

# Chrysalis Care

Chrysalis Care Ltd - 1022174

Chrysalis Care, 7 Princes Street, Bexleyheath, Kent DA7 4BQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Event 10030570

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Chrysalis Care is an independent fostering agency that recruits, trains and supports foster carers in London and some of the home counties. There is a children's services team that provides direct support and therapeutic interventions for children in placement. The agency provides emergency, short-, medium- and long-term fostering arrangements for children who are unable for any reason to live with their birth family. They are also able to offer specialist placements for parent and children, young people in the criminal justice system and some short breaks. As at the 31 March 2017, the agency had 107 foster carers in 63 households and looked after 73 children. During the year up to 31 March 2017, the agency approved four new foster families.

**Inspection dates:** 24 to 28 April 2017

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **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:** 10 August 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:

- Children and young people live in stable and consistent placements.
- Good support is offered to foster carers by the agency, to maintain and sustain placements. Social workers have worked for the agency for a long time and have established positive and supportive relationships with the carers they support.
- A number of young people in long-term foster placements go on to attend university and/or find employment.
- Children and young people have good opportunities and live with foster carers who are ambitious for them. An annual awards ceremony celebrates achievements.
- Foster carers and social workers working for the agency are experienced and are committed to meeting the needs of children and young people.
- Young people who have left care return to become young people's ambassadors for the agency.
- The training and development team offers a wide range of training for foster carers. It also links into the local safeguarding children boards in the areas in which its foster carers live.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- A minority of carers have yet to complete their Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of their approval.
- The agency has not always updated the regulator about the conclusion of investigations into significant events or complaints about foster carers.
- On a few occasions important information from placing authorities is not on children's records and the agency has not been robust enough in its challenge about this.
- To improve the fostering agency's panel, the agency could expand the expert knowledge available in health and education. A regular slot for the additional business of the panel could help the panel to structure itself and be more effective in ensuring positive working together and sharing ideas about feedback and training.

To improve young people's opportunity of remaining in placement after the age of 18 years, the agency could promote and establish better working relationships with placing authorities to advocate for better transitions.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that the registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. Where the significant event is in relation to an investigation, the agency will ensure that the regulator receives an update on the progress of the investigation. (national minimum standard 29.1)
  
- Ensure that foster carers can evidence that the Training Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval and ensure that foster carers take up regular safeguarding refresher training. (national minimum standard 20.3)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people experience stable and consistent foster care at this agency. Many have been in placement for over five years and some for over ten years. They have the opportunity to build trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers. This helps build excellent relationships and provides children and young people with stability and consistency of care. Foster carers know children and young people well, are inclusive and welcome them as part of their families. Children and young people say they feel accepted as part of the family and are included in everyday family events, such as weddings, holidays, days out and usual daily routines. One young person said, 'When I met X, something clicked, she just got me straight away.' Another young person said, 'I can tell my foster mum anything, I love both of them, I consider them to be my parents.'

Foster carers talk about the children and young people in their care as if they are their own children. During the inspection, carers spoken to had high expectations of the children and young people's ability to succeed and do well. This translated into positive advocacy and challenge towards those who held lower expectations for them.

Children and young people are making good progress from their starting points. For example, working part time while studying, being in full time education or employment or simply learning to accept boundaries and regulate their behaviour. Children and young people in long-term care are achieving high standards in education with significant numbers going on to attend university.

Respite care is only provided when necessary. Foster carers are supported in a range of other ways to care for children and young people and only request respite if this is really needed. In the case where foster carers are managing children or young people with highly complex needs, respite is sensitively arranged. For example, one young person requested a break from her foster carer and was supported to choose an alternative short-term placement to give her and her foster carers a break.

Children and young people are supported in a variety of ways to give their views about their day-to-day care and important decisions in their lives. For example, views are sought for foster carers' annual reviews and young people assist with staff interviews. The agency supports young people to seek and use advocates appropriately, for example around decisions on placement transitions.

