

Banya Family Placement Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC033818
Inspection date	25 September 2007
Inspector	Elisabeth Brunton
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	25 September 2007

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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

Banya Family Placement Agency (Banya) is an independent fostering agency which has been established for 10 years. The primary role of the agency is to recruit, approve and support a diverse range of foster carers for looked after children. Banya is a private limited company with two directors, one of whom is the social work director and designated decision maker. The other director has a lead role in administration and finance and represents the agency as the designated responsible individual. The day-to-day management of the service is delegated to the fostering manager, though the additional post of service manager has recently been established and recruited to. The agency employs a number of social workers and administrators, both as permanent and sessional staff. The office premises are located in a small commercial estate, close to transport links and other facilities. At the time of the inspection, the agency has 46 approved fostering households and 70 young people in placement.

Summary

The inspection was announced and carried out by one inspector over four days. The directors, manager and a number of the social work staff were interviewed. Three foster carers and young people in placement were visited and additional foster carers spoken to. The views of placing social workers were also sought. It was not possible to attend a meeting of the fostering panel, as one was not scheduled to take place around the time of the inspection. However, the panel chair was spoken to and records of recent panels inspected. Other records were looked at, including foster carer and staff records. Completed questionnaires were received from a number of foster carers and fostered young people prior to the inspection. Young people are well matched with foster carers, who are providing good care in safe and comfortable homes. Placements are stable and many have become long term. Young people's health care, diversity and educational needs are being well met and good support is given to young people in maintaining contact with their families. Placing social workers are confident that young people are safe in placement and staff and foster carers are aware of the importance of safe caring. Child protection concerns have mostly been properly dealt with but proper procedure was not followed in one case. Staff are able and experienced. Recruitment checks are in place for staff, foster carers and panel members and are regularly updated. The agency's joint fostering panel is properly constituted, has an experienced and independent chair and is functioning well. The service is well managed and the work of the agency is monitored. Staffing levels are adequate for the size of the agency and the staff group is stable and effective. Assessments of prospective foster carers are reasonably thorough, though recommendations are made for improvement. Foster carers are very well supported and supervised, a good range of training is provided and foster carers' approval is regularly reviewed. Records are mostly comprehensive and well maintained.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There have been a significant number of improvements in the service provided by the agency since the last inspections and the requirements made have been met. Staff recruitment is thorough and previous recruitment has been reviewed and outstanding references obtained. Effective quality assurance mechanisms are in place. The terms of approval of foster carers are

clear, realistic and justified through assessment and the matching of young people is sound and in line with foster carers' terms of approval. No exemptions to the usual fostering limit have been sought and notifications to foster carers about their approval and the register of foster carers are accurate.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Foster carers are ensuring that young people's health care needs are met and this is confirmed by placing social workers. Young people say they get the advice and support they need in order to stay healthy. They are registered with general practitioners and attend the necessary dental, optician and any other healthcare appointments. Foster carers are encouraging young people to lead healthy lifestyles, by providing nutritious food and opportunities for physical activity. Foster carers are also demonstrating understanding and skill in caring for young people with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autistic spectrum disorder. These carers have been well supported by the agency and training has been provided. The agency has recently engaged the sessional services of a child and adolescent psychologist, who is currently providing advice and guidance to foster carers and supervising social workers. Foster carers report on the health care provided for each young person in four-monthly reports to the agency. Supervising social workers also monitor this in monthly progress records. However, the agency and foster carers are not provided with written information about all young people's health care needs by placing authorities and signed consents to emergency treatment are not regularly made available. In addition to the training mentioned above, foster carers are expected to undertake training in first aid and drug awareness training was recently provided. Training in health and hygiene issues, including health promotion, has not recently been offered. Some guidance on meeting young people's health care needs is included in the foster carers' handbook but the information included on health promotion is brief.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The necessary references and checks were undertaken for the responsible individual and the manager at the time of registration. The directors and manager confirm that they have up-to-date Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. The social work director and registered manager are both qualified and experienced social workers and have recently completed post-qualifying training. The directors and manager continue to demonstrate that they are suitable people to be providing and managing a fostering service. Foster carers are providing good care to young people. Placements are generally stable, many have become long-term and some foster carers are considering special guardianship. Almost all young people who gave their views reported that they always feel well cared for in their foster homes. Foster carers demonstrate concern for and attachment to the young people placed with them and good understanding of their needs. Young people are well integrated into foster carers' families and placing social workers are pleased with the care given. Foster carers' accommodation seen was comfortable and sufficiently spacious and health and safety checks on foster carers' homes are regularly undertaken. All the necessary references and checks are taken up as part of foster carers' assessments and records show that these are regularly updated. The matching of young people with foster carers is undertaken by the agency's social workers, in consultation with the manager. Foster carers' terms of approval are clear and matching is in line with this. The directors report only one placement made outside a foster carer's terms of approval since the last

