

Pilgrims Corner Fostering- Verona House

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC376060
Inspection date	23 July 2010
Inspector	Mark Blesky
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	21 July 2009

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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

The fostering office is on the top floor of a three storey building. This office is within an existing children's home owned by the same company.

Summary

At this unannounced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. This is a satisfactory service with many good features. Close and co-operative working between the agency and the carers is evident. Carers are well supported by the agency and in constant contact with one another. Carers are motivated and demonstrate insight and understanding into the caring role and the wider roles of care planning. Staff and carers are clearly child focussed and committed. This close, less formal relationship, has however resulted in expectations between parties, rather than more formal effective systems. Some of the less formal arrangements have led to shortfalls in services and planning. This has limited the opportunities for young people to plan towards independence, learning essential life skills and left some other systems rather muddled.

However, this service has made some good progress in its first year of operation. It is clear that both staff and carers are supportive towards improvements and the inspection process as they strive towards best practice.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable. This is the first inspection since registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people are supported by well managed healthcare monitoring. The agency ensures that all carers register the young people with core health services when they become looked after by the agency. Healthcare files are maintained in all carers' homes, these include routine and specific interventions from General Practitioners, dentists and opticians.

The agency has formed and maintained links with the community services and placing social workers are made aware of any emerging healthcare treatments. Mandatory training is provided for all carers to ensure that they are able to understand and meet the needs of the young people in their care. Young people are supported with their diverse needs by effective planning and close liaison with the young people.

The visiting social worker regularly checks diets and menus with carers and young people. Each child has a health care booklet detailing healthcare and healthy living. The children's guidance is currently detailed and comprehensive, but it was not considered to be written in the most suitable form for children under 14. The agency is already reviewing this matter.

Secure storage for medications are either supplied by the agency or provided within a safe place in the home. Communication between carers and the agency is well established and

effective. Any changes in healthcare needs or more urgent need for treatments are promptly addressed. All carers have the necessary medical consent for young people to receive treatments.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency is in the process of employing a new manager, but this person was not in post at the time of the inspection.

All foster homes are regularly visited and the visiting social worker carries out health and safety checks along with reviews of risk assessments. Checks and visits are frequent. This provides an opportunity to discuss how a young person's behaviour or needs may impact on the suitability of the home and placement. All young are provided with suitable services to meet their needs and encouraged to express their views. Discussions with the young people and carers include consideration for the individual and diverse needs of the young people.

Documents record provisions and services that have been deployed. Arrangements for transport to school or other necessary appointments are provided by the carers and any unplanned or exceptional support is catered for. All vehicles and appropriate documents of legal entitlement to operate these are monitored by the agency to ensure safety is maintained for all transport.

Bedrooms are personalised by the young people and the young people are able have time alone and appropriate privacy. Although a matching exercise is undertaken by the provider this is somewhat informal and not well evidenced. Details of matching are not recorded in planning documents. Current systems do not detail any shortfalls or supplemental provisions where gaps in matching may have existed. In all but emergency placements, young people are introduced to carers prior to placement and appropriate plans for introduction are agreed. All carers and staff undertake mandatory training in matters of safeguarding and child protection.

All carers and are provided with written guidance on dealing with matters of safeguarding and this guidance is written in accordance with local authority protocols. The agency make it clear to all carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable and guidance details approved methods of control and sanction.

All carers and staff are employed through robust recruitment practices and all references and statutory checks are undertaken in every case. It was noted that some panel members records did not contain photographs supporting proof of identity, however, it was confirmed that these had recently been removed and were already being replaced as part of a recent review. It was noted that minor unexplained gaps in employment were also present in two files sampled.

Guidance is provided for all panel members to ensure that activities are conducted in accordance with the national minimum standards. It was noted that the limited evidence exists to confirm that the panel is currently performing an adequate quality assurance function.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

All foster carers undertake diversity training as part of their mandatory training. Initial and refresher training includes matters of ethnicity, gender, culture and other areas of difference. Training for carers also promotes effective planning for individual needs and raising awareness

of ethnicity and culture. Guidance for carers details difference and diversity in planning of services for the individual young people. Although there is some reference to religion and ethnicity within young people's files, this is not always clear and no reference is evident to detail resulting expectations from carers. Current guidance makes reference to formal planning, but current systems do not evidence a formal or rigorous approach in some cases.

Education is supported by both the agency and the carers. The agency provides its own education services for young people that are not within the mainstream education system. Carers liaise closely with all providers of education and demonstrate their support for schools. Carers attend open days and parental consultation days. The agency is updated accordingly by both the schools and the carers. Supervision and visits to the carers ensure that educational support is discussed and progress assessed.

