

# The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Cheryl Carter
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	05/11/2007

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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**

The service is based in south London and operates as a fostering branch office of The Adolescent and Children's Trust. The service provides a range of placements for children and young people aged from birth to under 18 years. Services include outreach support to children and their families, supervised contact, parent and child placements and assessments.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Children and young people enjoy positive outcomes and individualised care that reflects their needs. They play a part in the decision-making process and they are consulted about developments in the service that directly impact on their care. There are some outstanding areas of care reflected in the area of enjoying and achieving and economic well-being. Education is valued, allowing young people to maximise their potential. A strong emphasis is placed on close support to foster families and young people and this helps young people to make good progress in all areas of their lives. Good emotional and practical support is provided to young people who are making the transition to adulthood.

This is a well-run service. Staff are competent, skilled and keep up to date with relevant legislation, good practice and guidance. They receive good support from the management team, practice is reflective and the quality assurance process helps to ensure that problems are addressed promptly. However, the agency does not collate a central record of complaints made by children and young people so it is not possible to identify any patterns or trends in terms of children's complaints, and information relating to Ofsted is out of date. Equality and diversity are well promoted in all areas of the service. This all helps to ensure that young people's welfare is promoted.

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

At the last inspection the agency was asked to review the application of systems to monitor the quality and adequacy of records. This recommendation has been addressed and there is now a system in place to audit records and take action when necessary.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health and well-being of all children are very well considered by this agency and its carers. The health needs of children are comprehensively explored at the referral and matching stage; hence, prospective foster carers are ready and able to meet identified needs.

Children and young people's health needs are monitored on an ongoing basis. All children are registered with a General Practitioner and children are also provided with access to a range of health professionals including dentists, psychologists and therapists. All children are subject to an annual health assessment that picks up on any health needs. Records show that babies and toddlers are achieving their developmental milestones and in cases where they are not, then the appropriate referrals are made to other professionals. Children and young people 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 have placement plans that identify the roles appropriately.

Carers are proactive in promoting healthy living and encourage children to adopt healthy lifestyles by eating well. Children say that they enjoy healthy and nutritious meals and foster carers always talk to them about eating healthily. One child said that his foster care is the best cook and he enjoys her food. Another said, 'she makes sure that we get our five a day'. Children say that they have the opportunity to shop and prepare meals if they wish. Foster carers also encourage children to take regular exercise and raise awareness of drugs and alcohol abuse.

Visits by the supervising social workers are an opportunity to further explore the health needs of the children in placement and this information is forwarded to placing social workers. Hence, the ongoing health needs of children are being consistently monitored. The agency provides training and guidance which equip foster carers to ensure that those in their care receive the appropriate support with their health care needs. Examples include nursing guidance for specific medical needs and psychiatric and psychology input from the local child and adolescent mental health teams. Foster carers work closely with such agencies and accurately record all appointments and advice within their monthly reports. All carers undertake first aid training that is updated as required. The agency has a policy on the administration of medication and carers record all medication dispensed. Carers' homes are subject to annual health and safety checks and measures introduced to ensure the safety of children.

The fostering households are generally well maintained and free from potential health and safety hazards. Supervising social workers appropriately note any shortfalls and these are promptly addressed. Children and young people enjoy accessing their local community in terms of their hobbies and leisure pursuits and youth clubs. 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 live in a family environment where foster carers provide them with nurturing and safe homes. Children in foster care feel that they receive relevant information that helps them to keep themselves safe. They say that they have discussions with their carers about safety when using the internet and also about meeting and talking to strangers. The relationship between the carers and children is one of openness and honesty and this helps to promote young people's safety. Carers know how to keep children safe. Risks are managed effectively and this reduces the chances of young people experiencing harm. Foster carers receive training on safe caring practices and safeguarding as part of the approval training programme and these are regularly updated. The agency has access to specialist child protection advice through their fostering panel chair. The agency works with a number of local authorities to safeguard children and follows the London child protection guidelines when safeguarding concerns arise.

Overall, rules and boundaries are explicitly clear in line with good parenting; hence, children and young people are well matched and they respond positively to the style of care they receive. Foster carers write and implement their own specific safe care guidance which is personalised to their own homes and circumstances. In the event that a child should go missing from their placement, foster carers implement clear and effective guidelines which are in line with the agency, the local authority and the local 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.

