

Adoption, Fostering and Short Breaks (Barnardos)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC068456
Inspection date	26/05/2011
Inspector	Jacqueline Malcolm
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

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Date of last inspection	14/08/2007

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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

Barnardo's Family Placement Service is an independent fostering agency based in Yorkshire. It was launched in April 2007 and incorporates adoption, fostering and short breaks. It aims to provide long-, medium- and short-term family placements for children, young people and siblings.

The service recruits foster carers and short breaks carers. On approval, they receive ongoing training and are supported by a designated, qualified and experienced fostering social worker.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Children receive good quality care with some outstanding outcomes. Children's needs are central to the operation of the service. Children are very well matched with carers who can meet their diverse and complex needs and are valued as part of the family. Children are making good progress in all aspects of their care from their starting points. Their welfare and development is actively promoted. Children confirm that they feel safe and know who they can approach with any concerns or complaints.

Fostering and short break carers are well supported. They provide safe, nurturing environments that keep children safe and provide positive role models, clear boundaries and stability. This helps carers and children develop appropriate attachments and trust. Children are supported to reach their potential in all aspects of their lives and a number of them are developing positive self-esteem and emotional resilience. Parents of children having short breaks maintain primary responsibility and work well with carers.

The fostering service has reorganised from three services to one. The changes have not impacted on outcomes for children and the service continues to be well run. The new manager previously led the short breaks service, and is fully involved in the development of the new arrangements, with support from senior management and the staff team. Staff are competent and experienced to undertake their roles and receive good support and training opportunities. Strong, child focused practice compliments the highly regarded support provided to carers. The service makes effective use of internal and external resources to promote children's participation, carers training and individual support. There is a clear acknowledgement that the service is still in transition. The manager understands the service's strengths and has identified areas for development.

However, aspects of practice fall short of the required standard but have no impact

on outcomes for children's experiences. The service has not notified Ofsted about serious illness or serious accident of children in foster care. Monitoring the service performance at regular intervals and consulting with foster carers, children and placing social workers to inform service delivery has not been formally done. Not all carers are provided with, or do not have, up-to-date health plans, health needs assessments and personal education plans (PEPs). Not all carers' homes are inspected annually by the service to ensure they continue to meet children's needs. The service has no local area protocol with the police to manage children if they go missing. Recruitment practices do not routinely call for verification of all references and every social work file does not have evidence of their qualifications.

Improvements since the last inspection

The registered provider was asked to ensure personnel files include positive proof of identity, including a recent photograph. Positive action has been taken to address this matter. This practice ensures the protection of children.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children thrive in healthy environments that promote their physical, emotional and developmental needs to an exceptionally high standard. Carers are trained and advised on food hygiene and healthy eating. Children confirm that they are helped to be healthy and say that the food is nice. Carers have excellent access to health services, good practice information, good policies and procedures on a range of health issues that support the expectations of the service. Carers are sufficiently trained and are aware about hygiene and health issues, including first aid. This means that children are provided with immediate treatment in the event of an accident or injury. Children benefit from carers who can competently administer medication and maintain clear health records. Carers follow health procedures that are approved by Primary Care Trusts including the action to take in the event of an emergency or hospital admission. These arrangements ensure children's ongoing health promotion and safety.

Children benefit extensively from highly motivated carers who are thoroughly informed about their health needs. Children who present with complex and life threatening health conditions are competently supported by carers who are specifically trained in approved medical procedures. Children have excellent access to multi-disciplinary health and social care professionals who deliver prompt services. This is in the best interests of children, particularly those who cannot advocate for themselves. Children's health needs are regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure they continue to be met.

Short break carers are fully aware about children's health needs and can actively meet them. Carers confirm positive relationships with parents and information is appropriately shared. This promotes consistency and does not compromise children's health and well-being.