It was noted that whilst communication between the carer and the agency is typically effective, communication is more often retrospective. Dates for open days and parental consultation days are not generally communicated in advance. The current systems are likely to fail to identify a carer's absence at these important meetings.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency promotes contact for all young people and contact arrangements are made with the carers at the commencement of the placement. Fostering agreements and placement agreements detail the importance of contact. The roles and responsibilities of the carers and agency are detailed in contact planning. The progress of contact is overseen by regular visits from the agency's social worker and discussed in supervisions sessions. Young people are therefore supported to achieve and maintain contact and benefit from well planned arrangements. The views and opinions of the young people are also canvassed during visits to the foster home and through day-to-day discussions with carers.

Young people are supported and their views are also sought through the use of surveys and questionnaires. These documents are assessed by the agency and copies of these are also overseen by the fostering panel. Information and views of the young people are then considered and changes may be made to the services as a result. Training is provided to carers to ensure that they are aware of the importance of young people's views. Carers are encouraged to listen carefully when important views or any concerns are expressed. Young people are also given the opportunity to make comments that are more formal prior to their statutory reviews.

All young people are supported by a detailed and comprehensive complaints procedure and they are kept informed of the progress of any complaints. Young people spoken to expressed their awareness of the complaints system and were clearly confident in this area. All complaints are overseen and monitored by the agency and the agency does promptly address any shortfalls in service.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is inadequate.

The agency and the carers regularly discuss the development of young people's skills and moves towards independence. However, there is little evidence available that the agency maintains formal systems to manage this. There is no evidence of assessment, planning, and

implementation of any formal programmes to support young people to develop the necessary skills. This area has not been effectively developed.

The fostering service makes regular payments to all staff and allowances are agreed and reviewed accordingly. All known expenses are agreed at the point of placement and the agency is supportive at meeting any financial needs that emerge or develop subsequent to the placement.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out what services are provided for children who are placed within the fostering service. The current statement was last reviewed in June 2009. The manager has the relevant experience for working with young people and has also completed appropriate training.

The agency oversees the operation of its services and monitors the services provided by the foster carers. Carers and the young people benefit from the regular and consistent visits by agency workers. It was noted that additional to the fostering social worker, carers are periodically visited by the manager and the provider.

Carers expressed feeling very supported by this contact and all the young people spoken to are familiar with the agency's staff members. It was noted that the recording and monitoring of some matters under schedule 7 are not robust. Limited evidence could be found to confirm that formal and rigorous systems are in place.

The manager has been appointed, but had not taken up post at the time of the inspection. The provider was managing the service effectively. The provider has the necessary experience and is currently being supported by a qualified social worker. The manager's roles and responsibilities are clearly detailed in the job description and accountability is made explicit. Adequate arrangements can be put into place for any absence of the manager and the agency maintains an on-call and out of hours service. All staff are appropriately managed and supervised and all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities to the carers and young people.

Training is provided for all staff and carers; however, the current management of training schedules is inaccurate. The provider is currently reviewing the training programmes and planning for all staff. Administration is well managed and this role is currently being developed effectively.

All staff are provided with a copy of the procedures manual and supervision sessions consider the development and evaluation of all staff. All staff are recruited through formal employment processes which include background checks, references and statutory checks. All carers undertake formal assessment and training in foster care and are only then employed if they are suitable for the role. Formal training assesses qualities, competences, and aptitudes for fostering and an awareness of matters of difference and diversity. Carers are well supported by the agency with regular supervision and training. Network days are also arranged for carers and carers say that they feel supported by the services provided.

Each young person has a detailed and comprehensive case record of his or her history, care planning, and assessed needs. The agency retains relevant information on all young people within the service and this is kept up to date and monitored by the administrator. Carers also

keep a young person's file and day-to-day information along with historic records which are maintained in the home. It was noted that although carers tended to retain everything relevant to the young person they are not clear exactly what they should have. Consequently, files are somewhat difficult to navigate and cumbersome or sometimes vague and unclear.

In the case of outstanding information, carers are not clear of timescales to receive information or how to chase outstanding documents. It was acknowledged that the agency is in the process of revising file information which has led to some of the current shortfalls in the system.

The agency maintains adequate administrative records and keeps records in accordance with the national minimum standards. Systems for monitoring and quality assurance continue to be developed and emerging systems reflect effective planning.

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
3	keep all the information set out in regulations (Regulations 5, 7 and 20 and Schedule 1)	30 September 2010
5	establish and maintain a system for (a) monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 at appropriate intervals; and (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 42(1))	30 September 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that written foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer (National Minimum Standards 8.4)
- ensure that placement decisions consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family (National Minimum Standards 8.5)
- ensure that the fostering panel provides a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process, in particular to monitor and review the work of the assessors; to provide feedback (National Minimum Standards 30.5)
- ensure that the fostering service gives high priority to helping their foster carers to meet a child's education needs (National Minimum Standards 13.2)

- ensure there is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments (National Minimum Standards 19.1)
- ensure that there is an effective system to monitor the quality and adequacy of children's case records, and remedial action is taken when necessary. (National Minimum Standards 25.3)