

St Helens Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Sarah Oldham
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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

St. Helens Social Services Fostering team are based in Wesley House which is situated in St. Helens town centre, close to car parks and public transport facilities.

The fostering team comprises of specialist workers who are qualified and experienced in fostering. Their main function is to recruit, assess, train and support foster carers provide care for children and young people.

The office accommodation is sited on the fourth floor of the building and is accessible via stairs and passenger lift. The team has appropriate space to carry out their role and function. Plans are in place for the service to be moved into purpose built accommodation based with all child care teams.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The inspection was an announced inspection and all of the key standards were inspected over a five day period. The team is fully staffed by permanent staff members including a manager and a senior practitioner.

The fostering service provides a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people. Further development of the service is planned to provide additional carers for short break services.

The fostering service is well managed, with clear direction from senior managers. In turn the team are an experienced team who provide guidance and support to foster carers to enable the needs of children and young people to be met.

The service is committed to positive change, fostered children and young people are actively involved in this ongoing process.

Improvements since the last inspection

The fostering service team is fully staffed and has also recruited community support workers to further support foster carers with practical arrangements including childcare during the evenings and weekends.

Additional support groups for carers have been made available including evening support groups and relative carer groups.

Children and young people are consulted about their care and support that they

receive. Additional information has been provided for them with regards their personal education plans to enable them to be fully involved in their education. Information and training has also been developed for carers and professionals regarding education to enable them to have a clear understanding of the national curriculum and key stages for children and young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The service has clear policies and procedures in place for the promotion of the health care and development of children and young people placed with foster carers. Staff and foster carers are able to demonstrate that they are clear about their roles and responsibilities. There is a clear procedure in place to ensure that placing social workers provide information for all children and young people prior to placement or as soon as possible if the placement is made in an emergency. In practice this generally happens and carers feel that they are provided with clear information.

Children and young people in foster care are registered with a doctor, dentist, optician and receive additional specialist health care as required. Young people are provided with information and advice to promote their individual health care needs.

Children and young people who require ongoing medical intervention have previously experienced delays in authorisation being gained from the local authority, if they have parental responsibility. To address this the authority have put in place additional safeguards to ensure that this does not prevent medical attention or procedures being delayed.

There is a policy on administration of medication in foster homes and systems in place for the family placement staff to monitor the use of prescribed and non prescribed medication.

Foster carers receive ongoing training and support with health care issues. One area that has been identified as requiring additional training for foster carers is Sudden Unexplained Death Syndrome. This is currently being addressed and the training regarding this is planned to commence in 2008.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The fostering service has suitably qualified and experienced senior managers, manager and staff to run and manage the service.

The fostering service has appropriate safeguarding and child protection procedures in place. Foster carers are provided with child protection training to enable them to safeguard the welfare of children and young people within their care. All statutory checks are undertaken for carers prior to approval and subsequent placement of children and young people. There are systems in place to ensure that these statutory

checks are updated at required intervals. Supervisory visits and annual foster carer reviews ensure that health and safety assessments and safe environments are maintained for young people. Health and safety assessments are annually reviewed. All carers have a safe care policy in place. Carers are provided with information regarding the services policies and procedures to further promote safe caring. These include policies on bullying, safe care, transportation and missing from home. The service promotes positive behaviour management and encouragement and does not provide training on physical intervention.

The fostering service has a matching pro forma in place to enable information about appropriate matches to be gathered. Foster placement agreements refer to the matching process and also specify how the needs of the young people will be met.

The fostering panel meets on a regular basis and is properly constituted with members who are able to bring a range of experience and expertise to their role on the panel. The panel has access to medical, educational and legal expertise. Panel discussions is robust and the panel is effectively chaired. Reasons for decisions are clear and applicants are kept informed of the decisions made. Applicants are invited to attend panel.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service promotes equality and values diversity. Staff and carers have access to equality and diversity training. Training also covers anti-discriminatory practice.

Children and young people are supported with their education. The authority has recently developed and distributed leaflets to young people, carers and other professionals, containing information about Personal Education Plans (PEP's). This enables everyone involved in the development of a PEP to have a good understanding of the importance and information to be included within this document. A multi agency education monitoring group meet on a monthly basis to review the educational needs of Looked After Children (LAC) within the authority and make additional funding and resources available to support children with their educational needs.

Training regarding education and the expectations regarding the support of children and young people with their educational needs is provided to foster carers. Additional training relating to education is being developed to enable carers, social workers and support staff understand the various key stages and national curriculum to enable children and young people to be supported effectively.

The service provides a short break service for children and young people with disabilities. There is a clear recognition that parents remain the main carers and consultation is clearly recorded to ensure that the needs of the children and young people are appropriately met.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes and maintains an ongoing commitment to contact arrangements. These arrangements are identified and outlined in the planning of the placement and foster carers encourage and support contact. Where there are complex contact arrangements in place, additional support and review of these arrangements are put into place.

The fostering service has a consultation process and procedure in place to establish the views of the children and young people, carers and family members. Questionnaires are sent to young people to gain their views. There are also two young peoples groups that meet on a regular basis. Children and young people are invited to attend their reviews and if they do not wish to do so their views are sought prior to the review. Children and young people are also consulted with regards the foster carer reviews. Young people have access to a Children's rights officer and are aware of how to contact them. Children and young people who returned inspection questionnaires say they feel listened to and that their views and opinions are gained.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are supported by the fostering service and their foster carers to develop skills and knowledge for adulthood. The fostering service works closely with the leaving care team to ensure that information and support is available for young people and their carers.

The fostering service payments to carers is in accordance with the fostering network guidance and additional payment is linked to skills and training. Carers responding to inspection questionnaires say that the allowances that they receive are paid within appropriate timescales and they are aware of the payment structure in place.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose has been updated. It contains all the necessary information about the services provided. It is reviewed and revised as required. Copies of the Statement of Purpose are available for all carers.

The fostering service is fully staffed. This has enabled the service to continue to develop to meet the ongoing needs of the children and young people in placement. Further strategic plans are in place to increase the numbers of recruited carers and to develop the short break scheme. The fostering service is an integral part of children's services within St. Helens and communication with other services is positive. The manager and staff team are committed to developing and improving

outcomes for children and young people.

Monitoring of the service is ongoing at all levels. Records are regularly reviewed and audited to ensure that they comply with the policies and procedures of the local authority. These include records of child protection and safeguarding issues as well as concerns and complaints.

The service has a suitably qualified manager with the necessary skills and experience to manage the fostering service. In addition to the manager, there is a team of experienced and skilled social workers and support workers who are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. Staff are supported via supervision, training and team meetings to enable them to develop their skills and practice. Staff caseloads are manageable and all staff are able to demonstrate a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Training for staff and foster carers is comprehensive and is regularly monitored. Topics for training are varied and held at different times to enable carers to have more options for times of attendance. Training is discussed and recorded as part of the foster carers annual review.

The service has a recruitment strategy in place with clear aims and objectives about the number and range of carers it aims to recruit. The short break service is currently being established and a recruitment campaign for carers specifically for this service will be undertaken. The service has a number of recruitment materials that it uses to access a wide range of carers.

The service undertakes comprehensive pre approval training for carers. The assessment process and assessments completed are detailed and provide appropriate checks including references, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures and health and safety to safeguard the children and young people placed within the service. Foster carers are supported and supervised within timescales identified by the service. The service is developing the out of hours service for carers to ensure that they are able to speak with staff who have a good knowledge and understanding of the service.

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):

- consider providing sudden unexplained death syndrome (SUDS) training to carers providing care to babies (NMS 23.1)

- further develop the out of hours support for carers (NMS 22.7)