

# Chrysalis Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Joanna Heller
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<b>Setting address</b>	Chrysalis Care, 7 Princes Street, BEXLEYHEATH, Kent, DA7 4BQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0208 298 2800
<b>Email</b>	info@chrysaliscare.org
<b>Registered person</b>	Chrysalis Care Ltd
<b>Registered manager</b>	Ian Dixon
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Lynda Boden
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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**

Chrysalis Care is an independent fostering agency that recruits, trains and supports foster carers in Kent, Essex, Luton and the London area. There is a children's services team that provides direct support and therapeutic intervention for children in placement.

The agency provides both short and long term fostering arrangements for children who are unable for any reason to live with their birth family.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The agency is clearly child focused and ensures that children are offered excellent support and given the best opportunity to secure positive outcomes. The agency demonstrates a clear commitment to ensuring services which meet the individual needs of each child placed. Children and young people say they have started their life over again in an environment where they feel well looked after, cared for, wanted and loved. Carers and young people refer to extremely close bonds that have been built between them and that children have become an integral part of the family.

A key strength of the agency is the excellent level of support provided to carers, and both birth and foster children living in foster households. Carers say the agency has trained and empowered them to look after the children in their care. Carers also say that they feel proud of the job they do and are proud to be a carer for this agency.

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

The fostering agency was asked at the last inspection to review the matching, safe care and short break policies. The agency has reviewed and implemented new policies in order to ensure they meet the needs of the children and reflect the care provided. At the last inspection the agency was also asked to review the administrative and quality assurance systems of the panel. There is now a much improved panel membership and administrative systems now enable panel to make more timely decisions. Changes to the way assessments are completed and a commitment to developing stronger quality assurance systems through the panel process has resulted in robust assessments of prospective foster carers.

The children's guide and information provided by the agency for children has been reviewed ensuring that a wealth of information is available in suitable formats for the age and understanding of children.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children are healthy and live in a healthy environment which meets their needs. Carers demonstrate a solid commitment to ensuring positive healthcare outcomes for children. Children and young people feel that their carers display real care and concern for their health and welfare. Carers ensure that children and young people have a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. Children receive the appropriate support from all medical professionals that they require. Where specialist support, such as counselling is required, the agency ensures that this is in place. The agency sources and funds such specialist outside support where it is felt that it will be of significant benefit to the child. Training is provided to carers in key areas such as promoting health, first aid and food and nutrition. When children and young people are first placed with foster carers they are promptly registered with a doctor, dentist and optician. Children receive education, guidance and support in respect of growing up, personal relationships, drugs and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. An excellent selection of material is provided and carers are able to access support from children's services if required.

Carers ensure medication is stored securely; ensuring children are safeguarded from accidental ingestion. The agency provides exceptional levels of support to carers of children with complex medical needs, attending appointments to support carers where appropriate. Children including those with disabilities are encouraged to be physically active and participate in a wide range of sports such as swimming, athletics and tennis. Supervising social workers are fully aware of the health needs of each of the children placed. The agency has effective systems in place to monitor the overall health of children placed with the agency.

Foster homes are spacious and maintained appropriately, allowing children the opportunity to thrive. Children enjoy access to a wide range of activities appropriate to their age and development which help them grow and develop. Supervising social workers monitor the safety of the building during their monthly visits and carry out unannounced visits ensuring the foster home remains appropriate and safe to meet the children's needs. The recording of health and safety checks, however, does not always fully evidence the work undertaken, particularly where accommodation arrangements are unconventional. Carers and supervising social workers are confident in challenging local authorities to ensure children with special needs receive the specialist support and adaptations they need.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people's safety and welfare are at the centre of the service delivered by the fostering agency. This is very well evidenced by case file records, and by the comments of young people themselves. Children feel safe with their carers and have developed strong attachments to the people whom they feel will

protect them from harm. Children and young people highlight the difference their carers have made to their lives in making them feel loved, valued, safe and wanted.

