

# Cornerways Fostering Services Ltd

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC059535
<b>Inspection date</b>	17/11/2010
<b>Inspector</b>	David Coulter
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	25/07/2007

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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 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**

Cornerways Fostering Agency is an Independent Fostering Agency run by Cornerways Fostering Services Ltd. It is registered to provide care to looked after children and provides long term, short term and respite placements, which includes emergency admissions.

The agency has moved premises since the last inspection and is now based in Horley, Surrey. The new premises provide a spacious office and separate meeting area within the same building.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This announced inspection assessed the service against the key national minimum standards for fostering services.

Evidence collected through the inspection process indicates that children and young people placed with the agency receive individualised care and support to meet their specific needs. Carers provide children and young people with opportunities to pursue healthy lifestyles and are pro-active in seeking out specialist health and medical services to address areas of concern. Children and young people are supported in accessing appropriate educational and training opportunities and carers frequently provide transport to help maintain existing placements.

The agency's child-centred approach lays great emphasis on the importance of matching children and young people with carers who have the pre-requisite knowledge and skills to meet their often complex care needs. The high incidence of placement stability indicates that the matching process is effective. Carers feel they are well supported by their allocated agency workers. There are well developed monitoring systems that ensure all placements are subject to regular review.

The service operates with a team of motivated staff and dedicated carers who are ably led by an experienced manager. The service is inclusive and involves young people and carers in its development. While there are two recommendations arising from this inspection, neither are directly concerned with the quality of the current fostering provision which is outstanding.

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

There were no recommendations arising from the last inspection.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The health and well-being of children and young people receive a high priority within the agency. The agency takes great care to ensure that children and young people are matched with carers who have the requisite knowledge and skills to meet their often complex needs. The agency provides carers with training and information on specific health related conditions such as autistic spectrum disorders.

Carers ensure that children and young people are provided with access to appropriate medical care and register them with local doctors and dentists. Carers and agency staff liaise with placing agencies to ensure that every child and young person has a health plan that identifies their specific needs and provides guidance for carers on how they should be met. All health plans are subject to regular review. Carers monitor the health and well-being of each young person on an ongoing basis and convey any concerns to appropriate parties. A record is kept of all medical appointments and interventions. Carers seek out referrals to specialist services, such as CAMHS, to address mental health concerns.

Carers promote the concept of healthy living and children and young people are encouraged to eat wisely and undertake regular exercise. All carers undertake first aid training. Although training is provided for carers on the administration of medication, carers need to ensure that all medication is stored in appropriately locked facilities within their homes. Carers spoke in very positive terms about the advice and guidance that was available to them on health-related subjects. Evidence indicates that young people receive excellent individualised care and support that meets their specific health needs.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency operates with a very experienced manager who has been in post for a number of years and has overseen its development. The manager operates an open door policy and provides advice and guidance for staff and carers on request. The manager is held in high regard for her professionalism and child-centred approach. The manager is well supported by the services director who fulfils the role of agency decision maker.

The agency has an effective system of selecting and training foster carers. All prospective carers are subject to a thorough assessment process that includes checks on both themselves and family members. Health and safety assessments are also carried out in respect of their properties and pets. Prospective carers have to successfully complete a skills to foster training programme before being presented to panel for approval. During their initial training prospective carers are introduced to the concept of safeguarding and are made aware of their personal responsibilities in regard to the reporting of any child protection concerns.

Carers reported that the assessment and training processes are comprehensive and made them fully aware of the possible social and emotional demands that fostering could place on them and their families. The agency recruits carers from all sections of the community. Although the agency operates with a relatively small pool of thirty approved households, carers offer a wide range of skills and experience. The performance of carers is monitored on an on-going basis and all are subject to an annual review.

At the point of referral, staff identify the physical, social, emotional, cultural, educational and religious needs of the young people to be placed. Staff are quite clear about the strengths of carers and evidence indicates that great care is taken to match young people with appropriate households. The matching process takes into consideration the skills and experience of carers, the composition of their households and the suitability of the location. Each placement is considered on an individual basis. Carers reported that they were never put under pressure to accept placements. Placement plans are developed in respect of all placements. These plans are comprehensive and provide carers with clear guidance on how the physical, social and emotional needs of the young people in their care can be met. The small number of placement breakdowns indicate that the matching process is successful.

Staff are recruited to the service via a well-established process that requires them to complete a detailed application form, undertake a Criminal Records Bureau check and provide the names of referees who can comment on their knowledge and skills. All new staff have to undertake a full induction before assuming their full responsibilities. The agency encourages staff to develop their professional knowledge and skills by accessing regular training opportunities. The Criminal Records Bureau Checks on staff are updated at appropriate intervals.

The agency has its own fostering panel that convenes at regular intervals. The panel contains members with appropriate skills and experience. There are clear written policies and procedures for its operation. The panel maintains independent scrutiny of the agency. Carers reported that appearing in front of panel had been a positive experience and that its members had put them at ease and sought information in a polite yet thorough manner. Panel minutes are detailed and clearly reflect how decisions are arrived at.

Although children and young people receive support from their designated social workers, agency staff regularly check on their well-being and will spend time with them during their regular supervision visits. Young people's questionnaires indicate that they are generally happy with the degree of support they receive and are aware of how and to whom they can raise concerns. Young people's views of their placements are obtained as part of the annual reviewing process. There is an effective out of hours system and well established procedures in the event of a young person going missing.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Carers are pro-active in ensuring that children and young people have access to appropriate educational placements. If a child or young person enters care with an existing educational placement, if appropriate, every effort will be made to maintain it. In some instances, this necessitates carers providing regular transport over significant distances. Carers are actively involved in liaising with school staff and advocate on behalf of children and young people to ensure they are being provided with access to appropriate educational resources such as additional tutoring. Carers attend educational reviews and contribute to the development of education plans. The agency recognises the achievements of all the children and young people in its care.