The agency provides caring, stable and comfortable placements to children. Children enjoy excellent relationships with their foster families, within which they are placed. Carers are given a high level of support from the agency to manage children's behaviour appropriately and this helps children to feel safe and valued. Children say that they are made to feel part of the family and speak affectionately about their foster carers. One young person said: 'When I have been reprimanded I never feel that this is because I am a child in care, I know she does it because she cares', and another said, 'this is my family I love it here, it's my home'. Clear boundaries are in place for children which helps them to feel secure.

Children are encouraged to engage in their own preferred leisure pursuits and hobbies. Foster carers equip themselves with useful information about local leisure facilities and resources. Children enjoy using such resources as football clubs and leisure centres, as well as simply spending time with their own friends and peer groups, through joint hobbies and youth clubs. Placement plans provide clear guidelines about the day-to-day plans for young people and there is guidance around

issues such as overnight stays with friends and this makes it easier for foster carers to make some decisions about issues that may come up in the children's day-to-day lives.

The educational achievements of each child are recognised and children are rewarded for their attendance and progress. Foster carers effectively support and promote educational attendance and achievement. The roles of the foster carer and the supervising social worker are very clear and ensure that information with regards to educational reviews, personal educational plans, and where necessary, statements of special educational needs are obtained from local authorities and are up to date. This gives carers a good understanding of the educational aspirations for the children.

Foster carers, and where possible supervising social workers, attend personal education planning meetings for children to ensure that those in placement are receiving the support they need. Foster carers act as advocates in this regard and appropriately challenge decisions about school placements if they are concerned. Foster carers support children with homework and children are provided with access to computers for educational and recreational purposes. A number of children have achieved good examination results and have gone on to college and are looking forward to going on to university.

Children benefit from living in comfortable and homely surroundings. Children over three years old who are not siblings do not share bedrooms. Regular checks by the agency help to ensure that foster homes are safe and secure. Training in health and safety for carers helps to remove avoidable hazards.

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

The provision is good.

Children's views are sought through their care reviews, foster carer supervision and placement supervision visits and meeting with the children. The staff try to establish a realistic view of each placement by regularly having discussions with carers and their children in order to seek their views about all aspects of the care and support provided. The agency also provides support to children to complete the looked after children consultation for their statutory reviews. Supervising social workers have regular contact with the children's social workers to ensure that the children's views are recorded. In addition, the agency has its own age-appropriate consultation which is regularly sent out to children to ascertain their views. However, there is no record of complaints made by children in their foster homes, so it is not possible to determine the outcomes of complaints and whether there are any trends or patterns developing.

Placement plans set out the needs of children and they are assisted to develop a positive self-image and are treated as individuals. There are good arrangements in place to ensure that children have the opportunity to exercise choice in important aspects of their lives such as food and clothing and they also receive personal

allowances and pocket money according to their age. This helps children to develop skills in budgeting and prepares them for adulthood.

Contact arrangements are well managed and dealt with sensitively in order to promote children's best interests. Practical help is provided by the agency to support positive contact arrangements and this helps them to make decisions and provide care in line with children's best interests. Sensitive arrangements are in place for introducing children to new foster families and this helps young people to feel secure and valued. The agency clearly recognises that the success of placements is often due to how a child adapts to life within the new family and the relationships they establish with all its members. Young people spoken to and feedback received by Ofsted confirms they feel welcomed and cared for by foster carers and their family members.

