

Horizon Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jill Marriott
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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

Horizon Fostering Services aim to meet the needs of children and young people who are temporarily or permanently separated from their families. The agency aims to provide a high level of care, encouragement, safety and security for children living away from home, by providing appropriate substitute families able to meet the needs of each individual child. The agency is located in Kingsbury, Northwest London. It is situated in a multi-purpose office building. The service has a director, manager, administrative officer two supporting social workers and a social work assistant. The agency is supported by a pool of independent social workers who carry out Form F assessments of potential foster carers. The agency's foster carers are recruited through various sources including media advertising. The assessment and approval of foster carers takes between four and six months. Information such as satisfactory references, health checks and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures are obtained during the assessment process.

Summary

This announced inspection focussed on the key national minimum standards for fostering services. The inspection included discussion with the director, the manager and two social workers. Three homes were visited and these were all providing safe care in a warm and comfortable environment. Horizon continue to have good systems in place enabling them to provide good services that support foster carers to maintain stability for the children placed with them. The agency's Statement of Purpose, Children's guides to service and policies and procedures have not been reviewed. Some of the information incorporated in these documents is out of date

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were two actions and one recommendation made at the last inspection. These are now met. All members of staff have the appropriate information available on their personnel files with regard to CRB disclosures, references and qualifications. The agency has recruited to vacant social work posts and this has reduced the high case loads identified at the previous inspection. Case loads are reviewed during regular supervision sessions. There is a contingency plan in place to support social workers when dealing with an increase in work load and/or complex cases. The steps taken to meet the actions and recommendations made at the last inspection enable the agency to provide appropriate support and supervision for foster carers, which ensures good outcomes for children.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Good health outcomes can be demonstrated for the children and young people placed by the agency. This is attributed to the agency's policies and good practice procedures in place. The service monitors outcomes for children through staff supervision and team meetings and through the child care review process. Carers are given an understandable health care plan for each child at the time of placement or within 24 hours of an emergency placement being made. The plan identifies the roles and responsibilities of the key people and health professionals in the

child's life. Health issues that may arise from each child's ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality and/or cultural needs are also considered at the planning stage of the placement. Children said that their health needs are addressed by their carers. They said that they are asked about their health by social workers who visit regularly to assess the placement and as part of the statutory child care review process. Returned questionnaires confirmed that children know who to approach should they feel unwell. The agency works in partnership as required with health professionals such as, the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), psychologists and physiotherapists. Each child is registered with a GP and dentist and has access to an optician if required. Foster carers receive initial training to support them to identify and address children's health needs. Further training is arranged to enable carers to support children with specific health needs. Carers are aware of their responsibilities to children and the responsibilities of the health professionals involved. Regular training relating to health and nutrition enables carers to provide children with healthy life styles, regular exercise and nutritious food. All carers are trained to administer first aid and are required to attend regular refresher courses.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency has an experienced management team who are qualified social workers. Members of staff and carers confirmed that the management team are approachable, supportive and maintain professional boundaries at all times. The managers, staff and carers are demonstrably safe and suitable to work with children. Safe recruitment practices are comprehensive and thorough. Evidence of appropriate references, CRB disclosures and identity checks are held on each individual employee and carer file. Children and young people are placed with carers who have been thoroughly assessed as being able to keep them safe. Carers receive training and ongoing refresher courses to enhance their fostering skills. Training includes looking at behaviour management, child protection, the effects of contact, health and safety and first aid. The three homes visited during the inspection provide a warm, comfortable and safe environment with appropriate space and privacy for the children and young people being cared for. Health and safety checks are carried out on foster carers' homes at least once each year. Records show that visits can be announced or unannounced. Documented evidence is required for gas and electrical servicing and for home and car insurance. As far as possible carers are given full information about each child to ensure they are able to meet their needs. Each referral form requires information about the child's health, education, leisure interests and family background. The matching process is thorough; where a match is not perfect carers are assisted to provide specific support in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, disability, gender and religion. There are appropriate child protection, anti bullying, absent without authority and behaviour management policies and procedures in place. Related information can be found in the foster carer's hand book. Staff and carers have the appropriate training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to respond appropriately to child protection issues and concerns. They are aware of the need to notify the appropriate professionals under schedule (5) of the regulations. Statutory child care reviews are held regularly and children are encouraged to give their views of the care and support they receive. Their opinions are taken seriously and are viewed as central to a safe service that improves the lives of all children and young people placed by the agency. The foster panel was not observed during this inspection. Minutes from previous panels were seen and records of panel business were comprehensive. The panel demonstrates good outcomes for children, it is well managed with effective membership who understand the needs of children. There is a protocol in place for the panel, which includes information about roles

