

Credo Care

Credo Care Limited

Credo Care, 12 High Street, Lydd, ROMNEY MARSH, Kent TN29 9AJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was founded in 2004 and is based in Lydd, Kent within the Southeast Region. There is a satellite office located in the Midlands. The agency specialises in caring for disabled children and those with complex medical needs, learning difficulties and autism. The agency offers short term, long term, staying put and specialised respite care placements.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 August 2017

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: 19 May 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Exceptional matching practices have allowed children with complex needs to live in stable placements with carers who are committed to their long-term care.
- Carers provide nurturing, loving homes to the children, accepting them into their family and consistently meeting their needs to a high standard.
- The views of the children are highly valued. The agency ensures that even those who are non-verbal have an opportunity to express themselves. Advocates are often allocated for the children.
- The children consistently make good progress that is celebrated by the agency.
- The agency has developed a culture in which protecting the children is high priority. Safeguarding training is current and individualised to children's needs. Incidents in which the children are at risk very rarely occur.
- Recruitment procedures for the carers and the staff are robust. Any concern about foster carers' ability is promptly reviewed at panel.
- The leadership and management of the agency are extremely stable and experienced. The leader's efforts to improve the agency since the last inspection have been successful through effective planning and management.
- The agency has established a reputation among professionals as being highly effective in understanding, communicating and meeting the complex needs of the children placed.
- All staff and carers are committed to the ethos of the agency. They feel valued and supported, and the agency emanates a family atmosphere.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The most noticeable attribute of the agency is that children with extremely complex needs live in safe, stable placements with committed carers. The children's daily needs are fully understood and met while they are provided with consistent emotional warmth and nurturing. The children successfully integrate into the carers' lives and become part of their immediate family. A high number of the arrangements have become permanent through adoption and special guardianship orders, while other children have legally changed their surname to match their carers and remain living with their carers after eighteen.

Respite care arrangements are a prime example of the children being treated with dignity and respect. The carers share the belief that the children should be looked after only by people familiar to them and who understand their needs, in a way that is comparable to traditional family experiences. Many carers have successfully recruited extended family that are well known to the children to be their respite carers. The children benefit from the consistency in their care and environment.

The matching of children to the appropriate carer(s) is managed exceptionally well by the agency. The referral process is extensive and thorough; the managers always consider the child and whether potential carers have the required level of knowledge, experience and availability before any placements commence. The agency goes over and beyond by funding carers to have the necessary training and required adaptations in their homes to allow children to be comfortable, such as ensuring properties are wheelchair accessible and have available medical beds and wet rooms for bathing. The agency does not take emergency placements.

The views of the children are highly valued by the agency. The majority of the children have difficulty communicating as a result of their various conditions. The agency ensures that carers are skilful at understanding and responding to the exact wishes and feelings of the children. Some methods used are the picture exchange communication system and the interpretation of body gestures and sounds. The agency commonly uses advocates to understand and promote children's best interests.

There are numerous examples of children who have autism, epilepsy, learning difficulties and/or very complex medical needs making significant progress and taking great strides. Social workers were highly complimentary about the monthly progress reports completed by the supervising social workers. They believe that all aspects of the care being provided to children is comprehensively captured. A social worker said, 'The reports completed by the agency are often used at looked-after review meetings, as they are always filled with useful information.'

Children's health needs are very well met. Carers are knowledgeable and patient with the children while attending numerous medical appointments and engaging with

health specialists. They assist children by teaching them to utilise specialised equipment that is required for physical development and provide opportunities for them to lead healthier lives. Several of the carers are experienced and qualified professionals who work with children who have disabilities professionally. The agency often enlists these carers to provide group and one-to-one medical training, such as on caring for children that use a tracheostomy.

Several children have extreme health complications and have a limited life expectancy. In some cases, medical professionals have been amazed that children have exceeded expectations because of the love and care provided by their carers. A resource that has proved to be inspiring is the end-of-life carer who is assigned to children so that they may experience comfort and support during their final days. The carer spoke passionately about her role and how she recently moved into a hospice with a child while also engaging the birth parents, ensuring that the child did not feel alone.

Learning and development for the children is supported and encouraged through excellent, well-maintained links with education. The majority of the children attend school and receive services such as occupational support. The supervising social workers complete detailed educational reports using information obtained from the carers' attendance at personal educational plan meetings and engagement with education professionals.

Some children have made good strides in developing independence skills. Some children have learned to complete aspects of their own personal care, which is a major accomplishment from their starting points.

Children maintain family ties and their identity as a result of their carers and the agency supporting their relationships with significant others and completing life story work. Biological parents speak highly and are supportive of the care that their children receive. Records reflect that a parent was amazed at the progress their child had made since their last visit. The agency encourages parents, when appropriate, to be actively involved in all meetings and make informed decisions, promoting positive relationships between carers and parents.

The children participate in a wide range of activities that allow them to express their individual differences while promoting positive interactions. The carers routinely take the children on planned family holidays in this country and abroad, developing their sense of adventure and providing new experiences. One child with autism experienced his first camping trip, which was captured in a picture sent to the agency.

How well children and young people are helped and protected:

outstanding

Promoting the safety and well-being of the children is unquestionably an outstanding trait of the agency. All policies and procedures reflect the agency's commitment to keeping the children safe. Consistent guidance is in place for the staff and carers to follow when safeguarding matters arise. There have been only three safeguarding incidents reported relating to the children since the last inspection, well below the national average.

