

ISP Sussex

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC383539
Inspection date	4 September 2009
Inspector	Lynda Mosling
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	4 November 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

Integrated Services Programme (ISP) Sussex is an independent fostering agency that was previously linked to the ISP registration in Kent but registered as a separate branch in 2008. The Head Office for the organisation is based at Sittingbourne in Kent. ISP Sussex has a manager, a team of qualified social workers, an education worker and a foster carer advisor. ISP Sussex provides social work support and supervision to foster carers, assistance with contact, transport, educational support and therapeutic weekly meetings. Training for staff and carers is available locally. Carers provide long term, short term, emergency, respite and permanent care placements. At the time of this inspection ISP Sussex had 40 approved foster carers, with 40 children in placement.

Summary

This announced key inspection covers the key National Minimum Standards for fostering services.

The service provides outstanding care to young people placed with its foster carers and excellent support to the carers. The service is very child focused and employs a range of skilled and well qualified staff to deliver thoughtful and nurturing care to young people with complex needs.

The service is efficiently managed and has well tested monitoring systems to ensure a consistent approach across the branches.

Consultation with young people is seen as a priority and there are very good systems in place to enable all young people to voice their opinions. Close liaison with schools has helped to provide much improved educational outcomes for the young people in placement.

The service works in a therapeutic way and benefits from the involvement of suitably qualified and experienced therapists.

One recommendation has been made as a result of this inspection. This is with regard to recording the views of parents in decision making.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the Sussex branch of the Integrated Services Programme since its separate registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The service is outstanding at promoting the health and development of young people. This is achieved by comprehensive medical assessments and a clear health plan for each young person at the start of the placement. Foster carers receive training and support to help them meet the health needs of the young people they care for. Young people are registered with a local general practitioner, and specialist health professionals are involved in providing advice to young people

and carers. The emotional health of young people is also assessed and therapy sessions are provided where needed by qualified therapists under the consultation of a highly experienced psychotherapist.

Young people say they are continually encouraged to live healthy lifestyles by their carers. They are provided with information, healthy food and appropriate activities. Some have been encouraged to help grow their own fruit and vegetables to further their understanding and enjoyment of healthy eating.

Comprehensive records detail the steps taken to meet the young peoples health needs. These are up to date and very well organised. They are monitored by the supervising social workers during their visits to foster carers and young people to ensure there are no gaps in provision.

There is a designated health care advisor employed by the agency to ensure consistency throughout the service, and close liaison with placing agency Looked After Children nurses.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The service is well managed by a competent and suitably qualified centre manager, overseen by a team of managers employed by the agency. The monitoring of practice is excellent with all managers measuring their work against the National Minimum Standards and additional ones set by the organisation. Outcomes for young people are collated and the findings used to develop the service.

The recruitment of carers is designed to provide a range of suitable people who can meet the needs of young people who may display attachment difficulties and challenging behaviour. Assessments of carers is thorough and includes group and individual sessions to look at the skills and competencies needed to provide excellent care. Training opportunities are described by carers as outstanding in their relevance to the task and in increasing their understanding of the needs of young people. Observation of carers and young people in their homes confirmed that the care offered is of a high standard. Young people commented that they have very good carers and are happy in their placement. The accommodation seen was warm, child focused and assessed as safe for the particular young people placed there. Carers suitability is reviewed annually and outcomes reported to the fostering panel. These reviews include the views of a large range of people including any young people placed during the year and those of the family of the foster carers. This ensures that everyone involved in the care of the young people have the opportunity to raise issues of concern.

The service has a very clear understanding of the principles of good matching and keeps up to date with research findings. The processes used to match young people to carers include gaining the views of those who know the young person as well as careful consideration of their assessed needs. Matching considerations include religion, cultural background, language and contact arrangements. Any gaps in matching are recorded and covered in the care plan to ensure as many needs as possible are met. This enables the service and carers to look at specific actions such as making links with local ethnic minority groups to provide appropriate help and support to young people. The service is careful only to accept referrals of young people whose needs they feel they can meet.

The comprehensive safeguarding policy includes child protection reporting procedures, definitions of abuse and signs and symptoms. It has recently been updated and approved by the Board of Directors. Carers and staff receive excellent training in child protection. This informs their day to day practice. Carers develop individual safe caring plans for each young person placed and these are monitored at their supervision visits. Carers demonstrate a clear understanding of their responsibility to keep young people and their own families safe. Detailed records of all incidents and accidents in the home are seen by the manager and reported to the appropriate agencies. Young people say they feel safe in their foster placements and have a range of people they can talk to if they have any concerns. They know about their right to complain and are confident that they will be taken seriously if they raise any issues. Carers are aware of the steps that will be taken, and the support they can expect in the event of an allegation made against them.

All personnel have been robustly checked to ensure their safety to work with young people. There are effective procedures to consider their ongoing suitability. Recruitment processes are well recorded and provide evidence of all the necessary checks. Staff are all qualified for their role and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the needs of fostered young people generally, and of specific needs of individuals placed. This promotes a confidence that the young people are the central consideration in the service.

The fostering panel is set up in accordance with legislation and its members have an extensive range of skills and experiences. They include representatives from health and education. The minutes are carefully written to outline the main considerations and to accurately record the recommendation of the panel. These recommendations are passed to the agency decision maker without delay. The independent panel chair ensures all members are able to share their views and fully debate all applications that are presented to them. Foster carers say they are dealt with respectfully and sensitively when they attend panel meetings. The consistency of the working of panels across the agency is monitored by the head of family placement who also ensures that membership meets the requirements of current legislation.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service values diversity and is excellent at promoting equality. Foster carers receive training on issues of equality and diversity and work hard to raise young people's self-esteem through valuing them as individuals. The agency celebrates a large range of achievements with awards and articles in their newsletter. They have also supported young people to publish books describing their experience of being looked after in the care system. Understanding the young people's previous experiences is central to the support and training they provide to carers. They firmly believe that each individual is unique and has a right to develop their potential, as stated in their Statement of Purpose. This view is borne out by the practice observed in foster homes and offices throughout the service. Young people were observed to be treated with respect, encouraged to express themselves honestly and given warmth and affection by their carers. They presented as confident, engaging and interested in the inspection process.

