

Banya Family Placement Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Elisabeth Brunton
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Date of last inspection	25 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

Banya Family Placement Agency (Banya) is an independent fostering agency which has been established for over 10 years. It is a private limited company with two directors. There is a registered manager in post and the agency employs a number of social workers and administrators, both as permanent and sessional staff. The office premises are located close to transport links and other facilities in south London. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 81 approved foster carers and 78 young people in placement.

Summary

The inspection was announced and all key standards were considered. Young people's needs are generally well met by foster carers and many foster carers are providing excellent care. Matching is generally sound though some additional measures are needed to ensure that all young people are well placed in emergencies. Young people are safeguarded and any allegations properly dealt with. The recruitment of staff and foster carers is thorough and the service benefits from a very effective fostering panel. The service is satisfactorily managed and well staffed. Foster carers are well supported and their supervision is adequate in most cases. Records are well maintained and the service provided is monitored.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Improvements have been made to the service in response to the six actions set at the last inspection. Proper procedure is now followed when allegations are made against foster carers. Full information is gathered as part of foster carers' annual reviews, including the views of placing authorities. The foster care agreement has been revised and is now comprehensive. Attempts have been made to provide foster carers with information about young people's health care needs. However, health care information and signed consents for medical treatment have not been made available for all young people, so this action is repeated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people benefit from good support from foster carers in maintaining their health. Young people are promptly registered with local general practitioners and attend the necessary healthcare appointments. Young people receive the proper care when unwell and additional psychological support is provided where needed. Young people are encouraged to maintain healthy lifestyles and enjoy varied and nutritious meals. Their food preferences, cultural and religious needs are taken into account by foster carers. Young people are also encouraged to take part in physical activity and benefit from sensitive support in maintaining good personal hygiene and sexual health.

Though young people benefit from placement with foster carers who are confident that they know about their health care needs, adequate written information is not always provided by placing authorities. Not all foster carers have signed consents to emergency medical treatment and this could potentially cause a delay in young people receiving treatment. Young people's

health care is promoted by good support to foster carers by the agency, through supervision, monitoring and training.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Both the registered provider and the manager are directors of the company which provides the fostering service. They both have the necessary qualifications and experience. The suitability of the registered provider and manager was established at registration and the necessary suitability checks are regularly updated. Both attend regular update training and are committed to the ongoing improvement and development of the service.

Young people report that they are well cared for in the agency's foster homes. Many young people are receiving excellent care from skilled and experienced foster carers who demonstrate very good understanding of their needs. The agency recognises that a small number of less experienced foster carers need careful matching or additional support and training, in order to achieve the best outcomes for young people. Young people benefit from comfortable, well maintained foster homes and bedrooms which are sufficiently spacious and personalised. Bedrooms are only shared by siblings and where it is safe for them to do so. Young people are safeguarded by thorough suitability checks made on foster carers, their households and support carers and regular health and safety inspections of their accommodation.

Most young people benefit from sound matching with foster carers who can meet their needs well. Young people also benefit from placement within easy reach of their schools and with foster carers who normally share their racial and cultural backgrounds, religion and language. Young people are placed within foster carers' terms of approval and matching is informed by adequate information from placing authorities. A small number of young people are placed in emergencies with foster carers who are less able to meet their needs and sustain their placements and the agency recognises this. Placement agreement meetings are held at the outset of placements.

Young people are safeguarded in foster homes and the importance of safe caring is recognised by foster carers and the agency. Allegations against foster carers are properly dealt with and any necessary measures taken to ensure the safety of young people remaining in placement. Training for foster carers in safeguarding and written guidance support young people's safety in foster homes. Most young people benefit from a skilled and understanding approach to their behaviour. The need for some inexperienced foster carers to receive additional support and training in this area is recognised by the agency. Young people are not being bullied in foster homes and are safeguarded through sound practice when missing.

Young people benefit from the recruitment of qualified and able staff to work for the agency and are safeguarded by very thorough recruitment practice. All necessary references are taken up and checks made before staff are employed, freelance staff and panel members engaged.

The provider has established a properly constituted and very effective panel. Through able and independent chairing, panel's diverse membership thoroughly considers foster carer assessments, reviews and other matters and makes sound decisions. Panel's effective fulfilment of its quality assurance role safeguards young people and the agency benefits from valuable feedback on the quality of work presented to the panel.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people's individual needs are well met by foster carers. Young people are encouraged to develop their talents and interests and are helped to grow in confidence. Priority is given to placing young people with foster carers who share their racial and cultural backgrounds and young people are pleased to be with foster carers who understand their heritage. Young people's diversity needs are also well met when not ideally matched. These young people are supported in following their religions, their racial and cultural heritage is respected and every effort is made to provide them with familiar food and lifestyles. Young people with disabilities are also receiving good care. Foster carers ensure that these young people are provided with the resources and educational opportunities to which they are entitled and advocate effectively on their behalf.