Children are cared for in suitable home environments that can adequately accommodate them. Carers' homes are appropriately adapted for children and provide a safe and stimulating child friendly environments. Children say that their bedrooms have the things they need and their bedroom is nice and comfortable. Carers say that health and safety risk assessments are completed on their homes and avoidable hazards are removed. However, annual inspections of carers' homes are inconsistent. This is particularly notable with respect to short break carers who are often out on activities with children during their stay.

However, not all carers have access to children's health plans and health needs assessments. The service has not always notified Ofsted of serious events in relation to children's health; for example, children with health conditions that result in planned or emergency hospital admissions. These issues do not affect outcomes for children because children's health needs are responded to. However, the service has a responsibility to inform Ofsted under the regulations.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Good safeguarding procedures protect children. The service has good links with local safeguarding agencies and promotes communication and contact with placing social workers and parents as appropriate. These measures ensure safe care practices.

Carers are trained in safeguarding children, are well motivated and implement their learning in practice. This ensures that carers know how to keep children safe and protected from significant harm. Children benefit from individual safe care plans that take into account any health procedures and personal care needs. Carers talk to children about keeping safe from the child's starting point. If this is not appropriate, other agreed safety measures are used, for example, observations and use of safety adaptations. Children have good opportunities to express how safe they feel using individual communication methods. They have access to internal and external advocate services. Children say they feel safe. Parents for children on short breaks have confidence in carers' ability to keep their children safe. One parent commented it is important 'for us to know that he really enjoys this time and is safe with carers'. Carers are sensitive to the needs of children who disclose incidents and follow the appropriate reporting procedures.

Children are encouraged to take appropriate risks. They are supported by individual risk assessments and carers are reflective and learn lessons to improve their care practices. These measures keep children safe.

Carers report no children missing. However, although the service has a missing procedure, there is no local area protocol with the police for managing children who go missing. Carers are not fully informed about their responsibilities to children when this information is not available to them.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children enjoy excellent relationships with carers, which enhances their life experiences. Carers are well trained in positive behaviour management and know that restraint is not to be used. Children say that they are not restrained. Carers know the children well and the strategies to manage children's behaviour ensures effective boundaries are maintained. Carers communicate well with children about their challenging behaviour in a manner that is appropriate to their age and understanding. Children are supported to take responsibility for their actions and have positive role models who can influence how they behave. Most children are actively responsive to praise, which is positively recognised. Carers are sensitive to children's previous experiences and demonstrate high levels of patience, understanding and tenacity.

Carers have a positive, appropriate and professional dialogue with parents. Parents and carers praise the relationships they have with each other and feel that their children's lives are enhanced. Parents commented 'We were fortunate to be matched with a family who could look after and enhance my son's experiences, by a very professional and experienced short breaks worker. The link has been going for over 9 years and my son enjoys going and it has given him new relationships and has broadened his world'; 'We have a very good relationship with short breaks carer. We use a communication book if we are unable to meet up or give verbal handovers when we do'.

Children have excellent opportunities to get involved in hobbies, interests and activities they enjoy. Children are actively encouraged to develop appropriate friendships and visit each others homes as appropriate. Carers support children's interests irrespective of their stay with them. For example, children are engaged in outdoor and indoor activities, holidays at home and abroad, horse riding, sports, various club memberships and out of school activities. Children's social skills, confidence and self-esteem are highly enhanced by these activities.

Children's education is highly valued and promoted. Carers ensure that children are supported to reach their full potential. Carers maintain positive contacts with schools and take an active interest in children's educational development and achievements. Carers act as positive advocates for children, ensuring they have access to additional educational support and guidance. Carers are resourceful and their homes provide children with opportunities to participate in activities that stimulate their learning and development. Short break carers provide excellent support to other carers and parents. They engage with schools, facilitate school attendance and attend and contribute to education meetings and share information with carers. This ensures consistency. Childcare reviews acknowledge the good progress that children are making educationally. However, not all carers are provided with an up to date personal education plan (PEP). Outcomes for children are not directly affected, but it is not clear how carers continue to support and monitor children's changing educational needs when they do not have this reference.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children benefit from very good matching in short break and foster placements. This is a particular strength of the service. Placement stability is testament to the carefully considered matching process. Carers say that the service 'match so well'; 'Barnardo's team have been great in matching us up with the young person and providing ongoing support'; 'Barnardo's take time and give a lot of thought when matching children to a family'.

