

Children Of Colour Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Peter Daniel
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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

Children of Colour is a small independent fostering agency based in South London, near Croydon. The majority of its foster carers live in the vicinity. Children of Colour primarily places children from Black, Asian and mixed parent backgrounds into families of a similar background. The agency provides emergency, respite, short and long-term foster placements for children up to the age of 18 years as well as mother and baby placements.

Summary

The agency has addressed the need to be more robust in its management, as discussed below. The agency is a well run service and staff and foster carers are being effectively managed and supervised. Foster carers feel they are fully supported. The fostering panel has recently been reconstituted. The overall impression is that Children of Colour is an organisation committed to achieving good standards and conveys a culture of improvement.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection report highlighted the agency's need to develop a more robust management approach, mainly in relation to obtaining better information on the child prior to placement and putting in place information systems to monitor children's educational achievements. The agency has achieved this and is undertaking a quarterly analysis of children in placement. As part of its more robust approach, the agency is also carrying out file audits. Information held on files was seen to be in excellent order.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children of Colour promotes the health and development of children in placement to a good standard. Each child and young person is receiving health care which meets his/her needs. Children are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician and all appropriate health checks and immunisations are undertaken. Children have been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as appropriate. Young people are offered sexual health advice. Foster carers give advice to children/young people about healthy eating and children receive a balanced diet. In addition to the child's Looked After Medical Record, the agency has produced a medical record/health passport for each child in placement. Health and safety checks of the foster home are undertaken. Foster carers have attended training in first aid and safe caring. The agency has produced a medical record/health passport for each child. The agency also includes a copy of Looked After Children (LAC) medical on file. The agency has a system for flagging up medical checks for foster carers. Young people attend CAMHS, annual LAC medicals, vaccinations, ophthalmic review, dental checks and activities such as netball, physical education lessons, dance classes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff and foster carers who work for Children of Colour are suitable to work with children and there are appropriate recruitment and selection procedures in place. Up to date records of Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are held on staff and foster carers' files. The agency has an effective system for flagging up the renewal of Criminal Record checks every three years. Checks are also undertaken on Fostering Panel members and external consultants. The inspection revealed that three external staff had up to date Criminal Record Bureau checks which had been applied for through another agency. Children of Colour has been informed of the guidance on portability of Criminal Record checks and the agency has since made fresh CRB applications on behalf of these staff. Staff are fully aware of the agency's child protection procedures and understand the principle of working in partnership with Social Services and the Police. The agency has been advised that it must ensure that it has a system for recording and notifying significant events as listed under Schedule 8. This has been included as an action. Foster carers have attended training on safe caring and are aware of the agency's Safe Care Policy and signed copies are held on foster carers' files. Health and safety checks of foster carers homes are carried out but need to be updated as part of the Annual Review. This has been included as a Recommendation. Unannounced visits are taking place but it was noted that the Responsible Person whose expertise is in finance and accountancy had accompanied the Manager on some of the visits. An action has been set to ensure that unannounced visits are carried out by staff who have the skills and experience necessary for this function. Foster carers are provided with full information about the foster child and there is adequate information available prior to placement. The inspection of case files showed evidence that children were matched appropriately to placements. Records on file showed that the agency takes appropriate details at the point of referral. The agency has implemented a protocol for placements and referrals ensuring that placements are consistent with approval terms.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency through its foster carers is actively involved in promoting educational achievement. Foster carers attend parent evenings, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, liaise with teachers, schools and colleges and provide a quiet place for homework. Foster carers help young people with their homework. Foster carers help children/young people complete PEP targets. Young people are being helped with literacy and numeracy and help children and young people access the library and computer. Foster carers help initiate tutorial sessions where appropriate. Foster carers discuss attendance at school clubs with young people. Foster carers are asked to inform the agency about children/young people's achievements and these are reported in the Children of Colour's news letter. The agency has systems in place to monitor each child's education. Carers are expected to complete monthly progress reports about the placement which covers the child's progress at school. The agency has started to provide statistics which analyses all children in placement in terms of school attendance and exclusions and home tutoring. Children have Personal Education Plans. Young people are encouraged to take part in social activities such as shopping, church, youth centre, mosque, swimming, cycling, trampolining, cinema, trips to museums and football. Foster carers and children have recently been on a day trip to Chessington World of Adventures, organised by the fostering agency. The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and updated to include the promotion of equality and diversity. The foster care service recognises the child's needs in terms of religion, ethnic origin, language and culture. For example, Muslim children are offered Halal meat and attend mosque. West African children are provided with a culturally appropriate diet. Children attend cultural events.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service makes sure that children and young people are actively encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. Foster carers are facilitating planned contact with parents and relatives at the placement or contact centres as well as indirect contact with relatives. The fostering service ensures that children know how to raise concerns and complaints and that children's opinions and views are sought. Children and young people attend their own reviews and complete a consultation form beforehand. The agency's Supervising Social Worker also attends the child/young person's Looked After review. The Children's Guide contains information about what children need to do if they wish to make a complaint and about such matters as abuse, bullying or their general care. In most cases children/young people would initially talk to their social worker. It is recommended in this report that the agency should update the information in the Children's Guide to include contact phone numbers and websites of the NSPCC 'There4Me', Voice and Ofsted -Standard 11.5.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children of Colour encourages young people in preparing them for independent living and adulthood. The agency has a policy on Promoting Independence. Foster carers provide life training and independent living skills training to young people and teach them how to shop, prepare meals, do their own laundry, budget and self-care skills. Young people are being referred to Connexions for vocational advice. Foster carers who have young people placed have been given an 'independence toolkit' which is a guide for careers supporting young people towards independence.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has 25 foster carers and 25 children in placement; six foster carers are without placements. The majority of foster carers are Afro-Caribbean. There are also West African, Asian and white carers. The great majority of the foster carers live in the vicinity of South London. The fostering service has an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff. The agency is managed by two directors. One director is the Registered manager. She has a Diploma in Social Work and Diploma in Management with experience and a background of Local Authority Social Work, including child protection and fostering. She is supervised by an external consultant once a month. The other director is the Responsible Person and has a background in accountancy and finance. There are two Supervising Social Workers. One has a Diploma in Social Work and a Post Qualifying 1 award. Her duties are to support foster carers and undertake a small number of assessments. The other Supervising Social Worker does not have a social work qualification but will start a degree in Social Work (one day a week) in January 2008. Her duties are to offer support to families. She does not undertake assessments. There is an administration officer who is part time (three days per week). Staff are properly accountable and supported. Both Supervising Social Workers are supervised by the Registered Manager. The agency employs five independent assessors who undertake Form F assessments. They are supervised monthly by an Independent Consultant who also undertakes quality assurance of the Form F's. The latter is supervised by the Team Manager. The office administrator is supervised by the responsible individual. Staff confirmed that they are satisfied with the support given by

