

# Children Of Colour Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sophie Wood
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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**

Children of Colour is a small independent fostering agency based in South London, near Croydon. The majority of its foster carers live in the vicinity. Children of Colour primarily places children from Black, Asian and mixed parent backgrounds into families of a similar background. The agency provides emergency, respite, short and long-term foster placements for children up to the age of 18 years including mother and baby placements.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Children and young people are thriving in nurturing placements which enhance their quality of life and provide safe, stable care. Foster carers are approved subject to robust assessments and are subsequently provided with the training, guidance and supervision they need to continue to provide excellent levels of care.

Children and young people say they feel safe. They enjoy their own hobbies and interests and are supported to maintain contact with those who are important to them. Their health and educational needs are being met. Appropriate external support, guidance and interventions promote their continued development. The agency is comprised of a suitably qualified and experienced team of professionals. The management style is open and inclusive. Foster carers say it is like being part of a family, and social work staff confirm they receive the training and support needed to be effective supervisors. The impact upon children's welfare and personal growth is very positive.

Four areas for improvement are identified, the need to: review safe care policies; review current out of hours support arrangements; ensure that panel recommendations are robustly followed through; and monitor the health and safety aspects of fostering households in between annual review meetings.

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

Four actions were made from the previous inspection of 12 November 2007. These concerned recruitment checks, notifications to external agencies, monitoring mechanisms and unannounced visits to fostering households.

Direct action has promptly addressed these areas, resulting in strong recruitment practice, swift liaison with other agencies, improved monitoring and unannounced visits being conducted by qualified staff. The quality of service provision has improved as a direct result, ensuring better safeguards.

Five recommendations were also made. The agency was asked to: review its children's guide; improve upon recording systems in respect of allegations; ensure health and safety checks be completed annually; ensure training and development is explored at annual reviews; and appoint a panel member with expertise in health. The agency has updated its children's guide and the content is effectively shared and explained to those in placement. Children and young people know how to use such information effectively. Health and safety checks are being conducted annually and annual reviews are now examining the training needs of foster carers. Panel membership and function is being reviewed in accordance with the 2011 regulations and such membership includes health expertise. This progress has strengthened the service and provides improved outcomes for children and young people.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people thrive within nurturing environments, which effectively promote their physical and emotional well-being. The health needs of children and young people are comprehensively explored at the referral and matching stage, hence prospective foster carers are ready and able to meet such identified needs.

The agency provides comprehensive training and guidance which equips foster carers to ensure that those in their care receive the interventions they require. Examples include, nursing guidance for specific medical needs and psychiatric and psychology input from the local children and adolescent mental health teams. Foster carers work closely with such agencies and accurately record all appointments and interventions within their monthly reports. This information is further explored during supervision visits and is forwarded to placing social workers, as is appropriate. The ongoing holistic health needs of children and young people are being robustly monitored.

Children and young people say they enjoy healthy and tasty meals. Quotes include, 'we are also allowed to have some sweets and treats, which is really good!' Another states, 'I love the food and I am learning to cook for myself'.

Through written guidance and training, foster carers remain acutely aware of their responsibilities for the health needs of the children and young people in their care. Training and guidance is tailored to meet the specific needs of foster carers, who have a range of placements including young children, teenagers and parent and child placements. Foster carers say, 'I get the guidance I need with regards to his specific health needs' and 'the training and support I receive is exactly what I need'. Records indicate that babies and toddlers are achieving their developmental milestones or the appropriate external services are engaged to support any difficulties. Teenagers possess full immunisation histories and are receiving the guidance and support they need in terms of impending adolescence. Those individuals placed under parent and child arrangements say, 'my foster carer gives me good advice on how to look after my child properly'.

Fostering households are usually spacious, well maintained and free from potential health and safety hazards. Supervising social workers appropriately note any shortfalls; however, there are a small number of occasions when such findings are not being swiftly addressed. This shortfall presents potential risks to the safety of a small number of the children and young people accommodated.

