

Banya Family Placement Agency

Banya Family Placement Agency Limited
Unit 1, 6 and 7, 286a–288 Croxted Road, London SE24 9DA
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately run agency provides foster care to 156 children; this an increase of 41 children since the last inspection. The agency has 209 foster carers in 156 households. The vast majority of children are in long-term placements, but some are in short-term, respite and parent-and-child placements.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **Good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers Good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 20 July 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The vast majority of children do well and live in long-term placements.
- The agency undertakes effective matching of children with foster carers' households.
- Young people feel welcomed and part of their carer's family.
- The agency recruits good carers and staff.
- Carers help children to progress in education by supporting their learning.
- School attendance levels are good, and carers encourage children to be ambitious for their futures.
- Children benefit from a warm, family-style atmosphere in the fostering households and throughout the service.
- Children say they feel safe and there are few negative or dangerous incidents.
- The agency benefits from experienced and conscientious leadership.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Important documents, including the statement of purpose and the foster carers' handbook, are not up to date or used effectively.
- Specialist training to meet the needs of children is not being provided to all carers.
- Foster carers do not always feel listened to or supported to meet all the identified needs of children.
- Managers fail to notify Ofsted of all serious events or concerns as required.

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>The fostering service provider must—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide;</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, and;</p> <p>if the children’s guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and each child placed by them (subject to the child’s age and understanding). (Regulation 4 (a) (b) (c))</p>	30/11/2017
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and;</p> <p>improve the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1) (a) (b) (2) (3))</p>	30/11/2017
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes places in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the</p>	30/11/2017

table.

Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))

Recommendations

- The fostering service must be clear and transparent with their foster carers about the level of support available to them and how to access such support. (National Minimum Standards 20.7)
- Ensure support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific need of the children there are caring for or expected to care for. (National Minimum Standards, 20.8) This is with specific reference to ensuring foster carers receive training on honour-based violence, forced marriages and signs and symptoms of child sexual exploitation.
- Ensure the role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and foster carer. (National Minimum Standards 21.7)
- The supervising social worker must ensure that each foster carer he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all regulations and standards and with policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service. (National Minimum Standards 21.9)
- Ensure foster carers are given information, either in a handbook or via electronic resources, which covers policies, procedures (including with regard to allegations), guidance, financial information, legal information and insurance details, and ensure this information is updated regularly. (National Minimum Standards 21.10)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The overall effectiveness of the service is good. The progress for many of the children is excellent. Independent reviewing officers, placing social workers and educational professionals consistently reiterated this. An independent reviewing officer commented, 'Over the years, I have watched this young man grow and thrive in placement. He is confident, with good self-esteem, and this confidence is evident in his full participation in reviews.' The focus of the agency is in creating stability for children, which translates into nearly all children being in long-term placements. This is the basis for much of their marked progress. Their foster carers are committed to this objective, which runs throughout the agency. Placements are well planned, with only a few children experiencing disruption or placement breakdown. The stability of placements is the basis for children's lasting relationship with foster carers. A child said, 'I am happy with my foster carers. They show me respect and that is what is important to me.'

Foster carers and staff come from a range of diverse backgrounds, promoting diversity in the religious and cultural heritage of children. Children are accepted as part of the wider family of their foster carers and the agency. A child spoken to regarding the agency and carers commented, 'I do not use the term "foster carer", I say "family", because that is how I am treated and how I feel.' Another child has legally added their foster carer's last name to her own, to create a hyphenated last name. These were just some of the many highly positive words expressed by them, as well as the positive situations described.

Children confirm that their wishes and feelings are always taken into account. They know how to complain. In the main, children have progressed to being happy and confident, and they took great pleasure in talking about their lives in foster care.

Eighty-seven per cent of school-age children are in full-time education, with 6% out of education due to exclusions or not having an identified education placement. Children made good progress in their end-of-year exams. Seventeen children entered for GCSE and A level examinations gained a grade 'C' or above. Thirty children will progress to further education and training, with one young person gaining a place at university. The agency has good systems in place to track the educational progress of children and to identify any specialist input to aid further progress.