inspection. This is said to have been agreed by the social work director and panel chair and the foster carer's approval was subsequently varied by the fostering panel. The matching process takes account of young people's racial and cultural backgrounds and the agency does well at placing siblings together. The manager is committed to proposing only those foster carers to local authorities who represent appropriate matches for young people. Foster carers do not report being approached to take young people outside their terms of approval and only one example of this was noted. Most foster carers report that the information received about young people prior to placement is good or satisfactory. However, full written information is not always subsequently provided and this is dealt with under a later standard. Placement agreement meetings are normally held for new placements, at which expectations, roles and responsibilities are agreed. However, the agency does not always have a record of the agreements made. Placing social workers are confident that young people are safe in placement. Foster carers are aware of the importance of safe caring and support young people in learning to keep themselves safe. Training for foster carers in child protection was provided last year. There have been three reported child protection allegations against foster carers since the beginning of the year. These were dealt with promptly by the agency, proper procedure was followed and none resulted in full child protection investigations. The necessary follow-up work was undertaken by the agency's social work staff but this was not fully recorded in all cases. A further child protection allegation was recently made against a foster carer. The agency responded promptly, visited the foster home, investigated and found no evidence. However, neither the foster carer's local authority or the placing authority were notified, in line with the agency's procedure. It was not a serious allegation and the senior member of staff who responded to the allegation established that the young adult in question was not at risk and that no abuse had occurred. The recording of events relating to the allegation was also limited. The directors are aware of this failure to follow proper procedure, in order to ensure the safety and well being of young people and undertake to establish additional safeguards without delay. In the light of the agency's otherwise strong provision for protecting young people and their positive track record for making improvements where necessary, the provision in this outcome area is still assessed as good. Foster carers are provided with copies of the agency's safe caring policy but safe caring guidelines for each fostering household, based on this policy, are not yet in place. Foster carers are responding thoughtfully and constructively to young people's behaviour. Sanctions appear to be used infrequently and there is no evidence of unacceptable sanctions being used. Social workers report that foster carers use effective strategies for dealing with young people's behaviour, such as taking up issues at times when young people are receptive. Foster carers have recently been provided with a number of training courses dealing with this aspect of care and brief information is included in their handbook. No young people report being bullied in foster homes. The agency employs suitable social work and administrative staff and those spoken to during the inspection were knowledgeable, able and committed to providing a good service. Since the last inspection, the recruitment checks for all staff have been reviewed, using a comprehensive checklist. Recent staff recruitment has been thorough and all the necessary references and checks are in place. The agency has a shared panel with another fostering provider. It is a properly constituted panel and membership is diverse in terms of experience, racial background and gender. However, the panel does not currently have a member who has been placed with foster carers or whose own child has. The panel chair is independent, qualified and experienced and exercises her responsibilities robustly. The panel also has access to legal and medical expertise, as required. It was not possible to attend the panel as part of this inspection, as a meeting was not scheduled. However, comprehensive minutes of the three most recent panels and discussion with the panel chair demonstrate that these panels were

