

# ABC Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	5 September 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

ABC is a private limited company operating as an independent fostering agency. One of its directors is a qualified social worker and has previous experience in managing a fostering agency. It was registered in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 on March 23rd 2007. The foster care agency undertakes the recruitment, assessment, support and training of foster carers. It offers a number of different types of placements for children; emergency, short term, assessment, bridging, long term and permanent placements. These placements are provided to children and young people from up to 18 years of age.

### Summary

This is the second inspection of the independent fostering agency since its registration in March 2007. A full announced inspection was made to inspect all of the key national minimum standards and to monitor progress with the actions and recommendations from the previous inspection made in September 2007. All areas of the Every Child Matters framework were assessed.

ABC Fostering Services Ltd is judged as good overall. It has good outcomes in being healthy, staying safe, positive contribution and organisation. The commitment of the management and staff working in partnership with foster carers has made a significant contribution to the development of a good quality of service and its continuing growth.

The agency has fully addressed the previous shortfalls in relation to risk assessments, approval status and recruitment processes. On this occasion there are two minor actions and a recommendation in respect of approval status, monitoring of the service and the foster placement agreement.

The agency has continued to grow and develop the service while ensuring the individual needs of children and young people are met.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### Improvements since the last inspection

The fostering service has made good progress with meeting the actions from the previous inspection. The matching process has been revised to include a risk assessment which covers sharing bedrooms where this is suitable for siblings wishing to share. This means young people's views are taken into consideration while safeguarding their health and safety. The foster carer approval status is regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects their assessed skills and abilities. The fostering service has improved systems for the recruitment and selection of staff and also complete exit interviews. This provides a robust system for employment of suitable staff to work with young people. All of the recommendations were also addressed. The policy in respect of smoking in foster carer households has been fully implemented to protect the health of children and young people. Clear child protection guidance has been provided which includes the procedures for carers to take should they be concerned about institutional abuse by the agency. Foster carers are provided with skills training in respect of contact arrangements and recording. A children's guide has been produced in two formats for different age groups and

is given to young people at the start of their placement. Supervising social workers maintain full and detailed records of foster carers and young people's supervision forms to provide an accurate record of the service provided to young people.

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

The provision is good.

Young people's health needs are well met by their foster carers, who are supported in this task by the fostering service. Foster carers receive a health care plan for each young person. The agency has a robust referral and matching process to ensure all relevant information is available regarding the young person's health care needs. Foster carers demonstrate a clear understanding of the developmental and health care needs of young people. They feel well supported by the agency which provides, 'constant care and support for all children in placement with ABC. Health checks, dental checks are important and ABC staff constantly ask about these and dietary needs are also discussed on a regular basis.'

Foster carers have a written health record which includes medical consent for treatments and full details of the immunisation history. Foster carers maintain a chronological record of appointments and treatments for young people. Young people are aware of the records and understand they are about their health care. Foster carers receive training in first aid and other health care topics. The agency seek relevant specialist support and guidance where there are particular health care needs.

Young people are registered with all of the local health care services and foster carers support them to attend appointments at dentists, opticians and doctors as needed. Young people confirm they are well cared for if they feel unwell or have health care problems. They are encouraged to participate in exercise and activities to keep them fit and healthy. The foster carers are aware of environmental and healthy lifestyle issues and raise the awareness of young people in their daily routines and making healthy choices.

The agency promotes a no smoking policy and where necessary smoking in the household is risk assessed and taken into consideration in the matching process due to the risks related to passive smoking. The agency has restricted the approval age range in accordance with guidance which states that carers who smoke should not be approved to care for children under the age of five.

The agency and foster carers develop good links with a range of health care professionals and agencies. Agency staff make appropriate referrals and access to specialist health care services when these are needed. For example, children and adolescent mental health services.

Foster carers maintain detailed current records of all medication administered to young people. Similarly accidents are recorded and reported when necessary. Robust supervision and support by supervising social workers identifies any omissions and addresses these appropriately with foster carers.

The agency expects foster carers to provide secure lockable storage of medication and this is established during the health and safety assessment and monitored during supervision and review processes. Young people's health and safety are protected and promoted through the agencies policies, procedures and practice.

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

The provision is good.

Young people are kept safe by foster carers and the fostering agency through the provision of suitable foster carers and the support of comprehensive guidance and training. The registered manager has completed the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 4 in Management. She is well motivated to develop and manage a regulated service. Both staff and foster carers confirm the manager is accessible and approachable. The ethos of the agency is child centred and the protection and promotion of young people is central to the service delivery.

The agency follows good practice guidelines and completes all the required references and telephone enquiries to confirm the suitability of applicants. Similarly police checks are renewed every three years with the required records kept of the outcomes. This means the agency consistently safeguards and promotes the welfare of young people.

Prospective foster carers complete a thorough and robust assessment which includes a health and safety assessment of the household. This means the young people are placed in safe, healthy and nurturing environments. All young people have a fostering placement agreement in place at the time of placement. This is based on an assessment of their needs, a comprehensive risk assessment and the individual household health and safety plan. These are all subject to regular review. Foster carers involve young people and household members in drawing up individual safe care plans, this means young people and others in the household are quite clear about how to keep themselves and others safe.