and responsibilities and procedures for decision making. The panel makes recommendations about foster carers approval and review of approval. They receive information related to exemptions and extensions as well as about issues that arise from the assessment process. The panel receives data and information about the activities of the agency and gives feed back about any concerns or gaps in service. Feedback is seen as an important tool to broaden the range of options available to children. Evidence on personnel files show that panel members are subject to relevant checks and references; they receive induction and ongoing training, which includes the role of panel members, child protection awareness and safe care practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service recruits carers that can meet the diverse needs of the children placed. Its policies and procedures value diversity and equality and the contribution that such an approach makes to the care of children. Children and foster carers said that the service is sensitive to issues of race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Related issues are discussed during the initial recruitment process and during supervision, training and ongoing refresher courses. Particular care is taken to ensure appropriate matches are made for children. Support is available to assist placements which may not fully meet the overall needs of the child. The service ensures that carers are given an understandable plan for meeting the educational needs of each child at the time of placement or as soon after as is possible. The education plan details how the child's educational needs will be met and determines the specific roles of carer and key professionals. The service ensures that arrangements for education are in place at the beginning of each placement. Children said they are given good support with their schooling. They confirmed that carers talk to them and ensure their educational needs are met. It is the role of the foster carer to attend parents' evenings, open days and personal education planning meetings. Foster carers also support children with their home work. Parents are involved where appropriate in planning the education arrangements of their children. Where possible children attend the local school most appropriate to meet their needs and allow them to become part of the local community. The service takes steps to minimise the impact of school changes on children's development and where possible children remain at the school they know best. The agency strives to support and encourage children and young people to gain good educational outcomes. Where necessary they are provided with additional support to help them achieve their goals. The fostering service ensures foster carers promote the leisure interests of children placed with them. Children said they are encouraged to take regular exercise, they use the local leisure centres, play football, swim and join youth groups. They also go to the cinema, bowling and to the local park.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service has developed positive initiatives to enable foster carers to help children to make sense of their family relationships and to promote positive contact. Foster carers said they are supported by the supervising social worker to manage contact. Children's wishes and feelings are sought and taken into account when arranging contact. Details of arrangements are made clear in the foster placement agreements and these are reviewed through supervision visits and at each individual child care review. The service demonstrates that systems are in place for children to participate in discussion and decision making about their futures. All young people are encouraged to attend their statutory review and are consulted for the review of

approval for their carers. Support is available for children with language or communication difficulties to participate in the consultation process. Children's views of their placement are important and help to ensure that, as far as possible they are placed with carers who meet their expressed needs. The agency has an annual consultation form that young people are asked to complete. This document asks about things children would most like to change about their care, pocket money, mealtimes, after school activities and their accommodation. It gives them the opportunity to comment on and make a difference with regard to all aspects of their care and of the services provided by the agency. There is a children's guide to service provided to all children at the time of placement. This gives information about how to access an independent advocate, how to make a complaint and includes a list of useful contact numbers.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are supported to prepare for independence by their foster carer. They receive support as identified in individual care plans. From the start of each placement children are encouraged to develop age appropriate independent living skills as part of their daily routine. For example small children are encouraged to cook simple things and help around the house. Older children are encouraged to learn about budgeting and issues related to nutrition, health and keeping safe. Foster carers confirmed that they receive their allowances on time and that they are adequate to meet the needs of the children placed. Carers understand the amounts received for each child and these are clearly described in the foster carer's handbook with an explanation of how these are to be used to support children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose, children's guide to service and the policies and procedures were seen during the inspection. In general these are appropriate but they have not been reviewed for sometime and some include out of date information. The children's guide although colourful and eye-catching has not been updated since 2003. There is a clear management structure in place. Staff and carers confirmed that the director and the service manager are supportive and approachable. The management team have the appropriate skills to manage the service and the social work and support staff have the relevant qualifications and experience for the posts they hold. There are good recruitment and selection procedures in place. The agency has a diverse range of staff and carers who can meet the needs of the children in relation to their ethnicity, race, religion, gender, disability and sexuality. Staff said they receive regular recorded supervision and supervision notes are kept on individual files. Appraisals are held yearly and are reviewed through the supervision process. A staff training plan is developed as part of the appraisal process. The agency ensures that staff and carers are kept up to date with regard to new legislation, key policy and practice developments. Staffing levels are appropriate to support the numbers of carers and the children placed at the time of the inspection. The agency has a bank of suitably qualified independent social workers who can provide support as necessary. If the agency expands further, consideration will be given to how support will be provided to the extra carers and children. There are accurate records in place for the service; these are monitored and well maintained. The records for all staff, five young people and three carers were seen during this inspection. Individual records were in good order; they contain the most recent case supervision notes and a range of information required by legislation to ensure safe care. Children's records are available for them and relevant others to see on request. All agency

records are securely stored in locked filing cabinets. The agency has an efficient case auditing system in place.

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
1	ensure that the agency's Statement of Purpose, children's guide to service and policies and procedures are reviewed and include up to date information.	24 October 2008

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.