

# Time out Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Time Out is an independent fostering agency that is privately owned. The agency has 28 current fostering households with 21 young people placed. The agency offers long- and short-term fostering and specialise in working with parent and child placements. A total of 12 applications to foster were approved during the year to 31 March 2012 and one household was de-registered.

### 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: **outstanding**.

This is an outstanding fostering agency that provides a high quality service to young people and foster carers. A real strength of the agency is the individualised support provided to young people. This means that their needs are well met and they make outstanding and sustained progress. Instances of young people going missing are considerably lower than national averages. Young people's views are central to all the agency does. There is excellent support for carers. Most foster carers say the support they receive is excellent. One said of their supervising social worker 'She is on top of everything, you feel like you are not on your own.' The safety of young people is paramount. All that the agency does is based on the welfare of young people. There is highly effective leadership and management. Leaders have high aspirations for young people and this helps to drive progress. Vigorous quality assurance takes place which results in on-going improvement and development.

There is a highly motivated staff team who have the skills and experience required to provide an excellent service. The agency shares high quality relationships with partner agencies and as a result young people receive the care they need. A commissioner said 'The size of the agency means they are big enough to be robust and flexible but small enough to be focused.'

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

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Young people make exceptional progress from their starting points and enjoy stable placements in which they thrive. Young people are provided with a range of appropriate information before they move to foster carers' homes and this helps them to settle. This includes electronic guides and slide shows. Young people are well cared for and many achieve permanence with their foster families. They become fully integrated into their foster families. They feel safe and develop good attachments to their foster carers. Young people have an excellent range of opportunities to that help them achieve excellent outcomes. They mature successfully and develop a strong sense of identity and self-worth. Young people's views are central to planning in this agency. There are many opportunities for young people to express their wishes and feelings and to influence their own care. The agency ensures that that they are able to talk to a range of adults about how they feel.

Young people learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour. For example, incidents of going missing reduce dramatically over short periods. This is achieved by thoughtful planning and effective direct work with suitable mentors and experienced support workers. Risks are clearly identified and well tackled resulting in young people being protected from harm. Young people lead healthy lifestyles. They make excellent progress with their physical and emotional health as a result of effective therapeutic and psychological help they receive. Young people make exceptional progress with their educational attainment. Young people who did not attend school at the beginning of placements now have 100% attendance. They make exceptional progress in their learning and development through the wide ranging new experiences they are exposed to. Young people learn to swim, become active and respected members of clubs and take on responsibilities such as junior school governor. As a result their confidence and self-esteem improves dramatically. A commissioner said of a young person's placement, 'This successful placement has been achieved through the high level of support provided by the agency. They know the carers and child well, there is a whole agency approach to this case.'

### **Quality of service**

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

There is thoughtful and effective planning which results in the agency recruiting a range of carers who can meet the diverse needs of young people. Specialist support is provided where young people have complex and challenging needs. For example,

therapy is provided for foster carers and young people alongside the support received from the agency. There is excellent preparation, assessment, support and training for foster carers that has a clear focus on the welfare of young people. This ensures that carers have a strong understanding of what is required in order to ensure that young people make progress. Matching arrangements are effective and result in low numbers of placement breakdowns. Consideration is always given to whole family when matching. A stakeholder said, 'placing and matching is vital and the agency to my knowledge work really hard to ensure that families meet the needs of children and young people.' Foster carers enjoy excellent supporting relationships with the agency. They are almost unanimously happy with the agency and support received. One foster carer said, 'this has always been an excellent service. There is prompt, constructive support which is hands on when needed.' Another said, 'the support is second to none, not a week goes by without some contact and support from the agency.' Where one carer has been less happy with the agency, a robust response has been taken in order to address this issue effectively.

There are effective arrangements for the training of carers which provide them with the skills to promote young people's welfare. Training and supervision are tailored to the individual needs of young people. This results in complex needs being addressed and placements stability. Carers say training gives them, 'a greater understanding of where young people are coming from.' Foster carers support young people to become integral to family life. They form positive working relationships with significant adults in young people's lives. For example, a foster carer said of a young people's family, 'they are his family and we respect that'. This helps young people to understand their pasts and become resilient. Respite is used in young people's best interests.

There is an effective fostering panel that promotes safe and secure placements. It has robust quality assurance functions and this is achieved through constant scrutiny of its practices. Research is used to inform on-going improvement in the panels work. Attention is paid to ensuring that there is a diverse panel with the correct expertise to make decisions in young people's best interests. There is a vigorous approach to care planning and delegated authority arrangements which promotes the welfare and safety of young people and results in sustained improvements in their lives. Effective joint working with social workers and independent reviewing officers ensure that plans are reviewed routinely and when required.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Young people feel safe and are safe. They know how to make a complaint and feel confident that their concerns will be respected and addressed. Young people take age appropriate risks and are well supported to keep themselves safe. Risk are clearly identified in placement plans and kept under review. As a result risks to young people reduce over time.

The agency has a proactive approach to young people's safety. Young people who

may be at risk of child sexual exploitation are effectively monitored and supported with direct work from agency staff. This means that risks are identified and addressed early and as a result young people are protected from harm. Incidents of young people going missing are greatly reduced as the agency and foster carers follow local protocols for young people who go missing and take action to reduce the risks of going missing. A strong working relationship with the police supports this. Foster carers and staff have a clear understanding of child protection. They understand good safeguarding practices and recognise the impact of abuse and neglect. Safeguarding is threaded through all the agency does. Recruitment, assessment and training all have a clear focus on safeguarding and this ensure that safeguarding effective in promoting the safety and welfare of young people. There is a robust approach to the recruitment of new staff which helps to prevent unsuitable adults from working with young people.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

There is clear vision and ambition for young people who are fostered. Leaders are innovative and influential in changing the lives of young people. All working in the agency are highly driven with a clear focus on ensuring positive outcomes for young people. There are strong systems for monitoring the quality of the service and a clear business strategy that is reviewed annually. The views of young people and stakeholders inform this. Systems have recently been put in place to improve the amount of feedback provided and this is being used to drive forwards improvement. The effective use of data analysis, audit and management review ensures that targets are measurable. This means that goals are achieved and there is on-going improvement in the development of a more efficient and effective service. Satisfaction surveys are used to ensure that user needs drive improvement goals. There is effective review of trends and patterns in recruitment. For example, this has been used to increase the recruitment of foster carers from diverse backgrounds. Excellent working practices are shared with placing authorities. Social workers and commissioners speak highly of the professional service offered and say this is effective in improving the lives of young people.

There are excellent arrangements for the regular reviewing and tracking of progress made by individual young people. The size of the agency means that this is a real strength. Effective action is taken to address concerns about young people not making progress. This is a strong, confident qualified workforce. Agency staff are enthusiastic, skilled and experienced. They receive excellent support and training which helps them to deliver a service that is focussed on achieving excellent outcomes for young people. A staff member said, 'I have good supervision and training and good practice updates from my agency.' The views of young people influence the running of the service. A stakeholder said, 'we have begun to invite young people into the Form F assessment panel. This has worked effectively so far and has mirrored the recommendations made by panel.' A commissioner said, 'the agency are creative and highly effective in working with complex cases. We enjoy working with them.' Another said, 'the size of the agency means they are big enough

to be robust and flexible but small enough to be focused.'

## 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.