It is evident that the degree of support that children receive from their own social workers can vary dramatically. In many cases the supervising social worker of the agency advocates on behalf of the children placed with them. All children's placements are subject to regular internal monthly monitoring and six-monthly looked after children reviews. The recommendations arising out of reviews are incorporated into children's placement plans.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency aims to ensure that children have the skills needed to achieve their full potential and make a successful transition to adulthood. Carers and supervising social workers proactively ensure that pathway plans are developed in advance of planned departures. Local authorities are now prepared to maintain stable placements until a young person reaches the age of 18 or until they leave college. In recognition of the need to prepare children for their lives beyond foster care, the agency has developed a life skills programme for children, and a number of children have already participated in the programme that has helped them to develop independent living skills. The manager explained that the carers are familiar with the concept of supported living and the likely implications of caring for young people beyond 18. Carers said that caring for young people does not end when the young people move on to independent living, and there were examples of care continuing beyond 18 for young people after leaving care, receiving support from foster carers that is not financially rewarded. These carers are to be commended.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The fostering panel comprises individuals who are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake this task. The role of the fostering panel is clearly defined. The panel assessments of prospective foster carers are rigorous and thorough. The agency has a strict filtering system when recruiting new foster carers, 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. Annual reviews occur on time and the panel makes clear recommendations; for example, attendance for training, to improve upon the quality of care provided. Good matching arrangements ensure that children and young people are placed with families who can meet their needs. Foster carers say that they work hard to provide stable placements for the children placed and feel that they would not agree to take a child unless they feel able to provide a good service.

The agency offers placement to children from across the South East including the Greater London area which is culturally diverse. The staff are clearly aware of this and are proactive in trying to recruit from all sections of the community. All carers undertake courses in equality and diversity as part of their initial training. The present group of carers includes single people and married couples from a range of social backgrounds. There is a Statement of Purpose that sets out clearly what the agency intends to achieve. This guide includes information about Ofsted that has not been updated. Young people know their rights and know that they can contact support services outside of the agency and foster home, as they are provided with this information within the children's guide; however, the information relating to Ofsted is out of date.

This is a well run, financially viable service. This branch of the agency is managed by a well qualified and experienced manager who possesses both professional social work and management qualifications. The Registered Manager is supported by a team of qualified social workers, a support worker and administrative staff. The team is committed to ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people. Quality monitoring systems are in place which help to ensure that the service is run in the best interests of the children. Record keeping is of a good standard and there is a clear acknowledgement that this contributes to young people developing a clear understanding of their lives. The lines of accountability within the agency are clear and good administrative systems allow the agency to function effectively. Staff say that the service is always looking at ways to improve, in the best interests of the children and young people referred.

Staff say that they are provided with good support, training and monthly supervision from the manager. This helps them to promote young people's welfare. The arrangements in place for the selection of staff and carers are robust and this helps to keep young people safe. All staff and panel members have undergone robust checks in line with regulations.

Foster carers are provided with good opportunities for training and support which help them to promote young people's well-being. Much time and energy has been spent over the last two years to ensure that all carers have completed the Children's Workforce Development Training. Children and young people are assured that their carers possess the necessary skills, qualifications and guidance, which promote safe care. The agency recognises that its carers come from a wide range of backgrounds, with some possessing additional professional qualifications and relevant skills. One carer said that the training provided in behaviour management has helped to ensure

that the placement did not break down. The personal development of carers is seen as important in this agency and a regular review of training needs takes place during supervision and at annual reviews. The agency endeavours to support 'hard to reach' carers to undertake training and development. Online training, and training local to the area where the carers resides, is provided for those carers who live a long distance away from this branch of the agency where training is carried out.

A foster carer said support is available '24/7'. There is an on-call system where foster carers can receive advice and support if needed out of hours. Carers are supported to understand the needs of children and young people in order to understand the nature of support required. Regular supervision occurs in carers' homes and carers report that the agency is always available and approachable. There is good communication between the agency, carers and children's social workers and this helps to ensure that young people benefit from consistency in their care. Children and young people have placement plans that provide clarity about the roles of all those involved in their care and how the parenting tasks should be shared. Children and young people are able to contribute their views to these plans and these measures help to ensure that placements provide stability. Statutory reviews occur as required and these help to ensure that young people continue to make progress in their placements.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency is clear 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. 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 children and young people to thrive.

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 appropriately 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. Foster carers ensure that those children living with them have the information needed in order to make their views heard and to take control of their own lives

Written information relating to the agency, children's rights and how to make complaints is produced in an age-appropriate style, on DVD and is further verbally explained by foster carers and supervising social workers in an effort to ensure the children and young people have a good understanding of the fostering 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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

<b>Reg</b>	<b>Statutory Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
3 (2011)	ensure that the children's guide includes current information relating to Ofsted such as the address, email address, and telephone number. (Regulation 3(3)(c))	12/07/2011

## Recommendations

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

- maintain a central record of complaints made by children and young people in placement. (NMS 1.6)