management. Staff have the opportunity to attend regular staff meetings and management meetings and team meetings take place once a month. The agency provides staff training. Since the last inspection, staff have attended British Adoption and Fostering Agency (BAAF) training in undertaking Form F assessments and supporting black children in placement. The independent assessors have attended in-house training on Form F assessments. The fostering panel attends training once a year. Up to the present time, one of the Supervising Social Workers has undertaken the annual reviews of foster carers. In order to bring about more objectivity, the agency has appointed an Independent Reviewing Officer who will start early next year. The agency has procedures for monitoring its activities. It has endeavoured to bring about more robust practices in its management of the service. The Statement of Purpose has been updated, as have policies and procedures. Children of Colour has improved its monitoring through better collection of data. It has initiated a quarterly analysis of children in placement. The data collected includes statistics for the number of children in placement, their age, ethnicity, the number of unaccompanied minors, revenues from placement and income per placement. The agency has also improved the information collected at the point of referral for matching. Foster carers are supported and appropriately trained. Foster carers are visited monthly and receive a weekly phone call. There is also a 24 hour duty service. Foster carers receive monthly supervision. The supervision agenda covers the five outcomes in Every Child Matters. Fostering carers have been encouraged to do NVQ training, 10 foster carers started NVQ training in September. In addition, the agency is using the Fostering Network to carry out its training programme for this year. Training has included the following courses:- child development, managing allegations, recordkeeping, working with children who have been abused; an introduction to working with asylum seeking children, promoting independence, challenging behaviour, sexual abuse, first aid, safe caring and record keeping. A group of 10-12 core carers attend the majority of the training but the agency is still presented with the challenge of trying to get all foster carers to attend as part of the fostering agreement. Foster carers reported that there should be more advanced training for those carers with more experience. The agency will provide child care if necessary. The agency runs a 'skills to fostering' course for new applicants. There are currently five to six applicants doing the course. The fostering support group meets monthly. About 50%-60% of foster carers attend regularly. Overall, the foster carers reported that they are very pleased with the support they get from the agency. They feel that there is good communication and that the management of the agency are approachable. The agency organises outings and a Christmas party for its carers and young people. The agency has excellent standards regarding the keeping of records for foster carers and children. Files have clear information and are divided into appropriate sections. Foster carers' files include a 'working file' and a pre-approval file. Records are extremely well kept and include weekly contact sheets, monthly supervision records, and the Form F, training details history, allegations, monthly progress reports, supervision agreement, safe care policy, letter of re-approval and a copy of the annual review and the decision. It is recommended that each carer's annual review includes an appraisal of training and development which is documented in the review report. Children's files include the child's Essential Information Record, Placement Plan, Placement Information Record, Care Plan and Statutory Review Record and monthly progress reports completed by the foster carer. The fostering agency has ensured that the file includes an up to date comprehensive case record for each child which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. The agency has a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records and carries out monthly audits of foster carers and children's files. Foster carers are sent letters reminding them to complete monthly record sheets. The fostering panel has recently been re-constituted with new members. The panel chair is a qualified Social worker

who has over 20 years experience of managing Adoption and Fostering services. The new panel consists of a Local Authority Team Manager, a foster carer, an ex young person in care, an Education Welfare Officer and one of the agency's supervising social workers. A Consultant Paediatrician acts as an external medical consultant and assesses medical information. A recommendation has been included that the panel should include someone with a health/nursing background. Inspection of panel minutes showed that the panel is robust in its decision making. The fostering agency is financially viable and able to fulfil its obligations.

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
15	ensure that the agency carries out all Criminal Record Bureau checks and applies the Criminal Record Bureau's current code of practice on portability of disclosures - Regulation 15.	28 February 2008
4	ensure that notifiable incidents, as listed under Schedule 8, are recorded and notified to the agencies indicated in column 2 of the table (Regulation 43 (1).	29 March 2008
4	ensure that monitoring activities include the separate logging of significant incidents and complaints as set out in Schedule 7 (Regulation 42.1)	29 March 2008
2	ensure that unannounced visits are carried out by staff with the qualifications, skills and experience necessary - Regulation 20.3 (b)	29 March 2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the children's guide updates the information of advocacy services should children wish to raise concerns or invoke a complaint. - NMS 11.5
- ensure there are systems for recording allegations and complaints and which can be used for monitoring purposes - NMS 25.13
- ensure health and safety checks are undertaken annually and are part of the Annual Review - NMS 6.1
- ensure that each carer's annual review includes an appraisal of training and development and which is documented in the annual review report NMS 23.8
- ensure that one of the independent members of the fostering panel is someone with expertise in child health - NMS 30.8

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.