

Active Care Solutions

Active Care Solutions Limited

Pure Offices, Broadwell Road, Oldbury, West Midlands B69 4BY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Active Care Solutions is an independent fostering agency based in Sandwell. The company is part of a much larger organisation, Polaris Community, comprising several independent fostering agencies. The agency specialises in providing placements for children and young people of multiple faiths with foster carers who can meet their cultural and religious requirements. The agency offers a wide range of placement types for children, including emergency, respite, short and long term, parent and child, unaccompanied children and young people and young adults 'staying put'.

At the time of the inspection, the agency supported 75 fostering households and 94 children and young people.

The manager registered with Ofsted in 2015.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 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: 11 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points, because of the nurturing and warm care they receive from their foster carers. The children form safe and secure attachments with their carers and are embraced as part of their foster families. For example, children are part of family celebrations, holidays and family instant messaging groups. This helps children to feel accepted and provides them with a sense of belonging.

Children spoke with warmth and confidence about their experiences of living with their foster families. One child said that they felt part of a family, while another child told the inspectors that their foster carer believed in them. Many of the children referred to the foster carers as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'.

Most children live with permanent and long-term fostering families. In several cases children are living alongside their siblings. This provides children with a sense of security and stability and children form lasting bonds. For some children, the agency is actively supporting foster carers to apply for special guardianship. In addition, one child is in the process of being adopted by their current foster carers.

Children can stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthdays. This offers children an increased sense of acceptance and permanency with their foster family, as well as providing them with important support throughout their transition into adulthood. To further support the children's independence, the agency has created several essential life skills workshops that include interview skills and CV writing. This, coupled with a team-building weekend away, further prepares children for the transition into adulthood.

Foster carers are passionate about the children they care for and will advocate on their behalf to ensure that their voices are heard and their individual needs are met. The dedication and commitment of one foster carer has enabled a child to remain living in their care and stopped a move into residential care. This is a remarkable achievement and is in the best interest of the child, who has been living with her foster carers for over four years and is thriving in their care.

Children's health needs are consistently met. Carers ensure that children have access to local health services and manage the children's health plans effectively.

Children are encouraged to flourish in education or employment and carers are effective advocates, ensuring that most children have access to the right support at the right time. There is a great emphasis on children's enjoyment and leisure activities. Children are encouraged to develop positive friendship groups. They are routinely supported to take part in out-of-school activities to enrich their quality of life.

The progress of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is exceptional from their starting points. For example, an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, who at the outset did not speak English, is now sitting their GCSEs. Every effort is made to match unaccompanied children with foster carers who meet the children's cultural needs and ensure that they have access to a wide range of support.

Foster carers are proud of the children they provide care for. They recognise and celebrate their achievements and capture these in children's records. The agency hosts an annual award event when all children, including birth children, receive awards. For example, children have received awards for attendance at school or tying their shoelaces. These awards help to support and develop children's sense of pride and accomplishment and are meaningful for children to share now and in the future.

The voice of the child is embedded within the agency. The agency continually reviews how they can purposefully engage with the children to improve how it can respond to their needs. Some of the children are part of the young volunteers group and they have been involved in reviewing and developing the children's guide as well as contributing to the recruitment process for new foster carers. Children feel that they are listened to and that their wishes, views and feelings are heard.

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

There are robust safeguarding practices throughout the fostering service. Children have individual risk assessments that are clear and concise. They are regularly reviewed and provide foster carers with relevant information to support children to keep safe and feel safe.

Children feel safe living with their foster carers because of the meaningful relationships they have developed with them. Children trust their foster carers and they can talk to them about any worries or concerns they may have. One child said: 'I can talk to her [foster carer's name] about things.'

Supervising social workers spend prioritised time alone with children to help build and maintain positive relationships with them. This helps to ensure that they understand children's needs, wishes and feelings and what support foster carers need to meet these. Consequently, children have an additional trusted adult they can talk to about any worries.

The children are helped to understand risk to keep themselves safe. Supervising social workers have carried out direct work sessions with children when safeguarding concerns have arisen. For one child, this has helped her to talk about her experiences and enabled the agency to provide the right support to keep her safe. Furthermore, the children have benefited from workshops that cover a range of topics, including county lines, knife crime and child sexual exploitation. The workshops are engaging and innovative and draw on current research in practice.