quorate, cases were dealt with thoroughly, pertinent issues raised and appropriate decisions made. Panel members undertake annual training jointly with the agency's staff and the chair feeds back to the directors and manager about the quality of work presented to the panel. The social work director acts as decision maker for the agency. She is independent of the panel and has accepted the recommendations of the panel. Foster carers and applicants attend panel and are notified of the decisions made. Panel's written procedure does not include the process for decision making, including those situations where all panel members are not in agreement.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency's staff and foster carers are from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Diversity needs are considered in matching and young people are pleased to be placed with foster carers who share their racial and cultural backgrounds. The agency has recently developed a policy for trans-racial and trans-cultural placements, which sets out what needs to be done to ensure that young people's needs are met in these placements. Foster carers show respect for young people's choice of religion and support them in practising religions which differ from their own. Other young people benefit from involvement with their foster carers' places of worship and enjoy the activities provided. Foster carers encourage young people in developing their interests and talents and are providing good support to young people with disabilities, in partnership with local services. Young people are receiving very good support from foster carers in their education and this is confirmed by placing social workers. Foster carers guide young people in their choice of school or college, liaise closely with schools, sensitively encourage reluctant young people back into education and show pride in young people's achievements. Most young people confirm that they always get the right help, so that they can be successful in their education. Foster carers and supervising social workers regularly report in writing on young people's educational progress and any issues arising. Young people are provided with the facilities for study and most young people have access to a computer at home. The agency is developing a policy on the expectations of foster carers in this area. Training has recently been provided for foster carers on looked after young people in the school system and training on playing with children is about to be given. The foster carers' handbook includes brief guidance on meeting young people's educational needs but this could be expanded to include promoting education in the broader sense.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Foster carers appreciate the importance to young people of maintaining contact with family and friends and are giving good support in this area. Foster carers establish positive relationships with birth families and are working successfully in partnership with parents whose children are accommodated by local authorities. Foster carers invite family members to their homes and accompany young people on visits to other family members. Foster carers are also to be commended for facilitating continued birth family contact after adoption and special guardianship. The agency provides support through escorting young people to contact meetings, supervising and providing a venue for contact. Foster carers demonstrate sensitivity and understanding of young people's attachment to their birth families and consequent feelings of loss. Young people say they can talk to their foster carers and that they know who to speak to if they are not happy or have a problem. Placing social workers consider that foster carers communicate well with young people. Young people who gave their views were divided as to

whether foster carers always or usually listen and take notice of their opinions and not all young people feel their views are sufficiently taken into account when important decisions, such as choice of school, are being made. Training for foster carers in this area has not recently been provided. Foster carers act as advocates for young people, supporting them in making their views known to other services. Young people are given written information about the agency's complaints procedure and say they know how to complain. The agency is to be commended for organising regular children's forums for fostered young people and foster carers' birth children. An independent facilitator runs these sessions, at which young people's views are explored through activity and discussion.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers allowances are above the minimum rates recommended by the Fostering Network and are paid directly into their bank accounts. No delays are reported. Young people are provided with pocket money and clothing allowances and foster carers save for them. An annual holiday allowance for young people and foster carers is included in the weekly payments made, though this does not adequately finance some of the family holidays taken by foster carers, in which fostered young people are included. This issue is common to other fostering services and one over which foster carers, staff and the agency's directors continue to negotiate. Foster carers are given detailed information about the breakdown of their allowances.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has a comprehensive Statement of Purpose, which has been recently reviewed and updated. The children's guides contain brief information about what the agency sets out to do and about how to complain. The service is well managed by an able, experienced and qualified manager. The manager is in close touch with the service and staff find her accessible and supportive. Lines of accountability are clear. The new post of service manager has recently been recruited to, with a view to the directors reducing their direct involvement in the work of the service. Staff are regularly supervised and have annual appraisals. Staff and management meetings take place and the manager regularly monitors the work of her team. Monitoring of those matters listed under schedule 7 to the regulations is regularly carried out by the social work director. The agency has suitable premises, with space for meetings and training events. The necessary equipment is provided and the agency is in the process of transferring to electronic records. There is good administrative support. The agency employs sufficient social work and administrative staff for its current size and workloads are reasonable. As previously mentioned, staff appear to be able and effective and the agency does not have a problem retaining staff. All social work staff are qualified, apart from a family placement worker, who is being supported by the agency in undertaking social work training. She is appropriately supported and supervised in her role. Training is generally made available to staff and all social work staff have recently completed the first part of their post-qualifying social work training. The small number of assessments of prospective foster carers carried out during the past year have been undertaken by permanent and sessional staff. Assessments are reasonably thorough but some include relatively little analysis of the information presented about applicants, in relation to their suitability as foster carers. The fostering panel has been asking the agency to provide a clearly set out assessment process for all staff undertaking this work. Foster carers are well supported and supervised by the agency. Supervisory visits are regular and constructive and unannounced