Children and young people enjoy accessing their local community to pursue hobbies and leisure interests. Quotes include, 'I go to football every weekend' and 'we always go to the park to play. It's really fun'. Foster carers actively encourage and support such activities. These are monitored by the agency throughout supervision visits and annual reviews.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people feel safe and protected. Comments include, 'I am really well looked after', 'my carers make me safe' and 'my carer gives me good advice about how to protect myself'. Robust safeguarding mechanisms are being keenly implemented because the agency is very good at providing foster carers with the guidance they need. Training on safety issues is specific and clear. It is underpinned by a detailed handbook which includes clear and specific policies and procedures. Foster carers take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. Children and young people live in warm and nurturing environments. They also receive firm and appropriate boundaries, in line with good parenting. Foster carers write and implement their own specific safe care guidance which is personalised to their own homes and circumstances. The quality of these documents is variable and they are not always being sufficiently updated once a child, including those exhibiting unsafe behaviour, is in the placement. This omission presents risks to foster carers who may be implementing a strategy without evidenced support. In the main, rules and boundaries are explicitly clear; hence, children and young people are well matched and they respond positively to the style of care they receive.

Children and young people are actively encouraged to grow and develop by making mistakes and taking responsible risks, in accordance with their age and understanding.

Written records and monthly reports completed by foster carers include clear details about incidents, situations and concerns with regards to the safety of children and young people in their care. Risks are reduced and children and young people are suitably protected as a direct result.

Foster carers commend the support they receive from the agency. Comments include, 'I receive excellent support in terms of keeping him safe' and 'I know exactly what to do in terms of reporting concerns about the young person and I also know how to protect myself from potential allegations'.

Agency staff members possess a wealth of relevant previous training and experience within local authority and child protection provision. Such knowledge further complements the agency's written protocols and procedures which are congruent with statutory agency guidance.

Instances of young people being missing are rare. In the event of such an incident, foster carers implement clear and effective guidelines which are congruent with local authority and police protocols. Potential risks are reduced and young people receive appropriate responses when they return home.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people enjoy excellent relationships with their foster families, within which, they are made to feel as valued family members themselves. Direct quotes from young people include, 'I am part of this family' and 'this is my home'. The agency effectively promotes positive behaviour management strategies. Foster carers are provided with clear guidance and training with regards to the use of sanctions and physical interventions; however, its actual use is rare. Emphasis is placed by the agency, and subsequently the foster carers, upon appropriately rewarding positive conduct which in turn, reduces the occurrence of difficult and challenging behaviour. Individual young people who engage in particularly difficult behaviour are placed with foster carers who have been provided with separate, specific training and guidance. One particular example shows how the supervising social worker is actively liaising with the foster carer and placing authority to ensure the interventions being prescribed are appropriate and monitored.

Foster carers make great effort and are successful in ensuring that children and young people can engage in preferred leisure pursuits and hobbies. The agency promotes this at the very start of prospective foster carers' assessment processes, and also furnishes approved households with useful information and literature about local leisure facilities and resources. Children and young people enjoy using resources such as football clubs and leisure centres, as well as simply spending time with their own friends and peer groups, through joint hobbies, youth clubs and sleepovers.

Foster carers effectively support and promote educational attendance and achievement. The agency is very clear about the foster carer's role and ensures that information from educational reviews, personal educational plans, and where necessary, educational statements of needs are obtained from local authorities and are up to date. Supervising social workers support foster carers and young people by attending all such meetings and reviews to ensure that those in placement are receiving the support they need. Foster carers act as excellent advocates in this regard; they appropriately challenge decisions about school placements if they are concerned and positively encourage and reward children and young people for their attendance and effort.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people are effectively consulted and listened. Foster carers take great care to furnish those living with them with the mechanisms they need to share their own personal views and to take control of their own lives.

Written literature about joining the agency, children's rights and how to make complaints is delivered in an age appropriate style, and is further verbally explained by foster carers and agency staff, in an effort to ensure each young person's understanding. Consequently, quotes from young people include, 'I know how to contact my own social worker', 'the supervising social worker from the agency spends time talking to me' and 'I know how to make a complaint if I need to'. Training and guidance for foster carers includes life story work and assisting children and young people to understand and make sense of their past histories and experiences. Counselling and therapeutic services are accessed where necessary to enable children and young people to get the support they need. Children's ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds are respected and their individual identities are actively promoted and celebrated by foster carers: This enables children and young people to develop positive self imagery. Foster carers are very good at this; they promote self worth by treating young people as valued family members. Contact arrangements are explicitly clear and foster carers receive good quality training and guidance. Their understanding of the importance of positive contact is clear and this benefits the children and young people. Foster carers and the agency provide practical assistance, where necessary, and they facilitate complicated and difficult arrangements professionally and sensitively.

Children and young people benefit by joining and leaving the service in a planned and sensitive manner. In the event of emergency placements, great effort is made to welcome individuals and carefully explain the purpose of their placement. There are robust matching processes which increase the likelihood of placement stability; a significant number of children and young people are enjoying long term placements, where they experience being treated as valued family members.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive the guidance they need to achieve a successful transition into adulthood. Foster carers provide excellent support, in line with individual placement plans. They also act as strong advocates, making appropriate challenges when young people are anxious and worried about leaving care.