Carers are aware of children's care plans. Most carers say that they have enough information about children. Some carers say that initial information is not always forthcoming and is available after the placement is made. Short break carers say that they do not always get the whole information from parents in case the placement is refused. Carers say that supervising social workers are good at chasing information from local authorities. Children are introduced to carers on a planned basis. This is child focused and individual to the child. Carers do not feel pressurised into taking placements and the process is sensitivity and careful handled. Children are made to feel welcome in carers' homes. They are highly valued, loved and considered part of the family and integrated into community life. Carers say that some young people continue to stay in touch with them, once they have moved on from them.

Children's diverse and individual needs are well met. Children are encouraged to be independent and exercise choice. Carers are good at supporting children to develop social and emotional resilience and positive self-identity. Parents commented 'I am very happy with the way the service has helped'; 'it allows him to be quite independent packing his bag and doing things for himself'. Contact is actively promoted for children to ensure they stay in touch with people who are significant to them. Carers understand the impact that children's histories may have on them and provide appropriate support. The service listens to any concerns raised by carers and considered in the best interests of children.

Children confirm that their views, wishes and feelings are listened to and acted on as far as possible. Children are appropriately encouraged to attend their reviews and contribute to them. They are provided with their preferred or most effective method of communication. Children express themselves in a manner that can be understood, taking into account their individual needs. Information about the complaints procedure is known to children and stakeholders. Children say that they can talk to someone if they feel sad and parents know how to complain. One complaint made in the past year was satisfactorily resolved by the service.

Children benefit from good consultation opportunities. Children are listened to and their wishes and feelings are ascertained. Children have access to independent support from adults. This includes good interventions from parents, foster carers and fostering social workers. The service has a clear and inclusive participation strategy. It aims to ensure that all children are valued, respected and listened to. The service

has appointed participation workers who have proceeded to visit children in short break placements. Their interaction with the children so far has been very positive. However, the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them about the service are not being used to develop and influence the service for maximum impact.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are too young to be involved in transitional plans. However, they are actively encouraged to participate in activities that promote their independence and life chances. Children develop skills appropriate to their needs. For example, rising from bed unaided, getting dressed and undertaking self care with prompts, developing cooking and baking skills. These activities promote children's participation, confidence, self-esteem and independence.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The service meets the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose. The document was ratified by the fostering panel in February 2011. It is due to be updated, along with aspects of the children's information to ensure it meets the new national minimum standards and regulations. This includes updating Ofsted's contact details.

The service is ethically managed and is financially sound. In recent months, the service has reorganised. This has resulted in a loss of personnel and the development of other posts, most of which have been filled. Carers say that although the service is 'stretched', this has not impacted on the quality of service. The new manager has applied to register with Ofsted. The manager has significant experience of managing the organisation's short breaks service. They have a clear vision of how the service needs to be further developed. The manager has the support and respect of the staff team and is known and well regarded by a number of existing short break carers. There are clear lines of accountability and appropriate deputising arrangements when the manager is not available. Senior managers support the manager. They have a strong commitment to valuing children and helping them reach their full potential. Staff are well retained. They are qualified, competent and highly child focused. Staff say that they feel well supported, are supervised at regular intervals and know about the manager's 'open door' policy. Supervising social workers are registered with the General Social Care Council and have access to further training and learning opportunities to ensure well-informed practice.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a clear acknowledgement that although the service is situated in a diverse community, there is not a lot of interest shown in foster care from the local communities. The manager is addressing this issue, which will inform the recruitment strategy. The service's ethos with

respect to valuing people, in terms of race, culture, disability, religion, sexuality and language is a strength of the service. The values are strongly captured in the policies and procedures and carers have this information. Children are well matched with carers who can meet and promote their diverse and complex needs. The majority of parents agree that the service understands their child's individual needs, including their culture and ethnicity to a good standard. Most carers comment that the service addresses this aspect to a 'good' standard and some describe this area as 'outstanding'.