All school age children and young people are on roll at school, college or on a work experience placement. They are all learning and making good progress. For example, two brothers placed together with foster carers have made excellent progress in their studies. The schoolteacher says 'The boys are doing phenomenally well. When they first came there were gaps in learning, they get a lot of support at home, which is very obvious.' In addition, some young people have achieved good

GCSE results and some have gone on to attend university. When children and young people are struggling at school, the agency puts in additional support in the form of paying for additional tuition and has at times run a homework club. In some cases, the agency has offered one-to-one support, including educational activities, for example, when children and young people are on a reduced timetable or have a fixed-term exclusion. This helps to support and sustain placements when there are difficulties.

The agency has a specialist children's services team, which provides an excellent range of therapeutic services, social, educational and recreational opportunities. Supporting social workers can refer children and young people for a range of services, including direct work, play therapy, educational support or transport support to and from school. The children's services team also organises a range of events including a young people's group, school holiday activities, a Christmas party and an annual awards event.

Many of the children and young people looked after by the agency are attending extra-curricular clubs, activities and participating in community, sporting and other events. One young person holds the under-17 national record for running the 800 metres and has represented Great Britain at the World Junior Athletics Championships in this event. Foster carers are inclusive of children and young people and take them on holiday. A brother and sister spoken to at the inspection had just returned from an Easter break in Dorset with their foster family.

The children's services team also offers independence assessments and training for young people who are over 16 years of age. This involves an assessment to determine what skills the young person already has and what areas need development. Staff speak to teachers, foster carers and parents to complete this assessment and then devise an independence training programme. Young people are well prepared in everyday skills they need when they leave care.

The agency begins to consider arrangements for young people leaving care early on, including whether they want to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday, under the 'staying put' arrangements. Whether young people can stay is also determined by placing authorities' own criteria and policies. Chrysalis Care senior management negotiate and advocate to formalise 'staying put' arrangements for all young people who wish to stay with their foster carers, however in a minority of cases the agency has not provided robust challenge when decisions are not in young people's best interests. For example, via advocates, judicial review or writing to directors of children's services. Despite this, since the last inspection in August 2015 to date the agency facilitated 13 out of 16 young people to remain with their foster families for various periods of time post 18 years, under formalised and recognised 'staying put' arrangements. Some young people have remained with their foster carers' post 18 years without placing authority support, relying on the goodwill of foster carers or under private arrangements. This is a testament to the commitment of foster carers and their relationships with young people.

Children and young people are helped to be as healthy as possible, and when they have more complex health needs, these are being met well with support from the

agency. For example, ensuring that both foster carers and supporting social workers had training in percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy feeding to meet children and young people's needs. Training to meet health needs is targeted specifically to meet the needs of children placed. For example, the training and development team, plans training for the year ahead by considering the training needs raised in foster carers' annual reviews and social workers' appraisals.

The agency offers good support to foster carers and specialist help to children and young people to support individual needs, such as emotional needs and needs arising from children and young people's past traumatic experiences. The agency has developed good working in partnership relationships with children and adolescent mental health services, educational staff and placing authority social workers. The workers providing care and specialist support are experienced, appropriately qualified and well supervised. Placements have been supported by regular social work visits, telephone calls and direct work, and this has helped to avoid breakdown. Additional support services are provided in a clear, structured way and the need for these are regularly reviewed.

The agency provides a positive welcome for children and young people moving into foster care. Welcome packs, memory boxes and information about what to expect from the agency and other services, including how to complain, are made available. All the children and young people spoken to during the inspection described positive introductions and said they had been able to visit their carers prior to moving in. All of the agency's foster carers prepare a family book after their approval as carers. This book is then adapted for individual children and young people and shared prior to any placement, so that they know what to expect when they move in.

Children and young people are well matched with foster carers. There have not been any unplanned endings since the last inspection in August 2015. Some children and young people have moved placements due to the combination of complex needs and sibling groups, but with time for some planning and negotiation. When it has been obvious that a child or young person's needs are not being met, placement stability meetings consider what additional support can be offered to prevent breakdowns if possible.