The wording of placement plans is transformed into meaningful and practical actions by foster carers, who actively encourage young people to reach their full potential. Goals and targets are realistic; however, young people are also encouraged to have aspirations and to aim high.



Young people benefit by acquiring the practical life skills needed for independent living. Foster carers ensure they provide the necessary opportunities for young people to learn how to budget and develop personal care skills. The agency provides foster carers with specific training and guidance in order to equip them with the information they need to deliver such good quality support.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The fostering panel is comprised of individuals who are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake this task. Assessments of prospective foster carers are rigorous and thorough. The agency implements strict criteria and filtering systems, hence, those carers who reach the approval stage are deemed to have the potential to provide safe and stable placements in the best interests of children and young people. Annual reviews occur on time and the panel makes clear recommendations, for example, training attendance, so as to improve upon the quality of care provided. There are occasions when the fostering service has not implemented such recommendations fully and this omission impedes the desired progress. Excellent matching arrangements ensure that children and young people are placed with families who can meet their needs. Disruptions and breakdowns are rare; stability of placements is a particular strength. Foster carers say, 'I enjoy the journey with the young person' and 'I've never been asked to take a child unless I feel able to provide a good service'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency is explicit about the diverse range of foster carers and children it seeks to work with. Policy and procedural guidance is clear and specific; staff and foster carers can expect to be treated fairly and they work in this way with those they look after. Foster carers receive appropriate training and they ensure that the children and young people in their care receive support which is sensitive and respectful of their individual needs. Culture, heritage, religious beliefs, economic backgrounds and disabilities are integral to the initial and ongoing care planning process, which enables young people to thrive.

The agency is very good at providing clear and explicit information to all of its stakeholders. Hence placing authorities know what to expect in terms of the services provided, and children and young people know how to contact external services, should they need to, either for advice, support, or to make a complaint. The agency is transparent and open and this creates a feeling of trust and security.

The service is efficiently run by a team which has the skills and experience necessary to ensure good and excellent outcomes for children and young people. Social work staff receive ongoing supervision and training opportunities which promotes their own development and gives them the skills to support foster carers effectively. Foster carers speak very positively about out of hours support: they feel very well supported in times of difficulty. This provision is currently being delivered by the

registered manager and this arrangement presents the risk of the individual being overworked. Recruitment procedures are robust and this serves to effectively protect children and young people.

The service is financially viable and this provides security for all concerned. The premises are of good quality and additional resources and venues are used for training purposes, which are fit for purpose. The agency recognises the need to continue to review its staffing levels in order to maintain the positive outcomes currently being enjoyed by all.

Training opportunities for foster carers are good. Much time and energy has been spent over the last two years to ensure that all have completed the national vocational qualification in childcare, as well as the children's workforce development council training. Children and young people are assured that their carers possess sound qualifications and guidance, which promotes safe care. The agency recognises that its carers come from a wide range of backgrounds, with some possessing additional professional qualifications and relevant skills. Hence the current training programme is under review in order to become more flexible, in response to the specific training and developmental needs of individual carers. These aspects are explored through foster carer's monthly supervision meetings, during which their own specific needs are discussed and subsequently provided for. Foster carers speak very positively about their training provision, particularly when a specific course has been provided in response to an ongoing issue or concern about a child. Foster carers say, 'it is thanks to the support, training and guidance I have received from the agency that my placement has continued' and 'the support and guidance is second to none'. Foster carers also value monthly support group meetings, where they seek appropriate support and guidance from each other.

Placement plans are clear and foster carers know exactly what is expected of them. They are keen advocates for children and young people and assist them to contribute to their own statutory reviews. Hence, children and young people feel valued, with many enjoying the security and stability of safe, long term placements.

## **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 foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. This recommendation is made within the context of ensuring that all safe care policies are of the same good standard (NMS 4.1)
- ensure the foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated, is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and is in good order throughout. This recommendation is made within the context of a lack of monitoring by the fostering service in between the annual health and safety

checks of fostering households (NMS 10.2)

- ensure that recommendations made by the panel are effectively implemented and monitored by the fostering service (NMS 14)
- ensure there is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers. This recommendation is made within the context of the need to review current out of hours cover arrangements, which are currently being provided solely by the registered manager. (NMS 21.3)