

# Synergy Fostering

Synergy Fostering Limited

Synergy Fostering Limited, Unit C2, Tavern Quay, Rope Street, London SE16 7EX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Since its last inspection, the office base has moved to the Surrey Quays area in London.

The aim of the service is to provide high-quality substitute family care for children in care. The fostering service adopts a therapeutic approach to care and offers extensive training to foster carers using this model. The service offers a range of placements. These include short and long-term placements, respite, emergency, bridging and parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 31 approved foster caring households with 47 children and young people in placement.

**Inspection dates:** 14 to 18 January 2019

**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:** 11 January 2016

**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 fostering service provides a good quality of care and the experiences and outcomes for children are very positive.
- Placements are secure and stable, and children's individual needs are well met. Staff's and foster carers' use of therapeutic models of care supports placement success.
- Safeguarding is at the heart of this agency. Managers ensure that there are effective systems in place to keep children safe.
- The training, supervision and support of foster carers are excellent.
- The fostering service provides a number of parent and child placements. These are highly successful.
- The management and leadership of the fostering service are strong. Managers are appropriately skilled and experienced.
- The fostering panel is well organised and efficiently run.
- Staff's and foster carers' partnership working with other professionals is effective.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The number of new foster carers being recruited has been low.
- The recruitment and vetting of some staff is not thorough.
- The quality of some key records requires improvement.
- Some foster carers' assessments are insufficiently detailed and lack analysis.
- One foster family reported that they did not feel fully supported by the agency when allegations are made against them.
- Foster carers who met with the inspector said they either did not understand and/or agree with the service's engagement reward system.
- The children's guides require revision.

## 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
The fostering service provider must—  keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide. (Regulation 4 (a))	01/06/2019

### Recommendations

- The fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. (NMS 13.1)
- Unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. (NMS 11.3)  
  
In particular, that children are provided with written/pictorial profiles about their new families.
- The written report on the person’s suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider’s fostering teams. (NMS 13.7)
- Ensure that investigations into allegations are handled fairly and consistently, in supporting the person who is subject of the allegation. (NMS 22.9)
- All people working in or for the fostering service, and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a fostering panel, are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references. (NMS 19.1)
- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature

of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. (NMS 26.2)

This relates to information that charts children's progress, foster carers' assessments and written responses to complaints.

- The fostering service ensures foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service. (NMS 21.2)

In particular, that foster carers understand and are consulted about the fostering service's engagement reward system.

## Inspection judgements

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

The fostering service provides a good quality of care, and the experiences and outcomes for children and young people are very positive. Children, many of whom have complex needs, receive personalised care that meets their needs and they are kept safe.

Children benefit from successful and stable foster placements. Their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. As a result, children thrive in secure placements, enjoying relationships that are loving and nurturing. A child said of the fostering service, 'It's good. I get help and people listen to what I say. No one's demanding or controlling.'

Children benefit from the fostering service's careful placement planning and negotiation. Where placements are planned, introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are sensitively arranged. This helps children to settle quickly with their new families. To enhance this transition further, the service is to consider providing children with easy read profiles of their new families.

Children have opportunities to share their views, wishes and opinions. The fostering service continues to develop strategies to help children influence the shape of the service. For example, staff conduct consultation exercises with children to help gain their opinion about the service. Children are aware of how to make complaints but largely do not do so.

Children's learning outcomes are good, and they make good academic and vocational progress. School and college attendance is high, and children make steady progress from their starting points. As and when required, children receive additional academic support. This is particularly true if they are not achieving their learning targets and when they are due to sit formal examinations.

Children enjoy a range of leisure and social activities that are of their choosing. Routinely these include attendance at sports and arts activities, going to the gym and attending community events. Many children enjoy family holidays and celebrations with their foster families. This promotes their sense of belonging. The fostering service facilitates fun events for children and their families. Recently, this has included a safari trip, a bowling event and a Christmas social event.

Children live healthy lifestyles. They are promptly registered with primary healthcare services and have good access to specialist medical care. A child told the inspector, 'I get help with my diabetes. At first it was annoying, but now it's under control.' Disabled children have very good access to specialist resources such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and paediatric consultants.

Children benefit significantly from the fostering service's therapeutic approach to care. Staff and foster carers receive training in therapeutic crisis intervention. This

supports them to sensitively communicate, understand and explore with children their emotional state and how this influences their behaviour. Foster carers continually work on developing secure relationships and attachments that enhance children's emotional well-being and resilience. This has led to considerable success in addressing children's issues around attachment, loss, rejection and trauma.

Children are treated with dignity and respect. The fostering service ensures that children's identity needs are well met by foster carers and staff. The matching process is robust and effective. Staff pay good attention to matching the individual needs of children with the skills of foster carers from the outset of placement negotiations and thereafter. This supports successful, long-term placements.

Children enjoy meeting with their parents, siblings, other family members and friends when it is safe for them to do so. Staff and foster carers manage these arrangements carefully and there is a strong focus on the impact and best interests of children.

Children and young people are supported to learn practical life skills that help to prepare them for adulthood. These include money management, food preparation and shopping and completing household chores. Parents in parent and child placements receive support that helps them to care for their children safely.

Prospective foster carers making enquiries with the fostering service said that they felt valued and welcomed by the staff team. The assessment process is timely and sensitive to the needs of carers. Foster care assessments are generally comprehensive and of a high quality. However, not all assessments are sufficiently analytical and do not identify well the strengths and competencies that foster carers have or need to develop.

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

Children are protected from harm and abuse. The fostering service staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people are paramount. The service ensures that foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of children and they are well informed about the underlying causes of the behaviours that they can exhibit. The fostering service's protection of children is strong at all levels. This is a clear strength of the service.

