

# Barnardo's Apex Project

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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**

The 'Apex Project', operates through the wider charitable organisation, Barnardos, and is registered as an independent fostering agency, situated in Southborough, Tunbridge Wells. According to its Statement of Purpose, the agency aims to work in a planned and proactive way, therefore, the agency generally does not accept emergency referrals. The agency accommodates children with disabilities, sibling groups and has a service level agreement with Kent County Council to provide placements for asylum-seeking youngsters. At the time of this visit, 20 foster carer families were working for the agency and 15 children and young people were in placement.

### **Summary**

This was an announced visit carried out over four days. The overall care provided to the foster carers and young people is very good, however the agency is not consistent with paperwork. A overall strength of the agency is its staffing structure. The agency is led by an experienced and motivated registered manager, whose inclusive style of management ensures the staff team feels valued and very much involved with the service delivery. This approach is then delivered to the foster carers, who also feel consulted and valued. As a relatively small agency, the staff all have a good understanding of the support needs of the foster carers and those placed with them. Carers are particularly positive about contacting the office for support, as they know everyone working there and feel the out of hours service is excellent. Careful matching processes ensure that placements are only made based upon sound assessments. The agency very rarely engages with emergency placements. The agency has developed an expertise in working with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The agency has worked hard on ensuring the health training for carers is developed and have worked jointly with the looked after children's nurse to provide this. The recording and reviewing systems have been improved and continue to be worked on. The staff now have flexible working arrangements and work from home unless covering the office as the on call duty worker. This period of great change for all the staff meant the quality of recording and paperwork had slipped. However they are aware of what changes need to be made to ensure unity and structure of recording is returned to a good standard again. During the inspection the manager and social workers evidenced ways they were improving the format and recording in several key areas, and these were being developed and implemented.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is satisfactory.

The young people have all been supported to access regular and specialist health care services. All young people are registered with local health care practices, including doctors, dentists and opticians. The looked after children annual medicals are attended but the agency's recording of these is poor. The agency's health section kept on file varies from no detail to limited. Most files have no health plans from local authorities. The agency's log of incidents and health appointments on the carers' records being completed by the social workers lack consistency

and structure. The agency has formed good liaisons with the looked after children's nurse and together they are setting up all of next year's training. The focus of which is to concentrate on all areas of health e.g. health care for foster children, emotional wellbeing, sexual wellbeing and health question and answer sessions. Young people will be invited to attend sexual health training as appropriate to their age and understanding. They are also invited to attend the last session covering all health issues in a question and answer type setting. The agency does not provide written health records that are updated during the placement and will move with the young person. The carers do not have a signed consent card with delegated rights afforded to them. The agency does not provide health training for young people, in preventative measures, such as healthy eating and advice on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances. The agency has addressed these issues with a new foster carer handbook and health passports, and when these are issued it will contain all the above lacking information on health and health related issues.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The manager has many years of experience in social care and is suitable to manage the service and promote the welfare of the young people. The staff team possess the qualifications and experience commensurate with their roles and function. Checks and references are carried out in a comprehensive manner, and renewed as required, telephone enquiries are made to follow up any written references. The young people can be assured that the agency will provide suitable foster carers. Foster parents' homes were visited; each was comfortably furnished and decorated, and able to accommodate all who lived there with no obvious health and safety hazards noted. The agency does not complete yearly health and safety checks in conjunction with annual reviews. There was clear written guidance pertaining to the agency's health and safety policy and procedure, which is an individual check for each child when they move into the foster home. The young people's rooms that were seen were all personalised and they allowed for privacy and space. Matching is a careful well thought out process in the agency with team meetings discussing all referrals received and carers available. The social work staff will also attend any local authority panels for long term placements and present a written report. The agency worker for asylum seekers has her own matching processes which enables a swift but planned response to emergency arrivals. However the agency does not complete matching paperwork or identify any deficits in the match and keep it on the foster carer's file. Children and young people are protected from potential harm and abuse by robust and sound child protection systems. All reports of abuse and neglect are scrutinised by the manager and social workers of the agency. Child protection policies and procedures are being revised, updated and communicated to all staff and carers. Carers undertake annual mandatory child protection training, this was recently completed. Carers do not maintain and update their own individual safe care policies, which could be monitored through the annual review process. Staff files are of a good quality and ensure that the staff are suitable to work with young people. They consistently hold all the relevant paperwork in a clear and concise manner. There are rigorous safeguarding checks for all people working in or for the agency, and all have had enhanced checks through the Criminal Records Bureau. Checks on identity and qualifications have been completed along with full employment histories. Written references are followed up by telephone verification. Recruitment and selection policies and procedures follow good practice guidelines in safeguarding young people. The panel consists of a wide range of child care professionals, and independent members, including the Chair and Vice Chair. All members have been recruited subject to providing appropriate references and checks, conducted by the agency. Access to medical expertise is in place, the Registered Manager routinely attends panel meetings. Panel

