

Safehouses North Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Helen Humphreys
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Safe Houses North is a small independent Foster Care Agency, which was established in 1997 and, currently, has 25 carers caring for 33 children. The children and young people are placed by Local Authorities, mainly from the North East and North West of England. The agency offers a comprehensive support system to the carers, including access to the services of the National Teaching Advisory Service, out of hours support system and respite care. The agency provides care on a short and medium to long-term basis for children of all ages, including babies, siblings groups and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate mother and baby placements.

Summary

This inspection was announced. The agency has made improvements over the last 12 months and continues to provide a supportive service to the carers. The young people are well cared for and are making good progress. Carers and young people are satisfied with the service they are receiving. A small number of recommendations were made where practice could be further developed.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the agency has continued to develop the service and all the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been met. The panel chair and carers commented that the service has improved over the last 12 months. The agency has made changes in the management team and a new team manager has been appointed. The previous manager has been appointed as the training manager and is responsible for creating and delivering training and is developing training courses for other fostering services. The agency has appointed two new staff including a family support worker who is well experienced and has a range of skills and is providing additional support to carers. The agency has implemented a new system for unannounced visits to carers and all, in the previous 12 months have received at least one visit which is recorded on file. This also includes interviews with the children placed which are conducted without the presence of the carer. This has improved further the overall safety of the children placed. A new panel and panel chair has been appointed and this is no longer a joint panel with Premier Foster Care. The panel members have undertaken training and are developing their roles and responsibilities. The panel procedures have been revised. The manager has undertaken work to improve the overall standard of the carer's assessments to ensure that they are more analytical and that specific issues are explored in detail. The manager and staff have created a new policy and young people's hand book on developing independent living skills and this is supported by a training programme. The policy and handbook contains useful information for carers and young people. The agency has amended its procedures for re-assessing carers who become long term carers for specific young people which includes either the completion of a new report (F2) or an addendum to the original assessment. This is to ensure that specific issues relating to long term matching are addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The staff and carers promote the health care needs of the young people placed. Carers are aware of the health care needs of the children placed and have access to health care information and practitioners. Some carers are looking after children with specific health care needs. The carers have access to a range of training opportunities including emergency first aid, eating disorders and mental health matters. Health care needs are discussed during carer's supervision and health care actions are raised and monitored. Young people can record their health care information including appointments with health care practitioners in their own health care booklets. The agency has started to use the medical treatment authorisation cards produced by Fostering Network to ensure that appropriate authorisation has been obtained from the placing authorities. The carers do not currently receive copies of the health care action plans created following the statutory health care assessments undertaken by the placing authority health practitioners and which would provide additional information for the carer. The agency has taken part in health care initiatives in conjunction with Oldham Council and this provides opportunities for young people to gain specific awards.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency is managed by two well experienced and qualified social work practitioners and the division of responsibility is clear and well known. The manager is undertaking an additional management qualification. The recruitment and selection processes are clear and the staff personnel files contained all relevant information. The carers provide a good service to the young people and young people are satisfied with their bedrooms, which they do not have to share. Health and safety checklists, risk assessments and safe caring policies are in place. However on two files the safe caring policy had not been updated when a new young person had been placed, which means that specific safe caring matters have not been considered. The agency currently completes a risk assessment when a child is initially placed. This is not routinely updated and the present format does not create a risk management plan or indicate a risk 'rating'. Therefore the risk assessments do not highlight specific risks or provide adequate information for carers on how to manage the known risks. There is no process for monitoring and review. The matching procedure is appropriate and there have been very few placement break downs in the previous 12 months. Following placement break downs the agency reviews the placements and takes action as appropriate to support the carers and where required amend their procedures. The agency has difficulty in obtaining all the appropriate information from placing authorities, particularly at the time of referral and matching. It is important that the agency continue to obtain as much information as possible from the placing authority when matching to ensure that all matters have been considered. Carers are provided with training on safeguarding matters and there have been no child protection issues in the last 12 months. Unannounced visits are routinely undertaken to all carers and staff try to talk to young people on a regular basis. Few young people have been reported missing from home and the manager reviews all incidents. Carers and young people attend fire safety awareness activities at the local fire station and additional specific training has been offered to carers and older young people. The arrangements for the panel have recently changed, a new panel and panel members have been appointed. The panel chair is an experienced social work practitioner who is aware of her roles and responsibilities. The panel members have a range of knowledge and experience and the manager acts as the panel advisor. The panel undertakes a quality assurance role as well as reviewing thoroughly the panel business.