The health needs of children are met in accordance with their health plans. Specialised assistance is sought as necessary. The agency has access to a clinical psychotherapist and, when required, referrals are made to the child and adolescent mental health services.

Some children have made remarkable progress. For example, one child under the age of eight experienced a number of prior placement breakdowns and had exhibited considerable levels of behavioural problems. This child is now achieving full

attendance at school, working within age-related expectations, has made friends and is now a healthy weight. Education professionals commented that, given his starting point, the difference made to his life by the foster carers is astonishing. Education professionals no longer have concerns for the child's educational or emotional well-being. Another child who previously had abandonment issues is now able to enjoy overnight activities away from the foster carer and is now fully engaged in her learning inside the classroom.

Several foster-carer households care for sibling groups, with one household caring for a sibling group of five. This has important benefits for these children, especially in relation to their emotional welfare. Foster carers sustain important links with children's families and encourage positive interactions. This occurs even when local authorities place children a long way from their communities. A parent commented, 'The foster carer, by setting firm and fair boundaries for my son, has enabled him to make positive progress as he grows. I cannot tell you how pleased and grateful I am to her.'

There is good support for 'Staying put' arrangements, which allow for children who have reached the age of 18 to remain with their foster carers. This enables children to experience long-term family life. This is a strength of the agency.

Children are familiar with the agency and its staff and feel part of the extended 'family' that the organisation has created. The majority attend social events that the provider puts on. The agency has a participation officer. The officer works with children to ensure that their views are more central to the agency's development plans. These children's forums enable children to improve on independent activities by learning together, for example curriculum vitae writing, mock job interviews and budgeting. Children also have the opportunity to be involved in creative and fun events. However, the agency has missed an opportunity to engage children as a group in age-appropriate safeguarding training.

The agency fails to place enough emphasis on fully consulting foster carers and, by default, children about their wishes, feelings and views. Foster carers as a group stated that while they feel fully involved in the care planning for children, their voice is often not listened to when requesting improvements to the support that the agency provides them. This includes the use of support workers and training on specific safeguarding issues relevant to the care of their children. Important documents the agency's statement of purpose and foster carers handbook are not up to date. This creates a risk of providing inaccurate information.

In the vast majority of cases, the agency is extremely careful about the placing of children with foster carers. This is one of the reasons why placements are successful and last so long. On the occasions when placements have broken down, there were shortfalls in the matching process coupled with a lack of professional curiosity on the part of supervising social workers in the supervision of foster carers. Examples include foster carers failing to keep accurate and clear records, and failing to inform the agency of significant safeguarding concerns, including missing from care episodes. In addition, supervising social workers have also accepted the word of foster carers about the behaviour of young people, despite significant concerns

raised by other professionals.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children benefit from good levels of safety, and those spoken with during the inspection say they feel safe in their foster homes. On settling in, the majority of children learn to keep themselves safe. Some children make sufficient emotional progress to decide to stay away from familiar problematic situations and individuals. Social workers report that some children are learning 'how to be a child again'. Foster carers and staff liaise well with fellow professionals about situations and concerns, and seek to improve their own practice in light of these discussions. This means that children are supported and can flourish and grow in placements.

Foster carers aim to understand their foster children, even under difficult circumstances. A foster carer reflected on this by saying that a child was said to be naughty and oppositional in his behaviour, when in fact what he needed was to be shown love and care and know that he would not experience yet another placement breakdown. A placing authority social worker commented, 'This agency and the foster carers understand, and are aware of, the importance of creating a secure base for children in which they feel emotionally and physically safe, and that is what they do. I do not know how they do it but it works.'

Safeguarding training for foster carers and the staff team is valued by them. They believe the agency has improved greatly in this area and listens to them regarding their training needs. Foster carers demonstrate good knowledge on keeping children safe from harm. However, foster carers and staff lack sufficient information and training around female genital mutilation, honour-based violence, forced marriages and the risk of radicalisation.

