

# Child Action NorthWest

Child Action NorthWest

Dixon House, Whalley Road, Wilshire, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 9LL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering charity

This independent fostering charity is part of a wider charitable organisation. Its main functions are to recruit, assess, approve, train and support foster carers. The service provides emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, therapeutic, step-down, and parent and child foster placements.

The manager was registered to manage the service in July 2017.

### Inspection dates: 2 to 6 October 2023

**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 charity provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 20 January 2020

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Children are making good progress from their starting points. Care planning is personalised and effective in meeting the children's holistic needs. Careful consideration is made to ensure that children are well matched in relation to their individual needs with the skill set of their foster carers. This results in placement stability for children. A commissioning professional said, 'Placement stability is high for this provider.'

Some children who have had disrupted education now attend full time and have 100% attendance. Children are offered education that meets their individual needs, and, when needed, includes various opportunities for formal or informal learning and apprenticeships. This supports children's learning, as well as supporting children to develop life skills.

Children are supported to stay with their foster carers after they have turned 18 years old. Furthermore, for children with disabilities, some carers are assessed to become 'Shared Lives' carers to continue caring for young people. This provides young people with continuity of care, stability and permanence into adulthood.

Children's physical and emotional needs are met well. For example, children are helped to improve their health and manage lifelong conditions. Foster carers are competent in managing medication for children's complex health needs. Children who are non-verbal are supported to actively participate in decisions about their lives. One professional said, '[The foster carer] is an exemplary carer. Due to the care and support she has provided, [the child] is unrecognisable.'

Children's views and voices are captured in records. This practice is strengthened by children having good relationships with their family's supervising social worker as children are regularly seen by them. Children recognise them as trusted adults. Children consistently provide their feedback as part of the annual review process, and their comments are considered and taken seriously.

The charity provides a wealth of regular opportunities, activities, awards and celebrations as part of their service. These are open to all children and foster carers. There has been a high number of compliments and positive feedback about these events from children and carers. Foster carers and children thoroughly enjoy taking part in these events.

As well as formal support, foster carers receive informal support from the staff team and each other. This includes weekly catch ups, a well-managed phone message group, and a mentor and budding system, which is particularly beneficial for new carers. The charity also rewards carers by sending out hampers and gifts that are individual to each child and carer. This makes foster carers feel valued and supported.

The charity promotes equality and diversity well. It ensures that foster carers have a good understanding of children's cultural identity and needs. Equality and diversity training is mandatory for all staff and foster carers.

Family time for children is well supported. The charity works well with placing authorities to ensure that children's time with family and significant people is promoted and is a positive experience for children.

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

Safeguarding practices are effective. Leaders and managers are committed to providing safe and secure foster homes for children. Risk assessments are clear and succinct and provide effective strategies for foster carers to manage children's individual risks. This supports foster carers to understand and respond to children's vulnerabilities.

Observations of interactions between children and foster carers are warm, loving and genuine. This supports children to build trust with their foster carers so that they can share any worries or concerns. Clear and consistent boundaries within foster carers' homes contribute to children receiving predictable and safe care.

There are a low number of incidents of children needing to be held by carers to keep them safe. When incidents do occur, records are shared with the charity and child's social worker, and foster carers have been appropriately trained. Records would benefit from direct management overview to strengthen the quality of care being provided, and this is currently being embedded within the charity's systems.

The assessment, recruitment and approval of foster carers is robust. All required checks are completed prior to the application being presented to panel. Detailed minutes of panel meetings reflect discussions that support recommendations. This supports the charity decision-maker to consider these minutes to make a robust decision about the applicant's suitability to foster.

The charity follows robust safer recruitment processes to ensure that all staff and panel members employed by the charity are suitably vetted prior to starting their employment. Children's safety is supported further by staff and foster carers being trained in safeguarding practices, and foster carers being trained in paediatric first aid.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure and protect children from harm or the risk of harm. Children with disabilities are cared for by foster carers who have all the necessary aids, adaptations and equipment needed to care for children safely.

Investigations into allegations are appropriately shared with the placing authority. Although these matters receive appropriate investigation from the local authority, not all safeguarding matters have been referred to the regulator. A requirement has been made to address this shortfall.

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

The Fostering Service is managed by a qualified and experienced registered person, who provides a high standard of care. The registered person is supported by a committed responsible individual who shares the same child-centred ethos.

Since the previous inspection, the charity has faced challenges with the recruitment of social workers and senior staff. In response to this, the charity paused the recruitment of new foster carers temporarily. Managers also held cases for a short period of time to support the remaining staff and foster carers. This minimised the impact on children, carers and staff.

Recent successful recruitment has meant that there is a full staff team and stability. The charity has now recruited an experienced and competent team manager. The team manager and registered person work interchangeably and complement each other's practice. Staff said that morale is high and staff feel valued. Children and foster carers benefit from this positive work environment.

Monitoring systems are an area of development that is recognised by the charity. For example, documents related to allegations are not of a consistent quality. Some records lack details of how the allegation was followed up, the actions taken and the decisions reached. There are plans in place to improve monitoring and recording systems.

Management meetings and full-team meetings happen regularly, are meaningful, and the minutes reviewed are of good quality. These meetings are a good opportunity for staff, leaders and managers to come together, reflect on practice, and strive to improve. All staff attend and have a voice in the group discussions. Actions are agreed together, with realistic timescales.

Foster carers receive effective training and supervision in respect of the individual needs of children. Foster carers spoke highly of the charity and are proud to work for a charity. One foster carer said, 'I love fostering and I have fostered for over 15 years for this charity and I am proud to be part of this charity and what they give back to children.'

There was not sufficient scrutiny of practice in relation to the quality of some foster carers' reviews, in which information had been duplicated. However, this had been identified and training was being provided to staff.

There is good multi-agency collaboration, and staff build effective relationships with professionals external to the charity. This means that children receive holistic care. One professional said, 'Communication is excellent, and they put the children at the heart of everything they do.'

## What does the independent fostering charity 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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for— improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering charity. (Regulation 35 (1)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that there are efficient and robust information technology systems that provide comprehensive information in a streamlined and consistent manner.</p>	10 November 2023
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering charity, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that all foster carer allegations are notified to the regulator.</p>	10 November 2023

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.8)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a record of any action taken and the decisions reached is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.7)

## **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 charity details**

**Unique reference number:** SC036972

**Registered provider:** Child Action NorthWest

**Registered provider address:** Child Action North West, Dixon House, Whalley Road, Wilpshire, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 9LL

**Responsible individual:** Susan Cotton

**Registered manager:** Winifred Dawkins

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## **Inspectors**

Nicola Clements, Social Care Inspector  
Jessica Higginson, Social Care Inspector

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