

# Doncaster Children's Trust – Fostering Service

Doncaster Children's Services Trust Limited  
Colonnades House, Duke Street, Doncaster DN1 1ER  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this independent fostering agency**

This independent fostering agency is managed by Doncaster Children's Services Trust, which provides children's social care services on behalf of Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. The agency provides long-term, short-term, emergency and respite placements. It currently provides placements for 226 children and young people, and has 113 approved carers. A number of connected persons' foster placements have been assessed and approved to enable extended family or friends to care for those children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parent(s).

**Inspection dates:** 19 to 23 November 2018

**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 **good**

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:** 17 August 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:

- Children and young people are flourishing in stable and nurturing placements where they have developed excellent attachments to their carers.
- The research-based model, which is embraced by the agency, is implemented in an exceedingly effective way. It provides outstanding support for carers and children and young people, which improves placement stability.
- The mental health of children and young people improves significantly because of the skill of specialist carers and the close partnership working between them, supervising social workers and staff in therapeutic agencies.
- Children and young people in placement are kept safe through the highly proactive safeguarding practice of supervising social workers and carers. Excellent relationships between the children and young people's social workers and the agency are in place to support this.
- The agency's leaders and managers place children and young people's well-being at the heart of their practice, resulting in children and young people having exceptional experiences in foster care.
- The carers find leaders extremely responsive to their views and feedback. These are acted on wherever possible, resulting in continual development and innovation.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Annual reviews of foster carers are not always carried out within the required timescales. The agency does not always gather feedback from the children and young people in placement or their social workers. This could compromise the quality of the care and safety of the children and young people.
- The minutes of fostering panels do not clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members, and do not clearly record the reasons for the panel's recommendations.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.</p> <p>When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>seek and take into account of the views of—</p> <p>any child placed with the foster parent (subject to that child’s age and understanding); and</p> <p>any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent. (Regulation 28(2)(3)(b)(ii)(iii))</p>	<p>30/12/2018</p>

### Recommendations

- The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and do not clearly record the reasons for its recommendation. (‘National Minimum Standards’, page 30, paragraph 14.7)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The foster carers and the agency staff are exceedingly child focused in their approach. Living in the agency's foster placements greatly enhances the life chances of the children and young people. They experience considerable security and stability in their foster homes.

The recruitment, assessment and preparation of carers are thorough and timely. Focused and rigorous assessments explore the applicant's capacity to parent, ensuring that only those with the ability to parent safely proceed to approval.

Excellent information sharing between children's and young people's social workers and the fostering team aids effective matching. This has recently been strengthened by the introduction of placement planning meetings prior to matching. Foster carers learn about the children's and young people's needs directly from the social worker, and have their queries answered before they progress to placement. The supervising social workers' comprehensive knowledge of their carers helps them to secure appropriate matching with children and young people. Planned introductions ensure that children and young people receive the appropriate information, including the children's guide, prior to placement.

The agency has adopted a research-based supportive model to deliver care to some of the children and young people. This model enables staff and carers to deliver outstanding support through their 'hub carer' and the 'constellation' or group. The agency currently operates five 'constellations', supporting 44 foster carers and 71 children and young people. A carer said, 'We have no family up here to support us, but now we do.' Another carer said, 'My placement may break down if it wasn't for the support of the hub carer.'

Families within a constellation undertake regular activities together. The children and young people benefit from developing friendships, creating a sense of 'extended family'. Instead of respite they have sleepovers, which are a positive experience for them. The weekly youth club, trips and events are widely attended. This allows children and young people to make new friends and enhance their relationships with other children in care.

The agency responds swiftly when difficulties arise in placements. Placement support meetings, involving all professionals working with the children and young people, take place in order to look for solutions. When children and young people move on, their new carers, even if outside of the agency, are supported because all children and young people are a part of the 'extended family'. This shows an impressive commitment to children and young people.

The agency prioritises education and training for its children and young people, with an admirable number successfully engaging in full-time education or training. For the

few who are not, there is swift action to bring schools, including the virtual school, carers and social workers together to plan ways to overcome any barriers to education.

The health needs of the children and young people are identified through comprehensive healthcare assessments. These consider an impressive range of risks, including those arising from children and young people's physical and mental health. They benefit from therapy to address their emotional health where necessary. Some children and young people who have exceptionally complex health needs are making outstanding progress in their placements.

The children and young people are fully included in the lives of their carers. They have a variety of positive experiences, such as holidays abroad, keeping horses and attending clubs in the community. They said that they feel happy and comfortable in their foster homes.

