

# Sankofa Care - Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Cheryl Carter / Caroline Wilson
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<b>Address</b>	Grosvenor Suite 2 Justin Plaza 3 341 London Road Mitcham Surrey CR4 4BE
<b>Telephone number</b>	0208 5445100
<b>Email</b>	enquiries@sankofacare.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Sankofa Care Ltd
<b>Registered manager</b>	Olivia Osei-Asibey
<b>Responsible individual</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	29 December 2008

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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**

Sankofa Care is an independent fostering agency based in Mitcham, Surrey. The fostering agency was formerly Fulani Foster Care. The agency is now under new management and has changed its name. Sankofa Care was registered in December 2008. The agency is registered to provide placements for children and young people up to the age of 18 years. There are currently 15 carers registered with the agency but recruitment is on-going.

### **Summary**

This is an announced inspection to assess the key National Minimum Standards for fostering services. This is the first key inspection of the agency since taking over from Fulani Foster Care and under the new management and the name of Sankofa Care.

The overall outcomes for children fostered through the agency are good. Two of the outcome areas, Being Healthy and Enjoying and Achieving, are judged as outstanding. The agency is very child focused and monitors its performance on a regular basis. There are good systems for matching young people and foster carers and young people feel safe and well cared for. Carers receive excellent support and are valued by the agency. The agency is well managed and employs committed, enthusiastic staff who understand the needs of the children in foster care.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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

This is the first inspection of this agency.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children's health needs are assessed prior to placement and inform the process of matching carers and children. Good assessments are undertaken, including specialist information that ensures carers are aware of how to best meet the needs of the children placed with them. Children are encouraged to live healthy lives and are informed of any likely risks resulting from their choices. Clear records of appointments with doctors, opticians and dentists demonstrate that carers provide good support to children to look after their health needs. Health needs are regularly reviewed and updated. The agency provides appropriate training to carers to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the children and to ensure a shared understanding of children's emotional needs.

Information to carers about health and safety issues is of a very high standard. The foster carer's handbook, provides clear details about the importance of providing a safe and caring environment. Health and safety checks are carried out annually. All records around health and safety relating to children and foster carers are of a very high standard, very well maintained and up to date. The monitoring systems in use are very effective. Carers are required to notify the agency of any significant events, such as illnesses and accidents of children placed with them.

The standard of management within the agency is high. The manager is clear about her responsibilities relating to health provision. The supervising social workers and support workers are knowledgeable of each of the children they are looking after. Information relating to health and healthy lifestyle choices is provided to children in language that is age appropriate. Children's information is compiled in three age groups: eight to ten years, eleven to twelve years and thirteen years and above. The oldest group is divided into packs for girls and boys. The packs contain general information for both sexes, however, the different genders hold information that is specific to that group, for example, the girls' pack contains additional information relating to issues that are specific to girls such as a below the bra guide to the female body and for the boys there is a below the belt guide to the male body. There is also information to discourage smoking and substance misuse in both packs. A separate file also holds health records that will include memories, health records, certificates etc and takes a holistic view of the child.

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

The provision is good.

The manager has the appropriate qualifications and experience, skills and knowledge of child care to ensure the safety of those children placed with the agency. The manager provides good leadership and there are management structures in place with clear lines of accountability and communication within the team. The agency has a clear recruitment strategy with good checks and a performance and development, appraisal system and induction programme in place. The inspector saw an up to date spreadsheet of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks of all staff demonstrating that there are good systems in place for monitoring CRB checks.

Foster homes are providing good care in a nurturing environment. Children said that they feel safe and well cared for. All children benefit from single rooms. Risk assessments and clear safe care plans for each child ensure safety is a priority. The foster carer assessments are thorough and take into account any potential hazards such as family pets, proximity to the road and transport issues. Carers are aware of their responsibility to keep children safe whilst allowing them to take some risks as part of becoming independent.

The process of matching children with carers is good with a process to record the matching considerations. This highlights any gaps in matching, such as closeness to family and school, shared interests, religion and culture, and identifies how gaps will be managed. Sometimes links with other carers will be made to provide additional support. Before accepting a referral the agency ensures that there is an appropriate available carer to ensure the best experience for the child. Carers sign a foster care agreement and a placement agreement to ensure they are aware of their role and the expectations of the agency.

Child protection training is part of the carers' induction and carers are aware of the child protection procedures. There are clear guidelines about permitted sanctions and carers have been trained in de-escalation techniques as part of the behaviour management process. Carers feel well supported by the staff when they are in challenging situations. Carers discuss any incidents of restraint with their supervising social workers who ensure the policy and procedures are correctly followed to provide safe care to the child.

Children said they are not being bullied in their placements. Children feel confident that their carers and the supervising social workers take up such issues on their behalf if they felt bullied either in the placement or at school.

The recruitment processes are robust and put the safety of children first. The checks taken up include references from previous employers as well as the usual Criminal Records Bureau checks, probation and health checks. The staff have appropriate qualifications for their roles and are encouraged to undertake post qualifying child care training.

The fostering panel is working effectively. It is chaired by an independent person and has a good mix of skills and experiences represented. The assessment information presented to the panel is thorough and includes information about competences and experience with children. Applicants are invited to attend and are dealt with sensitively by the panel members. There is good recording of all recommendations and decisions made.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Sankofa Care makes excellent attempts to understand and provide care that meets the individual needs of the child. They celebrate differences and encourage carers, staff and children to value and respect individuals.

