

# SWAP Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Suzanne Young
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	30/06/2010

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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**

SWAP Foster Care provides foster care to children from birth to 18. It is a private limited company also operating an independent social work consultancy business. A range of placement types are provided including: emergency, long term, short term and respite placements. The agency is located on an industrial estate on the outskirts of Coventry and currently supports four fostering households providing placements for four children and young people.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This is the agency's first inspection following registration. The inspection focused on all the national minimum standards.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable to work with children and young people. It is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently delivering a service which meets the needs of its users.

The agency promotes the health, safety and well-being of children effectively with satisfactory and good outcomes for children and young people being achieved. Children and young people are supported to maintain healthy lifestyles and to have their health care needs met. Education is actively supported and promoted by foster carers and the fostering agency is good at ensuring that the wishes and feelings of children and young people can be heard. Children and young people are happy in their foster homes and say they feel like part of the family. Foster carers have safe care policies that are specific to their families. These however are not reviewed on the placement of children and young people to ensure that they reflect the individual needs and requirements of children or young people placed with them.

The panel effectively scrutinises prospective foster carers' assessments and makes balanced recommendations to the agency decision maker. They do not, however, have access to all the information available about foster carers, which could compromise their recommendation. Foster carers' terms of approval do not always accurately reflect their home situation or current practice guidance.

There are some minor administrative shortfalls around staff documents and records.

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

This is the first inspection following registration.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people's health needs are effectively met and promoted by the agency. Foster carers ensure that children have prompt access to health services including any specialist services that is required to meet their health needs. Foster carers are provided with appropriate health care information and are clear about the arrangements that are in place for consent to medical treatment to ensure any delay is prevented. The agency's fostering panel has access to a medical adviser who provides health advice and feedback on adult health assessment reports.

Children and young people have health plans which are completed by foster carers. These capture key essential health information, and provide a record of all health interventions and treatments. This ensures that all children and young people have full knowledge and understanding of their health needs.

There is a strong emphasis on health promotion consistent with current legislation and guidance. Good health practices are promoted in supervision sessions and during regular support group meetings. Training on health and hygiene and first aid is included as part of foster carers' core training and is scheduled for later in the year.

Children and young people are encouraged and supported to lead healthy active lifestyles by foster carers, such as attending after school clubs and engaging in activities such as horse riding and swimming. This is also encouraged by the agency. One carer stated that, 'the agency fully supports me and my decisions with implementing sport, healthy eating and healthy activities.' The promotion of healthy eating and lifestyles ensures children and young people are able to develop positive lifestyles and emotional well-being.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Children and young people's safety and welfare is promoted by the agency. Foster carers receive safeguarding training to ensure they are aware of their role and responsibility in supporting and safeguarding children and young people. Safeguarding is also discussed with foster carers during supervision visits and during support group meetings. This is further underpinned by the agency's policies on safeguarding, complaints and missing from care.

Fostering households have developed safe care policies that are specific to their families. These, however, are not reviewed on the placement of children and young people to ensure that they reflect the individual needs and requirements of specific children or young people. Although areas of risk are highlighted on matching documents, risk assessments are not then completed to inform the development or review of safe caring policies. This has the potential to compromise the safety of all within the fostering household.

Children and young people who go missing are protected, as far as possible, and responded to positively on their return. There is a policy and procedure in place if young people go missing from care. Foster carers are aware of the procedure to follow and report that they are confident in the event of this happening.

The manager has systems in place to collate, respond to, and investigate information about allegations, disclosures of abuse and complaints from children and young people so that the safety of children and young people is promoted. Safe guarding procedures have been submitted for consideration to the local safeguarding children's board (LSCB) for approval.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Children and young people enjoy sound relationships with their foster families and interact positively with them. Their social and emotional needs are promoted to enable them to develop resilience, self control and improved social skills. Foster carers provide an environment and culture that promote and support positive behaviour and encourage children and young people to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and ability. They receive training in positive behaviour management. Children and young people develop a sense of self and belonging in their placements. They say they feel part of the family and younger children interact with their foster carers in a positive way. One young person commented that, 'they treat me how they treat... their granddaughter.' Another young person stated, 'I have my own room... and I call my carer Nan. I know she wants the best for me and I love her.'

Children and young people are able to access activities and leisure pursuits. Foster carers ensure that children and young people are able to pursue hobbies and sporting interests such as swimming, horse-riding and ice-skating. The agency also held a training day for children of fostering households where fostered children also attended for part of the day, playing games, interacting with staff and carers.

The agency promotes the educational needs of young people. All children placed have a dedicated educational plan record in their files that captures key achievements, absences and exclusions. The educational needs of children and young people are also given a high priority by foster carers. They engage and work with schools and colleges to support children and young people's education and have successfully fought to improve the educational provision for children placed with them.

