

Ansacare Fostercare Agency

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

Ansacare is an independent fostering agency. Initially it intends to start with approximately 10 foster carers offering short- and long-term placements and respite care for children from birth to 18 years. The agency will provide care to children from all backgrounds.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced inspection. The fostering agency is a new service in the early stages of its development. There are currently four foster carers and one child in placement.

The majority of the national minimum standards were inspected but because the service is not fully operational, it did not cover them in full. Furthermore, an inspection normally relies on users' views about the service and this was not possible. The overall rating of satisfactory for this inspection merely reflects the limitation of the inspection.

The agency plan is to expand to ten foster carers. Before it can progress, the agency needs to be registered by a local consortium, representing local authorities. The agency is committed to developing high standards including regular support and training for its foster carers. The registered individual impressed as someone who is committed to developing a professional service and delivering high standards to children and young people in foster care.

The agency has a small team of staff including the registered individual, the Registered Manager, a supervising social worker and four external assessors. The agency also deploys an outside consultant who will supervise the manager. Both the manager and supervising social worker have been working on a part-time basis and the plan is that they will become more involved when more foster carers are recruited and children are placed. The agency's development has reached the stage where the Registered Manager should now become more involved to support the agency in reaching its objectives.

The agency's development is a work in progress and the report includes the following actions and recommendations that need to be addressed:- the Registered Manager should enrol to undertake a National Vocational Qualification in management; the agency should develop a matching process and accompanying referral forms for placing children; the fostering panel should undertake training for its members in the role and function of the panel; the agency should raise the standard of form F

assessments through the effective supervision and monitoring of form F assessors; the agency should increase the diversity of its staff and panel members and recruit a broader base of carers to ensure a better choice of matching of the child's needs.

In summary, the agency is in its early stages and has demonstrated the potential to develop and achieve its objectives.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable. This is the first inspection since registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

This is a new service that is still not yet fully operational. It was, therefore, not possible to fully assess the standard in relation to this outcome.

It was evident that the foster carers understand the issues in promoting the health and development of children. They are aware of the need to register children with a general practitioner, dentist and optician and ensure all appropriate health checks, medicals and immunisations take place. One foster carer was already supporting a young person to attend child mental health services and in seeing a drug specialist.

Foster carers are aware of their responsibility to promote healthy eating and nutrition and to encourage children and young people to take part in healthy outdoor activities.

The newly recruited foster carers have attended skills to fostering training that covered health and safety and safe caring. One foster carer is trained in first aid. The foster carers will undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training in the near future. The course will cover health matters in more depth.

It was evident that the foster carers who have been appointed understand their role and responsibilities in relation to health, but will need to consolidate their knowledge through the experience of caring for foster children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency is a new service that is not yet fully operational. It was not possible to inspect all the national minimum standards in depth.

The agency has appropriate safeguarding procedures in place, including unannounced visits, health and safety checks, annual reviews, complaints and concerns and allegations.

The agency has shown it is capable of implementing robust recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff, foster carers and fostering panel members. Checks of staff files and foster carers' files showed that Criminal Record Bureau checks, General Social Care Council registration (where appropriate), qualifications and suitable references are in place.

The small group of foster carers that have so far been recruited presented as competent but still have to demonstrate this through practice. They have attended skills to fostering training that covered allegations, looking after the child, safe caring and health and safety. The agency plans further ongoing training.

Foster carers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and understand how to respond and report any concern. Foster carers are expected to keep a diary of events. The foster carer's handbook has guidance on safe caring and also the reporting of safeguarding concerns.

The agency has not yet been able to match children according to their needs. The agency still needs to develop its own referral system to obtain relevant information and to take into account the child's care plan and relevant assessments. The agency recognises that in order to improve its choices of matching it will need to recruit a broader base of foster carers from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

The inspection included attendance and observation of the fostering panel. The panel is still in its infancy and has met on three occasions. All panel members have had Criminal Record Bureau checks. The panel was quorate on the day of the inspection. It has representation of medical expertise and an education representative. The panel also has a care leaver as a member. All panel members are women who are from ethnic backgrounds. The panel is conscious that it needs to recruit some male members and achieve a broader ethnic diversity. Observation of the panel showed it was fairly robust in monitoring assessor's reports. There appears room for improvement in the quality of the form F reports. The panel has yet to develop its quality assurance function through the receipt of management information and the monitoring of the work of the agency. The panel members would benefit from a training day to learn about its role and function.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency is a new service that is not yet fully operational. It was not possible to inspect the national minimum standards in depth.