Recruitment strategies are in place to ensure as wide a range of carers as possible, and training provided aims to value diversity. There is a clear expectation that all children can reach their potential with help and support. There is acceptance that everyone has their own goals and the agency should help individuals achieve these. Children are treated with respect and tolerance. Children feel that their experience of fostering is good and have become more positive about themselves. Social workers have a very thorough knowledge of the carers and their skills and use this when matching placements; this enables placements and as a result these become long-term thus providing stability to the child. Carers are not afraid to challenge any unfair treatment of the children in their care and advocate strongly on their behalf.

Education has a very high priority within the agency. Education provision is a real strength of this agency. All the children, carers and supervising social workers spoken to and surveys returned were very complimentary about the work of the agency. The agency has bought into on-line education tuition that provides support with all school work and homework for children. The challenge for the agency is to get placing authorities to supply the children with computers so that they can benefit from this initiative.

The agency is focused on achieving the best educational outcomes for each child and is proactive in ensuring that all children's educational needs are being met in line with their care plans. All children have Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Children's achievements are acknowledged and celebrated.

Some carers register for short breaks only within the agency. Arrangements for a child needing respite will be confirmed and agreed between Sankofa Care and the placing authority.

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

The provision is good.

Contact with family and friends is a clear expectation across the agency and foster carers demonstrate that they have a good understanding of the child's need to retain contact if this forms part of the care plan. Some complicated contact arrangements are organised and supported by the carers to ensure children have safe contact.

Children are consulted by their carers on a day to day basis. They feel listened to and know who to talk to if they disagree with any actions or plans. They have regular one to one sessions with the supervising social workers in addition to contact with the placing social worker. This provides good opportunities to raise any issues of concern. Children are encouraged and supported to attend their reviews and if appropriate provide a written contribution.

Feedback from the children's surveys reveal the children's opinions are sought by foster carers and they are listened to; 90% of the children who returned their survey said that they knew how to raise concerns and complaints and would complain to their social worker, or to the agency. Only two children were aware that they can contact Ofsted.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Sankofa Care encourages children and contributes to their preparation for independent living and adulthood. Foster carers encourage independent living skills for children where appropriate by teaching them how to shop, prepare meals, do their own laundry, and other self-care skills. However, they have no formal training to help them prepare children for independent living. The agency takes an active role by providing information to children about the changes in their body, their emotions and feelings.

Allowances for foster carers are in line with Sankofa's agreed expenses as specified in the contracts. There were no complaints or issues relating to payments. Carers said their allowances and expenses are always paid on time and they are happy with what they receive. A policy on fostering allowances was seen.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The agency is now under new management and has changed its name from Fulani Care to Sankofa Care. Sankofa Care has a management structure with lines of accountability and staff are clear about their roles. This is the first inspection of this agency that was registered in December 2008. The statement of purpose provides a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the agency. It outlines the service on offer, the referral process and how to contact the service. In addition there is a pack for prospective foster carers that clearly states the expectations of foster carers and the process of assessment.

The agency is managed effectively; carers are well supported and records are maintained as required by law. All children are given a handbook which has a good range of information available according to their age and understanding. The children nought to eight years are also given a DVD with information about the agency and the older children are give a CD with information along with their handbook.

All staff have a job description and a clear idea of their roles and responsibilities. Supervision is provided regularly and there is honest feedback that ensures any performance issues are picked up and dealt with. The staff present as confident, committed and enthusiastic about the agency and the young people. The manager of the organisation, the provider and the staff share ideas and look together to find excellent problem solving systems.

There is a clearly defined foster care assessment and approval process. Foster carers' files that were tracked during this inspection covered all the required areas. The strategy for supporting foster carers includes monthly visits from a supervising social worker and an on-call service that foster carers feel they can rely on. The visits are recorded on the files of both the foster carer and the child.

The majority of carers who returned questionnaires and all carers who met with the inspectors were very positive about the agency and the individual support they receive. In discussion with them they spoke about their contact with their supervising social worker and how they acknowledge their personal struggles and achievements.

During the inspection, case files from four placements were examined. Carers' files still contain contracts with the former agency not with Sankofa Care. It was explained to the inspectors that the deeds of notification take care of the transfer of agreements and all new agreements will be in the name of Sankofa Care. Files also contained records of carers' training, copies of the Form F, records of supervision and fees paid by the agency. Carers say there is always someone available on the telephone and that they are dealt with promptly and warmly.

Children's files contained Looked After Children (LAC) forms, child protection conference minutes and records relating to LAC reviews, evidence of Health Care Plans and appointments, and Personal Education Plans. There were some inconsistencies in these records. The administration back up is good and the business manager helps keep the budget under control.

The commitment of the staff is reflected in their enthusiasm and energy. Staff undertake a range of work supporting young people and carers, attending meetings and setting up and attending support groups. There is also a drive to recruit more carers from diverse groups. The agency is very clear what they want from carers and produce information to prospective carers that spells out the expectations. Foster carers said that they feel valued and part of the team.

The children's files hold all the information required to provide good care and to evidence reviews and planning. The information is thorough, clear and up-to-date. There is a lack of consistency in the information on some files. Copies of reviews, safe caring strategies, risk assessments and one to one sessions with young people are on file. Contracts with the placing authorities and copies of correspondence were on some files. Referral forms and matching forms are also included on the files which gives very clear evidence as to why a particular placement was chosen and how young people's needs are being met.

All the necessary records are maintained and are clear and up-to-date. Reviews of files are undertaken regularly and the service continually looks at ways to make recording simpler and easier to read. They are aware of the legal requirements of record keeping and are efficient at evidencing their work.

## **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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24	ensure that records are kept up to date as specified in Schedule 2 (Regulation 22.1)	30 July 2009
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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 foster carers have training to prepare children for independent living (NMS 14)