The agency maintains close links with specialists in child protection and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Staff and foster carers have access to comprehensive and clear written guidance that address child protection and safeguarding issues. Carers have training which is regularly updated. This means that they are clear on what to do should they feel a child is at risk of harm, either physically or emotionally. Where incidents of a child protection nature occur, the service effectively and consistently acts in accordance with agreed safeguarding protocols to ensure children and young people's safety remains paramount. Staff and foster carers proactively encourage young people to be concerned about their safety both within and external to the placement. Young people are given information to help them understand how to protect themselves and stay safe and have someone they can call if they feel unsafe. Children rarely go missing, and if they do, carers ensure on their return that they are supported. Carers follow the local missing from care guidelines. Some young people have made very positive progress in this area and are going missing much less frequently than previously. Young people report that this is because they feel safe where they are, and can talk about whom they want to visit.

The fostering service is beginning to develop specialist foster carers who are geared towards offering placements to children and young people who are considered be at risk of criminal activity. The service has identified specific carers with experience of fostering, who have worked in the probation service or youth offending team. The fostering service feels these individuals are well equipped to manage the difficult issues presented by children and young people requiring a placement.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Relationships between the children and the foster carers are the bedrock of the high quality care provided. Children and young people consistently refer to the positive relationships they have developed with their carers. It is evident that carers have had a real effect in ensuring positive outcomes for young people and improving children's overall long term life chances. Young people refer to carers as providing stable homes where they know they are loved and cared for as one of the family. One young person spoke about how their carer referred to, 'all their children' when speaking to other people, including the foster children equally. This contributed to the effect of the child feeling a strong sense of self-worth and belonging within the foster household. Young people's comments included: 'I am very happy where I am. My foster carers do everything for me and mean a lot to me.'; 'I love my foster family and hug them.' and, 'My carers make me feel a part of the family. I proudly call her my mum.'

Young people interviewed consistently rated the agency and the carers as good to outstanding. Young people behave appropriately within the foster household as carers are able to enforce fair and consistent boundaries. The agency provides carers

with support in developing behaviour management strategies for children and young people who challenge boundaries. Young people respect their carers and are able to talk through any issues that are worrying them. Foster homes are suitable and sufficiently spacious to give children what they need to relax and engage in age appropriate activities. Children enjoy spending time playing in the garden on their climbing frames, trampolines and swings and time inside building models and playing games. Children and young people are able to develop friendships with other children of the same age in line with experiences for children who are not looked after.

Young people are able to enjoy a wide range of activities both inside and outside of the foster home. Children and young people who display specific interests and talents, such as sport, are provided with the equipment and support to participate fully in their chosen activity. In some cases this support and sponsorship by the agency has enabled young people to become local and national champions in their field. Children and young people are able to join in a wide range of activities organised every school holiday for both fostered and birth children in fostering households. Particularly popular with older children and young people was a recent young people's team day which included high ropes challenges and quad biking. Carers report that the agency, 'organise lots of days out for the children and activity days and get-together's for foster families as a whole. Carers are also able to use the company's caravans and holiday homes'. Young people regularly attend after school drama and sports clubs as appropriate to their individual interests and aspirations.

The agency provides exceptionally high support to promote good educational outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people clearly benefit from the fostering service's efforts to promote their educational success. Children are supported to do well in school and carers are aware of each child's individual educational progress and goals. Foster carers ensure children and young people have access to an array of play and learning materials to encourage appropriate development. The agency has effective systems for monitoring the educational outcomes of children. The children's services department of the fostering agency is able to provide extra tuition and one-to-one educational support to children to boost educational levels, or prepare for exams. A regular homework club is available to support all children with their homework. Foster carers demonstrate a commitment to independently accessing local educational resources such as after school tutor groups, local libraries and learning establishments. Children know that their carers will be there to watch their school plays, attend parents' evenings and cheer for them on sports day.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people are welcomed into foster carers' homes and embraced into the family. Young people are treated with the same care and respect as are the carers' birth children and are not made to feel different. Children and young people's feelings are taken into account on all aspects of their care. Children know that foster

carers and the agency will support them in ensuring their voice is heard. Comments from young people include; 'My carers really listen to me and help me sort out my problems, even when other people don't listen.' 'My carers are always there for me when I need a chat. They never ignore me or push me out.' One carer summed up the agency's approach as, 'They always include children's thoughts in their care and decisions made about their day to day lives and are always open to suggestions from children'.