ABC has made good progress in developing the referrals database to improve the matching process. The matching documents are very thorough and clearly identify gaps or shortfalls in information or service and how these will be met. Young people in placement and their respective placing authorities are consulted appropriately and consent gained prior to any match being agreed. The agency liaises well with placing local authorities and commissioning services to ensure all aspects of service agreements are covered to underpin the continuity of the placement in the interests of the young person. Good outcomes for children are promoted as foster placement agreements are in place at the time of a placement being made, including respite placements. This ensures all those involved are fully aware of the arrangements necessary to meet a child's individual needs.

Foster carers complete a range of training programmes including, child protection, behaviour management and recording. Many of these topics are discussed during the assessment process to raise awareness and initiate understanding of the issues.

Staff and foster carers have access to the safeguarding policies and procedures and contact details for the relevant agencies should they have any concerns regarding the safety and welfare of young people. Each placement has a foster placement agreement, individual risk assessment and household health and safety plan, these are all subject to regular review. Foster carers produce individual safe care plan with each young person. This addresses the needs of all members of the household and is reviewed for each new placement and at least annually. It is the agency policy that all children are to have their own bedrooms unless it is in the best interests for siblings to share, these are subject to risk assessments in all cases. The agency developed good practice through a planned system of unannounced visits which are carried out by social workers who are not the carers' supervising social worker. This provides an

additional safety check and an objective perspective on the foster carer household. The agency staff network well with other agencies and professionals to protect vulnerable young people. Placing social worker's state, 'The operations manager and the foster carer worked well in partnership and supported child protection plans.' The management have developed monitoring systems which include; bullying, child protection issues, incidents and missing/absence without authority, restraints and sanctions.

ABC has systems in place to ensure the appropriate assessment, recruitment and vetting of staff and foster carers. Recruitment records are very well organized with structured files front index and numbered dividers. All required information is held on file including basic recruitment and clearance information. A handbook is issued to employees and foster carers with clear policies and procedures, induction, probation and appraisal to ensure they remain suitable to work with children and young people.

The fostering agency has an independent fostering panel with a diverse panel membership. All members of the panel are subject to the same robust vetting process as other staff. The agency provides all members with a comprehensive handbook of panel policies and procedures and the panel code of conduct. In addition it includes, complaints procedure, confidentiality, conflict of interest, equal opportunities and the whistle blowing policy. The panel minutes are clear and well ordered, they reflect a good level of discussion, recommendation and decision making. However, there continues to be a concern around the approval status of foster carers which appears to be an administrative error in the recording of the approval status of foster carer that was subsequently agreed by the agency decision maker. This means the terms of approval of some foster carers do not accurately reflect their skills and expertise or number of bedrooms available for fostering. The panel does fulfil the quality assurance function in relation to the assessment and review processes of foster carers and provides constructive feedback to promote a consistent approach and standard.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people's individual needs are met by their foster carers, who provide support to young people to enable them to meet their educational potential.

The fostering agency has a wide range of policies and procedures which incorporate diversity issues and some that specifically relate to equality and diversity. For example, policies and procedures in relation to placements for children with disabilities have been produced and implemented. Foster carers and staff receive diversity training and it is addressed in monthly supervision and appraisals to monitor attitudes and learning needs. The agency formats for referral, matching, placement plans and assessments cover all aspects of diversity and equality in relation to children and young people placed with the fostering agency. The placement plan helps to provide clear objectives regarding all aspects of the individual needs of young people and how these will be met. Placing social workers feel able to raise any issues of concern regarding foster carers understanding of specific needs of young people and the agency demonstrates that these will be addressed with foster carers to ensure the needs of young people are consistently being met. Young people benefit from the support and understanding of foster carers who promote their self-confidence and self-esteem. Young people enjoy a range of leisure interests and activities, such as, fishing, bike riding and swimming. This enables them to develop new skills and abilities and explore their potential.

Foster carers support young people to learn and achieve. The agency promotes the educational needs of young people through developing good working relationships with local schools and educational professionals. Education needs are generally identified during the referral and matching process. However, foster placement agreements do not always fully address the education needs of young people placed within the agency. For example, the foster carers role is not always clearly defined in respect of meeting the educational needs of a young person. This means due to this lack of clarity the young person educational needs may not always be met. There are management systems to monitor the educational exclusion and attainment of young people. Young people's achievements are celebrated and they are encouraged to develop to their full potential.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering agency positively promotes young people's contact with their family. Foster carers and the agency consistently encourage young people to express their views regarding their care.

The agency provides training for foster carers to underpin positive practice in respect of contact arrangements. This is reinforced with clear policies, procedures and record keeping of contact arrangements and carer's responsibilities. The importance of positive contact is highlighted and monitored during supervision sessions. Contact arrangements are clearly recorded in the foster placement agreement and reviews. Foster carers maintain current records of the young person's views and feelings about contact and detail any changes. Young people are encouraged and supported to maintain positive contact with their birth families.

The fostering agency is pro-active in seeking the views of young people about their care and the service provided.

