

Barnardo's Disability Service North East
Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC042759
Inspection date	14 March 2008
Inspector	Stephen Graham
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	26 February 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

Barnardo's Disability Service North East assesses and supports foster carers to provide foster placements to children and young people with physical or learning disabilities or life threatening conditions. The service provides short break, sitting and befriending services as well as long term placements for children. At the time of this inspection the service was supporting over 40 foster placements across these areas of work. Some of these children and young people participated in the inspection during visits to their homes. Carers are supported and monitored by social workers from the foster care team, the administrative support workers, the manager for the service and their deputy.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection for the fostering service which was undertaken to assess how the service is complying with the key National Minimum Standards and regulations relating to fostering services and their progress in relation to previous recommendations. Arrangements to help children achieve economic wellbeing are not key standards and were not inspected on this occasion. The managers, staff and foster carers are committed to maintaining outstanding standards whilst working to further improve the range and quality of the service provided. The service is good at promoting children's health and children receive outstanding support to ensure their health needs are met. The service monitors the attendance of children and young people at their annual health reviews and all children have benefited from these in the last 12 months. Carers are provided with regular training in health and first aid. They also receive more specialist advice and training where necessary to meet the individual needs of the children they care for. To keep children safe, the service ensures that each foster home is a safe place for them to live and that they are properly matched with their foster carers. The matching forms used contain very good information regarding the care needs of children to be placed. However, the same form is used by both carers and parents when children receive respite with alternative carers. There are systems in place which closely monitor safe care arrangements for children and help ensure that they are properly protected. Staff and carers are very experienced and suitable. The fostering panel meets regularly and helps monitor arrangements to keep children safe, their minutes however do not clearly indicate whether meetings are statutory or non-statutory. The service works with its carers to both support and recognise the achievements of children and young people. It has further improved the methods by which children's views are gathered and presented both to their own and their carer's review meetings. The service is well organised and there are effective management structures and procedures in place. The arrangements to train and support carers are outstanding. However, the written records of referee interviews are not currently signed in confirmation by the referees themselves. The current foster carer agreements are compliant with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002, but do not highlight the change of responsibility for regulation from the Commission for Social Care Inspection to Ofsted. Case files and carers' records are very well presented and comprehensive.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The service has responded positively to the previous requirements set and recommendations made. When carers receive required and recommended training from external training sources, the service ensures that this is properly monitored and recorded within their carer files. To help keep children and young people safe and demonstrate that their care needs are being met, their safe care agreements are signed on each occasion by all those involved in their completion. The service has improved the systems used to monitor the renewal of required staff checks and made them more effective. Monitoring arrangements have also been improved to ensure that foster carer annual reviews are scheduled and occur at the required frequency.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people benefit from good health care services that meet their overall physical, emotional and social developmental needs. Foster carers describe the support received from the fostering service as 'good' or 'outstanding'. Social workers who have placed children through Barnardo's provide good evidence that the service is working well with its carers to ensure that children and young people keep themselves healthy. Examples of how they do this include excellent diet, good hygiene standards, good emergency procedures, good knowledge of medication and its administration, and training in first aid. One social worker describes how, 'Carers liaise with all relevant professionals'. The service monitors the attendance of children and young people at their annual health reviews. All children have attended these in the last 12 months. Details of these and other health appointments are recorded within their care files. Foster carers receive full details of the health needs of children in advance and also receive additional training and specialist support where necessary. Carers know their role in registering the children with doctors, dentists and opticians. The medical information form used by carers when children have respite with an alternative carer needs slight amendment as it is the same form currently used by parents. Carers support children with their health appointments, diet and personal hygiene and work closely with a variety of specialist medical staff. The questionnaires received from young people and their parents are very positive. All of these children feel that they are receiving the right support and advice regarding their own health needs from their foster carers.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