For the majority of children, episodes of them going missing from their foster care placements across the agency have reduced. Records show that there were 51 missing from care incidents between January to August 2017. This is a decrease since the last inspection. However, some carers of children who have extensive histories of going missing or consistently returning home late do not always report these events to the agency. In addition, these foster carers have not had recent training in how to manage incidents such as these.

Recently, there have been several significant incidents that needed the involvement of the police and other child protection agencies. Carers are encouraged to develop effective relationships with the police in respect of their children's needs. However, high-risk behaviours have not always been escalated to the police or the agency by foster carers. This is because supervising social workers have accepted verbal feedback from some foster carers that children with high risk-taking behaviour have immediately stopped acting this way since being placed with them. Supervising social workers fail to 'dig deep' into the reasons for the changes in behaviour. They also fail to question foster carers when written records do not evidence behavioural changes or when no records are kept. This lack of professional curiosity has led to children and members of the community being placed at risk, for example children's

involvement in anti-social behaviour and gang activities.

The agency has failed to notify Ofsted of a number of significant safeguarding concerns. Similarly, the methods of escalating shortfalls lack rigour. At the time of the inspection, a serious safeguarding matter was raised with senior managers as a breach of regulations in not notifying Ofsted. This means that the agency does not have a clear overview of all safeguarding issues and is not able to verify that concerns have been reported to appropriate agencies in a timely manner.

The number of foster carers not following agreed procedures amounts to less than 1% of the total fostering households. Such shortfalls should not detract from the otherwise excellent work of the vast majority of foster carers. Nearly all foster carers have a good understanding of risk, and have supported children to not place themselves at risk. As a result, these children are no longer at risk of exploitation or extremism.

The agency has successfully recruited new staff to work with children. In addition, disclosure and barring service (DBS) information is closely monitored by the agency.

Health and safety checks are undertaken annually in accordance with the agency's policies.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is qualified and highly experienced, and provides principled leadership to the service. A deputy manager is in post. With some exceptions, managers implement a robust system for overseeing the service. The registered manager is able to articulate the strengths and areas for improvements of the agency. For instance, she notes that there is a need to improve the monitoring and recording of the quality of care and taking into account the views of foster carers and children.

Staff receive good and regular reflective supervision, hold a good level caseloads and enjoy a high level of mutual support, which reflects the inclusive family ethos of the service. Regular business meetings take place between the registered manager and the responsible individual. From these, records are kept and action plans for improvement are made.

Foster carers report being provided with good and consistent reflective supervision that has assisted them in the development of trusted relationships with supervising social workers. However, there are a few occasions when their individual roles and responsibilities become blurred. For example, some foster carers note that they feel there is not good enough oversight of some newly qualified supervising social workers. This leads to the supervising social worker seeking advice from the foster carer themselves.

Foster carers value the support they receive from the agency during and outside of office hours. All foster carers have completed core training and mandatory NVQ level 3 training. The agency is moving towards using a crisis intervention therapeutic model. Staff and foster carers are receiving extensive training to ensure a good

understanding of this model of intervention and to maintain a consistent team approach in supporting children. Some specialist training is often available to foster carers so that they can meet the individual needs of children.

Foster carers are provided with appropriate respite arrangements to support the long-term continuity of placements. Respite arrangements are child-centred and are arranged between carers so that children are provided with consistency from respite carers known to them.

Each foster carer has a foster carer's handbook. However, these do not reflect the regulations accurately, are out of date in some areas and do not provide the carers with good enough information on the actions to take in regards to safeguarding allegations. Although no negative impact is caused by these shortfalls, while they remain there is a risk of foster carers making a mistake or not fulfilling their legal obligations in line with the agency's policies and procedures. Leaders and managers accept these errors and confirmed their intention to address the shortfalls without delay.

The fostering panel is a strength of the agency and brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the agency. This promotes safe and secure placements. The fostering panel minutes are clear, and panel members attend training and social events. Reviews of foster carer approvals take place annually, with any recommendations always followed up. This adds to the value of the reviewing process. The fostering panel has a good understanding of the strengths and areas of improvement for the agency.

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: SC033818

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Inspector

Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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