

Capstone Foster Care

Capstone Foster Care (North) Limited
1st Floor Longford House, Hall Street, Heywood, Lancashire OL10 1DP
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Capstone Foster Care recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of long- and short-term placements for children and young people on behalf of the local authorities who commission its services.

The agency's main office is situated in Heywood, and it has smaller area offices in Barnsley and Bradford. At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing placements to around 155 children in 120 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 February 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 1 June 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- The lives of fostered children and young people are significantly enhanced by the work of this agency. It helps to achieve excellent outcomes for them and enables them to make exceptional progress in most areas of their lives.
- Children and young people feel safe and happy in their foster homes. They benefit from warm, nurturing care, which helps them to develop positive attachments with their foster families.
- The agency creatively engages with children and young people through their well-established participation groups. This enables children and young people to make a significant contribution to the shaping of the service.
- The children and young people's safety is well assured by the agency's rigorous practices.
- Foster carers feel highly valued and part of the team providing support to children and young people.
- Training and development opportunities enable foster carers to develop and enhance their skills and knowledge. This enables them to provide effective support to the children they care for.
- The recruitment, assessment, preparation, training and annual reviews of foster carers have a strong focus on keeping children and young people safe. A robust fostering panel makes a meaningful contribution to the quality of safeguarding within the agency.
- The staff team is highly motivated and is led by a very positive and committed leadership team that adheres to the values and behaviours promoted by the service as laid out in the statement of purpose.
- Children and young people are at the heart of this service. Leaders and managers demonstrate a huge amount of passion, ambition and commitment to ensuring that children achieve the best outcomes possible and improve their life chances.
- The agency uses a research-based, therapeutic model to underpin the provision of care and support to children. This is embedded throughout all aspects of the service.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children flourish within nurturing and stable placements. They are benefiting from being placed with carers who are well trained and prepared for the duties of fostering.

The agency ensures that carers are recruited, assessed, trained and supervised to a high level. Carers find the training and support provided by the agency to be exceptional. A foster carer said, 'Because of the training I've attended I understand more about therapeutic-led parenting. I am more emotionally robust because of it and this helps me understand challenging behaviour that children can display.'

Children and young people flourish. They develop a strong sense of identity and experience a wide range of positive personal achievements. They are active participants in community-based activities such as football clubs, dance groups, cadets and swimming. They also have a wide range of hobbies and interests which they pursue with their foster family and on their own.

The quality and strength of relationships that exist between children and young people, their foster carers, staff and managers are strengths of the agency. The quality of these relationships ensures that care provided is holistic and well supported. A team approach to caring for children and young people is very much encouraged and promoted.

Children and young people spoke extremely positively about their foster carers. Comments included:

- 'My carers are wonderful. They haven't given up on me and they have stuck by me through thick or thin.'
- 'I know I always have someone to talk to. My carers are great. They've given me a voice and I am now more able to talk about things that worry me.'
- 'We do lots of fun things together, I've been on holiday and I get to do things I enjoy. I really like living here. My carers are very loving and I'm happier now than I was before.'

Most of the children and young people accessing this service are receiving appropriate education that best meets their assessed needs, and their attendance is excellent. Consequently, many are making outstanding progress from their individual starting points. For those children and young people who require further support, the in-house education team offers a range of support services, including additional tuition so that their chances of succeeding are maximised. As a result, children and young people speak positively about their education and have clear aspirations to

proceed on to higher education, skills-based education or university.

Support for children and young people is outstanding. Staff from the agency work closely with them and know them well. Children and young people have a strong voice in the agency, which influences its practice positively. The agency's family support workers provide individual support to children and young people based on an assessment of need. This provides children and young people with emotional support and someone else to talk to should they have concerns.

Several children and young people attend a range of workshops and training facilitated by the family support workers. These include relaxation and mindfulness groups. These sessions enable children and young people to learn, have fun and take responsibility for their own behaviour. Consequently, the behaviour and well-being of some children and young people has improved significantly.

The agency and its carers provide children and young people with excellent support to maintain family links. Carers work hard to develop good relationships with birth parents. Additionally, foster carers and support workers talk about and help children and young people understand their past. This results in children and young people who are confident individuals with an informed sense of self.

The health needs of the children and young people are met to a high standard. The agency ensures that individual health assessments are in place, offering as much medical information to carers as possible. Healthy routines are established with a good focus on diet, sleep, exercise and behaviour. As a result, children and young people's physical and emotional well-being has improved.

The agency utilises a model of therapeutic parenting. This specifically addresses children and young people's attachment difficulties. As a result, some children and young people have experienced significant improvements in their emotional well-being and have developed strong and life-long relationships with their foster carers.

A significant strength of the agency is placement stability. Most placements are long-term, and many children and young people have lived with their foster carers for over two years. Several young people have remained living with their foster families on a 'staying put' arrangement beyond 18 years of age. This means that fostered children live in stable placements and make progress that is often remarkable given their starting points.