Education has a very high priority in the agency and carers receive training on how to promote and support education. There is excellent liaison with schools and examples of carers and education support workers enabling young people to remain in mainstream schooling by their consistent support to class teachers. Young people often arrive in placement with little interest

in school and with a record of non attendance. There are many examples of young people being encouraged to try again and who now attend on a regular basis. Young people demonstrate high aspirations and clear hopes for the future. They feel positive about the outcome of their efforts and proud of the progress they have made. The agency keeps records of all education attainments and are looking at further ways of demonstrating good educational outcomes for the young people in their care. They support young people to take vocational and academic courses at further education level. Carers attend school open evenings and advocate on the young people's behalf on school matters.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers are taught the importance of contact with family and friends from the start of their involvement with the service. They therefore expect to promote and support contact and have a well developed understanding of the likely effects of this on the young people they care for. They feel well supported by the staff when handling difficult contact situations. The agency provides supervised contact and provides excellent reports on the observations made during these visits. These are helpful in planning future family involvement and to increase understanding of the relationships that are important to the young person. There are examples of exceptionally good arrangements for contact between siblings cared for across the agency. The arrangements include shared holidays and activities and overnight stays with siblings. This enables young people to maintain their identity with their family of origin. The safety of young people during these arrangements is carefully considered and shared with the placing agency prior to agreement.

The service is very keen to ensure they consult with young people regarding their care and have developed a range of options to enable young people to have their say. They have recently analysed the responses to a questionnaire sent to all young people in foster placements. It shows that young people feel listened to and identify positively with the agency. The results are being used to inform the business plan and to review the policies and procedures followed by the agency. There is a young persons forum with representatives from all branches to discuss issues of interest with managers. The agency has also involved young people in the recruitment of staff and in the training of carers. Young people are consulted by their carers on a day to day basis and have their views recorded on their individual files. Consultation with foster carers is also considerable, including daily discussions with supervising social workers, weekly lunches with staff and managers and a foster carer forum. Carers feel they are empowered by the staff to openly express their views and have them taken into consideration. Consultation with placing agencies is also well documented. Whilst there is involvement of parents in reviews and contact arrangements there is little evidence of parents views in the records seen.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

An excellent system to ensure young people are taught the skills needed to move into independence has been developed by the agency. It includes a thorough checklist of the action needed to help young people reach their stated goals. Foster carers can use the checklist to plan activities and experiences for the young people and record the progress they are making. This has helped both foster carers and young people manage the anxiety felt when planning the end of the foster placement. There is liaison with local authority leaving care and

independence teams. A lack of resources to fully support the young people emotionally when they leave the service continues to be an issue of concern for carers. The agency has passed these concerns on to placing authorities and do all they can to support the carers and young people in this situation. Some fostering arrangements have become supportive lodgings in order to continue to offer accommodation to older young people and there is evidence that many young people will remain part of the foster family for many years to come. This further demonstrates the commitment of foster carers to the young people they care for.

The fees and allowances paid to carers are clearly set out by the agency and carers report no difficulties with regard to payment. There are also very clear costs of the service available to placing authorities. Negotiation over the cost of placements is undertaken in an open and fair way and is based on the needs of the young person.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

A clear Statement of Purpose accurately describes the service on offer and includes key policies and aims and objectives. In addition there are colourful young people's guides explaining the service and what to expect. The majority of placements are planned and give young people the opportunity to be introduced to the family and the staff in an unhurried way. Young people's views are listened to and as much choice as possible is given when agreeing placements.

The service is organised and managed very efficiently with excellent monitoring processes. The staff are clear about the lines of accountability and are open to challenge and continual learning. Each branch has a business plan, in addition to the overall business plan of the agency, describing the work currently undertaken and setting out the vision and strategy for the future. There are effective financial monitoring systems.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding as described in the enjoying and achieving outcome section of this report.

A range of well qualified managers with specialist roles offer additional support and guidance to the branch managers to ensure that the work undertaken meets the agency's high standards. Professional supervision is seen as a priority across the service and is described as excellent by foster carers, social workers and managers. This ensures individual performance is examined on an ongoing basis.

Young people's welfare and development is the major emphasis across the service and allocation of work reflects this. Staff are encouraged to develop their particular skills and interests by heading up new projects and systems. This ensures staff feel valued and involved in the development of the service. Staff present as enthusiastic and proud of their work. They demonstrate an empathy with the young people they come into contact with and this clearly evident in the records kept.

Support to carers is consistently good and was quoted as being the reason carers remain with the agency. The support includes exceptional training opportunities, good quality supervision and easy access to help and advice at all times. Foster carers feel part of the team and have open dialogue with the social workers and managers about their care of the young people. They feel they, and their family, are valued by the agency. This is demonstrated by the

recognition of special family events, their involvement in training and their views being listened to over all major decisions.

Record keeping is a particular strength of the service. Files are kept up to date and are easy to read. All of the necessary paperwork is presented in a organised way and relates to the outcomes for children as well as regulations and standards. The service is excellent at providing evidence for the work that they do and make accurate self-assessments of their achievement.

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 views of young people's family are sought over all issues which are likely to affect their daily life and their future (NMS 11.1)