To help keep children safe, suitability checks are undertaken on carers and staff. These are monitored through a central system to make sure that they are kept up to date, but the summary sheets used to record this within individual carers' files are not always completed in full detail. Health and safety checklists are used to help ensure that homes are safe places for children to live. These are used when foster carers are first assessed and are routinely updated during subsequent visits to their homes by staff from the fostering service. Individual risk assessments and family safe care agreements are also used to help keep children safe. One social worker comments that, 'The carer's home is safe and secure. All procedures to ensure that the young person is kept safe and well are followed'. One parent describes how their child was kept safe through the 'care plans drawn up and adhered to at all times'. The service works to ensure that the systems used to match children with carers are as effective as possible. Agreed procedures and standard documentation are used to gather and share the information needed to properly match children with their carers. The matching information form used by carers when children

have respite with an alternative carer needs slight amendment as it is the same form currently used by parents. Visits with carers and children illustrate the good matching procedures in place. There have been no unplanned endings of placements. One placing social worker commented that the service is 'pro-active in ensuring the best outcome for the child, will not rush into a placement until they are sure all needs can be met'. When children do have to move, carers describe the support they receive from the service as at least good or even outstanding. They are equally positive when describing the quality of the matching of children with them and described the good, outstanding or at least satisfactory information they are receiving to help achieve this. Placement agreement meetings to formally agree and record care arrangements for the children take place promptly. One placing social worker describes how, 'Carers are fully involved in supporting the young persons care plan'. Children who wrote in confirmed that they are always well cared for where they are living now. One social worker who has supported the young person to respond by questionnaire explains that this was true as the young person's 'verbal and non-verbal communication indicates that she is settled and happy with the support provided by carers'. Arrangements for safeguarding children and young people from abuse are good. Carers receive training to help them keep children safe. There are systems in place to allow managers at the service to monitor any referrals and incidents. The questionnaires received from young people and their parents are very positive. Children feel that they are protected and can speak to someone if they are unhappy. The fostering panel ensures that the assessments undertaken on any new foster carers are thorough and that their ability to care safely for children is regularly reviewed. Panel members are also provided with training to help them with their responsibilities. The excerpts taken from panel meeting minutes and placed on carer's files do not always clearly indicate the role of each person in attendance. On one occasion a meeting of panel members took place which did not meet the minimum attendance required by fostering regulations. This meeting provided advice to the agency decision maker on non-statutory matters. The minutes of the meeting did not clearly indicate that this was the case.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service values and promotes diversity and equality for children and young people. Foster carers see the support received from the service in addressing these issues as outstanding. Carers and staff receive regular training in dealing with diversity issues and carers can obtain individual advice as needed. Carers are also given good support to help children use activities in the community. Carers are providing outstanding support to young people with severe disabilities to help them achieve this. One social worker describes how, 'Both children go horse riding now to a specialist disability centre. This is time consuming for the carers but both cherish the success of the children. I receive regular updates from the carers'. One parent describes how, 'The carers are very much aware of my child's hobbies and try to incorporate these into his stay'. The service works to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people are prioritised and they are supported to think about their future. Carers describe the outstanding, good or at least satisfactory support provided to them in meeting the educational needs of the children they care for. One describes how their 'support worker attends and contributes to educational reviews'. Care files contain outstanding examples of the quality of support provided to young people to ensure that their educational needs are met. Children confirm that they always get the right help to be successful in their education and to think about their future. One social worker assisting a young person to complete their questionnaire confirmed that the child is 'provided with appropriate advice and support'. The policies and

