

Caritas Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Inspector | David Martin |
| Type of Inspection | Key |

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| Date of last inspection | 2 November 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

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| 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

Caritas Care provides a range of services to children and adults and has been in existence for over 50 years. The fostering service was established ten years ago. The service currently has 25 carer households with 31 children placed from the north west of England. The service recruits, trains, assesses and supports carers and provides short, long term and respite placements. There is a team of four social workers with additional support provided by a development worker, educational support worker and a psychologist.

Summary

This announced key inspection was undertaken to assess the agency's performance against all key national minimum standards, to check on progress in meeting previous actions and recommendations and to assess outcomes for children.

The agency is actively promoting the health care needs of children. The approval of carers is subject to comprehensive assessment and robust scrutiny by panel. Children are looked after safely and protected from harm. The agency values education and positively seeks the views of children and young people. Overall, the agency is well managed and run by suitably qualified and experienced staff. Children and carers contributed to the inspection process.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the agency has made a significant number of improvements. This includes the implementation of health care plans and the delivery of first aid training. This contributes to the wellbeing of children.

There is now a programme of unannounced supervision visits to carers and a carers' training plan, ensuring that carers' practice is reflective and up to date.

An educational support worker has been appointed to coordinate the educational needs of children and to promote the agency's commitment to education.

Regulation 42 monitoring has been implemented and has provided the foundation for an improvement plan scheduled to be reviewed on a quarterly basis. This is an addition to existing quality monitoring processes and ensures the agency continues to meet the needs of children.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering agency is actively promoting the health and development needs of children and young people. Each child has a health care plan and is registered with primary health care providers. Specialist health care needs are identified and support such as speech therapy is arranged as required. This ensures that children's health care needs are met.

The agency has recently employed a psychologist to work with carers to help them manage emotional and behavioural issues. This is an excellent appointment and contributes to the overall well being of children.

Children are provided with health care information through a range of publications and promotional events. They are encouraged to eat healthily and to participate in regular exercise. Foster carers have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and have access to specialist training such as drug and alcohol awareness and attachment theory. Carers have completed paediatric first aid training to make sure that accidents and emergencies are managed safely.

The medical advice available to the panel is strong and scrutiny of health issues relating to prospective and existing carers is thorough. Supervision of carers includes discussion of the health needs of children, ensuring that information is up to date and that health needs continue to be met.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency is run by a suitably qualified and experienced manager who is regularly supervised and subject to annual appraisal. Ongoing monitoring of her performance ensures that she continues to promote the safety and well being of children placed with the agency.

Prospective foster carers are thoroughly assessed to ensure that they are suitable to look after and nurture children. The assessment process is evaluative and identifies key competencies. There is a comprehensive programme of pre-approval training which includes safeguarding and safe care. Foster carers' home are subject to an environmental assessment to make sure they are free from avoidable hazards. These measures contribute to the overall safety of children.

The agency's matching process is successful in making appropriate matches. The level of disrupted placements is low. Foster carer agreements are in place. Carers' annual reviews and Looked After Children's reviews are used to establish that placements continue to benefit children and to identify changing needs.

The agency has not had to manage any safeguarding issues in the last 12 months. Carers have completed safeguarding training and are confident about identifying signs and symptoms of abuse and reporting their concerns. The agency has strongly promoted anti-bullying awareness through publications, workbooks and training. Each carer has developed a safe care plan which takes into consideration the needs of their own children. Children are protected and looked after safely.

Staff working for the agency are appropriately qualified and have extensive experience in working with children. They are appointed following robust vetting to ensure their suitability to work with children.

The panel is properly constituted and panel meetings are quorate. The agency is in the process of appointing a panel member with personal experience of foster care. Cases coming before panel are thoroughly scrutinised and in the absence of sufficient information matters are deferred. Panel currently provides feedback to the agency but does not do this formally as part of its quality monitoring function. Overall the work of the panel makes a significant contribution to the safety of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency has untied its links to the Catholic Church helping it to broaden its contacts with the wider community. The social work team have an excellent understanding of the values underpinning equality and anti-discriminatory practice. Casework reflects the unique needs of children and the agency's policies and procedures express a commitment to the individuality of children.

The agency values the education of children. It has recently appointed an educational support worker to strengthen its approach to education. The role has been created to support carers and to link directly with schools to ensure that children's educational needs are met. Personal education plans are in place and are shared with carers. None of the children are currently excluded from school. The education of all children is monitored through the monthly supervision of carers. Through these measures the agency is ensuring that the education of children is a priority.

Children are engaged in a range of activities in their free time. Their successes and individual achievements are celebrated in the agency's magazine. Children are encouraged to pursue their own interests.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency recognises the importance of contact and promotes it in accordance with any limitations stipulated by the courts or social services. This ensures that contact takes place safely. Contact arrangements are monitored through the Looked After Children's reviews. Carers understand the contact arrangements and are actively involved in ensuring that it takes place.

The agency has a positive approach to consultation with both children who are fostered and children within the foster carers' household. Individual sessions are held with children during the assessment of prospective carers and they are assisted to share their views directly through written and pictorial exercises. There are regular events put on by the agency for all children to promote consultation.

The agency's complaints procedure is well publicised and there is advice for young people about who they can contact outside the agency if they are unhappy or worried. This underlines the agency's commitment to take complaints seriously.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency has a policy statement on the way it intends to assist young people make the transition to adulthood. It sets out the arrangements for working in partnership with other agencies and the support available to both carers and young people. It identifies the key areas as budgeting, self care skills and emotional and practical support. The training programme includes pertinent issues relating to drug and alcohol awareness and sex and sexuality. Depending on age and ability young people are provided with opportunities to acquire independent living skills.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

The statement of purpose is up to date and subject to regular review. It provides a clear and concise guide to the service and an overview of what can be expected of it. There is an excellent children's guide to the service which includes a range of helpful advice. Children are given a clear account of the way in which the agency works.

The agency staff are effectively managed and well supported to complete their work. There are sufficient numbers of staff to undertake recruitment and assessment of carers. They are appropriately qualified and experienced. All staff have monthly supervision and an annual appraisal scheme has been introduced. This ensures that staff have opportunities to reflect on their practice.

There is a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. They have access to advice and guidance at all times through the on call duty system and are formally supervised eight times per year. The agency has introduced a system for unannounced visits which is working well. Carers are expected to complete training and some have embarked upon national vocational qualifications in child care. A carers' training plan for 2009/2010 has been implemented ensuring the ongoing improvement in carers' skill and knowledge.

Comprehensive case records are maintained for each child and significant documents and information are shared with carers. This ensures that, as far as possible, carers understand the reason a child is placed in their care. Carers are also expected to maintain their own records which are reviewed during supervision. The agency's records are in good order and stored securely. They are subject to regular audit and comply with the agency's policy on the protection of information. The arrangements for the maintenance of records ensure that children's needs are clearly identified and continue to be met safely.

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 the fostering panel fulfils its quality monitoring function by providing formal feedback to the agency (NMS 30.5)