Children and young people experience clear boundaries and are treated with dignity and respect. When cultural, religious or language needs are not immediately met within a placement, the agency and foster carers are aware of the deficits, and make efforts to ensure that these needs are met. For example, when a Muslim child was placed with Hindu foster carers, arrangements were made for continued attendance at the local mosque.

The agency supports positive contact with parents, with many foster carers supporting this. For example, one foster carer sends text messages for a parent with learning difficulties to remind them when to attend contact. One foster carer commented that they regularly support contact and stay with the extended family of the birth parents to facilitate this contact. When possible, children remain placed with brothers and sisters. This helps them to maintain their identity and culture and keep them in touch with important people in their lives.

Foster carers receive fantastic support, which is undoubtedly helping them to provide high quality care. Good-quality training, support groups, individual support and supervisions are all offered consistently. Foster carers received helpful out-of-hours support and they report that all staff from administrative through to directors are helpful and supportive.

Prospective foster carers told the inspector they felt very welcomed and valued. One stated that she chose this agency as they got back to her promptly, were helpful, friendly and informative. This carer had attended other agencies' open evenings, but was already on the skills to foster course with this agency before some of the other agencies even contacted her back. Foster carers felt well prepared and informed throughout the assessment process. One foster carer says of the group training, 'The group was small and very helpful. We were encouraged and felt safe to ask questions, it was a good course, we came away from every session feeling that it was valid.'

The agency has appointed three young people who have left care as ambassadors. These young people have spoken at the skills to foster preparation groups, helped to interview staff and made presentations at the annual awards ceremony. One young ambassador said, 'I had low self-esteem, but this role has helped me feel valued.'

The agency holds an annual awards ceremony, where children and young people's achievements are celebrated and recognised. All foster carers, placing authority social workers, supporting social workers, children and young people are invited to attend for presentation of certificates and prizes, and a fun evening is had.

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

Safeguarding is at the centre of this agency. Young people spoken to say they feel safe. For example, one young person said, 'I feel safe, I have one-to-one attention and it really feels like my family.' The safety and welfare of children and young people take priority for foster carers and agency staff. The agency staff and foster carers know the children and young people well, including their vulnerabilities and associated risk factors. Foster carers receive the information they need to understand children and young people's backgrounds, which helps them understand underlying causes of displayed behaviour.

Children and young people have clear placement plans and risk assessments that are created by placing social workers, supporting social workers and foster carers together. These identify the history and likely risk factors and give strategies and support or services to reduce risks of harm.

Children and young people are supported to learn independence skills and take age-appropriate risks. For example, joining activities, negotiating and having a say in contact arrangements and decisions about the safety of specific activities. Since the last inspection in August 2015, some work was undertaken on allowing young people to take reasonable risks and learn from these. Similar issues, which have arisen since then, have been negotiated quickly through work with the carers. The

agency have responded well to ensure that carers and/or placing authorities are not 'risk-averse' and this has allowed children and young people to enjoy activities without unnecessary restrictions.

Safe recruitment practice is evident in both staff recruitment and in the assessment of foster carers. All necessary checks are undertaken, including checking identity, following up name changes, checking with previous employers, ensuring that police, local authority and health checks are completed and taking up references. All these checks and more help to identify any potential risks and prevent unsafe people gaining access to children and young people.

Safeguarding is central to the assessment, preparation, supervision and training of foster carers and routinely includes information about children who are missing and vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Wider safeguarding issues, such as the risk of radicalisation, are not yet included in preparation training, although they are available as separate courses for all staff. Most of the social work staff have now completed this training. However, not all foster carers have yet undertaken this training.

The agency has two referral and duty officers who screen all the incoming referrals and carefully match them with foster carers, taking into account foster carers' skills, and the children and young people's needs, including those already living at the home. When there are already children and young people in placement, the agency speaks with the placing authority before agreeing placements. The referral and duty officers work closely with supervising social workers and managers to ensure that suitable matches are made at the point of referral. The agency makes ethical decisions and does not make placements if they cannot meet the child or young person's needs.

