

Safehouses Ltd

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC036888
Inspection date	25/11/2010
Inspector	Lucy Ansell
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	24/09/2007

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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

Established in 1997, Safehouses is an independent fostering provider. The type of placements offered include task-centred, long term, parent/child, respite, sibling groups, asylum seekers and children with special needs. Safehouses is based in Knockholt, Kent and operates a sub office in Essex. Foster carers approved by Safehouses reside in the Kent, Essex and Greater London areas.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced key inspection completed by one inspector. The agency remains at an overall grade of outstanding and the outcomes for foster carers and young people fully support this. The feedback from surveys of young people, foster carers and other professionals is overwhelmingly positive with no responses received as to what the agency could do better. The foster carers spoken to were in agreement that the support is excellent and the matching is of a very high standard and all the staff are very professional and efficient at their jobs. The nine surveys received from external professionals all comment on the excellent communication of the agency, and how proactive the supervising social workers are. One recommendation has been made and details are included within the report.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations or actions to follow up from the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has excellent systems in place for promoting the health and development of children. The agency obtains relevant information about children's health needs prior to placements being made and this is carefully considered in the matching process. Effective systems are in place for chasing this information up from placing local authorities when it is not provided.

Every young person on arrival to the agency gets a health folder. These records are regularly scrutinised by the supervising social worker and are effectively used within review reports. Hence, the physical and emotional well-being of young people is being effectively monitored.

Foster carers state that the service provides them with the relevant information they need about their young people's health needs and that they always have the same information that the agency does. The foster carer handbook covers all the Every Child Matters outcome groups with comprehensive information for carers.

Foster carers are clear about their responsibility for registering children with a doctor, dentist and optician. The service also supports foster carers to access specialist services for children. The service has access to therapists to ensure swift attention to meet the mental health needs of the young people.

Extensive training is provided to both foster carers and staff members in all aspects of health and healthy living, first aid and hygiene issues. Training is also discussed with carers to ensure any specialist training they require can be provided. All carers and young people are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and participate in community activities and local leisure clubs. Surveys received from young people are all positive and state they always get advice and support on being healthy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people's welfare and safety are promoted through maintaining regular checks for all workers and foster carers. The service is managed by a suitably qualified person who has successfully met the registration criteria for a registered fostering service. Systems are in place to renew enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks every three years for foster carers, workers and panel members.

Young people live in comfortable, warm and welcoming homes with foster carers who fully understand the health and safety needs of young people. Individual safe care policies are in place to provide safe boundaries for children and all family members. Policies do not contain information on computers and mobile phone safety to evidence the use of safe practice.

The service will only begin the matching process with carers if they represent an appropriate match for a child. Careful consideration is given to ensure young people live with carers who can meet their needs. Records demonstrate that unplanned endings are rare. A very good number of young people are enjoying the stability of long-term placements which effectively meet their needs, leading to positive outcomes, and which demonstrates good matching. Records show carefully planned introductions to proposed foster carers. Detailed placement agreements specify arrangements and expectations of all parties. Foster carers report they are supported with additional training and relevant information to ensure they are fully prepared to care for young people, particularly if any gaps are found in the matching process. Carers spoken to said they felt 'the matching was excellent' and 'a good match is more important than having a placement, and 'the agency have always got it right when matching.

Policies and procedures are in place to safeguard children. Training, supervision and

guidance cover safe caring skills, managing behaviour, recognising signs of abuse and ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem. Guidelines are clear for foster carers on acceptable consequences and records show appropriate procedures are in place and followed in all potential safeguarding circumstances in line with good practice.

Recruitment procedures are robust and records show all staff are experienced, trained and qualified for their own role. Recruitment files are detailed and contain all relevant checks and information. Workers demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of young people's needs, supporting foster carers and working within policies and procedures.

