

Trafford Fostering Services

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

Trafford Family Placement Team provides a fostering service for Trafford local authority. The service has currently 112 approved fostering households to provide short-term, long-term and permanent placements. It also provides short-term breaks for children with disabilities. In December 2005, Trafford successfully bid and received a grant from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to set up a Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care programme. In recent months the Me2 Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care service has recruited a number of carers to provide short term care to young people between 10 to 16. The Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care programme is funded to develop locally based intervention to improve outcomes for looked after children who have serious behavioural difficulties or other complex needs. The overall plan is to provide 8 full time and 2 short break carers. The Me2 team forms part of Trafford Fostering service.

The service is responsible for recruiting, assessing and approving foster carers as well as supporting them. In addition to this the team assess and supports friend and family (kinship carers).

The Family Placement Team is currently based in Sale, in a new local authority building which houses a number of other council services. However, some of the administrative support to the service was still based at other sites. It is planned within the next 12 months for all Looked After Children services to be based within offices at Northenden Road, this will include the fostering service

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection and covered all the key National Minimum Standards. The service is managed well and is supporting carers to provide good outcomes for the young people placed.

The family placement team has benefited from a consistent level of staffing and works in partnership with the placing social workers, carers and young people to provide consistent levels of support. There is a dedicated Looked After Children (LAC) nurse and psychology service that has expanded to provide additional support. Both the LAC nurse and the psychology service are based within the children and young people service. The service is staffed by experienced and qualified managers and staff who are supported well within their role via training, personal development and supervision. The service uses the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F assessment format to assess prospective carers. The assessments

undertaken are of a good quality and provide comprehensive information.

The panel is chaired by an experienced chair and the membership is drawn from a wide range of professionals and people who have experience of fostering and care.

There are clear systems in place to ensure that the service is monitored effectively and ongoing development plans to further develop and improve the service are in place.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection in January 2007, two actions and recommendations were made. The service has developed an action plan in response to these and addressed the actions as required. Most of the recommendations have also been addressed.

The service has developed in a number of areas to improve communication between the service and carers to ensure that carers are kept informed of all areas of work being undertaken.

Ongoing development work with foster carer assessments have resulted in clearer assessments that provide greater analysis.

Recruitment of additional staff, initially on a temporary basis, has enabled additional allocation and support of family and friend carers.

The development of the Me2 service has enabled carers to be recruited to provide specific services for children and young people with additional behavioural needs. The service has yet to place a young person but has staff, carers and detailed procedures in place to support young people placed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The service supports the health care needs of the children and young people by providing access to a range of health care services. There is a designated LAC nurse who provides training regarding the medical and health care needs of children and young people as well as undertaking LAC health care assessments. In addition, the service has a Clinical Child Psychology service based within the Children and Young Person Service who provide support to children and young people including a weekly group meeting called Bounce. This provides support and promotes emotional wellbeing to younger children..

The number of children and young people having their health care assessments has risen since the last inspection and access to dental health care is monitored.

The service provides health training to carers including HIV and infectious diseases, puberty, enuresis, diet and health, sudden infant death and first aid. Numbers of

carers attending health care training has increased since the previous inspection.

The development of the Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care programme Me2 has been further developed and training has been provided to staff regarding the programme and the health care support that it provides.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The recruitment and selection for staff and carers is in accordance with the authority's recruitment and selection procedures. This includes appropriate references and Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) enhanced disclosures being obtained. The manager of the service has the qualifications and experience working within family placement to manage the service.

All carers approved for the service have been assessed to be able to meet children and young peoples needs and to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is safeguarded. Carers met on this inspection were found to be providing a satisfactory standard of care for the children and young people placed with them. The homes were warm and maintained to a good standard to provide the young people with appropriate facilities.

The process for placing children and young people is good. Matching meetings are recorded and details about support and services required are clearly identified. Carers are provided with the appropriate information about the child's needs including the LAC documentation.

Prospective carers receive training over a three day period prior to assessment and approval. Following approval, ongoing training is provided including child protection. The service has clear policies and procedures for dealing with complaints, allegations and other safeguarding issues. All complaints raised have been appropriately documented and dealt with appropriately.

The service ensures that all carers have a safe care policy. This is reviewed and updated as required on an annual basis, however, the safe care policy does not always clearly reflect the safe care in relation to the individual young person.

The service has a anti bullying policy in place and solutions to bullying are discussed and agreed with the child or young person concerned. Children and young people have good links with the children's rights officer and work has been undertaken with young people regarding bullying.

The Me2 approved carers have received in depth training regarding the programme, child protection and managing challenging behaviour.

The panel membership meets the regulations and has been successful in recruiting a young person who has experience of being a looked after child. The panel is

conducted appropriately and carers are made to feel welcome. The panel chair is experienced and has chaired the panel for over 12 months. Training for panel members has previously taken place and further training is planned within the next three months.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service provides training to foster carers to promote the needs of black and minority ethnic children and young people. Equality and diversity issues are taken into account in the matching process. The service is aware that the recruitment of carers from different ethnic minority backgrounds and communities needs to continue. For example over the previous 12 months has increased the numbers of black carers. The service has a black case panel to provide more culturally appropriate services to young people. The matching process ensures that cultural, racial and linguistic needs are considered as priorities. Carers are provided with information and training regarding caring for children and young people from different ethnic groups.

