

New Chapters Fostercare Agency

New Chapters Fostercare Limited

Blencathra, Upton Magna Business Park, Upton Magna, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 4TT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

New Chapters Fostercare was established in 2015. A Registered Manager and three Directors lead the agency, each of whom have their own roles: Head of Therapy, Responsible Individual & Agency Decision Maker and Strategic Director. The agency undertakes recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. Currently, the agency has 39 fostering families and 48 children in their care.

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 March 2024

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: 9 March 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Prospective foster carers receive a warm welcome to the agency. All initial visits are undertaken by a director, who carefully discusses the therapeutic, child focused ethos of the service with prospective carers. This approach puts the prospective carers at ease and helps them to make an informed decision about whether to proceed as a family.

The recruitment, assessment, preparation, and training of foster families is comprehensive and timely. The involvement of directors, the registered manager, the head of therapy, staff and approved foster carers helps applicants to understand the challenges that they may face and the strategies and services available to support them. Applicants told the inspector that the assessment process is safe and respectful and ensures that they are extremely well prepared for their new roles.

The agency succeeds in building trust and confidence with children and their foster families. The leadership team and staff are responsive and accessible, and families feel helped through timely consideration of a range of approaches in offering them the most appropriate support.

The leadership team has developed a relationship-based therapeutic model. The head of therapy leads training, peer support meetings, placement support meetings, reflective sessions and attends stability meetings with all foster families. Foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker and all the children are allocated a family support worker. Foster carers describe how this wraparound care ensures that they are well-equipped to parent the children and provide them with stable and nurturing homes. As a result, 62% of the children have been living with their foster families for over 2 years, with 23% of these children having lived with their foster families for over 5 years.

There is a commitment to promoting the inclusion and participation of foster families and children in the life and operation of the agency. Focus groups for children and foster carers influence events, the annual training programme, and the development of practice. For example, terminology workshops with staff, foster carers and the children are changing how the agency talks to children and how information about children is recorded and presented.

Children experience thoughtful, planned moves into their new homes. They build trusted and secure attachments with their foster families and flourish in many aspects of their lives. Foster carers ensure that the children's health, education and emotional needs are met. Carers are proud of their children's achievements.

The children make significant progress living with their foster families. They develop a strong sense of identity and experience a wide range of positive personal achievements. They become active members of clubs and enjoy a wide range of

activities and interests. For example, learning to play musical instruments and to horse ride. Children make excellent personal academic progress, including some children successfully re-engaging in education after a history of non-attendance. Older children are helped to gain college and university places. Foster families model resilient relationships and safe age-appropriate independence. This supports the children to build friendships and repair family relationships with a view to some children returning home to their birth families.

One father described how his son had 'really blossomed' since living with his foster family. A birth child described being 4 years old when his 6-year-old foster sister arrived to live with him. As an adult she is now completing her nursing qualification. He spoke of his foster sister being his role model, and how her commitment and diligence have helped him decide to pursue a career in dentistry.

The agency and foster families maintain strong links with the children who have left their care, as well as with young people, who either remain living with foster carers in 'staying-put arrangements' or who move on into adulthood. The inspector heard many examples of enduring relationships between carers and their former foster children. For example, one foster carer was able to be present at the birth of the baby of their adult foster child. The agency recognises the importance of on-going help for young people in enabling them to lead successful adult lives and provides a wide range of support including advice on financial and legal matters. The leadership team has recently introduced a new initiative to strengthen the support for young people at this important stage of life, including making funds available for each child post-18 to have membership of a specialist service that provides counselling services, legal and financial advice, and general advice and information.

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

The leadership team ensures safe and impactful foster placements because everyone throughout the agency has a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities to support and safeguard the children. They achieve this through regularly reviewed policies and comprehensive training. An established multi-agency approach ensures that there are close partnerships between the agency and external bodies, including the police and local authority safeguarding teams. The leadership team, staff and foster carers fulfil their statutory responsibilities to safeguard the children and when necessary, they challenge placing authorities to fulfil their own responsibilities.

The leadership team ensure that staff, foster families and the children have excellent knowledge of the local area and work alongside partnership agencies to identify where there are risks and how to reduce them. For example, they invite agencies to deliver training and attend information-sharing events for staff and foster carers on topics such as understanding child sexual exploitation, local concerns and strategies and how to meet the needs of the children affected by exploitation.

The registered manager, head of therapy and staff ensure that timely placement support meetings provide imaginative options in the support they provide to foster families and children. This might include additional support for the children from a support worker or additional therapeutic input as a family or individual.