The agency has a learning and development team, which sources excellent training for foster carers. They liaise with the local safeguarding children boards in all the areas that their foster carers live and link into their safeguarding and child protection training events. A training matrix is available for foster carers on the website so that they can see training coming up and make applications. The learning and development team also targets specific foster carers to ensure that mandatory training is completed. There have been improvements in ensuring that foster carers take up and complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within one year of being approved. However, there are still some foster carers who are yet to complete this essential training. Despite this deficit, no children or young people have been placed at risk. The agency has commissioned some independent social workers to work with specific carers on a one-to-one basis, offering training in evenings and at weekends to ensure that this training is completed.

Reviews of foster carers' approval take place within statutory timescales. Supervising social workers provide detailed reports for the panel, indicating strengths and areas for training and development. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their foster carers' review by the children's services team. The fostering panel gives each review proper scrutiny and picks up areas where further work or training are required. This ensures that issues such as incomplete training are



consistently addressed.

Supervising social workers regularly inspect the foster carers' homes to ensure that they are providing an acceptable home for children and young people, which is free from any health and safety hazards. The agency also undertakes unannounced visits to foster carers and routinely sees children and young people alone. Children and young people are asked to provide feedback and share any concerns or worries about the care they receive. This provides an additional level of scrutiny to the quality of care provided and offers a further safeguard for children and young people.

The agency has strong working relationships with placing authorities and works well in partnership to address any safeguarding concerns. The local authority designated officer says that there have not been any safeguarding allegations raised since the last inspection in August 2015, but was aware of the agency being within area. Wider collaboration with the designated officer, and establishing further links with other key safeguarding partners, such as the looked after children nurse and the local police, and inviting them to young people's groups or events would be beneficial on occasion.

The agency runs regular support groups for foster carers where they discuss safeguarding issues, such as restraint, bullying, risks associated with the internet or children going missing.

When children or young people go missing from care or are absent without permission, foster carers act quickly in partnership with other agencies, including the police and emergency duty teams, to ensure that they are safe. Foster carers have a good awareness of the potential risks of sexual exploitation and have attended specialist training to understand these issues. Children and young people placed with this agency seldom go missing. Staff and carers' knowledge of how to keep young people safe from a range of issues, including bullying, social media and grooming, is good.

When there have been issues of concern, children and young people can access one-to-one support from the children's services team. The agency also has good links with the children and adolescent mental health services, where a more specialist response can be sourced if needed. The agency keeps the regulator notified of significant events or incidents. These notifications allow the regulator to see what is happening and how the agency is responding to keep children and young people safe. Although notifications of events are clear and actions taken are appropriate, the agency has not always updated the regulator with the outcome of incidents or investigations.

Children and young people know how to complain. The agency provides a comprehensive children's guide, which is targeted at specific age ranges and gives clear information about how to complain. This guide is given to children and young people when they are first placed and is easily available on the agency website. There have been no formal complaints recorded directly from children since the last inspection. When children and young people are unhappy about the care they

receive, they have raised issues with supervising social workers. Examples of this are a young person requesting respite care to have a break from her carers, and another young person challenging his foster carers about the age they considered appropriate to have a mobile phone. The agency does not yet record these as complaints and deals with them in line with its complaints procedures.

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

The last registered manager left the service in December 2016. The lack of a registered manager has not had a detrimental impact on the functioning of the agency. The agency has kept the regulator informed about the appointment of a new manager in March 2017. She has worked for the agency since 2008 as a senior practitioner and practice manager with a remit for safeguarding and supervision of staff. She also took on responsibility for recruitment of foster carers in 2015, so knows the working of the agency well. She was going through the registration process with Ofsted at the time of this inspection. She is also a qualified social worker with many years of experience of working in fostering.

The agency has strong leaders and managers. It is an established agency with a long history of providing quality care for children and young people. The agency has successfully grown and developed over the past two decades and now has a training and strategic development team, a designated referral and duty officer and a children's services team as well as a supervising social work team. The leadership team provides strong role models for the agency and bases its practice on children and young people's best interests.

The staff team, foster carers, children and young people describe a 'family feel', to the agency. One young person said, 'I can go in and talk to any of them in the office, they are all like my family or personal counsellors.'