visits are made. Foster carers also have access to support out-of-hours. Support groups are provided, which foster carers find supportive and informative. The agency also provides foster carers with individual membership of the Fostering Network, which offers an additional source of information and support. The agency has done well at retaining foster carers, who appreciate the parties and other communal events and the certificates awarded after 10 years of work with the agency. Foster carers' approval has been reviewed during the past year and reviews are considered by the fostering panel, where necessary. A comprehensive format is used and most reviews are thorough and include feedback from foster carers, young people and placing social workers. A small number of reviews are relatively brief and not informed by feedback from placing social workers. Foster carers are notified of the outcome of their reviews. There has been delay in the panel being asked to consider a foster carer's approval following changes in circumstances. However, this has now been done and procedures have been revised accordingly. Foster carers are offered a good range of training and take-up has been fairly good. More than half of the agency's foster carers have obtained NVQ 3 qualifications. Foster carers are provided with a handbook but some sections of this are quite brief, as mentioned under previous standards. Well organised files are maintained for young people in placement and these are securely stored. However, the necessary written information has not always been obtained from placing authorities, as previously mentioned. Foster carers are maintaining records and have been supported in this through training. Comprehensive file records are maintained for each foster carer which include all the necessary information. Signed foster care agreements are retained on files but the format used does not include all items required by regulation. A register of foster carers is maintained and legal liability insurance protection is in place for foster carers. Information relating to staff recruitment, supervision and employment is held on well organised staff files and all computer and paper records are stored securely.

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	provide foster carers with information about each young person's state of health and identified health needs. (Regulation 17(3))	1 December 2007
12	provide foster carers with the placing authority's arrangements for giving consent to each young person's medical treatment. (Regulation 17(3))	1 December 2007
9	follow the agency's procedure in the event of any allegation of abuse of a child in foster care, which includes prompt referral to the area authority. (Regulation 12(1)(2))	1 November 2007
9	maintain full written records of the action taken in response to any allegation of abuse. (Regulation 12(2))	1 November 2007
21	ensure that all the necessary information is obtained in order to review foster carers' continued suitability and that the views	1 December 2007

	of placing authorities are sought and taken into account. (Regulation 3(3))	
25	revise the foster care agreement so that it includes all items listed under schedule 5 to the regulations. (Regulation 28(5))	1 December 2007

Recommendations

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

- arrange for foster carers to be provided with basic training on health and hygiene issues. (NMS 12.5)
- ensure that agreements made at placement agreement meetings are recorded and that the agency and foster carers receive copies of these records. (NMS 8.4)
- arrange for safe caring guidelines to be provided for each foster home, in consultation with foster carers and their households. (NMS 9.3)
- identify a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has, to be one of the independent members of the agency's fostering panel. (NMS 30.9)
- arrange for foster carers to be provided with training in listening to young people and responding to their views. (NMS 11.2)
- arrange for the children's guide to be updated so that it includes more information about what the agency sets out to do for young people. (NMS 1.5)
- ensure that assessments of prospective foster carers include thorough assessment of applicants' qualities, competencies and aptitudes for fostering. (NMS 17.7)
- provide a clear written assessment process for all staff undertaking this work which includes all the items listed under this standard. (NMS 17.6)
- revise the foster carers' handbook so that it includes more guidance on health promotion and education. (NMS 21)

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.