Agency staff have an excellent understanding of their fostering families, and this provides additional knowledge to inform placement decisions. The agency takes into consideration a range of matching criteria, which include the needs of the children who are already in placement. This results in sustained and stable placements.

Support to approved foster carers is exceptional. They speak highly of the ongoing support that they receive in the form of bespoke training, support meetings, mentoring schemes and formal supervision. Comments included:

- 'Capstone Foster Care have continued and ensured that the same level of

friendly, supportive and personal support is given at all times. We absolutely love being a part of Capstone fostering family and truly love fostering.'

- 'We have continued to receive a high level of support from our social worker, with whom we work most closely. She is always at the end of the phone and the support she has provided is amazing. The whole agency has gone above and beyond to support us and the children.'
- 'I can't speak highly enough of this agency. We made the right decision coming here and we have absolutely no regrets.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

The agency's practice, and that of its carers, is underpinned by a framework that supports carers to provide therapeutic care to children and young people. Because of this, children and young people form strong attachments to their carers. These secure relationships help to keep them safe.

Supervising social workers and managers are proactive in ensuring that children, young people and fostering households are safe. The identification and monitoring of risk are effective. Known risks are identified prior to placement, and these continue to be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. Risk assessments are thorough, insightful and individualised. Foster carers are vigilant, knowledgeable and confident in all areas of child protection, and this is very much the foundation of everyday care practices.

Foster carer training is exceptional. Foster carers feel that they benefit from the training they receive and speak of how effective it is in helping them understand and respond to children and young people's behaviour.

The agency helps children and young people to learn about personal safety in a number of ways. Examples include regular drop-in workshops on topics such as personal safety, gang culture, exploitation and online safety. As a result, children and young people have a greater understanding of risk and how to keep themselves safe.

Staff and foster carers understand the risks when children and young people go missing and take an active approach to discourage or prevent this behaviour. In cases when this does happen, it has been managed well with very good inter-agency communication and with strict adherence to the procedures. The follow-up work with the child or young person has involved a strong multi-agency approach. This has proved successful in preventing further incidents of missing.

The agency responds meticulously to allegations and concerns raised by children. It takes allegations seriously and acts on them quickly. Social workers and managers liaise effectively with partner agencies and challenge others to reduce delay in carrying out investigations. They reflect well on incidents and allegations and

improve practice as a result.

Supervising social workers visit all foster carers on an unannounced basis at least once per year and regularly spend time alone with fostered children. The agency's family support workers also get to know children and young people well, help to support their care and make sure that their views and worries are fed back to the agency for action. Annual health and safety checks, alongside monthly supervision, ensure that foster homes are always safe places for children and young people to live.

The recruitment, assessment, preparation, training and annual reviews of foster carers have a strong focus on keeping children and young people safe. A robust fostering panel makes a meaningful contribution to the quality of safeguarding within the agency.

Staff and panel members' recruitment is thorough and is compliant with safe recruitment policies and procedure.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

There is strong, competent and effective leadership at all levels within the agency. Leaders and managers demonstrate a huge amount of passion, ambition and commitment to ensuring that children and young people achieve the best outcomes possible and improve their life chances.

The management of the agency has developed a highly motivated, enthusiastic and energetic group of staff, who are ambitious for the children and young people. One member of staff said: 'We are a very strong team. We all pull together when needed and morale is excellent. I can honestly say that this is now a stronger, more effective agency than ever before.'

Staff receive regular reflective supervision and feel well supported. Annual appraisals are undertaken, and professional development and competency is a key focus throughout. Learning and development are key strengths of this agency. The manager takes every opportunity to develop staff skill. This creates confidence and forward-thinking practice throughout the staff team.

The preparation and assessment of foster carers are timely, and assessments are of a high quality. Assessments are carried out by qualified and competent social workers.

Panel membership consists of independent members with a range of expertise, knowledge and skills. The panel provides a rigorous quality assurance function to ensure that only those people who are suitable to foster are recommended for approval or continue to be assessed as suitable. The fostering panel constructively contributes to improvements within the agency.

The agency has established strong and collaborative working relationships with external agencies. Feedback received from external professionals is overwhelmingly

positive about this agency, with comments stating that the agency is 'excellent', 'proactive' and achieves 'fantastic outcomes' for children and young people.

Management monitoring and reviewing are effective. The registered manager ensures that all the agency's work is quality assured to achieve consistent and high-quality practice.

Statutory notifications have been made as required, with action plans implemented where this is necessary. All the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been met. There are no recommendations or requirements made at this inspection. This further demonstrates that the agency is managed by an effective and competent leadership team.

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: SC065333

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Registered provider address: Beech House, Wootton St. Lawrence, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG23 8PE

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Inspectors

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