

# SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

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>	13/12/2007

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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 Birmingham branch of SWIIS aims to provide a wide range of foster placements from the diverse backgrounds that reflect the demographic population of the locality. The remit of the service is to provide short and long-term placements for children and young people between the ages of 0-21 years.

The service has a team of resource workers to complete activities and one to one work with children. In addition all placements receive an educational support package from a qualified teacher. The agency has also employed health advisors to support carers in meeting the health care needs of children and young people.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The agency strongly promotes the health, safety and well-being of children with outstanding 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 one-to-one teaching support and by foster carers. The agency has a team of children's resource workers who provide excellent support to carers and work with children and young people to promote and develop positive behaviour. The fostering agency is excellent 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. They feel that foster carers take time to listen to them and are supportive in their education.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are experienced and suitable to work with children and young people. It is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently delivering an excellent service which meets the needs of its users. There is excellent retention of staff which provides stability in the support provided to carers. The agency undertakes effective matching of children and young people with carers which helps to ensure placement stability. The recruitment of foster carers is robust. Assessments are comprehensive and analytical. The fostering panel and agency decision-maker make timely and thorough decisions about the approval and reviewing of foster carers. Foster carers receive excellent support and feel highly valued.

There are no shortfalls leading to requirements or recommendations.

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

At the last inspection five recommendations were made. All have been addressed. Medical consent forms are obtained and pathway plans are actively pursued by the

agency to ensure young people are prepared for independence. Robust monitoring and recruitment records ensure children and young people's safety and well-being. The agency has developed creative and innovative ways in which to promote and encourage communication with children and young people of different ages and abilities.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The health care needs of the children and young people are effectively identified, supported and met. The agency is proactive in promoting healthy living. Children and young people have excellent access to health care resources including any specialist services required to meet their health needs. Foster carers are provided with a high level of health care information and are clear about the arrangements for consent to medical treatment to ensure any delays are prevented.

There is excellent health support to children and carers through health advisers who are qualified nurses. The health advisors play a major role offering support to carers and also supporting children and young people to lead healthy lifestyles. They work on an individual basis with children and young people to address specific issues, such as healthy eating, sexual health, personal hygiene, smoking and drug awareness. Where children with health issues or disabilities are placed, the health advisors are involved from the beginning of placement to offer support and advise to ensure all their needs are met. Young people over the age of 11 are provided with a health file for advice and to help them understand emerging development issues including how to care for their own health. This strong emphasis on health promotion is also continued through foster carers' supervision sessions with link workers and through further direct work offered to children and young people by children resource workers.

Foster carers receive training in first aid as part of their core training and this is updated every two years. Young people over 16 are also able to complete a first aid certificate as part of developing their independence and self esteem. Further training for foster carers is available on issues such as self harm, drug and alcohol awareness and autism. The agency also ensures that carers and their link workers receive excellent guidance and training to ensure the appropriate care is given when looking after children with complex health needs.

Foster carers promote healthy eating and encourage children to live healthy lifestyles. Children and young people have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of physical exercise in line with their interests.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people's safety and welfare are actively promoted by the agency. There are clear and comprehensive systems ensuring the protection and safety of children and young people. Foster carers receive safeguarding training as part of their core training to ensure they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in supporting and safeguarding children and young people. Link workers also ensure safeguarding is given a strong focus during supervision visits with foster carers. Children and young people's welfare is further promoted through direct work undertaken when required by a team of resource workers.

Fostering households have safe care policies that are specific to their families. These are reviewed on the placement of children and young people to ensure that they reflect the individual needs and requirements of those placed with them. Initial safe care risk assessments are undertaken to help identify any areas of risk and help inform the safe care policies. Individual risk management and individual behaviour management strategies are also completed if deemed necessary. This is excellent practice and ensures that the safety and well-being of young people is effectively promoted.

Children and young people rarely go missing. When this has occurred the agency has worked closely with other agencies to ensure they 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 following them in the event of this happening. Specific training for staff and foster carers on children who go missing is planned.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people enjoy strong relationships with their foster families and interact positively with them. They live in environments that promote and support positive behaviour and encourage them to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and ability. Children and young people are happy within their foster families and younger children interact with their foster carers in a positive way. One young person commented "I love this placement" another stated "I have an extremely loving family who always takes time to listen to me and there's nothing I want as I have got everything".

The agency is proactive in ensuring foster carers are supported in managing their feelings and responses arising from caring for children and young people, particularly where children and young people display very challenging behaviour. The agency has a team of children's resource workers who provide excellent support to carers and work with children and young people to promote and develop positive behaviour.

Foster carers' receive training in managing challenging behaviour which is updated regularly.

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. The children's resource workers have developed a comprehensive programme of activities open to all children and young people regardless of ability, to develop confidence and self esteem. Activities include scuba diving, bush craft, football tournaments, street dance and family challenge days.