The outcome 'enjoying and achieving' includes the issue of diversity. The staff group, members of the panel and foster carers are all from ethnic minorities. The challenge for the agency will be to increase the diversity of these groups in order to reflect the ethnic and cultural demography of the community. One foster carer already providing care is sensitive to the young person's ethnic and cultural needs.

The fostering service, through its foster carers aims to promote educational achievement. The agency has access to a tuition centre and is providing extra tuition as part of the package. Foster carers understand their role in supporting children and young people with homework, attending personal education planning meetings and attend parent's meetings.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency is a new service that is not yet fully operational. It was not possible the national minimum standards in depth.

The group of foster carers who were interviewed showed awareness and understanding about the need for children and young people to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. They also understood the need to ensure that children's views are sought with regard to issues that impact on their daily life. They have yet to put their views into practice.

The agency is planning to produce a children's handbook that gives them information on how to raise issues or make complaints nationally and locally.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency is a new service that is not yet fully operational. It was not possible to inspect all the national minimum standards in depth.

The fostering service pays carers an agreed allowance and expenses. Foster carers understand their role in supporting young people to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living. Once more, this is not a role they have yet had experience in.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency has an up to date Statement of Purpose. Initially it intends to start with approximately 10 foster carers offering short- and long-term placements and respite care for children from birth to 18 years. The agency will provide care to children from all backgrounds.

The agency has adequate numbers of staff in relation to the development of the service. The small staff group has the necessary skills to run a fostering service. The registered provider, who has overall responsibility for the service, is herself an experienced foster carer. She also has experience of running a bed and breakfast

agency. She has secretarial and book keeping skills.

The Registered Manager is a qualified social worker and has in-depth knowledge of child care and fostering. She is supervised by an external consultant. The Registered Manager is not yet fully involved in the agency and is waiting for the service to develop before taking over full-time duties. It is evident that she should take a more active role in the service now that it is expanding. She will be available next month to supervise the supervising social worker. The Registered Manager still has to complete National Vocational Qualification at level 4 in management.

The supervising social worker is experienced and has social work qualifications. She is working on a part-time basis until the agency is fully operational. It is planned that another supervising social worker will join when the agency grows. The agency is using four qualified external assessors to complete form F assessments.

Staff will receive formal supervision approximately every four weeks. Team members have not yet been offered training courses.

The staff currently meet informally and the registered provider plans to set up formal staff meetings. The fostering panel will also contribute to the monitoring of the service once the agency is more established.

The fostering service has systems in place for carer supervision and support. It is planned to visit new foster carers every two weeks and then on a monthly basis, once they are more experienced. The one foster carer who recently had a child placed, reported that she has already had two visits from the agency. The agency plans to start a support group once a couple more carers have been approved. The support group will meet monthly. The agency plans to do a news letter. The agency has an out of hours duty system.

The support visits to foster covers will include an agenda that involves discussion about health, education, safe caring, health and safety, the care plan and issues relating to the carer.

The agency's initial training plan is to ensure that all foster carers undertake the skills to fostering training followed by the Children's Workforce Development Council training.

It was not possible to assess recording keeping in relation to children and the agency's file system will develop once children are placed.

The premises used as offices is suitable for purpose. Next month, the agency plans to move to a larger space within the same building. The agency has access to a conference room for the fostering panel and other meetings. The agency has systems in place for monitoring all relevant expenditure.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The staff and members of the fostering panel are all from ethnic minorities. The agency needs to recruit a broader

base of foster carers to reflect the community it serves. The agency is aware of these issues and intends to address the issue of diversity as it develops the service.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
16	ensure, having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children placed by the fostering agency, manage the fostering agency with sufficient care, competence and skill. In particular the Registered Manager should become more involved in the management of the agency (Regulation 8 (1) (b))	31/12/2010
6	ensure that Form F reports assessing prospective applicants are written to a standard that fully investigates their suitability.(Regulation 27(1))	31/12/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure the fostering panel develops its quality assurance function in monitoring and reviewing the work of the agency, in particular the work of assessors; to provide feedback; to identify problems and ensure assessments have been completed in a thorough and rigorous way (NMS 30.5)
- ensure each child is carefully matched according to the care plan, relevant assessments, religious and cultural needs and there are systems in place to achieve this (NMS 8)
- ensure the fostering service provides children and young people with services that value diversity and equality. The service should aim to increase the diversity and choice of placements to ensure each child is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs (NMS 7.1 and 8.1)
- ensure the registered manager undertakes training for a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 4 in management or equivalent (NMS 19)