members receive the necessary documentation in good time and the Chair requires every member to actively contribute at the meeting. However more of a quality assurance role needs to be placed upon examining an applicant's ability to attend training and uphold the professional side of the fostering task. Annual reviews are up to date. The documentation for this process includes seeking the views and opinions of the foster carers, the young people in placement, placing authorities and birth children. Safe care policies and updated health and safety checks are not scrutinised. The panel are not checking if the foster carer agreement is being adhered to.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Sound and robust policies and procedures remain in place with regards to equal opportunities and valuing diversity. This is demonstrated in practice through the agency's recruitment procedures of foster carers and staff, and within the agency's strong commitment to provide a wide and diverse group of foster carers. The agency also has a service level agreement with Kent County Council to provide placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. The agency is looking to further expand this work to support them further when they move on to independent living. The lead project development worker undertakes training for the agency and its carers, on cultural competency to help build knowledge and new learning experiences. Some examples of the work with the asylum seeking young people, is for all Muslim children to get given a compass to assist them to pray, the agency ensures they also have prayer mats and any culturally sensitive equipment. All carers are given phrase books for their young person's language. The agency is also exploring training with the Imam from the local Mosque. The carers work hard at ensuring the young people can access local groups and pursue their interests, by ensuring they have equal access to opportunities and leisure activities. Foster carers confirmed they received excellent support with regards any specialist needs, including funding, adaptations to their homes, equipment, additional support for their child at school and specific training for them as carers. The agency provides for all young people including birth children, a monetary token for birthdays, Christmas and other religious festivals and any significant achievements. The young people all commented on this and felt included into the agency's extended family. All care files hold a separate 'education' section, but they don't all have an up to date 'Personal Education Plan' (PEP) in place or recent school reports. The new monthly reports, to be completed by the social workers, will include details of educational attendance, attainment and needs. This information will then be used by the agency for ongoing monitoring purposes. Foster carers are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in terms of promoting educational achievement. The households visited offer appropriate resources, such as quiet space, computer access and books. Foster carers attend school meetings and open events and 100% of the young people in the agency are in school places or college. Financial assistance may be given if needed, for example, to purchase school uniform and in the event of temporary exclusions or a school place not being immediately secured, the agency provides additional relevant support through paying for tutors with an in-house grant. Barnardos recognises achievements in education and will reward with financial incentives.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

The agency promotes good contact arrangements for the young people; included in the foster carers handbook is policy and guidelines regarding promoting and supervising contact. The

