

# Synergy Fostering Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Peter Daniel
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	9 July 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**

Synergy Fostering is an independent fostering service, in operation since May 2000. The primary role of the agency is to recruit, approve and support foster carers for looked after children needing substitute family care. The agency states that it is dedicated to providing safe and nurturing foster placements through their culturally diverse carers. Synergy Fostering is a private limited company with three directors. The premises are offices, located in a commercial building near London Bridge Station. At July 2008, there were 22 approved fostering households and 25 children were placed.

### **Summary**

This was an announced inspection. The inspection report should be read in conjunction with the previous inspection report. The current inspection was a 'light touch' inspection since the previous inspection had recorded a 'good' judgment. The agency has consolidated the progress since last year and is maintaining good standards in meeting the needs of children. The foster carers are a stable group who are well supported by the agency. The agency's main target in relation to this inspection is to achieve NVQ Level 3 training equivalent for all its foster carers and for the fostering panel to avoid the conflict of roles between membership of the panel and those who undertake assessments of foster carers.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The agency now has sufficient qualified staff who have the qualifications, skills and experience necessary to the work of the fostering agency. The agency has also updated its child protection procedures. The agency has recruited three additional foster carers since the previous inspection. There have been no resignations or de-registrations.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The agency promotes the health and development of young people in placement to a good standard. Children and young people are receiving health care which meets their needs. They are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician. All appropriate health checks, including looked after children's medical reviews and immunisations, are undertaken. Young people have been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as appropriate. Young people are offered advice on sexual health, smoking and drugs. Foster carers offer balanced healthy diets.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Synergy has sound recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff, foster carers and fostering panel members. Appropriate checks are in place and up to date. Staff files show Criminal Record Bureau checks, General Council of Social Care registration, references and qualifications. Foster carers' files also show similar robust recruitment has taken place. Foster carers are subject to annual reviews, unannounced visits and health and safety checks. Foster

carers have undergone training in safe caring and child protection procedures. The fostering panel provides a quality assurance role and monitors practice. Since the last inspection, the agency's child protection procedures have been updated and give much clearer information in explaining to foster carers what to do if they are worried a child has been abused.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Synergy, through its foster carers, is actively involved in promoting educational achievement. Foster carers drive children to school, attend Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, help children with homework and liaise with teachers and colleges. School age children in placement have a PEP. The fostering panel includes a representative from Education. Young people are being encouraged to take part in social activities including swimming, football, cooking, visiting museums, parks, shopping and going out for meals.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Synergy fostering service encourages children and young people to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. The fostering service also promotes consultation and ensures that the opinions and views of children are heard. Children and young people attend their own reviews and have the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings. Children and young people complete a consultation form for the review. Foster children are also consulted and provide feedback for the annual review. Children in placement receive a Children's Guide that gives information on how to complain. There have been no complaints since the last inspection. The impression gained from discussions with foster carers is that they do their best to ascertain the views and wishes of children.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The fostering agency encourages young people towards independence and foster carers prepare them for independent living and adulthood. Foster carers support young people to learn independent living skills such as budgeting, preparing meals, doing their own laundry and self care.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Synergy is a small fostering agency with 22 carers and 25 children in placement. The agency has an experienced and qualified staff group. The agency has a Registered Provider, a Registered Manager, a Commercial Director, two Supervising Social Workers, one full time administrative staff and a book keeper. The Registered Provider is still in the process of undertaking the NVQ Level 4 management qualification. In addition, the agency deploys two independent persons whose role is to complete Form F's and one external consultant who carries out annual reviews. Since the last inspection, a Team Manager has left the organisation and staff are now supervised by the Registered Manager. This staff change has not impacted on the service and staff in fact reported that there are now clearer lines of management responsibility. Staff are supervised on a regular basis and feel supported by management. The agency holds Team meetings. The fostering panel meets every two months. The panel was assessed at the time of the previous inspection and fully met the standard. The panel has recently recruited a health representative

to its membership. Examination of minutes show that the panel continues to make robust and clear decisions. The previous inspection noted that the agency's social worker representative on the panel also undertakes Form F assessments and therefore presents cases to the panel. This is a conflict of role and in the future, the agency should endeavour to allocate Form F assessments to persons who are independent of the panel. Foster carers are properly managed and supported by the agency. Foster carers are visited every four to six weeks and are offered supervision to help them develop their skills. Annual reviews and unannounced visits are carried out. The agency ensures that foster carers are trained in skills required to meet the needs of children. Recent in-service training has included attachment and loss, promoting contact, working with sexually abused children, skills to foster (for new carers) and drug awareness. Some foster carers have completed NVQ Level 3 training although newer carers have yet to do the training but would welcome the opportunity. This has been included as a recommendation within this report. Staff files and foster carers' files contain significant information relevant to the running of the agency. The evidence on the child's file showed some gaps and instances where care plans and review minutes need to be obtained from the Local Authority. The agency has appropriate monitoring arrangements that include the fostering panel, the collection of various data, the carrying out of annual reviews, unannounced visits and health and safety checks. The agency keeps a complaints and significant incident logs. The agency's complaints log indicated that there have been no complaints in over a year. Foster carers, young people and Local Authorities are invited to give feedback via consultation questionnaires. The agency is financially viable and has sufficient resources to fulfil its obligations. The office is suitable for its purpose and for carrying out the agency's business.

## 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):

- ensure that membership of the fostering panel avoids a conflict of roles between membership of the panel and those who undertake assessments of foster carers. This is a repeat of a previous recommendation. (NMS 30.5).
- ensure that the equivalent of NVQ Level 3 training is ongoing and is offered to foster carers to develop their skills. (NMS 23.5)
- ensure that systems for keeping records is congruent with the Looked After Children's System/Integrated Children's system. The agency will need to chase up the Local Authority for up to date care plans review minutes. (NMS 25.10)

## 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.**