The fostering panel ensures that all applicants approved are suitable to be foster carers. The panel is properly constituted and benefits from members that bring a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience in fostering and childcare. The panel provides a clear quality assurance function in relation to the assessment and review of foster carers. The operation of the panel is monitored; training and checks of panel members happen regularly.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people benefit by living with foster carers who meet their needs effectively. Policies, procedures and training sessions clearly cover pertinent topics, including religious and cultural needs of young people. Foster carers demonstrate awareness about the previous experiences of young people and show respect for these factors. Foster carers advocate strongly on behalf of young people to ensure they receive the immediate and ongoing services and support they need. Foster carers are particularly good at promoting young people's confidence and feelings of self-worth. For example, children are given encouragement and equal access to opportunities to develop and pursue their talents, interests and hobbies.

Educational attainment is valued and positively driven by the agency. Young people are actively encouraged and rewarded to attend school and this is robustly monitored. Foster carers ensure they have the correct uniforms and equipment. They liaise effectively with school personnel and provide environments at home which enable the completion of homework. The agency is very good at recognising where additional support and resources are required, and will seek to ensure vocational or academic tutors are sought. The agency has separate education files; this ensures all information is comprehensively recorded.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency promotes family ties and encourages the young people to maintain contact with their family members where this is appropriate. There are clear records

on children's files regarding contact, and foster carers feel that they have all the information they need regarding contact arrangements. Contact arrangements are reviewed on a regular basis and any information is shared with relevant professionals. Children's views about contact are sought and valued. All out-of-hours staff have regular updated information on contact details.

Foster carers are clear about the importance of listening to children. One foster carer said: 'We always discuss any decisions made with the children so they are involved in their care.' A foster child said: 'I am listened to and I can also get advice from the agency when I need it.' Review reports indicate that children's views are taken into account regarding their care and they are encouraged to attend. There is a child-friendly guide available as a booklet or on CD format that gives details of the service, explains how complaints can be made by children, and how advocates can be contacted. Children know the whole team well from seeing the supervising social workers on a regular basis; they also get birthday cards and personalised gifts at Christmas.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent and appropriate advice and support in terms of preparing for impending adulthood. This is underpinned by the training and guidance that foster carers receive from the agency. Young people are actively encouraged to think about their future and are given opportunities to further develop their independence skills. A detailed section within the foster carer handbook and a comprehensive training programme for moving into independence are in place. Transitional plans can be implemented to provide supported lodgings beyond fostering if required. The principle of providing support for young people who are over 18 years old and post-fostering age has been demonstrated in practice. Young people preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living are consulted about their future and encouraged to be actively involved in decisions made.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The fostering service's Statement of Purpose contains information about the service and facilities it provides. A children's guide to the fostering service is also produced in different formats to meet the needs of differing groups of children. The children's guide contains information on the agency and support available for the young person.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff are trained and responsive to matters of equality and supportive in encouraging the foster carers. Foster carers are particularly good at promoting young people's confidence and feelings of self-worth.

All the staff who work for the fostering service are managed, trained and supported to promote positive outcomes for children in foster care. The ethos of all staff and carers is a not-for-profit organisation and the priority is the children. There is a high level of social work expertise within the team. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are in line with achieving the purposes and functions of the agency. Comments received from placing social workers indicate a high satisfaction level with the services provided by the agency. One foster carer stated: 'The staff team have a lot to do with the agency's success.'

Children are placed with foster carers whose ability to provide appropriate care and support is assessed and kept under review. There is a clear assessment process leading to foster carers' initial and ongoing approval. Qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering are considered in relation to a wide range of topics recognised as essential to the role.

Foster carers receive an exceptionally high level of support. Clear strategies to help develop foster carers' skills and competencies are in place. Foster carers describe a service that is 'friendly, helpful and supportive, support is excellent', and 'like a large family, supportive not intrusive'. Support strategies include training and development, supervision, information and advice, assistance in dealing with other relevant services, out-of-hours support, respite care and support in reviews and professionals' meetings.

Written information and other administrative records are maintained to a high standard and are very well organised. Appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering service and the individual foster carers and foster children.

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):

- provide safe caring guidelines, based on a written policy, which includes computers and mobile phones. (NMS 9.3)