The agency has developed good practice with supervising social workers meeting young people in placement at least once every month. Young people said they knew the supervising social worker and were happy to meet with them. The views of foster carers and both foster children and carers' birth children are sought through a robust system of consultation with an annual meeting and a written questionnaire, every six-month's respectively. A group of young people also work alongside the fostering agency manager to complete a popular quarterly newsletter. Young people receive a children's guide with information of how to complain and who to contact if young people feel they are not being looked after properly. Young people are able to express their views and wishes and were confident there were a number of people they could speak to.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

A placing social worker stated, 'foster carers worked well with the young person to develop independence skills and to spend money appropriately. They encourage, monitor and empower the young person to take responsibility for their actions.'

The agency has policies and procedures that provide clear guidance of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing in young people for independent or semi-independent living.



Young people are assisted to acquire age and stage appropriate independence skills and preparation for adulthood. Foster carers use a life-skills inventory to inform objectives and targets. These enable young people to develop practical skills for the home, employment and community. For example, use of banks and bank accounts, accessing local health services and other community services. Incentive and reward systems, such as, certificates and gifts are used to engage young people to show initiative and to help develop the service. This in turn develops young people's self confidence and resilience for coping with independent living.

There is a written policy on fostering payments and allowances which carers are aware of. Foster carers confirm that their payments are accurate and timely.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The individual needs of young people are addressed well, regarding personal, social and cultural issues. This is demonstrated, for example, through inclusion of young people in all aspects of process and recording. Similarly, the recruitment of staff and foster carers encourages a diverse range of applicants from different cultures and social backgrounds. All employees and foster carers attend equality and diversity training to underpin common values and understanding in the delivery of the service.

The agency has produced a Statement of Purpose which is revised annually and provides clear description of the services available to prospective carers and placing authorities. Progress has been made with the production of a young people's guide which can be made age and stage appropriate to meet individual needs of young people. These could also be translated as required to meet the needs of individuals placed. The guide includes the complaints procedure of the agency and contact details of independent advice or advocacy services. This ensures children's and young people's wellbeing is safeguarded and promoted.

The agency was registered in March 2007 and has continued to develop in terms of growth and service provision. The management have implemented a sound infrastructure to ensure effective service delivery for young people and foster carers. The agency has established regular monthly quality assurance meetings where issues are reported under the five Every Child Matters outcome areas. The focus of the meetings is child centred to progress young people's care plans, monitor outcomes. This also provides an opportunity to share information to provide adequate cover in the absence of colleagues. However, while there are systems for monitoring all aspects of the service records do not adequately or consistently reflect the information recorded by foster carer's in the children's records. For example, administration of medication and achievements in education.

The agency has relocated to new premises with improved facilities and access for staff and foster carers. The registered manager efficiently organises and manages a small staff team. Both directors are pro-active in the development of the agency and work in an administration and finance capacity. Foster carers have a clear understanding of the lines of accountability within the organisation. The fostering agency has effective structures and procedures in place to ensure the smooth financial running of the agency.

The agency has completed an analysis of the business identifying strengths and weakness and a developing a clear business plan. This includes marketing and recruitment of foster carers and subsequently staff. There are a sufficient number of staff with relevant qualifications, skills

and experience to fulfil service functions. There are currently 14 foster carer households with a wide range of experience, skills and abilities. There is a clearly set out assessment process and training programme for foster carers to ensure carers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to care for children. The agency uses the new British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F to process assessments and uses a set of competencies to measure the skills and abilities of potential foster carers.

Staff and foster carers are well supported through supervision, appraisal and review processes. There are regular staff and management meetings for sharing of information and opportunities for practice and service development. Foster carers state, 'We get two visits a month, unlimited phone contact and feel part of a team. ABC is child focussed.' The high level of support ensures that children and young people's care remains appropriate and is constantly reviewed and evaluated. Foster carers have confidence in an out of hours duty system operated by staff who are well informed about the care plans of the young people in placement.

The agency provides a comprehensive training programme with relevant course accessible to panel members, staff and foster carers. All foster carers have either completed or are undertaking the children's workforce development council standards training for foster carers. The agency has introduced a peer mentoring scheme to assist newly approved carers to adapt to the agency, reduce isolation, increase communication links and meet formal training milestones. This enables foster carers to achieve their competencies and develop the skills and knowledge to provide a good quality service to young people.

Each young person has an up-to-date, comprehensive case record of the information required to be held. This means there is a good range of information in respect of their continuing needs and progress made in each of the Every Child Matters outcomes. The foster carers complete a carer's supervision form and a young person's supervision form which records this information. The efficient and accessible administration service facilitates effective systems for staff and foster carers to enable them to achieve positive outcomes for young people.

## 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
30	ensure the terms of the approval continues to be appropriate (Regulation 29 (4)(b))	31 December 2009
4	ensure there is a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 at appropriate intervals such as medication, restraints and sanctions. (Regulation 42 Schedule 7)	31 December 2009

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure the foster carer's role in school contact, for example, parents evenings, open days, discussions with teachers, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate and in line with the care plan is clearly laid out in the placement agreement. (NMS13.4)