Young people benefit from support and encouragement from foster carers in their education. The need for changes in school is minimised by foster carers providing escort to school. Young people's education is promoted by close liaison between foster carers and schools, with foster carers often advocating on young people's behalf. Young people develop greater confidence in their educational abilities as a result of foster carer's support and encouragement and valuing of their achievements. Foster carers provide young people with the necessary facilities for homework, including access to computers. Some young people benefit from additional tutoring and other educational input provided by the agency. Foster carers are well supported by the agency in promoting young people's education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people's family contact is well supported and facilitated by foster carers. Foster carers are aware of the importance of family contact to young people and are sensitive to their feelings about it. Some children have very regular contact with parents in their foster homes, with parents participating in their care. Other young people are supported by foster carers in re-establishing contact with family members. Young people benefit from escort to contact and supervision of contact by foster carers and the agency's staff. Facilities for contact are being developed within the agency's office premises.

There is good communication between young people and foster carers. Young people's views and opinions are sought and listened to by foster carers who appreciate the importance of this. Young people's views are also sought by their own social workers and at statutory reviews. Opportunity is provided for young people to share their views about their placements with the agency's supervising social workers, during their regular visits to foster homes. Young people contribute their views to foster carers' annual reviews and have further opportunity to share their opinions at regular discussion and activity events provided by the agency.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are supported by foster carers in developing skills needed for independent living and are helped to grow in confidence. Some young people are actively supported by foster carers while studying away from home. Others benefit from foster carers advocating on their

behalf in discussions with placing authorities about their future plans. Training and support is provided for foster carers in preparing young people for independence.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Young people and other stakeholders are informed about the services provided by the agency. There is a comprehensive statement of purpose and separate welcome packs for older and younger age groups. Both versions are well-presented and include all the necessary information.

Roles and responsibilities of staff and the lines of accountability are generally clear. The establishment of senior posts, in addition to that of the manager, is relatively recent. The allocation of management tasks and responsibilities across management and the senior staff group has not yet been fully clarified. Nevertheless, the service appears to be well managed and staff with management responsibilities are able, experienced and suitable for their roles. There are sound systems in place for monitoring the agency's functions and for determining the workloads of staff. The agency appears to be financially sound. Complaints which could have implications for the suitability of staff are satisfactorily investigated on behalf of the provider. However, complaint investigations and their outcomes not always fully evidenced through records maintained.

Young people benefit from qualified, experienced and able staff being employed to work for the agency. Following recent recruitment, staffing is now adequate for the size of the service. Staff are well supported in their work and receive regular formal supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Regular staff meetings are held. An effective strategy for recruiting foster carers has contributed to recent growth in the service and an increased diversity of foster carers. Assessments of prospective foster carers are satisfactory. They address the competencies and include analysis of information presented.

Young people benefit from placements with foster carers who are well supported by their agency. Supervisory visits to foster homes are normally carried out monthly but there have been some slightly longer gaps. Regular unannounced visits are also made. Additional support is provided to foster carers through the provision of support groups, a responsive out-of-hours service and a foster carer's forum, through which issues are raised with the agency. Foster carers also benefit from individual membership of the Fostering Network, an informative handbook and regular social events. Foster carers' continuing suitability is reviewed at least annually and reviews incorporate the views of young people in placement, their social workers and foster carers. Reviews are considered by the fostering panel when required and a decision as to the continuing suitability of all foster carers following review, is made by the agency's decision maker.

Foster carers are provided with a good range of training. Courses are well publicised and said to be interesting and informative. Prospective foster carers are expected to attend pre-approval training. There are clear expectations of foster carers that they attend certain training following approval, including training on the recently introduced training, support and development standards. Most young people benefit from placement with foster carers who participate in regular training but there are a small number who do not. Attendance at training courses is monitored and comprehensive training records maintained for each foster carer. Foster carers are encouraged to undertake training but the agency's expectations and appraisal of foster carers' training needs are not always included in their annual reviews.

The promotion of equality and diversity within this fostering service is good. Young people's backgrounds and identity are given priority in matching and most young people are placed with foster carers who share their heritage. Young people's individual needs are well met, including their equality and diversity needs. Young people with disabilities are also receiving good care.

Young people are safeguarded by the agency and its foster carers obtaining key information about them. However, foster carers and the agency are not always provided with full written information about young people's backgrounds and needs, by placing authorities. Foster carers are maintaining records about young people's welfare and progress. They are aware of the importance of confidentiality and store records securely.

Comprehensive and well-ordered paper and computer records are maintained for young people, foster carers and staff. Records are safely stored and the confidentiality of information safeguarded. All required records relating to foster carers are maintained.

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
12	ensure that all foster carers are provided with information about young people's state of health and arrangements for giving consent to medical examination or treatment (Regulation 17(3))	1 March 2010
8	ensure that the welfare of young people to be placed with foster carers is safeguarded and promoted at all times through appropriate matching (Regulation 11(a))	1 February 2010
21	provide all foster carers with the necessary supervision at all times. (Regulation 17(1))	1 February 2010

Recommendations

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

- define clear roles for management and staff, particularly in the task of matching young people with foster carers (NMS 4.2)
- ensure quality performance by maintaining full written records of investigations into complaints against staff (NMS 4.1)
- ensure that that annual reviews include an appraisal of foster carers' training and development needs (NMS 23)
- ensure that foster carers have access to all relevant information concerning young people placed with them. (NMS 24.6)