

# Seafields Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| <b>Inspector</b>               | Cheryl Carter |
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| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Jo-Anne Savage   |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 23 July 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**

This is an independent fostering agency which was established in 1996. It operates from a main office in Hornchurch. Carers are widely dispersed throughout the home counties and additional offices operate from Newick and Newmarket. The agency provides a range of services including short and long term fostering for children from birth to 18 years of age.

### **Summary**

This announced inspection focused on the key national minimum standards for fostering services. The inspection included discussion with the manager, three social workers and the Head of administration with a responsibility for recruitment and Human Resources. Three foster carers homes were visited and these were all providing safe care in a warm and comfortable environment. The agency continue to have good systems in place enabling staff to provide good services that support foster cares to maintain stability for the children placed with them.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There were two recommendations made at the last inspection that related to obtaining full information about the children placed with foster carers. The Registered Manager ensures that as much information is obtained at the point of admission and continues to seek all relevant information within a short time span.

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

The provision is good.

The agency is able to demonstrate good health outcomes for the children and young people. There are systems in place to assess the health care needs of children and young people and these needs are generally well met. There are detailed policies and procedures relating to healthy eating, medication, health promotion, smoking, alcohol and drug misuse. The foster carers handbook also contains information relating to healthcare issues and foster carers refer to this manual whenever they need guidance. The service monitors outcomes for children through staff supervision and team meetings and through the childcare review process.

Carers are given a health care plan for each child at the start of the placement. The plan identifies the roles and responsibilities of the key people and health professionals in the child's life. Health issues that may arise from each child's ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality and/or cultural needs are also considered at the planning stage of the placement. Young people are provided with healthy living and eating guides appropriate to their age and understanding.

Foster carers take their responsibilities in relation to meeting the healthcare needs of the children and young people very seriously. They ensure that all children and young people are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician, and the outcome of any appointments attended is recorded and discussed with the supervising social worker as well as the child's social worker.

Risk assessments are in place for each child and these contain all identified risks and strategies to manage the risk. The agency does not always receive the necessary consent for medical treatment that is required from placing authorities for children and young people placed. However, the agency has evidence of emails sent to placing authorities requesting this information and is looking at ways to resolve this issue. Action is taken and guidance is given for foster carers in case of a medical emergency. This guidance needs to be more precise so that foster carers are clear about who they need to contact. First aid training has been provided for foster carers.

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

The provision is good.

Young people are safeguarded from unsuitable people becoming foster carers or gaining employment in the agency through robust vetting practices. The approval of foster carers is not confirmed until such time as all checks on their suitability, such as, checks on their identity, employment, criminal history and backgrounds are completed. The agency uses the British Association for Adoption and Fostering competency based assessment format to determine the suitability and caring capacity of potential foster carers. Staff and panel members are not employed until the checks set out in regulations and national minimum standards are completed

The agency has an experienced and qualified team of social workers that manage the service. Members of staff and carers confirmed that the management team are approachable, supportive and have an open door policy which staff and carers find helpful. The managers, staff and carers are demonstrably safe and suitable to work with children. Safe recruitment practices are comprehensive and thorough. Evidence of appropriate references, Criminal Records Bureau disclosures and identity checks are held on each individual employee and carer file, however, one file seen did not evidence that the gaps in employment were explored.

Children and young people are placed with carers who have been thoroughly assessed as being able to keep them safe. Carers receive training and ongoing refresher courses to enhance their fostering skills. Training includes behaviour management, child protection, the effects of contact, health and safety and first aid. The three homes visited during the inspection provide a warm, comfortable and safe environment with appropriate space and privacy for the children and young people being cared for. Health and safety checks are carried out on foster carers' homes at least once each year. Records show that these visits are usually unannounced.

As far as possible carers are given full information about each child to ensure they are able to meet their needs. Each referral form requires information about the child's health, education, leisure interests and family background. The matching process is thorough; where a match is not perfect carers are assisted to provide specific support in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, disability, gender and religion.

There are appropriate policies and procedures relating to child protection, anti bullying, absent without authority and behaviour management in place. Related information can be found in the foster carer's hand book. Staff and carers have the appropriate training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to respond appropriately to child protection issues and concerns. They are aware of the need to notify the appropriate professionals under schedule (5) of the regulations.

Statutory child care reviews are held regularly and children are encouraged to give their views of the care and support they receive. Their opinions are taken seriously and are viewed as central to a safe service that improves the lives of all children and young people placed by the agency.

The foster panel was not observed during this inspection. Minutes from the last three panel meetings were seen. The records of panel business were comprehensive. The panel demonstrates good outcomes for children, it is well managed with effective membership who understand the needs of children. There is a protocol in place for the panel, which includes information about roles and responsibilities and procedures for decision making. The panel makes recommendations about foster carers approval and review of approval. The panel receives data and information about the activities of the agency and gives feedback about any concerns or gaps in service. Feedback is seen as an important tool to broaden the range of options available to children.

Evidence on personnel files show that panel members are subject to relevant checks and references; they receive induction and ongoing training, which includes the role of panel members, child protection awareness and safe care practice.

