional needs, and a psychotherapist who can offer individual support and family therapy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are safeguarded by robust recruitment practices that ensures all people working for the agency are carefully selected and suitable to work with children. The manager is well qualified and has substantial experience of working in children services ensuring an excellent understanding of promoting children's welfare. The agency is staffed by a small team of professionally qualified social workers who have the relevant skills and expertise of working in a fostering service. The team is supported by an unqualified worker who provides valuable support in carrying out direct work with young people.

Young people's safety is promoted by robust monitoring of foster carers' homes to ensure high standards are maintained. Foster carers are suitably trained in health and safety and there are clear written guidelines setting out their responsibilities to provide a safe environment. The organisation employs a health and safety manager who undertakes annual assessments of foster carers homes and advises them of any work that needs to be undertaken. A sample of visits undertaken as part of the inspection evidenced that accommodation was of a high standard providing a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Young people benefit from a comprehensive matching process ensuring the service only accepts referrals if they have an appropriate carer to best meet the young person's needs. Foster carers are extremely well known by their supervising social workers who have an excellent awareness of their skills and experience. This helps to promote optimum matching resulting in excellent stability for placements. Clear records of the process highlight any gaps and how these will be managed, for

example by providing additional training. Where practicable, young people have had the opportunity for a period of introduction to a proposed foster carer in order that they can become familiar with the carer before moving in.

Young people are well protected by clear guidelines that ensure foster carers are familiar with safe caring practices. Comprehensive training ensures foster carers promote children's welfare by being aware of a range of issues such as safe care, recognising signs of abuse, behaviour management, bullying and internet safety. Foster carers are given comprehensive risk assessments about individual children to ensure they can protect the foster child, their own children and other family members. Carers feel extremely well supported by staff, including experts in behaviour management outside the organisation, when dealing with challenging situations. Good support and guidance increases foster carers confidence and promotes excellent stability of placement. Foster carers are clear about the procedures to use if a foster child is missing and value the 24 hour on call service available to support them if this happens. Young people said they were not bullied in their placement and where this was experienced outside of the home by a very small minority of children they were being appropriately supported.

The fostering panel is well organised and works effectively to ensure good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. The panel is independently chaired and membership includes expertise in education, health and a care experienced person providing good diversity of opinion. Panel members receive suitable training to ensure they are aware of the role and functions of the panel, including the quality assurance function.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people benefit from the organisation's child centred ethos which ensures their individuality is recognised and promoted. There is a genuine commitment to inclusion with a clear belief that all young people can reach their potential with help and support. Young people's needs in relation to their gender, religion, ethnic origin and disability are considered to ensure the best match before placements are made. Foster carers are given training in diversity and there are clear expectations that foster carers respect family backgrounds and encourage young people to develop their own sense of identity. This enables young people to develop in confidence and significantly improves their feelings of self-worth during their time in foster care. Young people with disabilities receive exceptional support helping them to maximise their potential and lead as full a life as possible. Foster carers are highly committed to the young people they support and take their role as advocates seriously, including challenging any unfair treatment on the young person's behalf.

Young people's educational needs are given a high priority. The organisation also provides a registered school that can take young people with challenging behaviour, including some young people in foster care. This provides additional expertise in the organisation and has been pivotal not only in providing valuable support with young

people's learning but also in helping young people to return to mainstream education. The agency aims to ensure all young people are provided with suitable educational placements and has been effective at implementing this in practice. There were good examples of young people exceeding expectations by making successful transitions back to mainstream school. Foster carers understand the importance of young people achieving educationally and provide a key role in supporting school placements, including providing transport, support with homework, regular communication with schools and attendance at all relevant meetings.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's contact with their families is encouraged and supported in such a way that places an emphasises on young person developing more constructive relationships. This includes advocating on young people's behalf to increase contact with families, if appropriate, and helping young people to re-engage with family members they have not seen for some time. Foster carers recognise the importance of family ties and actively work with relatives to promote positive associations. One foster carer commented how placements could be more successful if good links were formed with birth families. Young people's individual contact arrangements are made clear and any requirements, such as supervised contacts, are appropriately addressed to ensure young people are kept safe.

Young people's views are actively sought; they have opportunities to discuss their opinions about matters which affect their daily lives and their futures. Young people said they felt listened to by their carers. There were good examples where young people's views about their placements and contact with their families had been acted upon. Young people have regular one-to-one sessions with the supervising social workers where they are able to express their views away from their foster carer. They also have regular opportunities to fill in feedback questionnaires about the quality of their placement. The office has an open door policy and young people said they are encouraged to ring or visit if they have any concerns. Young people said all the supervising social workers and the manager were very accessible and they could talk to any of them, commenting 'I can always talk to someone from Fairways with confidence that they will listen to me.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are fully supported in their transition to adulthood. The agency promotes continuity of care that extends to young people beyond their 18th birthday. In order to facilitate this the agency has set up their own supported lodgings accommodation. Also enable foster carers to provide a supported lodging placement to continue to care for a young person, if appropriate.