The agency is well staffed and resourced. However, since the last inspection, there have been several staff leave and a change in the registered manager. Although these changes have not been seamless, as there have been some additional tasks for others and some information and systems have suffered slightly, overall the changes have been managed well. The presence of the long-standing responsible individual and agency decision-maker, combined with a stable staff team in general, have meant that staff continue to feel safe and supported in their roles.

The staff team is extremely experienced, highly motivated and committed to providing the best outcomes and experiences for children and young people. Children and young people's experiences and outcomes remain extremely good as a direct result of what the agency staff and foster carers, driven by motivated leaders and managers, are doing.

The agency has a good sense of its own strengths and areas for development. There is good internal monitoring of the quality of the care provided. The manager completes regular six-monthly reports on the work of the agency and submits these to the regulator with an action plan to develop the service further. Leaders and managers show that they are planning and thinking about children and young

people's needs in the development and training programme for staff and carers. They have acted on the recommendations made from the last inspection, showing they can act on advice.

Complaints are responded to quickly, and robust follow-up with placing authorities takes place. When needed, investigations or reviews happen and outcomes are reported to placing authorities. Leaders and managers challenge placing authorities when they do not feel that appropriate actions are taken, for example in ensuring that a safeguarding matter was properly considered.

Despite good challenge to placing authorities in respect of safeguarding, a less robust approach is taken with regard to young people staying with foster carers after the age of 18 years. Improving relationships with placing authorities and providing challenge at the highest level in placing authorities to improve this area of the service would benefit young people leaving care. One young person says, 'It was a shock how I moved, it was very quick and I didn't want to go.'

Leaders and managers know the children and young people well and are involved in running the children's groups and various events throughout the year. The agency has appointed young ambassadors to the service and they have contributed to the training of foster carers. The annual awards is another example of how leaders and managers know the children and young people being looked after by the service and what they are up to.

Staff feel that supervision, induction and probation are good. They feel part of a bigger team and they feel respected and supported by the leaders and managers. They describe reflective supervision, which gives clear guidance on important issues and is open and transparent. Both directors, the responsible individual and the decision maker provide effective support and supervision to the manager, giving clear guidance and direction about the overall vision of the service.

The fostering service maintains good electronic records and strives to be a paper-free service. The inspection identified minor weaknesses in some records, although this caused no direct impact on children and young people.

Foster carers report having regular and high quality support and supervision. Foster carers were unanimous in their praise at the level of response they received, and in some cases this helped them to continue to care for children and young people with high level and complex needs, where they may have otherwise given up.

Recruitment of carers has slowed and this is combined with the agency losing carers from specific diverse backgrounds in the last year. The agency is aware of this and is actively advertising through social media and actively targeting publications to ensure recruitment of carers to match the needs of children requiring placement.

The panel promotes safe and secure placements and actively engages with the agency without being collusive. Panel minutes and decisions are clear, well thought through and identify areas of discussion or disagreement. The panel quality assures assessments and reviews and the agency is continuing to improve these documents

in response to feedback. The panel chair has brought more structure and rigour to the system and has plans to continue this work to ensure that supervising social workers understand what foster carers require to fulfil the standards and evidence these, particularly in relation to mandatory training.

The panel has a good mix of gender and diversity and includes a medical adviser (although not sitting at every panel) and a previously looked after young person. It would be improved by having more expertise in health and education. Panels sit regularly and are quorate. The panel chair and the agency plan some developmental training days together and plan to develop the minutes for the business part of panel meetings. Overall, the panel makes child-focused decisions and gives good scrutiny and gatekeeping for the agency.

The agency decision-maker is appropriately qualified for her role and understands the law, process and regulation, which guides the work of the panel. She is able to challenge the panel and request further clarification, information or work if necessary.

The agency has good working relationships with placing authorities. One commissioner said, 'They are one of our top providers; we have good relationships, it has been the same officers and we have built good relationships with them over many years.'

## **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 difference 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 who 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:** SC036587

**Registered provider:** Chrysalis Care Ltd

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## **Inspector**

Christine Kennet, social care inspector



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