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

The provision is good.

The agency is proactive in exploring equality and diversity issues and has developed an equality and diversity action plan. Equality and diversity issues are explored throughout the assessment process for prospective foster carers and every effort is made to ensure that children and young people are appropriately matched to foster carers who can meet their individual needs. Foster carers understand the need to promote equality and diversity issues and support and encourage children and young people to explore their own views. There are appropriate equal opportunities policies and procedures in place.

Carers develop positive relationships with the children and young people in their care ensuring their needs are met. Young people spoke very highly of carers' qualities such as listening, caring for them and making them feel part of the family which has helped them develop good self-esteem. The individual interests of young people are pursued. Those young people choosing to participate in activities such as swimming, football and other activities are provided with suitable equipment, transport and encouragement.

All of the children currently in placement with this service are attending school or some form of education provision. The manager stated that as part of the planning to care process, foster carers are encouraged to contact schools and other resources in the area. The organisation has in place systems to monitor the educational outcomes of looked after children. Supervising social workers discuss educational progress during their visits. Carers are clear as to their roles and responsibilities in promoting good educational outcomes. Carers attend school meetings and events, and liaise closely with schools to ensure good attendance.

The agency provides a short breaks service for foster carers as well as for the local authority. The policy in relation to short breaks is unclear, the agency has yet to develop this guidance further to clarify the procedures and details of arrangements for receiving children and young people for respite care when provided.

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

The provision is good.

Carers demonstrate a clear commitment to maintaining regular and complex contact arrangements with young people's families. Carers understand the importance of maintaining contact and are clearly guided by the care plans and the wishes of the placing authority. The agency has designated support workers, who are available to escort the children to and from contact if this is needed and agreed.

Young people say carers consult with them on a day-to day basis about their care and planning their future. The agency demonstrates that it seeks to feedback the views of young people to the placing authority. Only four questionnaires were returned from children and young people and all young people were very positive and stated that they are encouraged to take an active part in their looked after children reviews. The agency has a clear complaints procedure which is known to both carers and young people.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The agency has clear systems in place to support young people in developing skills in preparation for adulthood and independent living. The agency has developed an independent living skills package and guidance for young people and carers looking at the skills they need to develop in order to successfully move on to living independently.

The agency is committed to helping young people manage their own money and developing independence skills in line with the 'Leaving Care Act'. All carers are required to save a specified minimum amount from the children's money into a savings plan. When the child moves on to independent living or another placement this money goes with them.

Carers benefit from the reliable regular monthly payment of the carers allowance. The amount paid is clear and carers say any queries are quickly addressed.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency has developed an equality and diversity action plan and completed an analysis of all aspects of equality and diversity within the agency and identified the gaps in the service. The matching process considers the individual needs of children and young people and the agency has explored ways of introducing events that explore and celebrate difference within the agency. The agency is currently looking at ways to recruit a more diverse range of staff and carers who can meet the needs of the needs of children in relation to their ethnicity, race, religion, gender, disability and sexuality.

The Statement of Purpose, the children's guide to service and the policies and procedures were seen during the inspection. Young people are guided through the fostering agency rules and what is meant by fostering through the young people's guides. The young people's guide is also available on a CD and children are given both the CD and the booklet in their welcome pack. The Registered Manager stated that the information available can be translated into a variety of languages upon request.

Supervising social workers and family support workers make up the team that support foster carers. Work is allocated appropriately to staff and caseloads are generally well managed. Assessments of carers are carried out by the Supervising social workers. Staff move through a six month probation period during which time they serve an induction, shadowing experienced staff and undertaking key training. The management structure of the organisation is clear. Staff feel supported through regular supervision and team meetings. The management style in staff and carers views is supportive flexible and inclusive.

Carers feel that they are well supported and trained by an agency which is well managed. The agency has a clear strategy for supporting carers. There is an expectation that all carers will update their skills by attending training/support groups but not all attend regularly. The agency has made attempts to address this, such as offering one to one training at home during the weekend and information logs which can be shared with a partner.

Both the responsible individual and the manager are known to carers who feel they can call upon their support as well as the supervising social workers 24 hours a day. Carers feel that the support provided is a key strength of the agency and the reason they choose to foster for this service.

Feedback from children is positive and children feel that they are part of a family and are very happy living with their foster carers.

The agency has developed systems for monitoring key areas such as education and health, and child protection concerns, however, the systems that the agency has for monitoring complaints from children and young people is unclear. Case records are maintained and stored appropriately. The premises are suitable to be used as a fostering agency.

## 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

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

- ensure that there a clear procedures in place in the case of a child or young person needing emergency treatment in the absence of the signed consent to emergency treatment (NMS12)
- ensure that the guidance for foster carers and staff in terms of emergency treatment for children and young people is specific in terms of their roles and responsibilities (NMS12)
- develop clear guidance outlining the details of the short breaks arrangements for foster carers (NMS 31)
- ensure where two adults are approved as joint carers, that both attend training. (NMS 23)