The leadership team is continually looking to improve stability and long term outcomes for the children and support and resilience in foster families. They have recently developed the agency's placement ending process to ensure that there is joined-up learning with staff, foster families, and partnership agencies. Unplanned endings have reduced year on year and are low. However, if there is an unplanned ending foster carers and children are provided with a wealth of support. Reflective supervision takes place following a placement ending with the foster carer, supervising social worker and head of therapy to map a plan for moving forward. Carers are also sent flowers as a token of support. All the children receive a therapeutic letter about their achievements and experiences while living with their foster family, even if the end of their placement is unplanned. This remains part of the child's record so that whatever the reason for moving on, the child's history is well presented, in a kind and thoughtful way should they want to access it as an adult.

Effective quality assurance means that there is a constant focus on the development of the agency, the well-being of staff, the support to foster families, and the quality of care and outcomes for the children. For example, work completed by the responsible individual on patterns of missing from care has informed practice and training including introducing sessions on the teenage brain. As a result of a focus on building positive relationships and ensuring long-term stable placements there have been no missing from care incidents during the last 12 months.

The leadership team appropriately uses auditing and reviewing procedures following serious incidents and safeguarding concerns being raised. Post-allegation reviews are analytical, are taken to panel and the agency decision-maker and are shared with local authority designated officers.

In 2021 a safeguarding incident resulted in the leadership team commissioning an independent case review. As a result of the review actions were taken to improve and progress practice. For example, all partner carers now receive a minimum of four supervisions a year. All staff, panel members, independent assessors and foster carers attended externally run training in safeguarding, professional dangerousness and professional curiosity. Two of the agency's directors led a debrief session with key professionals from the placing authority involved in the case. As a result, the placing authority also decided to expand their knowledge by commissioning the professional curiosity training.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

There is well considered succession planning. The new registered manager has been mentored by the previous registered manager and since taking on the role has become an influential member of the leadership team. For example, she has

developed the structure of staff supervisions, which has improved lines of communication and information sharing on the outcomes and progress of children.

The leadership team have a clear understanding of their ethos and principles. Their monitoring is comprehensive and ensures that they have excellent self-awareness. They actively engage external mentors who describe how as leaders they are reflective in their approach and value and learn from challenges. This open practice is instrumental in the leadership team successfully improving practice and driving change for foster carers and children.

The leadership team creates the right environment for successful reflective practice to take place. As a result, staff are highly motivated and committed. They feel well supported on both a formal and informal basis. They value high-quality supervision, appraisal, team meetings and training that enables them to reflect on and develop their expertise and safeguarding practice, and then feed into the development of the service.

The leadership team are strategic in providing a service that operates over a focused geographic area. This ensures that as a staff team, they provide excellent quality and timely support to foster families. Foster families and children have easy access to the office for training, support groups, and activities. The agency has strong relationships with local authorities, professional bodies and specialist services who operate within the area.

The therapeutic model underpins the agency's values and ethos and is the seam that runs throughout the practice of the leadership team, staff and foster families to create a positive experience for children. All staff and foster families receive a range of specialist training delivered by the agency's head of therapy and external therapeutic clinicians. This includes all supervising social workers and family support workers qualifying to a specific level of dyadic developmental psychotherapy and supervising social workers, family support workers and primary foster carers completing an 18-week course in nurturing and attachment training program.

The agency is a learning organisation. High quality and effective training is provided to equip foster families, staff and panel members with the knowledge and skills to meet the children's wide-ranging needs and enable them to flourish. Training is research-based. It is informed by staff and foster carers and takes account of emerging national, regional and agency themes. The qualifications of the staff team mean that children have access to in-house specialist services as part of the agency's offer. For example, all family support workers are trained to undertake life-story work and the head of therapy undertakes direct work with children and foster carers.

Panel is regularly reviewed to ensure a diverse membership and to take account of evolving practice. Members are suitably skilled and knowledgeable. A new initiative means that the chair and vice are present at each panel but rotate the Chair. This ensures greater consistency. The leadership team keeps panel members informed of developments in the agency through regular discussions and access to a wide range

of training. This ensures that panel members continue to reflect upon and develop their practice, as well as being able to contribute to the development of the agency.

Panel members are sensitive to the challenges faced by prospective and approved foster carers whilst providing the leadership team with a valuable quality assurance function that ensures approvals are made in the best interests of children. Panel members provide feedback on the quality of reports and presentations by social workers. This enables the leadership team and staff to address any shortfalls swiftly and to celebrate insightful, reflective work.

There are positive working relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. Universities and specialist clinicians are consulted and are actively involved in running training, providing reflective discussions to staff and the leadership team and acting as a critical friend to the leadership team. Feedback from professionals, including commissioning teams, is consistently complimentary about the agency and outcomes for children.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC487945

Registered provider: New Chapters FosterCare Limited

Registered provider address: Blencathra, Upton Magna Business Park, Upton Magna, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 4TT

Responsible individual: Martin George

Registered manager: Claire Upcott

Telephone number: 01952 463251

Email address: info@newchaptersfostercare.co.uk

Inspector

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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