agreed procedures put in place by the service ensure that during short-term breaks in foster care the parents of the children placed continue to be recognised as their main carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Policies and procedures are in place which both promote and monitor contact arrangements for each child or young person. Carers are supported to help children maintain contact with their birth families and friends, including previous carers and their families. Arrangements are agreed in advance and when contact occurs, it is recorded by carers and shared with the children's own social worker. Carers describe children overall as having good or outstanding networks with their family, friends and the local community. Children are regularly consulted and are able to raise and discuss any concerns they have regarding the care they receive. Most children feel that their carers always listen to them and take notice of their opinions. One young person said of their carers that 'They always ask me what I would like to do or where I would like to go'. Children also know who to speak to if they are unhappy and nearly all know how to complain formally if necessary. Staff members have reviewed and improved the documentation used by the service to consult with looked after children and young people. Carers rate the service as good or outstanding at involving children in decisions about their day-to-day lives and involving them in how the service is run. One carer comments that, 'The little girl I care for cannot speak, but she does attend all the meetings about her review'. One parent describes how 'We have a good communication link with Barnardo's'. Children are encouraged to participate in their own care review meetings as well as their carers' annual reviews. Any written comments they make are maintained within their care files. One social worker comments that, 'The carers fully involve the young person in all decisions during their respite visits'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose (SOP) is reviewed annually and provides a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the service. Foster carers are provided with a copy of the statement. Children and young people are also given their own guide to it, which the service ensures is appropriate to their age and disability. Management arrangements within the service are effective and individual areas of responsibility and delegation are clearly agreed. The administrative support is well organised and is provided by very experienced staff. Data systems are used to ensure that carer reviews are completed to schedule and that initial applications are processed efficiently. The processes to check, assess and train new carers are effective, but the records of the interviews held with their nominated referees do not include the signature of the referees themselves. Details of the terms of each carer's approval are maintained and amended as their circumstances change. The letters used to confirm this are not properly dated. The foster carer agreement documents currently used are compliant with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002, but do not reflect the change of responsibility for regulation from the Commission for Social Care Inspection to Ofsted. Carers give good examples of why they choose to foster for this service. One simply highlights the 'excellent support' they have received. Others describe how they feel 'valued' by the service. Regular supervision visits are undertaken by fostering staff to help ensure that their carers are supported effectively. Records

of these visits are maintained within files and on data systems for reference. Carers are provided with their own signed copy. The arrangements to store these records are not being followed consistently on each occasion. Carers feel that the service provides good support to them in caring for children, including the support provided outside office hours. One states simply, 'Social worker at the end of the phone 24/7'. Others highlight the excellent support, training and access to specialist advice and equipment. One carer states, 'Barnardo's do a fantastic job and I am glad to be part of their team and services'. Foster carer group meetings take place regularly and carers are very complimentary regarding the timing of these meetings, which are planned to encourage maximum participation. Unannounced visits to carers do take place, however summary records of these visits are not always kept up to date within each file. Foster carer annual review meetings are scheduled to take place at least annually. These are closely monitored to ensure they take place at the required frequency. The documentation used for reviews is comprehensive and is being used to demonstrate that routine safety, police and health checks for carers are being updated as necessary, and that their ongoing abilities to provide good standards of care to children are being properly considered. Good communication exists between social workers placing children through the fostering service and the service itself. One social worker comments that, 'I have had the pleasure of working with the Barnardo's service for approximately two years and have found our relationship to be extremely positive. The young person has the benefit of an experienced respite carer, who has offered her a high standard of care and always made herself available for visits and meetings'. Parents and placing social workers are routinely requested to provide their written views to the carers review meetings. The documents used to gather the views of children have been further improved. The service encourages and regularly reviews the overall participation of carers in training. An annual programme is arranged in advance and shared with carers. These include opportunities for joint training with staff from the fostering service. Carers' individual training needs are discussed regularly in their own supervision meetings. The service maintains a central data base which records individual attendance at training. Copies of the certificates obtained are kept within foster carers' own files. Attendance at training is also monitored through each annual review meeting. Opportunities for carers to further develop their skills through a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) are also provided. Case files for children are generally well presented and contain comprehensive information and files are audited regularly by fostering service team managers. The overall administrative systems are well organised and records are in place which contain information relevant to the running of the service. These are regularly monitored by the manager.

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):

- amend the matching information form used by foster carers when children have respite with an alternative carer (NMS 8)
- ensure that fostering panel minutes clearly indicate whether meetings are statutory or non-statutory (NMS 30)
- ensure that the records of interviews held with referees are signed by the referees themselves (NMS 17)
- amend foster carer agreements to highlight the change of responsibility for inspection and regulation from the Commission for Social Care Inspection to Ofsted (NMS 22).

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.