agency provides training that sets out the principles and expectations that foster carers are expected to adhere to and the arrangements to support them in facilitating contact. The records monitor and review contact arrangements and the views of the young person are sought in determining future arrangements. Team meetings discuss placement updates and all contact arrangements for young people and carers. The agency does not directly have any contact facilities but can help with transport or financial support as required. Records indicate that children's opinions have been sought prior to their own reviews and that of their foster carer's review. Children and young people spoken to described means by which they had been consulted for example reviews, evaluation forms every term, the opportunity to attend groups and events set up by the service. As part of the agency's participation strategy they hold regular and planned events for young people and foster carers. In the summer they held an Apex family day with Caribbean food and steel drums, however the sunshine was missing. Barnardos has a children's rights officer and along with a member of staff from Apex spoke to both birth children and foster children during days out last year. This was to find out their opinions on what makes an ideal foster carer and what makes a not so good carer. The agency has just started a specific course designed and presented by ex looked after young people to the foster carers called "Total respect". Barnardos have an in-house grant system, where staff make an application for their young person by requesting further funds to help them towards a short fall from local authority e.g. tutoring or educational support, outward bound course, equipment for disability aids.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The statement of purpose provides an accurate account of the services provided. There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the service and it has recently been revised and is updated on a yearly basis. The fostering service's policies and procedures along with any guidance accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose. A children's guide to the service is suitable for all the young people fostered and has been translated into their preferred language. This guide is also available in two child friendly formats one for older and one for younger children. The children and young people's guide to the fostering service includes information about how to complain or to raise concerns in relation to their being in foster care. The young people were spoken to by the agency about the handbook and offered the view that they had found it helpful and reassuring especially in the early stages of their placement. The staff are organised and managed in an effective and efficient way. Management structure has clear lines of accountability and although the manager divides his time between this agency and other projects, this does not appear to adversely affect the running of the project. The agency provides a sufficient number of staff to meet the needs of its foster carers. Staff receive ongoing supervision and appraisal. There was no staff training completed this year and Barnardos has not reviewed the terms and conditions of the staff. The social work staff maintain their own records and complete monthly reports, these lack structure and can be of a variable standard. The staff are however acutely aware of the fostering task and what it means for the individual in their direct care and are dedicated to this role. This is a long term stable group of staff who are able to be seconded out of the project to get additional experience in other fields. They are also keen to take the lead roles and get involved in new projects within their own agency. The agency is looking at jointly funding a post between Apex and Kent County Council for

recruiting and organising volunteers to support asylum seeking youngsters who are living in the community independently. They are also putting together a proposal for Apex to directly manage and supervise this service, but will also receive support from the Asylum seeking team. The agency are also looking to set up a pilot to approve lodgings for semi independent care for young people at the end of their foster placement. There is a clear written strategy in place for working with carers. Foster carers receive regular support visits and professional supervision. Foster carers, through their returned questionnaires reported good communication with the agency and confirmed that all carers receive regular, recorded supervision. 'Out of Hours' support was described as "excellent" and very accessible. The carers also all receive respite breaks with the foster children going to the same respite carer or a family member if possible, this helps to relieve the risk of placement breakdown. Ongoing support groups and training sessions bring the agency staff and foster carers together on a regular basis. This enables effective communication between the two groups however arrangements in place for training and development of the carers are not always taken up in a significant way. The case records for the young people are of variable standards and in most of the cases the information is in place but is held on an electronic data base. There are files that do not hold all of the relevant information. There is a system of file auditing in place but this is not managing the joint system. In most cases it is clear that the up to date information, for example health and education sections, are not cross referenced to both filing systems. The agency's administration records contain all the required information in a comprehensive way. The organisation software information system does not aid the staff and it is not easy to navigate around it. Written 'Foster Carer Agreements' are not detailed specifying the role of the carer and what steps will be taken if not followed. The agency and its foster carers need to know what to expect of one another.

## 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
12	maintain an up to date record of children and young people's health which is transferable with the young person Regulation 15(2)	30 November 2007
8	make specific reference to matching in any Foster Placement Agreement Regulation 12(1a)	31 December 2007
9	ensure a yearly health and safety check is taking place Regulation 29(4a)	30 November 2007
9	ensure that safe caring guidelines are in place for each foster home. Regulation 12(1a)	31 December 2007
23	provide an on going programme of training and development for foster carers Regulation 17 (1)	31 December 2007



24	ensure that foster carers keep up to date records of the children and young people they care for. Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6	31 December 2007
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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):

- ensure the agency provides health training for young people, in preventative measures, such as healthy eating and advice on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances. NMS 12
- ensure panel upholds its quality assurance role and monitors the suitability of the foster carers if not undertaking all the required professional tasks. NMS 30
- ensure all educational information is up to date and complete NMS 13
- ensure the data system and case files accurately hold the required information NMS 24

## 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.**