Children and young people are living in foster homes that can comfortably accommodate them. Foster homes visited were warm, adequately furnished and decorated. All children have their own bedrooms; however, the use of personal space within foster carers' homes is not always clearly defined. This could compromise children and young people's privacy.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering agency is good at ensuring that the wishes and feelings of children and young people can be heard. Children and young people say that they are listened to and their views are sought. Their views are actively sought through a variety of ways. The agency has developed consultation forms to gain children and young people's views about their experiences of being looked after prior to their review meetings, and at various other times during their placement. Their views are also gained when possible at the end of placements. The agency is in the process of developing a magazine that will focus on the experiences of children and young people placed, as well as issues relevant to foster carers. Children and young people have been asked to express their interest in sitting on an editorial board to determine items for inclusion in the magazine, its name and other related issues. They have also been asked about sitting on a children's council to look at policy improvement and recruitment. This will enable them to have a voice and be heard, as well as to be involved in the running of the agency and improve the quality of care given to young people.

Managers have been proactive in developing links to enable children and young people to have access to the local children's rights advocacy service and other advocacy services; to ensure their voices can be heard and have their say about their experiences of being looked after and cared for. Contact arrangements are good. Foster carers support children and young people to have constructive contact with family and friends. This is undertaken in accordance care plans to ensure that they only have contact with people who are safe. The agency is able to provide local authorities with supervised contact arrangements in their own premises.

Children and young people are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes self-esteem. Their needs are clearly set out in their placement plans. Wherever possible children and young people are welcomed and leave foster homes in a planned and sensitive manner, which makes them feel valued. In emergency placements the agency ensures all information is shared with foster carers as soon as is practicably possible. They are well matched to their foster placements and carers have all known information about them.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

Although the agency currently has very few young people placed with them over the age of 16 years, they ensure there are arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes providing training and support to foster carers to care appropriately for young people who are approaching adulthood. Foster carers are aware that part of their responsibilities are

to prepare children and young people to live independently and provide age appropriate support to children and young people in developing independence skills.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service works closely with children, young people and carers to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and met. There is a commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice and the agency has specific policies and training that challenges oppression and discrimination. Management and staff undertake research to inform practice and hold events to celebrate differences.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable to work with children and young people. It is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently delivering a service which meets the needs of its users. The agency is very small with currently four fostering households approved. The manager of the agency is suitable, qualified and knowledgeable. He competently monitors the operation of the service. Any allegations and suspicions of harm are handled appropriately and in line with government guidance. These are not however being notified to Ofsted as required by legislation. Recruitment procedures are in place and ensure that all appropriate checks and references are undertaken and appropriately ratified. Copies of staff and panel members' qualifications and identification however are not kept on file.

The statement of purpose provides a clear outline of the aims and objectives of the agency. The children's guide is available in age appropriate formats which enable children and young people to have an understanding of the service provided to them. Prospective foster carers are recruited and assessed to ensure they meet the needs of children and young people. Assessments are detailed, analytical and identify the competencies and strengths they have, or need to develop.

The fostering panel is undertaken by a core group of members who are quorate and make decisions about the approval and review of foster carers. The fostering panel has a good mix of ethnicity, skills, knowledge and experience and provides a quality assurance function by feeding back on the quality of reports being presented to panel. Foster carers' terms of approval, however, are not appropriate as they do not always reflect accurately the foster carers' home situation nor do they reflect current practice guidance. Not all the required information is available to panel in order to make its recommendation as health and safety checks and safe care plans are not presented to panel. The lack of this information has the potential to compromise the quality of the recommendations being made. The service undertakes effective matching of children and young people with carers and this helps to ensure placement stability. The agency has developed a good matching matrix which demonstrates clearly how foster carers' skills can meet children and young people's needs.

Foster carers receive good support and comprehensive training from the agency



through regular visits, telephone calls and fortnightly support groups. Foster carers are in the process of completing the Children's Workforce Development Council training for foster carers. One carer commented that she felt foster carers and the agency all work as one team, supporting each other and utilising each other's skills and experience. The agency has developed good relationships with local colleges and uses final year students to carry out most social work functions. Although the registered manager supervises the students in this task, foster carers are not receiving formal supervision by a named, appropriately qualified social worker.

Carers say that they receive their payments in a timely manner and there are no issues with their payments. Records are well maintained and clear, and contribute to child's understanding of their life. Foster carers and panel members understand what is expected of them and are aware of the agency's policies and procedures. Some administrative records however are not being kept by the agency as required. This does not affect the outcomes for children and young people.

## 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
11 (2011)	ensure the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. This refers to ensuring safe care plans and risk assessments are developed which reflect the individual needs of children and young people (Regulation 11 (a))	31/07/2011
25 (2011)	ensure foster carers' terms of approval are appropriate (NMS 25 (c))	31/07/2011
36 (2011)	ensure Ofsted is notified of any events as required in Schedule 7 (NMS 36)	31/07/2011
30 (2011)	ensure a case record is maintained which details a record of each placement made including the name, age, and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated, and the circumstances of the termination. (Regulation 30 (3) (a))	31/07/2011

### Recommendations

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

- ensure foster carers' homes can comfortably accommodate all who live there, without compromising children's personal space (NMS 10.1)

- ensure all necessary information is provided to panel to enable full and proper consideration (14.3)
- ensure there is a record of the recruitment and suitability checks that have been carried out for those working for the agency (NMS 19.3)
- ensure each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker. (NMS 21.8)