Children benefit from the fostering service's clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. Children have good opportunities to speak with staff in private, and they receive information about making complaints. However, information in the service's children's guides requires some revision to make this process clearer. Staff routinely complete unannounced visits to foster carers' homes. This is to further promote the safety of placements.

Staff ensure that placement plans and risk assessments highlight known and anticipated risks. Managers and staff review and update safeguarding documents

regularly to reflect children's changing needs and circumstances. Very few critical incidents occur with children in placements. Episodes of children going missing and their involvement in sexual or criminal exploitation are infrequent. When these instances do occur, staff and foster carers devise effective strategies to help curb risk-taking behaviour. This helps to protect children from harm.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection and this supports the safe care of vulnerable children. Family safe care policies lay the foundations to how fostering households will care for children safely.

Foster carers receive regular and consistent child protection training. Staff ensure that they routinely explore safeguarding issues in supervision and in all other foster carer forums. Children respond positively to the clear boundaries set by their foster carers. These are appropriate and encourage children's good behaviour. Where children's behaviour is challenging, staff assist foster carers to develop strategies that sensitively address the behaviour.

Gaps in the safe vetting and recruitment of some staff mean that recruitment procedures are not always robust. Managers do not consistently verify written references or confirm and document that staff are eligible to work in the UK.

The fostering service has strong and effective working partnerships with other agencies such as children's social workers, school personnel and health professionals. These successful collaborations promote an effective and coordinated approach to safeguarding children. A local authority social worker said, 'I am kept well informed of both positives and any challenges.'

Concerns for the quality of care provided by foster carers are rare. In the last 12 months, there has been one standard of care issue, one allegation and several complaints made against foster carers.

Staff and managers work effectively with local authority personnel, including designated officers, the police, other professionals and family members. This is to ensure that effective action is taken in keeping children safe. The fostering service's internal investigations are robust and result in foster carers' cases being represented at the fostering panel. This is to confirm that they remain suitable to care for children.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. Staff conduct checks that ensure homes are well maintained, comfortable and that there are no health and safety concerns.

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

Leaders of the fostering service are ambitious for change and the leadership and management of the service are sound. The service has a realistic business plan in place to support its continued improvement. This is illustrated by the development of staff champions, who take the lead in promoting children's outcomes in key areas. Most shortfalls highlighted at the last inspection have been satisfactorily resolved.

The exception to this is the shortfall identified in the vetting and recruitment of staff members.

The fostering service's statement of purpose is a detailed document that outlines well the aims and objective of the service. The children's guides are currently under review and require revision prior to being reissued. The service's current number of approved fostering households does not meet the demands of placing authorities seeking a diverse range of foster care placements for children.

The registered manager is a highly experienced, qualified social worker who leads the fostering team effectively. There are clear lines of accountability and the staff team members are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The fostering service is financially sound and well resourced to meet the aims of the service.

The fostering service has monitoring systems in place for most aspects of the service's operation. However, the effectiveness of some monitoring systems is an area identified for improvement. For example, increased management oversight is required to ensure that documents which chart children's progress are accurate. Managers' monitoring of the quality of some foster carers' assessments is not consistently robust, and some written responses to complaints require review.

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer. Staff support and training and development opportunities are excellent. A member of staff said, 'When I arrived, I thought "This is too good to be true". I've never felt unsupported. All the managers are good here.' Managers provide regular, meaningful supervision to the staff team, and appraisals are conducted annually.

The fostering service's preparation of foster carers is thorough. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of children and have appropriate knowledge and skills. Most foster carers have completed identified core training and have personal development plans. The service's foster carer annual reviewing process is vigorous and ensures that foster carers remain suitable to care for children.

Foster carers complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within the 12-month timeframe following their initial approval. Most have also completed a 12-week therapeutic training programme focused on therapeutic crisis intervention for families. Foster carers say that the training has significantly enhanced their understanding of children's trauma and has provided them with meaningful techniques to build strong attachments and to understand and manage children's often complex feelings and behaviours. A foster carer said, 'The therapeutic training? That's the best. It's turned my life around with my foster children. Even my own children and my husband have noticed the difference.'

Foster carers approved to care for parent and child placements receive specialist training to support the work that they do with families. The fostering service has a solid track record in providing very successful parent and child placements.

The service is well resourced to meet the needs of foster carers and children. Foster



carers overwhelmingly say that the support they receive from the fostering service is excellent. Staff maintain good communication with foster carers and very regularly visit them and children at their homes. A foster carer said, 'You can call anyone, at any time, 24/7. They always respond and give you the encouragement and advice that you need.' Support groups are well attended. This includes a male foster carer support group that continues to grow in strength.

Foster carers feel valued and listened to. However, many are very dissatisfied and confused by the agency's engagement reward system. This issue requires continued discussion and consultation. One foster family reported that they did not feel fully supported by staff following a child making an allegation against them.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively and benefits by having a membership that is drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The panel largely undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective and panel meeting minutes are sufficiently detailed.

The leadership and management of the fostering service are strong, despite some noted shortfalls. However, these shortfalls do not adversely affect the outcomes, experiences and progress of children, which are very positive.

## **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:** SC043377

**Registered provider:** Synergy Fostering Limited

**Registered provider address:** Synergy Fostering Limited, Unit C2, Tavern Quay, Rope Street, London SE16 7EX

**Responsible individual:** Gurmeet Sodhi

**Registered manager:** Shobha Harris

**Telephone number:** 0203 713 7293

**Email address:** [enquiries@synergy-fostering.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@synergy-fostering.co.uk)

## **Inspector**

Sandra Jacobs-Walls: 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 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](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 2019