

Asphaleia Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Valerie Packham
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Date of last inspection	11 October 2006

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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

Asphaleia Limited has been registered as an independent fostering agency since 2004. Since the last inspection in 2006, when there was only one approved foster carer, the agency has further developed, with five approved foster carers. The service specialises in providing foster placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

Summary

This announced key inspection took place during the week commencing 19 May 2008. A review was undertaken to assess whether the areas needing improvement identified at the last inspection had been met. The inspection also examined the ability of the agency to meet the key National Minimum Standards. Achieving Economic Wellbeing was not inspected. Asphaleia has moved forward since the last inspection and this is a good service in most respects. The recommendations and requirements made at the previous inspection have been attended to. More carers have been recruited and there are a number of children in placement. Members of the senior management team are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. The Registered Manager has a great deal of experience working with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. She is a committed and caring manager who wants to get things right. The complex needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people are being met. The views of children and young people in placement and those of the carer's birth children are respected. Children and young people feel safe and well cared for in their foster placements. Outcomes for young people are good, demonstrating individualised care and support. Diversity and equality are promoted extremely well in all aspects of the service. Carers are happy with the service and feel well supported. Shortfalls identified at this inspection and the resulting recommendations have not had an impact on outcomes for children and young people. Recommendations have been made about ensuring specific file recordings are easily located and are visible. Further recommendations have been made about a specific job description and a programme of training.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Action has been taken to meet the requirements and recommendations that were made at the last inspection. The time taken to assess prospective foster carers has reduced and is within an appropriate timescale. Staff, panel members and carers have thorough checks and records in place, which include telephone calls to verify references. The most recent version of the BAAF Form F is used when assessing prospective carers. Any training needs identified in fostering assessments are met prior to any children being placed. Satisfactory foster care agreements are in place. Carers transport is checked as part of the initial assessment process and then at subsequent annual health and safety checks. The Registered Manager is nearing completion of a Level 5 ILM management course.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

All young people have had health assessments and health plans completed. Carers ensure young people register with a General Practitioner, optician and dentist. Young people are supported in accessing other services as required, such as the sexual health clinic. Consent to medical

treatment or examination was discussed in depth with the manager, who understood the complexities involved. The agency has good liaison with the looked after children's nurse for West Sussex. Carers know about providing a healthy diet and they discuss this with the young people. The agency and carers promote exercise. Some young people ride bicycles, play football and dance. Passes for the local swimming pool are provided by the agency. Asphaleia is encouraging all young people to take part in a sports day as part of refugee week. Policies and procedures are in place on contagious/infectious diseases, HIV and AIDS and health and safety. Guidance is provided to foster carers on health care through training sessions and the foster carer's handbook. Carers are expected to attend basic first aid training and HIV awareness.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager is a committed and enthusiastic professional, who cares about the young people and carers. The senior management of the agency are experienced in working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Foster carers speak highly of the support provided by the manager. Rigorous checks, including the telephone verification of references ensures that all staff and carers are safe and suitable to work with children. At the present time, the manager is the only qualified social worker, due to the size of the agency. One particularly complex matter was handled sensitively and professionally by the manager. Assessments of prospective carers are generally undertaken by qualified independent social workers. One student social worker completed an assessment under the close supervision of a qualified worker. All fostering assessments are of a satisfactory standard. The standard of carers' accommodation is examined as part of the initial assessment process. Written guidelines are provided to carers on their responsibilities and a dedicated worker completes an annual health and safety check on carers' homes and transport. Each young person in placement has their own bedroom. Carers' training covers health and safety matters and they are given written guidelines on their responsibilities. The fostering service ensures that all carers' homes and any transport are safe and appropriate to the needs of the children in placement. The Registered Manager undertakes the matching process with care. A matching pro-forma is used which looks at specific considerations and needs. Any particular elements of matching taken into account are included on the foster placement agreements. Wherever possible, the ethnicity of children is appropriately matched to carers. However, the manager is aware that this is not always achievable and indeed that it is not the only factor to consider. All carers are supported to meet the cultural needs of the young people in placement. Foster carers are supported in helping the young people gain a positive sense of their heritage. Children feel safe with their foster carers. One young person's comment of, 'I trust them and feel safe with them' is representative of all feedback received from children in placement for this inspection. Carers are taught about child protection and safeguarding in their initial preparation training. Following approval, they participate in further training with their supervising social worker and in team meetings. Additionally, carers have started to use an online child protection training course, but only one foster carer has completed the training. Carers are provided with written information on caring for children who have been abused and how to protect them. Safe caring guidelines have been produced for each family. The birth children in one household transferred the guidelines into a pictorial guide which suited the needs of the foster child. A procedure is in place should a young person go missing. No form of corporal punishment is acceptable and carers are made aware of this. Where necessary, behaviour contracts have been established between young people and their carers. The fostering service makes carers aware of the particular vulnerability of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and their susceptibility to bullying. Procedures are