Children rarely go missing from their foster carers' care. However, when children go missing, there are clear policies and procedures so appropriate action takes place to ensure that children return home safely. The agency works hard to ensure that children receive return home interviews from their placing authorities. However, if these do not take place in a timely manner, supervising social workers are proactive and will visit the children to ensure that relevant information is captured to look at strategies to reduce the risk of going missing.

Allegations against foster carers are managed in a timely and effective way to ensure the safety of children. The registered manager works in partnership with the relevant agencies to ensure that the appropriate safeguards are in place. Investigations are completed in a timely manner and foster carers are returned to the fostering panel for further independent review and oversight. This supports good decision-making for children and ensures the ongoing suitability of foster carers.

The registered manager uses auditing and reviewing procedures appropriately following safeguarding concerns being raised. This monitoring enables him to quickly identify themes and patterns to further improve safeguarding practice and ensures that the appropriate safeguards are in place to keep children safe.

The managers review and share related research materials such as serious case reviews with the supervising social workers. This supports them to explore, discuss and implement any learning points. To further enhance their safeguarding knowledge, the agency has introduced seven-minute briefings where a range of safeguarding topics are explored. This ensures that the agency takes a proactive approach to managing risk.

Managers ensure that unannounced visits are made to each fostering household every year. The records of these visits are detailed and highlight that children are spoken to alone and that safety checks of the foster carers' homes are carried out. This provides further opportunities for supervising social workers to meet the children and ensure that they are happy and safe.

The recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members is comprehensive and thorough. There is clear management oversight of all recruitment. This helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. He is dedicated and passionate and has high ambitions and aspirations for the children. He is supported by equally enthusiastic service managers who are committed to providing children with outstanding care and enriched experiences.

The members of the leadership team are present within the agency and maintain regular contact with children, foster carers and staff. The managers' knowledge of the children is exceptional, and they have excellent oversight of children's progress.

The agency has a comprehensive and effective quality assurance and monitoring framework. Regular audits and dip sampling of records also contributes to the registered manager's oversight of the quality of records. As a result of the framework, managers can evidence an improvement in practice and experiences for children through a reduction in the number of notifiable incidents and not seeing themes of poor practice being repeated.

The agency has a culture of learning. The registered manager is keen to develop research-based practice and he has taken active steps to ensure the continuous development and improvements of the service. One example where this has been particularly effective is the agency's participation in several research programmes that have been funded by the Department for Education and have been cited within government policies and published in research journals. These are excellent opportunities for staff and foster carers to develop.

The agency's training programme has been updated and includes individual pathways for supervising social workers and foster carers that are tailored to their personal needs and those of the children they care for. These pathways run alongside the consistent refreshing of mandatory training. In addition, there is an embedded management scheme for current or aspiring managers, which is accredited to The Institute of Leadership and Management.

Staff are very well supported and they spoke highly about the leadership team. Supervising social workers receive practice-related supervision. Team meetings offer dedicated time for reflective practice and enable staff to be resourceful and inquisitive about their practice.

An independent reviewing officer has been employed. This offers an additional level of scrutiny of the approval of foster carers. Foster carers' annual reviews are detailed and comprehensive. Annual reviews are completed within the required timescales and provide a wide range of information about the foster carer. Children actively contribute to their carers' reviews, which helps to capture an overview of their experiences.

The fostering panel consists of an appropriately qualified and experienced membership. The panel is chaired by an independent chair who knows the agency well. The panel provides a rigorous quality assurance function that ensures that there is a level of good oversight into the quality of assessments. This is further supported by the agency's decision-maker who provides a high level of scrutiny to ensure that decision-making is sound.

Foster carers have provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the support they receive from the agency. One foster carer said that the support provided was 'excellent' with another describing the agency as 'like being part of a family'.

The registered manager has developed positive relationships with partner agencies. Good collaborative working means that children receive coordinated care, and this

contributes to them achieving good outcomes. Many social workers said that the agency and its foster carers go above and beyond for the children in their care. No requirements or recommendations have been made arising from this inspection.

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: SC484141

Registered provider: Active Care Solutions Limited

Registered provider address: Core Assets, Abberley View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

Responsible individual: John Platt

Registered manager: Mohammed Bashir

Telephone number: 08009177937

Email address: activecare@solutions.co.uk

Inspectors

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

Andrew Waugh, His Majesty's Inspector Social Care

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 looked after children, 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.

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 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.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024