

New Routes Fostering

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

New Routes is a small, voluntary fostering project which was set up in 1992. It is one of the services provided by Father Hudson's Society and is based at the head office in Coleshill, Warwickshire. The project recruits carers within a 25 mile radius of the office and Birmingham city centre, but is willing to consider carers outside this area, providing they are willing to travel to training and support groups. This service offers a range of placements, short-term or permanent, single or sibling and respite in some circumstances. The aims of the project are to offer high quality family care experiences to young people whilst long-term plans are being developed, to recruit and retain a wide range of carers who can offer placements and to offer appropriate placement in consideration of the young person's race, culture, religion and disability to enable individual needs to be met.

Summary

New Routes provides good, detailed information to carers and other interested parties, outlining its aims and objectives and describing how it operates. There is information about how to complain and comments are welcomed. There are appropriate checks on carers and staff and good systems for assessing and recording risks, so that children are protected by the adults who care for them. The service is well managed, with appropriate policies and procedures which are known to and implemented by staff. There are sufficient staff, who are well trained and competent and who receive a good level of support and ongoing training. There are good and efficient administrative systems. The managers value the staff and carers, listen to their views and provide them with good opportunities for training, so that young people's needs are met. There are very good arrangements for ensuring that the high standards of performance are maintained and developed, in response to comments from children and carers, so that the service to young people is continually improved.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

In response to the recommendation in the last report that the service should expand guidance to carers in relation to preparing young people for independent living, the service has developed training and information in this area. Workers have also initiated pathway plans for young people in cases where there have been delays on the part of the local authority. More training is planned so that the knowledge base of staff can be increased in order for them to provide a greater level of support and guidance to carers in this respect. Young people are now better supported as they move towards independence.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Carers have a good understanding of the health needs of the children in their care so that children's health and welfare are maintained and promoted. Details of medical consent are available to carers from the start of each placement. Young people are enabled to attend appointments with a range of health professionals, such as orthodontists, opticians and dentists, in addition to being registered with General Practitioner. Carers maintain records of medication taken by the young people in their care, using charts which have recently been developed.

Support workers monitor the activity in this area through their visits. This service has a variety of policies and procedures which provide guidance to workers and carers on how to promote the health care needs of the children. Various issues relating to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle are explored and explained in the Carers' Handbook and the newsletters for carers. For example, there are articles on topics such as healthy eating. The society has a 'no smoking' policy and young people described how their carers had encouraged and enabled them to give up smoking. There is training for carers in first aid. The managers are committed to developing these systems further and expanding practice in this area. The service promotes the health and development of the children to whom it provides a service and seeks to improve practice in this area.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There is a newly registered manager for the service and she is appropriately qualified, with relevant experience. The service carries out appropriate checks on workers and carers, so that children are cared for by suitable people. Carers and workers are trained in child protection, safer caring and behaviour management. There are risk assessments in relation to the foster carers' homes and the activities in which the young people participate. There are appropriate systems to ensure that children are matched with suitable carers. Carers confirmed that they feel confident that the workers are aware of their strengths and attributes so that the children who are placed will benefit from these, although some expressed frustration at the time which can be taken in the matching process. Social workers who supervise the carers do so on a regular basis and unannounced visits are carried out by social workers who are not the supervising worker. Fostering social workers see the children during supervision and read the notes which the carers have written about their progress. The fostering panel is appropriately constituted and is well organised so that it carries out its business in an effective manner and protects the young people. There are policies and procedures which govern its conduct. Care is taken to ensure that prospective carers attending their first meeting are well prepared for the meeting and there is a leaflet which includes photographs of the panel members. All panel members are subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks and they are provided with suitable training.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service recognises and values diversity so that children are enabled to thrive and achieve to the best of their ability. The service recruits carers and workers from diverse backgrounds. They receive training in diversity and there is a range of materials available explaining the possible needs and expectations of young people from various cultures. The service uses interpreters when necessary. Carers demonstrate their commitment to enabling young people to follow their culture and religion. The service is currently working to resolve the difficulties posed by the recent implementation of the Sexual Orientation Regulations 2007 and is operating within the permitted transitional arrangements. This service encourages young people to achieve educationally by choosing carers who are committed to enabling them to succeed to the best of their ability. Education matters are considered at the time of the placement plan and at subsequent reviews of the young person's progress. Young people are consulted about their education and their successes are shared in the newsletter. Carers attend school meetings and events. Carers and young people spoke with enthusiasm about educational achievements and there are examples of young people with excellent attendance levels and continuing education

beyond the school leaving age. Carers also take children on holidays and provide them with support to engage in activities and interests of their choice. Young people and carers value the activities and support groups provided by the agency.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Written plans contain details of the contact which each child will have with people who have played a significant part in their lives. These are followed and carers provide good support to children before and after the contact. This support also includes transport where appropriate. Workers take children's views into account when agreeing these plans and carers have a good level of understanding of the possible effects that the contact may have on the children's behaviour and mood. This ensures that children, where possible, have positive experiences through contact. The service values young people's views and consults them about all aspects of their lives. Young people provided examples of their view being taken into consideration, for example, in relation to education plans and activities. The supervising social workers observe children and seek their views and opinions at supervision visits. Children are also asked their opinions at the time of their own reviews and at those of the carers. The service also seeks the views of the carers' birth children. Children are encouraged to contribute to the newsletters. They are enabled to provide comments and complaints. Carers and workers are enabled to advocate on behalf of young people and the welcome pack provides details of how young people can access independent representation so that they can be further supported in expressing their views. Interpreters are used when necessary. Examples of changes which have been made as a result of listening to young people include increased leisure activities and changes to the ways in which groups are organised.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The service has worked to improve the skills and knowledge of staff and carers in terms of supporting young people as they prepare for adulthood. Carers are aware of the need to enable children and young people to practise skills so that they are prepared for independent living as adults. Young people are consulted about their needs and expectations in this respect and carers receive guidance and training in relation to the areas in which young people need to develop skills. The carers and workers recognise the variety of needs which different young people have and the ongoing support needs of many young people once they have reached adulthood. The service provides clear details of its fees and allowances. Carers confirm that allowances are paid promptly.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is a clear and detailed Statement of Purpose and this is updated to reflect changes and developments. This is complemented by welcome packs for children, which provide them with basic information, including how to complain. This ensures that children and young people know what they can expect from their carers and the supervising social workers. The service is constantly revising materials, developing improved systems and seeking ways to improve practice, so that children and young people receive a more individual service. For example, the manager plans to develop welcome materials which are targeted at younger children. The service is well-staffed with competent and enthusiastic workers who have a good knowledge of the

aims, objectives and ethos of the organisation and the procedures which they follow in their work. All staff receive regular supervision and good opportunities for training, so that they are well-equipped to undertake their roles. There is a clear strategy for recruiting and working with carers and this includes providing them with opportunities for training and support. Supervising social workers provide a good level of support to carers and young people and this includes an out of hours telephone service until midnight. There has been a variable take-up of training and support groups in the past and the service has listened to carers' reasons for this and adjusted the programme so that training is offered at various times to enable carers to attend. The manager is also exploring a range of other strategies for ensuring that more carers benefit from training and meeting other carers. There are very good systems for ensuring that the records are maintained in an appropriate manner. Administrative staff are valued as part of the team and have designated areas of responsibility which they undertake in an efficient way. Staff and carers feel valued and supported by the organisation and their comments are welcomed when planning improvements. They feel able to contribute to the development of the service by providing ideas and opinions. There are effective systems for evaluating the performance of the service and for identifying areas which would benefit from further development. These arrangements ensure that young people receive the services they require.

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):

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.