The agency recruits carers from across a wide geographic area, across Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire. The agency values diversity and promotes equality. Specific carers are sought for young people from minority communities. The selection and training of carers addresses diversity issues around gender, religion, ethnic origin, culture, disability and sexuality. Evidence indicates that staff and carers confront discrimination and inappropriate practice.

All carers are made aware of the legal status of the children and young people placed with them and the implications in regard to contact and parental consent. A number of carers within the agency provide respite for other agency carers. If appropriate, they will move into their homes to minimise disruption for the children and young people.

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

The provision is good.

The agency has developed policies, procedures and agreed working practices around contact. The amount and nature of contact is determined by placing authorities and the courts. All contact arrangements are made explicit in placement plans and the role of carers established. A number of carers reported that contact visits can be stressful for all concerned and felt that its impact on children and young people was not always given the priority it deserves. Although contact visit arrangements are regularly monitored and specific difficulties discussed, there is currently no systematic recording system of children and young people's behaviour both before and after contact. Staff and carers indicate that many children and young people also maintain regular contact with their family and friends via their mobile phones and in some cases computers.

Although all young people are provided with information on how to complain, records indicate very few are ever made. Carers reported they monitor the well-being of

children and young people in their care on an on-going basis. A number of young people indicated they would raise any worries or concerns directly with their carers or social workers. Agency staff are extremely successful in mediating between young people and their carers. The high level of placement stability indicates that most difficulties within placements are satisfactorily resolved. The agency is successful in involving young people in decision making about their futures and participation in reviews is high. Young people are involved in the development of the service and their views are sought via one to one meetings and questionnaires.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Agency staff reported that an increasing number of young people are now staying with their carers until they are aged 18 and are supported while they complete their education or training. Although all young people are involved in the development of their pathway plans, the time and rate they are developed is dependent on their placing authority. While carers reported that young people are provided with opportunities to develop independent living skills such as cooking and managing their own finances, it is currently on an ad-hoc basis. A number felt that more specific guidance on the range and nature of independent living skills to be developed would be useful.

All carers now receive an allowance based on a nationally agreed rate. Individual placement agreements between the agency and carers make clear any additional expenses such as in relation to transport. Carers confirmed that their allowances are always paid on time and that the service is extremely responsive to changing circumstances.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose that details its aims and objectives. The statement is written in clear unambiguous language and is updated in response to changing circumstances. Carers reported that the agency's Statement of Purpose reflects the child-centred ethos that underpins its work. A number of age appropriate guides have been produced for children and young people including two for mothers of young babies. These guides detail what children and young people can expect during their placements.

The agency operates with a group of well qualified and motivated staff who are intent in delivering a high quality service for vulnerable children and young people. All staff are provided with job descriptions and undertake a full induction on appointment. Staff receive regular supervision and appreciate the manager's open door policy that provides instant consultation. Staff and carers work in partnership with a number of different agencies to ensure that the children and young people in their care have their educational, health and social needs effectively met. Staff are



provided with opportunities to extend their professional knowledge and experience by engaging in development work. Staff are good at establishing effective working relationships and lines of communication with placing authority personnel.

Agency staff have access to regular training opportunities and are encouraged to develop their professional knowledge and skills. The social work team is supported by a support team of able administrative staff. Communication within the team is good and regular team meetings provide staff with opportunities to discuss their work. Although staff acknowledge they are always busy, they feel that manageable caseloads enable them to provide effective support for carers.

There is a well-developed procedure for recruiting and introducing prospective carers to fostering. All prospective carers are subject to a comprehensive assessment process. Carers must successfully complete a skills to foster training programme before seeking panel approval. Carers confirmed they were well supported during the assessment and approval process. Once approved, carers are expected to further develop their knowledge and skills by accessing regular training opportunities. A number of carers have gained National Vocational Qualification at level three in Childcare. There is a high level of satisfaction amongst carers about the quality of training on offer. As the agency has grown its operational area has extended over a wider geographical area. As a consequence it is now proving more difficult to provide easily accessible locations for training activities. In response the agency is developing home-based learning opportunities that include computer based programmes.

Carers are well supported by their designated workers and receive regular supervision and unannounced visits. Agency staff aim to ensure that prior to any emergency placement, carers are provided with information on their care needs. In between supervision sessions, carers maintain communication via the phone and e-mail. Carers feel they are listened to and that advice and support is always available. All carers are subject to an annual review that, amongst other things, examines the success of placements and checks domestic arrangements. While some carers have formed informal support networks amongst themselves, those offering long-term placements frequently access support from their families and friends.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding and staff and carers advocate effectively on behalf of young people in care to ensure they are not discriminated against. Carers are recruited from all sections of the community regardless of their race, creed or sexual orientation. There are excellent systems in place to ensure that the cultural needs of young people are identified prior to placement and strategies developed to meet them.

During the course of the inspection a range of documents and records were examined. All the records inspected were written in clear unambiguous language and contained recent and relevant information. Individual files were accessible with clear indexing. Confidential information is appropriately stored in locked facilities and electronic data can only be accessed by authorised personnel. Detailed records are kept of all complaints including investigation procedures and outcomes. The service operates from well appointed offices that includes a large dedicated meeting room.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

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

- ensure that all carers are reminded of the need to keep all medications in secure facilities within their home(NMS 12.6).
- develop a process for recording the attitudes and behaviours of children and young people both before and after contact visits and ensure such information is shared with the placing authority social worker (NMS 12.9).