in place regarding bullying. It was not possible to observe a panel, but minutes of all previous panels were read and indicated clear questioning to the assessors and the applicants. All initial fostering assessments and well-written review reports are presented to panel. The panel provides a robust quality assurance function regarding the assessment of applicants and with carers' annual reviews. The panel has the required independent members, including a previously looked after young person, someone with expertise in child health, a foster carer for another agency and an education professional. The panel administrator attended a British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) training course which is relevant to her role. The Responsible Individual presented panel with training on unaccompanied asylum seeking children in 2007. Panel members have the appropriate recruitment checks and description of roles in place. The panel chair however, has a generic panel member's job description rather than one that accurately describes the role of panel chair.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are provided with services to meet their diverse needs. All training emphasises the need for carers to respect each young person's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. A module has been added by Asphaleia to the preparation training to examine the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and an overview of the immigration process. Written information is available to staff and carers about diversity. Meeting individual needs is stressed by the agency and carers. One foster carer researched how to cook some meals from the foster child's home country to help the child settle in. The agency has senior management with great depth of knowledge, experience and a genuine interest in working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The Registered Manager has made links with the West Sussex County Council (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership) due to a racist incident in the community. Education is promoted by the agency with, 'The enabling power of education and its potential to increase choices'. Asphaleia has its own educational programme which addresses the needs of asylum seeking young people new to the country. It teaches basic skills, useful phrases and involves a practical and cultural orientation. Following this, the agency works hard in supporting integration into mainstream schools. Carers support the foster children in accessing and attending education, as well as attending education meetings. As part of the foster carers' induction programme, they visit the Asphaleia education programme to gain an understanding of the work done with the young people. All young people are currently attending mainstream education provision. Some of the young people do not have Personal Education Plans in place. The Registered Manager is proactive in requesting Personal Education Plans from placing social workers, but copies of correspondence are not routinely placed on files. Young people are encouraged to integrate into their local communities. This includes local faith groups, sports clubs and leisure facilities and developing friendships. The service does not provide a short-term break service.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The Registered Manager is knowledgeable about the importance of contact and the complexities involved. Foster carers understand the significance of contact. The views of young people are sought and given weight in determining any contact arrangements, in conjunction with the placing social workers. It is unlikely that many unaccompanied asylum seeking children will have face to face contact with family, although some young people in placement are supported

in having face to face contact and with contact by e-mails. The Red Cross tracing service is accessed, where appropriate. The views and wishes of young people are sought over all matters that affect them. Interpreters are provided if needed. The initial Asphaleia education programme informs children and young people on how to express themselves and make their basic needs known. Children and young people are supported to comment as part of the foster carers' annual reviews and their own looked after child reviews. The agency ensures that birth children and foster children are supported to express their views. Children feel listened to and as one child said, '...they ask me how I feel'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the service. A Children's guide sets out basic information in a bright and colourful format. The Registered Manager is an experienced social worker and is nearing the end of a management course, which will give her a Level 5 Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualification. The Responsible Individual and the Registered Manager are highly experienced in working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. They both have the necessary business and management skills to manage the work efficiently. Foster carers and young people are provided with services that offer a personal touch. Foster carers appreciate having someone familiar on the end of the telephone. The Registered Manager controls the out of hour's telephone service, assisted on occasion by the Responsible Individual. This is currently appropriate, given the size of the agency. The service employs independent social workers to complete the fostering assessments. The most recent version of the BAAF assessment form is used. Assessments are being done noticeably quicker than at the last inspection in 2006. Carers attend preparation, post approval and in-service training. The agency delivers some training as part of supervision and during the monthly team meetings. Carers have started to work through the Children's Workforce Development Standards (CWDC) training for foster carers. Records of other types of training are not routinely recorded in carers' records. All carers are given a handbook which contains policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. The agency stores all files securely. Foster care agreements outline what is expected of the agency and the carers. Supervision is a means of developing carers' skills and provides them with support. Carers understand the role of the supervising social worker and are aware of the need for occasional unannounced visits. The agency ensures all carers receive one unannounced visit per year. Recordings of unannounced visits to foster carers are not easily visible in the files. Feedback received from foster carers for this inspection was positive. A common theme relates to the agency providing good support. '... the agency is professional and very supportive of carers as well as fostered children'.

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):

- continue with carers' online training on child protection and safeguarding (NMS 9)
- ensure unannounced visits to carers and the supervision of carers are clearly recorded in the files (NMS 22)
- provide a job description to the panel chair outlining particular responsibilities of the role (NMS 30)
- ensure all records of contact with placing social workers are filed when chasing up outstanding personal education plans (NMS 13)
- ensure all records of training undertaken at team meetings are included in carers' files (NMS 23)

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.