Carers and supervising social workers actively promote children and young people's relationships with their birth families if appropriate. Some have returned to live with family members because of the input from carers in helping parents to develop better parenting skills. Two children have recently returned to the care of family members in a different country and the social worker described the carers' roles as 'vital'.

Following consultation with children and young people, planning for transition to adulthood starts at 15 years. Carers and adults attend training which helps to prepare young people for employment. Young people attend 'experience days' where they can try out different career options such as childcare, army life, and hair and makeup. Young people who 'stay put' with their carers are supported by the post-16 team within the trust.

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

The children and young people are protected through extremely effective planning between the carers, agency social workers, and children and young people's social workers. The carers know about the individual risks to the children and young people, and what action to take to reduce these. The risks to the children and young people have reduced markedly since they have been in placement.

Incidents of children and young people going missing from placement are infrequent. When they occur, the carers are supported by clear protocols, which they follow. Children and young people receive the opportunity to have independent return home interviews so that they can express any concerns. Any behaviour that may suggest the occurrence of child sexual exploitation results in immediate referral to a specialist service.

The use of excellent partnership working between agencies has resulted in some extremely vulnerable children and young people being cared for safely by foster

carers. They have gone on to develop a strong sense of safety and well-being, with their risks reducing significantly. A young person said his placement has 'literally saved my life'. His hub carer said that she has an 'excellent' safety plan constructed in partnership with child and adolescent mental health services, which has taken away all her anxiety about caring for him for short breaks.

The children and young people develop a strong sense of permanence with their carers. They feel protected and safe from harm within their foster families. The carers are skilled at de-escalating behaviour and do not use any physical intervention to manage the behaviour of the children and young people. None of the young people have problematic substance misuse. The carers are helped to keep the children and young people safe from risks that may be posed by the internet through training and guidance found in the 'safer caring policy'.

Allegations and complaints are dealt with in a timely manner. The manager shares information with the appropriate agencies. Where practice concerns are identified, the manager ensures that a review or reassessment of the carer is undertaken. This enables clear recommendations to be made to enhance practice or de-register carers in the interests of children and young people.

The agency promotes safe care through undertaking unannounced visits and speaking to foster children alone. The supervising social workers also maintain excellent communication with children and young people's social workers to ensure that the needs of the children and young people are constantly reviewed. The carers receive comprehensive supervision from supervising social workers and support from hub carers to manage any safeguarding challenges. The agency also provides sensitive support for carers who have been the subject of allegations, alongside ensuring protection for children and young people.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The agency does not have a registered manager in place currently. The agency is taking appropriate steps to address this. An experienced and qualified interim manager is providing effective leadership in the meantime.

The leaders of this agency show ambitious vision for the children and young people in their care, with the needs of the children and young people being a priority. One senior manager said, 'I am their parent, so they are my children.'

The agency has recognised the benefits that the research-based model brings to the children and young people and the carers, and has invested in future development. There are plans to continue developing 'constellations' so that more carers and children and young people can become part of the secure community that they create.

The agency is well resourced. Supervising social workers provide a high level of support for carers. The staff team receives regular supervision and performance appraisal. Social workers feel well supported by their manager and the senior

management team. Foster carers have access to regular support and an out-of-hours service. These measures ensure that carers have access to advice and guidance, and provide them with opportunities for reflection on their practice. These resources also allow the agency to identify any areas for learning and development.

The quality of care provided is regularly monitored by the agency through annual reviews. However, these do not always take place within the required timescales. Some reviews are missing required information, such as the views of the children or young people placed with foster carers and the reports from placing authority social workers. This could result in the panel or the agency decision maker lacking important information on which to base their findings. This in turn could compromise the quality of the care given to children and young people.

The agency's central list of fostering panel members brings a diverse range of experience to the panel. A new panel chair has recently come into post. The fostering panel provides scrutiny of the applications and reviews that are presented. However, the minutes do not clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members, and do not clearly record the reasons for the panel's recommendations.

Carers and social workers are supported to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care through a wide-ranging and effective training and development programme. The interim manager and senior leadership team create a variety of opportunities for consultation with children and young people and carers, and are highly responsive to their views. This increases the carers' sense of being part of the team. A carer said, 'The way our views are received by senior management makes us feel professional and valued.'

## **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:** SC481446

**Registered provider:** Doncaster Children's Services Trust Limited

**Registered provider address:** Colonnades House, Duke Street, Doncaster DN1 1ER

**Responsible individual:** Mark Douglas

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

**Telephone number:** 01302 737 789

**Email address:** mark.douglas@doncaster.gov.uk

## **Inspector**

Janet Black: social care inspector





The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2018