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The carers are provided with training on matters relating to equality and diversity. Recent training has included caring for children who are refugees or asylum seekers. Carers who are looking after children with specific health care and cultural needs are well supported and aware of how to meet their needs and have undertaken additional training and research. All children are allocated a teacher from the National Teaching Advisory Service (NTAS), an organisation which works in partnership with the agency. The teachers provide a range of services including individual tutoring, support in schools and managing potentially difficult situations relating to education. Young people placed have all made good progress at school obtaining improved Standard Assessment Test (SATs) results and exclusions from school are limited. NTAS monitor regularly the progress being made by the children placed. The teachers support carers through individual sessions and training. Carers value this additional support and many indicate that this is one of the primary reasons they work for Safehouses. Most of the young people placed take part in a range of community based activities and this is monitored through carer's supervision. Young people are regularly awarded with certificates for individual achievement on a range of matters.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency promotes and supports carers in all matters relating to contact. Contact arrangements are recorded on file and taken into account when matching. Carers receive training on managing contact and this is discussed during carer's supervision. Young people are provided with information about contact in the children's guide. All young people know how to make a complaint. They are provided with information in the children's guide and are given contact cards should they need to contact a staff member quickly. Young people are encouraged to take part in the annual reviews of carers by completing a form regarding their views. The arrangements for statutory reviews of young people are good. The reports written by the agency and NTAS are thorough and clear. Young people are encouraged to attend and carers are supported by the agency. The agency is developing its consultation work with children and have plans in hand to develop children's groups for placed and birth children. Various activity days are arranged throughout the year providing an informal opportunity for staff to speak to children. The agency is working to develop a web site and some older young people have contributed to its development.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency has reviewed all its work in relation to long term matching, developing independent skills and providing information to carers. A new policy and advice for carers and a new handbook called 'On the road to independence' has been created. Both documents provide good and useful information for young people and their carers. Carers have also been provided with relevant training. Over the last 12 months the agency has undertaken some long term matching reports with carers who have been matched. These reports explore additional issues relating to the care of young people as they progress into adolescence.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The statement of purpose and children's guide have been revised and the children's guide provides good information and additional booklets for children placed. The management and staffing arrangements are clear and known and staff are well supported through supervision and training opportunities. The staff work loads are manageable and staff are given opportunities to develop their skills and experiences. The agency is well managed. The agency has a sufficient number of staff for the work to be undertaken. They have a range of skills and knowledge and are able to provide a good service. Over the last 12 months the agency has developed their recruitment material and this has resulted in a number of enquiries from prospective carers resulting in the assessment of four new carers and more planned. The agency is seeking to recruit carers with specific skills to meet the needs where possible of the placing authorities. The standard of assessment have improved over the last 12 months and more attention is now given to the analysis of the information provided and the exploration of specific issues. The staff routinely interview previous partners and adult children to ensure that as far as possible all information is known and considered. The agency continues to provide a good supportive service to carers, which include regular visits, detailed and thorough supervision sessions, out of hours support, training and social activities. Carers commented positively on how well they are supported by the agency. The case records and administrative records are in good order with a range of information of carer's and children's files available. The files are securely maintained. The agency is well supported by able administrative staff.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- obtain the health care action plans from the placing authority (NMS 12.3)
- ensure that safe caring policies are updated when a new child is admitted in a placement (NMS 9.3)
- ensure that written risk assessments identify all known risks and are monitored and reviewed (NMS 6.1)
- continue to develop the plans for more consultation with young people (NMS 11.1)
- continue to obtain as much available information from placing authorities, particularly at the point of referral and matching. (NMS 8.2)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.