

Amicus Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC389720
Inspection date	9 July 2010
Inspector	Paul Clark
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	15 Beverley Road Horfield BRISTOL BS7 0JL
Telephone number	0845 301 4133
Email	enquiries@amicusfostercare.com
Registered person	Amicus Foster Care Limited, company no: 6724648
Registered manager	Nasareen Hobbs-Ahmed
Responsible individual	Shirley Monahan
Date of last inspection	9 July 2010

© Crown copyright 2010

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

This independent fostering agency provides long term and short term care for children and young people who cannot be looked after in their own homes. They may also provide direct therapy to children and young people and therapeutic consultation and training to carers and colleagues.

The agency is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985. The Registered Manager and Responsible Individual being the two directors of the company. There is a senior management team comprising of the two directors and a Service Manager. The agency operates from the three homes/domestic premises of the three members of the senior management team, different administrative and practice functions occurring within each of these premises. Young people are not received at any of these addresses. The agency rent suitable venues for the provision of training and support groups for carers and other suitable venues for therapeutic work with young people. All case files and other records on carers and young people are entirely electronic and a suitable safeguarding system is in place to protect the security and confidentiality of these records.

At the time of the inspection there were 24 approved fostering households (two of which provide short term respite care for other carers) accommodating a total of 36 young people.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected. This small, independent fostering agency provides an excellent level of care for the young people it accommodates. The foster carers are well trained and supported by a dedicated team of professionals who are in turn well managed and supervised.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first regulatory inspection since registration. There were no actions or recommendations arising from the initial registration enquiries.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are good systems in place to support the health and well-being of young people. The agency ensures that foster carers register each young person accommodated with a General Practitioner, dentist and optician and that routine check ups are carried out. This is spelt out in the foster carer's handbook and is part of the 'Skills to Foster' preparation training that each foster carer undertakes.

Foster carers have undertaken the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training and several of them have been awarded the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Young People, which gives advice on the necessary health care arrangements that must be in place. Supervising social workers check these arrangements during their routine visits to the fostering households. Carers receive written information about a child's health

needs at the time of placement, including details of any ongoing health condition or treatment. The agency has a 'follow up' system in place to ensure that placing authorities are reminded of their responsibility to provide carers with a full health history, thus further supporting the health needs of young people. The agency provides each foster carer with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) 'Health Record' book which they complete on behalf of each child placed and which they will take to any future placement. This ensures young people have an ongoing record of their health history and of their ongoing health needs. Foster carers are responsible for ensuring that young people attend an annual medical examination, the findings of which are reported to the annual looked after children review.

The agency will ask placing authorities to refer a young person for psychiatric or psychological assessments from their local child and adolescent mental health service team if they have any concerns about a young person. The agency provides an in-house individual therapeutic care service for young people by a qualified psychotherapist. This provides young people with additional emotional and developmental support. There is a panel member with medical expertise and the agency has ongoing consultation arrangements in place with a local paediatrician. Therefore, increasing the level of health support that is provided by the agency for the young people it cares for.

The diet of young people is subject to the agency's written guidance on healthy eating. This written guidance helps to ensure that young people are fed appropriately by carers. Supervising social workers check that the food provided is balanced and nutritious and is in line with the training received and the advice contained within the guidance.

The agency are mindful of their responsibility in maintaining an oversight of the sexual health of young people and supervising social workers will discuss this with carers as part of their ongoing supervision. The agency guidebook for young people gives useful information and the contact details of helping agencies in this regard.

The agency policy on smoking does not allow young people to live in a home environment where carers smoke. The agency does not exclude people who smoke from applying to foster. However, the agency positively promotes non smoking by providing carers with advice and support on smoking cessation. For example, by paying for those carers who do smoke to undertake hypnotherapy sessions. This additional agency support further promotes the health and well-being of young people and carers. The foster carer's handbook and the young person's guide contains clear written help and advice on drug and alcohol related problems.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency takes rigorous steps to ensure that young people placed are kept safe. The responsible individual and the registered manager are both professionally qualified social workers and registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). The registered manager has an appropriate management qualification. Both have many years experience in child care management and practice. Both have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks in place and these are updated every three years.