There is a strong commitment to prepare young people for moving not only by

equipping them with practical skills but with the emotional support they need. Young people are encouraged to view Fairways as part of their family and they are able to visit and keep in touch after their placement has finished to give them a sense of continuity and belonging. The agency has been instrumental in helping young people update their curricula vitae and find appropriate employment. The agency has also been heavily involved in setting up an impressive package of care to support a young person with disabilities to live as independently as possible in the community.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is a clear, up-to-date Statement of Purpose that sets out the services aims and objectives and how these will be implemented in practice. There is additional information on the organisation's website that describes the therapeutic ethos and how all the services fit together. A children's guide is available and provides a summary of the service that can be provided to children as soon as they are fostered.

The fostering services benefits from strong and inspirational management. There is excellent communication between the manager and the team that enables sharing of ideas and creative solutions to provide a high quality foster care service. Staff are effectively organised with clear roles and responsibilities to ensure all fostering tasks are undertaken by staff with appropriate skills, qualifications and experience. Staff retention is excellent and the organisation is highly committed to providing staff with further training opportunities to further their personal development and career progression. Staff feel incredibly well supported and have regular supervision and informal support to provide guidance and advice when it is needed. Supervising social workers caseloads are deliberately kept small to allow them to provide an extensive level of support to foster carers. The fostering team has excellent administrative support and there are also dedicated departments dealing with advertising and recruitment of foster carers, training and financial payments.

Young people receive good quality care from a service that ensures only foster carers of the highest calibre are recruited. Thorough assessments are undertaken of foster carers qualities, competences and aptitudes to ensure they will be able to meet the needs of the children and young people needing placements. Prospective foster carers are given clear information and training so they are clear about expectations of the role prior to being approved. They are also encouraged to undertake shifts at one of the organisation's children's homes to find out what it is like to care for young people who may present challenges. The manager said they look for carers who can offer 'stickability' and are confident about managing challenging behaviour. This ensures that foster carers who are approved are more likely to commit to long-term placements and this was evident in the number of successful long-term places that had considerably improved outcomes for young people who had previously been thought of as 'hard to place'.

Foster carers commended the amount of support and training they were given,

describing it as outstanding. Foster carers said they chose to work for the agency for this reason. One carer commented, 'I chose to work for Fairways because they are a relatively small company, they know all the young people in the company and offer outstanding support both to the foster carers and young people.' The agency recognises that supporting carers effectively achieves high stability in placements and puts considerable resources into achieving this. This includes regular visits and telephone calls from supervising social workers, support with attending meetings, out of hours support by someone who knows the young people, regular respite and holiday schemes. This support extends to foster carer's birth children who have opportunities to speak confidentially to the supervising social worker about any issues or concerns.

Young people benefit from foster carers who are valued as professionals and trained to a high standard. Training is tailored to individual needs to ensure carers have the right skills to care for the young people who are placed with them. There is a strong commitment to enabling foster carers to commence professional training and they are encouraged to undertake the Children's Workforce Development Standards, National Vocational Qualifications and other relevant qualifications, such as a foundation degree in health and social care.

All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children. Each young person has an up-to-date, comprehensive case records that details the nature of the care provided and contributes to the young person's understanding of their life events. Foster carers have access to all relevant information so they can encourage the young person to reflect on their history and help them keep appropriate memorabilia of their time in foster care. Foster carers have clear guidelines about record keeping and recognise the importance of recording significant life events for the child and passing relevant information onto the fostering service. Administrative records meet regulatory requirements with separate records being kept for staff, carers, complaints and allegations. Records are kept securely with clear guidelines about managing confidential information.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Young people benefit from being placed in a small organisation where they are individually known ensuring an exceptionally high level of personalised care. Young people are placed with foster carers who best meet their needs by a robust matching process that takes into consideration the skills and competencies of carers. Foster carers are trained in diversity and act as strong advocates for the young people who are placed with them, for example enabling them to access the health and education services they are entitled to. Young people with disabilities receive care that enables them to maximise their potential and lead fulfilling lives. The organisation's ethos is very child centred and aims to always make decisions in the child's best interests. This includes being able to offer a continuum of care to meet the holistic needs of the child rather than making their needs fit the service.