Children all have someone to talk to in the agency about things which are worrying them, such as children's services who are the most well-known face of the agency to the children. In some cases independent advocates have been accessed to support children articulate what they want, feel and need. Carers help children understand those occasions when, what they want may not be able to happen, and why. The agency promotes young people's feedback on the agency as a whole, through forums appropriate to the age of the child, such as, the 'Your Voice' group. The agency does listen to the issues raised and is involving these forums in helping design new documentation such as the children's and young people guide.

Children are supported to develop a strong sense of self-esteem and emotional resilience. Carers sensitively support children through difficult experiences such as parental relationships, bereavement and disclosure. Carers gain support and guidance from their link workers and outside specialists to help children through these difficult times. Foster carers are clear about their role and responsibility in promoting contact between looked after children their families and significant others. Foster carers have access to clear written guidance and good training opportunities that explore issues of contact. Where necessary, the fostering service provides practical assistance, including funding and support, to ensure contact arrangements are keenly adhered to. These arrangements are always consistent with local authority care planning and court orders relating to contact. Carers raise any issues of concern regarding contact with appropriate agencies.

Children are supported in collecting memory boxes and undertaking life story work. Carers actively support young people in finding out about their background and life story in line with the child's wishes. For some young people, this has given a new insight into their history and opened the doors for the development of relationships with family members who had been out of contact for some time.

Children are actively involved in the local community in the same way any other child of the family is involved, and feel part of the carer's family. Children participate in community clubs facilities and on occasion get involved in raising money for charity as part of the agency's participation groups.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency demonstrates a solid commitment to preparing young people for adulthood. Foster carers ensure that young people have savings in place as they

prepare to leave placements and access any set up grants. The fostering service has a good track record of helping foster carers, if they so wish, negotiate placement continuation once the young person has reached aged 18. Some foster carers view young people they formerly cared for in placement, as members of their own families, and as a result continue to support them in some form. Others comment upon their intention of continuing this with other young people. There are good examples of the agency negotiating with placing authorities to offer continuing support for young people who have disabilities, for those who are not sufficiently emotionally mature to move on and those who want to remain in the local area. Young people therefore benefit from and appreciate the opportunity to be emotionally supported or continue living in households where they feel they are loved and with families which they belong to.

The agency invites all carers of children in the selected age range to attend training on providing support for young people at this crucial stage. Carers ensure that children develop their self-care skill base informally from the point they are welcomed into the foster home as would any responsible parent. Such development of skill becomes more formalised in line with the development of the pathway plan and transition plan and the training that carers undertake. The agency's children's service's department has a very visible role in assessing young people's skills and helping them progress individually through the agency's preparation for independence programme. They also support the young people to develop a curriculum vitae, seek out employment opportunities, do mock interviews and link with Connexions. The agency actively supports young people in understanding their rights and responsibilities and how to negotiate the legal and benefits' systems. The agency's staff support young people in work and skill based courses such as ASDAN. Such proactive input from the agency ensures young people have a much better chance when they move on, to continue to grow and develop into valued members of society. Young people speak very highly of how the agency's children's service's department are actively involved in helping them secure a better future once they have left local authority care.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency is clearly child focused and ensures that children are offered excellent support and given the best opportunity to secure positive outcomes. The people who operate and manage the service have many years of experience in the field of fostering. The directors and senior management team combine both professional and personal experience of fostering. A significant number of the directors and senior management team, have either been foster carers, or have grown up in a fostering household. This gives the management team a real understanding of what the issues on the ground are, and the difficulties which carers and young people face.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are useful documents which guide young people, their parents and placing authorities as to the services the agency is

able to provide. The children's guide, which is included in children's welcome bags, is available in age appropriate child friendly formats and is translated into a variety of languages upon request.

The agency ensures a good selection of carers are available to meet the needs of the local community. Where there are gaps, the agency has a strategic plan to address this. The agency has a robust panel process which ensures assessments about the suitability of carers are thoroughly explored. The panel benefits from a wide variety of experience and expertise. Decisions are clearly documented, reached in a timely manner and effectively shared with carers.