The process of foster carer recruitment, vetting, assessment, approval and training is rigorous and appropriate. All foster care applicants are assessed by an independent assessor who the agency employ on a sessional basis. The assessment is in line with the BAAF Form F guidance

which includes health and safety checks on the household and living environment. Clear agency policies are in place with regard to the latest guidance on the safety of households, for example, safety of dogs, poisonous plants and ornamental weapons. Thus ensuring that young people live in a safe environment. Enhanced CRB checks are in place for all foster carers and members of their families living with them, where age appropriate. Applicants undergo a two-day preparation 'Skills to Foster' course as part of their training and which also stands as part of the assessment process. The foster panel deliberates on the carer assessment and makes its recommendation to the agency decision maker. The panel chair and all members of the panel are recruited and appointed subject to appropriate approval. There is a suitable professional expertise amongst the panel membership. All members of the panel are suitably CRB checked.

The matching of young people with carers is thorough and appropriate. Complete information on a young person is taken from the placing authority, supervising social workers look for a potential 'young person/carer' match and full information is presented to the potential carer before an expression of interest is returned to the placing authority. Young people may undertake an overnight stay as part of their placement induction.

The agency has clearly written policies on child protection, bullying, complaints, action to be taken in the event of a child going missing. Carers and staff receive appropriate training in these policies. The agency notifies the appropriate authorities, including Ofsted, in the event of any serious occurrence. The agency keep a record book of complaints although no complaints have been received. These policies and recording systems help to promote the safety of young people.

All primary carers have undertaken the CWDC training course and eight out of the 24 approved foster care households have the NVQ at level 3 in Caring for Young People. The agency promotes the attainment of this award by carers ensuring that young people are cared for by suitable carers. The agency has a 24 hour management support service for carers in the event of crisis situations occurring within placements or where young people may be at risk. There is also a mentoring system in place for the support of newly approved carers. All foster carers are given free membership of the 'Fostering Network'. These additional provisions provide carers them with support and advice to ensure that young people are kept safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The management, staff and carers come from a diverse range of racial and cultural backgrounds and the everyday practice of the agency values diversity. This is also enshrined in its policies on equal opportunities, sexual orientation and disability. The agency has carers with specialist skills in working with children with disability. These arrangements ensure that young people placed have positive roles of diversity.

Young people are well supported in attending to their educational achievement. Foster carers will attend school evenings and will liaise directly with schools. Although the agency do not employ educational support workers directly there was evidence that the agency will access this support for a young person should this become necessary. All fostering households are provided with a laptop and internet access which young people may use for educational purposes. The Service Manager ensures that this equipment is suitably safeguarded for the use of young people. This provision helps to ensure that young people have the additional education support they need to achieve academically. There is a panel member with educational expertise. The

agency has good links with the Connexions service who they consult on a regular basis. Pathway plans were seen to be in place for those young people for whom these plans are necessary and the agency has a system in place to ensure that placing authorities are reminded of their responsibilities in this regard. Therefore, young people have a clear plan in place for their ongoing, and post formal education needs.

Apart from having two fostering households which provide respite care for carers, the service does not provide short term care for children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Contact arrangements between young people and their birth parents and siblings are discussed at placement planning meetings and the arrangements for contact are clearly spelt out in young people's care plans. These are subject to periodic review. Foster carers support contact arrangements either by assisting with transport arrangements or where appropriate, allowing contact to take place within their home. Several carers have been trained in supervising contact. Foster carers record contact visits appropriately. The foster carer's handbook gives clear guidance on contact arrangements.

The agency conducts six monthly questionnaire surveys on both young people and carers to elicit their views about the running of the service. Additionally, carers have monthly forum meetings which all staff attend and where carers can raise any concerns. Foster carers appreciate being kept fully informed about all aspects of the agency income and expenditure. Consultation with young people is otherwise, largely informal, usually taking place at one of the many social events that occur. However, formal consultation meetings with young people take place every six months. They may also raise any concerns and express their views at looked after children reviews, directly with their placing social worker or the advocacy service available from their placing authority. One young person wrote in their questionnaire survey return to Ofsted, 'I am always listened to and loved lots' and another wrote, 'Everyone takes care of everyone like one big family and I just love that.' The active consultation arrangements conducted by the agency enable young people to feel that their views and contributions are valued.