The extensive knowledge and insight that the staff and carers have about the children are incorporated into detailed risk assessments. Safeguarding concerns such as children going missing from care and child sexual exploitation are explored; however, there is also meticulous focus on the potential risks facing the children based on the complexity of their emotional or health needs. The assessments offer guidance to the carers on keeping the children safe, including on the impact and administration of medication, positive handling and behaviour management.

Children's behaviour is very well managed by their carers. The carers complete incident reports and submit them to the agency for review. The information is analysed by the managers and discussed with carers to determine whether any adjustments to the behaviour management plan need are needed. An outside consultant has been brought into the agency by the managers to review the behaviour management policy and provide feedback.

The managers are quick to challenge and act on any concerning practice by carers that may place children at risk. A report is prepared and presented to panel immediately for its consideration. The carer is informed of the outcome and offered the opportunity to appeal if necessary. A decision by the agency to deregister a carer was upheld by the Individual Review Mechanism, evidencing that the agency followed a robust and confidential process.

Robust recruitment practices are in place, preventing individuals that could be considered unsuitable from gaining employment as a member of staff. The agency reviews all background information for accuracy and always requests letters of good conduct from candidates who were previously employed abroad. The agency will not take potential carers past stage one of the recruitment process if there is concerning information on their background, such as on criminal behaviour.

The carers receive unannounced visits twice yearly. Health and safety checks for all the carers are reviewed consistently and updated. All specialist equipment used by the children is well maintained; fire precautions are implemented, which promotes a safe environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

There is an exceptional leadership and management team in place at the agency. A new manager has successfully registered with Ofsted. The manager has a wealth of experience with the agency, as he is currently one of the directors and previously held the position of responsible individual. His registration provides the agency with consistency and stability. The responsible individual offers road shows to carers to meet and discuss their needs, while making himself readily available if needed.

The carers and the staff praise the management team for its passion and commitment to children with complex needs. The manager and responsible individual have worked closely together to develop the agency by following a solid business plan, with the majority of the goals achieved. The agency was recently awarded funding from the Department of Education to work with two local authorities to move children from residential to foster care. The long-term goal of the agency is to grow in order to reduce the number of children with complex needs living in residential settings.

The new improved website and use of social media have allowed the agency to extend its reach nationwide. There are regular enquiries from potential applicants, expressing an interest in becoming a specialised carer for children with disabilities. A carer who was recently approved and experienced their first placement had positive words about the recruitment process. The carer said, 'Several agencies contacted me about fostering; however, the manager of this agency was able to demonstrate his knowledge and understanding without needing to seek advice from others.'

The agency's fostering panel is an effective gatekeeping mechanism that is committed to providing safe and reliable placements for all the children. The panel chair oversees an effective panel that consists of professionals from a wide range of professions, including social work and health. The panel makes informed decisions based on information gathered by independent social workers regarding potential carers. A new agency decision maker has been in post and evidenced that she is willing to challenge, or request further information regarding, all approvals on behalf of the agency.

The agency has established an excellent reputation with a wide range of placing authorities. Three placing authorities expressed a view that the agency was top notch in service delivery for all the children they have placed. A placement officer praised the agency for successfully recruiting and training a foster carer to accommodate a child requiring specialist care as a result of severe medical needs.

The agency has created two easy-to-use functional databases for maintaining records and documenting the progress of the young people. The systems were developed exclusively for the agency based on staff input and allow for efficient monitoring of the children and carers. The Credo care system allows managers to instantly see information as it is recorded and by whom. The carers' portal allows photos, daily diary entries and appointments to be uploaded by carers from any device that has internet capability, making it immediately accessible for supervising social workers to review.

The managers place high value on the views of the staff and the carers. 90% of staff

and carers responded to a survey conducted earlier this year. As a result of the survey feedback, changes were introduced including flexible working, improved training, health care and financial incentives.

The training and support provided to the foster carers by the agency are exceptional, ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge of the conditions of children cared for to enable them to fulfil their roles confidently. The carers feel appreciated and valued. During inspection, the manager acknowledged a carer's achievement by celebrating their 15 years as an approved carer. Monthly supervision and visits are purposeful, with a focus on appraising foster carers' ability to care for the children placed with them. The carers are reviewed every three years after their first annual review or earlier if needed. Carers feel comfortable knowing that the agency can be contacted 24 hours a day. The communications newsletter, annual carer steering groups and the annual Christmas party are notable improvements made by the agency for carers.

The staff at the agency are dedicated to their respective roles and believe in the ethos of the agency. The supervising social workers are qualified and have several years' experience of working with children who have disabilities. The group is made up of independent social workers and permanent staff who have worked for the agency for a considerable amount of time. All staff undertake training at regular intervals to enhance their professional development while being supervised as needed and with their performance appraised annually. The staff view changes in the agency over the past year as highly positive.

The statement of purpose has recently been updated to reflect the changes to management and staff. It provides a clear introduction and insight into the aims and objectives of the agency for anyone involved or interested in the service. The children's guide is made available to all young people in a format based on the picture exchange communication system.

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. Whenever 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 and 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: SC035250

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Inspector

James Harmon, social care inspector



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