Referral and matching processes are robust, ensuring that children are suitably matched to carers who can effectively meet their needs. Issues such as disability, culture, age, religion and language are all carefully thought through. Staff comment that the agency has a clear ethos of 'no match by the agency is better than a bad match', to prevent placement breakdown and further rejection for the child. Staff at the agency get to know the children in placement well. Staff effectively monitor the progress of each of the children during regular visits. Carers keep the agency informed of what has happened through regular reports which are forwarded to placing authorities. The agency ensures that carers deliver high quality child focused care to each of the children and young people in line with the placement plans. Record keeping in carers and children's files, however, is not always accurate and does not always fully evidence the work that the agency undertakes.

Carers benefit from a wealth of training which equips them for the role they are to perform. The agency, following on from the 'Skills to Foster' initial training, identifies areas of core training which all carers should complete. This core training includes areas such as safe care, safeguarding, working with abuse, behaviour management, child development, attachment theory, first aid, record keeping and information sharing, equality and diversity. The agency has clear systems in place for monitoring attendance at training and expects both carers to complete the core training. However, not all carers have completed all training. The impact of this is minimised as those carers who have not attended, are not the main carer. The agency is proactively reviewing how it will address this. The agency has been imaginative in supporting carers to engage with the training, such as, allowing a personal supporter for carers who are not confident in class room settings and exploring online training. Carers are able to benefit from a wide variety of 'non core' training to develop their skills and awareness. The vast majority of carers have completed or are undertaking their Children's Workforce Development Council support and development for foster care. Carers comment that, 'Chrysalis have trained and empowered us to look after the children in our care.'

The key strength of the organisation is the care and support it gives to carers, enabling them to provide such an excellent service to the children who are placed with them. Carers benefit from regular support groups and link workers whose regular visits have clear purpose. Foster carers consistently refer to their link workers as the person they can lean on and ask for support at any time day or night. The agency has innovative practical support systems such as homework clubs,

behavioural support, access to therapy, providing transport, and attending health and educational meetings. If carers have a difficulty, the agency is proactive at helping solve the problem. Carers state that on occasions this has helped them sustain placements which would otherwise have broken down, thus ensuring stability for young people. Carer's comments include: 'Chrysalis is 100% supportive 24 hours a day'; 'They are always at the end of the phone when we need them'; 'Everyone is really friendly and you know each other like an extended family.' Carers summed up the agency as, 'This agency cares about the people who work for them. That's why I am with them.'

Young people speak very highly of the support they receive from the agency in relation to activities, preparing them for adulthood and some young people said that they had developed good relationships with link workers who took the time to get to know them. Young people referred to the children's services staff as people that they contact if they had any complaints, worries or concerns. Young people and carers consistently graded the agency as excellent; social workers' feedback was also very positive.

Children and young people are effectively safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment in the agency in any capacity, whether carers, staff or panel members, through robust vetting practices. The agency follows best recruitment practice and ensures that no individuals are employed by the organisation until full checks on their suitability are complete. The agency acts appropriately to safeguard children and young people in the event of any child protection allegation and has robust processes for keeping agencies informed of any event affecting the welfare of the child.

Staff enjoy working for an organisation which respects them and values them. Staff are very well supported with the opportunity for regular case discussion and support. Staff benefit from a wide selection of opportunities for professional development. The agency has very low staff turnover rates with a number of staff having worked at the agency for many years. Staff say they are proud to work for an agency that has such an excellent reputation.

This is a well-financed agency which ensures that there are sufficient funds to underpin all of the work it undertakes. Effective systems are in place to monitor key information, such as outcomes for children. The agency also has clear and effective monitoring systems in relation to complaints, child protection and other significant events. Quality assurance systems are robust and aid the organisation in identifying ways to continuously improve. Practice within the organisation is reflective allowing staff to identify areas for personal growth.

This is an exceptionally well-managed agency which effectively demonstrates a clear commitment to securing the best outcomes for children through valuing and supporting staff and carers.

## **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 the foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated, is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and good order throughout. In particular; evidence that such matters have been fully explored with all relevant agencies when developing unconventional accommodation arrangements (NMS 10.2)
- ensure all members of a household who are approved foster carers are supported to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (NMS 20.2)
- implement a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering services files, on the child files and on case files relating to foster carers. In particular; ensure case recording is sufficiently accurate to reflect all the work undertaken. (NMS 26.1)