Birth parents may raise any concerns about the service with their placing authority social worker or through their complaints system. They are invited to attend social events organised by the agency. They are also consulted as part of the foster carer's annual review.

A questionnaire survey of foster carers own children is conducted annually and they have periodic meetings with the agency director which usually involve a social event. These consultations help to ensure that the views of all stakeholders are taken into account in the running of the service.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The foster carer's handbook gives advice and guidance to carer's on the way that young people should be prepared for independence and adulthood. This is also covered in the 'Skills to Foster' and in the NVQ training. The agency are currently preparing a training course on this subject which both carers and young people will attend. The agency has good links with the Connexions service. All young people over 15 years of age have a pathway plan in place and have been

contacted by the Connexions service. Although these arrangements are largely the responsibility of the placing authority, the agency has a system in place which will ensure that the authority will be informed if these arrangements are not in place. These agency arrangements for supporting young people nearing the end of full time education help to prepare them for adulthood.

Foster carers receive a fostering fee related to the age of the child placed. This is arranged in three age bands. The fee includes birthday and Christmas payments. The agency separately makes a birthday and Christmas gift to each child. The agency provides carers with an additional £200 payment to assist with the summer holiday period. This additional economic support is spent on outings and trips, providing young people with good leisure and social experiences. The agency takes active steps to ensure that transport costs incurred by carers when taking young people for contact visits are claimed from the placing authorities and repaid to them as soon as possible.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is evidenced by the range of staff and carers from differing racial and cultural backgrounds as well as a number of same sex couples approved as carers; carers who specialise in caring for children with a disability and the registered manager has experience in caring for children with a disability. In addition, the agency has clearly written policies on equal opportunities, sexual orientation and disability and staff spoken to were well aware of the detail of these policies. The everyday practice of the agency includes observance of cultural diversity. A recent social event with children and carers included a variety of cultural cuisine. Promoting diversity in this way provides positive experiences for young people and prepares them well for living in a diverse society.

The agency has a clearly written Statement of Purpose which outlines its aims and objectives. There is also a young person's guide which is presented in a user-friendly format and which provides young people with a wealth of information about the service. All carers are given a copy of the foster carer's handbook which is comprehensive and clearly written and provides them with all necessary information and guidance on their role, policies and procedures. The provision of this clear practice guidance helps to ensure that young people are cared for by people with the appropriate knowledge and direction.

As previously stated, the responsible individual and the Registered Manager are both professionally qualified social workers and registered with the GSCC. The Registered Manager has an appropriate management qualification. Both have many years experience in child care management and practice. Supervising social workers are supervised monthly by the responsible individual. Team meetings occur fortnightly and are appropriately minuted and recorded. Supervising social workers feel that their workload levels are appropriate, they are all professionally qualified and they feel that they receive the training necessary for their role.

The training strategy for carers is comprehensive. Carers interviewed and in survey returns stated that they are supported in accessing all training that they feel is necessary for their role. They also stated that they feel well supported by supervising social workers and management in undertaking their role as carers. All carers have undertaken the CWDC training course and a significant number of them have achieved the NVQ at level 3 in Caring for Young People. Good

training, supervision and support ensures that young people are cared for by confident and skilled people.

The agency has a Service Manager with overall responsibility for administrative management. The recording systems for carers, young people and staff personnel are entirely electronic. Access to these records is suitably safeguarded and back up systems are in place. All records seen were well ordered, up to date and comprehensive in content. There has been a full and comprehensive review of the overall service. The review has outlined key areas of service development that the agency have already begun to implement. This includes the appointment of an additional supervising social worker to enhance the service within the existing provision, thus providing further support for carers and 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
-----------------	---------------	-----------------

Recommendations

There are no recommendations.