The agency has a strong focus on the promotion of education and achievement of children and young people. All school age children have a qualified teacher allocated to work directly with them either in school or in the home. One foster carers commented that "the education worker has worked tirelessly, seeing the child for an hour most weeks". This level of support promotes the educational attainment of children and young people, improves communication with schools and provides immediate support to children and carers with difficult education issues. This emphasis on the promoting education adds to placement stability and improved outcomes for children and young people. Over the last two years young people looked after by the agency have attained significantly higher GCSE results than looked after children nationally.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people's social and emotional needs are actively promoted by foster carers and staff to enable them to develop resilience, self control and improved social skills. They are receiving excellent personalised care from carers which meets their needs. The agency has a dynamic and enthusiastic team of children's resource workers and teachers who work directly with children and young people to help them develop a sense of self belonging in their placements. They offer focussed work with children and young people completing life story work, identity work, safe care work, wishes and feelings work, preparation for adoption and moving on, as well as mentoring and targeted education support. This helps to promote a sense of identity and belonging. Children and young people develop in confidence and self esteem which leads to greater stability in placement.

The agency has developed creative and innovative ways in which to promote and encourage communication ensuring that the wishes and feelings of children and young people of all ages and abilities can be heard. 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. Children and young people can also express their views in newsletters, one-to-one discussions with link workers and through activities and play sessions with children's resource workers. Children and young people say that they are listened to and their views are sought.

Children and young people know how to complain. This information is provided in a number of age-appropriate booklets. This ensures that the information about how to complain is accessible to children and young people.

Foster carers' support children and young people to have constructive contact with family and friends. Contact is undertaken in accordance with children and young people's care plans to ensure that they only have contact with people who it is safe to do so. The agency encourages foster carers to have regular contact with children's families. This can be through a communication book, face-to-face, when appropriate, or by telephone. There is training available for foster carers on the importance of contact and on communicating with children.

Children and young people are carefully matched to their foster placements. Wherever possible, children and young people are welcomed and leave foster homes in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel valued. Foster carers are given all the information that is known about the children they are looking after and in emergency placements the agency ensures all information is shared with foster carers as soon as is practicably possible. The agency provides all children and young people with memory boxes at the start of their placement and support foster carers to encourage children and young people to be pro-active in gathering photographs and other memories to record their time within the placement. This enables the young person, from the beginning, to have a sense of belonging and acceptance.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people are prepared for and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their full potential and achieve economic well-being. The agency ensures there are arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. Foster carers receive training to support young people to develop age-appropriate independence skills. Education case workers help young people prepare for exams and plan for their future. They help young people to look for and plan which college university places or jobs they wish to consider often advocating for the young person to have their wishes and feelings addressed. One young person in the agency's newsletter said that "I want to do A level English and I am writing a book"

The agency is developing their own pathway programme, entitled moving forward, which will provide guidance skills and training for young people. As part of this programme young people will be able to attend workshops and obtain qualifications in such courses as first aid, substance abuse, cooking, diet, sexual health and staying safe.



## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency closely supports children and young people to ensure they receive excellent personalised care that meets their needs. The agency is committed to improving equality and diversity in practice. This can be seen in foster carer assessments, matching and training and through the individualised support offered to carers and children. Staff ensure that all children and young people regardless of ability are able to access the activities organised by the agency. The staff team, panel and carer base are diverse and reflect the cultural needs of the children and young people they care for. The agency supports foster carers who do not speak English or where it is not their first language through interpreters and education programmes.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable and qualified to work with children and young people. It is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently delivering an excellent service which meets the needs of its users. Social workers are appropriately qualified and experienced to competently support foster carers. There is excellent retention of staff which provides stability in the support provided to carers. Any allegations and suspicions of harm are handled appropriately and in line with government guidance. Robust recruitment procedures are in place which ensures that all appropriate checks and references are undertaken and appropriately ratified.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose which provides a clear outline of the aims and objectives of the service it provides. The children's guide is available which enables children and young people to have an understanding of the service provided to them. Records are well maintained, clear and contribute to a child's understanding of their life.

The agency ensures prospective foster carers are recruited and assessed to ensure they meet the needs of children and young people. Assessments are comprehensive and 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 make timely and thorough decisions about the approval and reviewing of foster carers. The fostering panel is made up of people from a central list who have a good mix of ethnicity, skills, knowledge and experience. The panel also provides a quality assurance function by feeding back on the quality of reports being presented to panel.

The agency undertakes effective matching of children and young people with carers which helps to ensure placement stability. Children's needs are carefully matched to carers' skills and where there are gaps in matching, the agency ensures resources are put in place to meet those needs. Foster carers are provided with all the information available to enable them to care effectively and appropriately for children and young people in their care.

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Foster carers receive excellent support from the agency through regular visits, telephone calls and support groups. The agency operates a buddy system where experienced carers can support and advise less experienced carers. There is a comprehensive training programme available for foster carers to assist them in meeting the specific needs of children and young people. Foster carers have undertaken the Children's Workforce Development Council induction programmes and a high percentage of carers have obtained National Vocational Qualifications at level three or four.

Foster carers feel highly valued within the agency. All feedback received from foster carers has been extremely positive with comments such as "should be marked outstanding", "it has always been outstanding" and "support and training excellent" common place. One foster carer summed up the general feeling of carers by commenting that "the ratio of staff to carers (and children) is encouraging. The training provided is superb and the personnel provide tremendous skills, commitment, knowledge, ability, support, love and care".