Recruitment and retention of carers is good and the service strategy is regularly reviewed. Good recruitment, vetting, assessment and support ensure suitable carers who are well matched with children who need short- or long-term care and support. The manager is aware and is addressing issues in relation to providing carer resources that can meet the diverse demands of local authorities. Carers report positively about the process the assessment and approval process. The recruitment and selection of staff is generally good. It ensures that prospective candidates are carefully chosen and vetted, which means that children are not exposed to people who may pose a risk to them. This includes Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) clearance. However, telephone enquires of written references are not consistently acted on. Not all social workers' professional social work qualifications are maintained. There is no direct impact on outcomes for young people, however, implementing these practices make for a more robust recruitment process.

Changes in the service have resulted in one, well-integrated fostering panel. The fostering panel provides a strong quality assurance function that is well managed by a skilled and experienced chair person. Fostering panels are quorate. They are represented by members who are strong in their field of expertise and actively contribute. Carers express satisfaction with the process. Some carers commented that not many questions were asked of them at panel because their assessments were very thorough. Carers are quickly informed about approval recommendations. The manager is addressing the central list requirements and plans to facilitate formal panel training.

Carers feel highly valued by the service. Carers say the advice and support is invaluable to their learning and development. This ensures they can continue to care for children well. Carers say that the service has a 'can do attitude'. Carers commented that the support as 'amazing'; 'I love what I do'. Another carer said the service provides 'excellent support. I cannot rate this highly enough. The team is very stretched with human resources but they always manage to provide support, advice and training when needed. Thanks you!' Carers are aware that in the absence of their supervising social worker, they can speak to their colleagues. Carers are aware about the breaks available to them and out of hours support. Carers have their performance and development reviewed annually and contribute to them.

Carers who need additional equipment or specific play equipment for children are provided with them. Carers understand the role of the supervising social workers and placing social workers. Carers are supervised at regular intervals in their homes and more frequently, depending on the child's needs. Carers comment on good peer

support, opportunities to meet up with other carers and enjoy the social activities hosted by the service. Carers speak highly about the training they receive. Carers say that they get training to meet the needs of the children placed with them. The service training programme enables carers to choose the courses they want to do on completion of mandatory training. Specific training to support carer households and raise and support children's self-esteem and behaviours has been invested in by the service. The impact of this training is not yet known. A number of carers have completed the Children's Workforce and Development Council (CWDC) training. However, a small number are refusing to participate. The service is addressing this issue. Carers have access to individual support in their homes. A carers' support group is in the process of development and carers have expressed a keen interest. Foster carer handbook updates are in process to reflect the new national minimum standards and regulations.

Children's records are in good order. Carers understand the impact of their recording on children who can access their information. Good administration systems support the needs of the service and continue to be developed to ensure a seamless service provision.

Investigations into allegations against carers and complaints are well managed and safeguard children. There is appropriate liaison with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). However, the manager has no formal, cohesive system for monitoring service performance. This also includes consultation with foster carers, children and placing social workers. It is unclear how improvements that benefit children are prioritised and addressed when this is not formally implemented.

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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
36 (2011)	notify Ofsted of events, in particular serious illness or serious accidents of a child placed with foster parents (Regulation 36 & Schedule 7)	31/05/2011
35 (2011)	monitor the quality of care at regular intervals and provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1), (a) & (b), (3))	30/06/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure that carers' homes are inspected annually without appointment, by the fostering service (NMS 10.5)
- ensure that health needs assessments and health plans are obtained for all children who are fostered (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4, paragraph 3.55)
- ensure compliance with the local area police protocol to manage children who go missing (NMS 5.6)
- provide carers with updated personal education plans (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4, paragraph 3.106)
- ensure good recruitment practice is consistently followed and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in particular making telephone enquiries to verify written references and obtaining evidence of relevant social work qualifications. (NMS 19.2)