The education of looked after children (LAC) is given a high priority within the authority. The educational needs of children and young people are identified in the initial referral to the service and in the matching and placement agreement meetings. Most young people have a personal education plan, however, some of these plans require updating to reflect the current education needs of the young person. A senior manager for education attends LAC resource panels and works closely with the service to continue to promote educational resources. A learning mentor is also based within the children and young people's service. This mentor works with young people who are unable to access full time education or have been excluded from school on a temporary basis. The Me2 scheme includes an education officer who is a qualified teacher and skills trainer to support young people engage in activities in the community.

The authority has a short break service for children and young people and their families via the multi link and the home from home scheme. The service recruits carers in the same way as mainstream carers. Carers are well supported and receive appropriate training and advice regarding specific needs of the individual young people. Introductory visits are planned over a number of occasions and appropriate information is provided to carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The arrangements for contact is good. The service ensures that the carers have a clear understanding of the need to promote and support contact for young people in accordance with their placement plan. This is discussed at the initial training for carers and is detailed as part of the initial matching. Contact arrangements are

recorded on individual files and in the placement agreements. Carers are supported through supervision if contact raises any issues and appropriate support is provided.

The views of children and young people are actively sought and they are encouraged and supported to contribute to their statutory reviews. The service tries to ensure that the reviews are held where the young person wishes them to be held and at appropriate times.

The children's rights officer is accessible to all children and young people. Regular meetings are held and young people have been involved in the development of the Me2 children and young person's guide. Children and young people say that they feel that the service is accessible and flexible and many positive comments were received via the individual questionnaires and when meeting with young people. The authority has three groups for looked after children, an under 11's group, an 11 to 16 group and an aftercare care leavers group.

Children and young people know how to make a complaint and information is provided within the children's guide on how to contact external agencies including Ofsted.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are supported to develop their independent living skills. Carers are aware of their role in facilitating this along with the after care team and the service plans to provide further training to carers to support young people prepare for independence. The after care team liaise closely with the young peoples social workers and family placement staff to ensure that they provide a continuity of support. Pathway plans are in place for most young people. The service has recently implemented a policy whereby a long term placement can be converted, if appropriate, to a supported lodgings placement when a young person reaches the age of 18.

Payment to carers is in line with the level of allowances as recommended by the Fostering Network. Carers confirm that they are aware of the allowances and that they are received in accordance with the services payment agreement.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The fostering service has a Statement of Purpose that identifies the aims and objectives of the service. This complies with the Fostering Regulations 2002. Consultation has been undertaken with children and young people via the children's rights service on the development of the children's guide for the Me2 scheme as well as the main children's guide. The children's rights service also provides an information pack and has developed a compact disc with information. The children's

guide needs to be further developed to make it accessible to all children that receive a service, this work is ongoing.

The service is well managed. The placements manager, team manager and the Me2 team manager have appropriate qualifications and experience of social care and family placement. The managers of the service demonstrate a clear commitment to the ongoing improvement of the service and good outcomes for children and young people.

Staff are well supported and receive regular supervision as well as appraisals via personal development plans that are reviewed on a six monthly basis. They have good access to ongoing training and development. All staff have appropriate qualifications and are experienced family placement workers. The case loads are manageable. All staff are knowledgeable about the carers and the children and young people placed.

There are currently plans in place for the fostering service to be co-located with all the looked after children services in May 2008. Staff are very positive about this planned move.

The service has continued to recruit and approve appropriate carers. Over the previous 12 months, additional focus on improving the quality and analysis of foster carer form F assessments has ensured that the standard of these assessments has improved. Systems are in place to continue to monitor quality prior to presentation at the panel.

Support to carers is provided via training, supervision and support groups. Carers feel that the service provides them with a good level of support. The service acknowledges that the attendance at training by carers has improved but plans are in place to further encourage and support carers to attend training.

Reviews of foster carers are held within timescales and information is gathered from a number of sources including the placing social workers and the carers. However, the views of the young people are not always clear in relation to these reviews.

The records held by the fostering team for the carers and the young people placed are in good order. Files are stored securely. Carers' files contain a chronology and information about the carer including their initial application, assessment and foster care reviews. In addition, the LAC documentation of the children and young people currently placed with them is also available. Files are audited on a regular basis.

Children and young person's files held by the placing social workers are audited on a regular basis via the safeguarding service. All have a chronology at the front of the file, however, the level of recording varied and did not always contain a clear overview of the events that had taken place.

The administrative processes in place are good. Records viewed were up to date and securely stored.

Family and friend carers are assessed by the family placement service. The assessments are detailed and a viability assessment is undertaken. This is presented to panel and those assessments inspected contained comprehensive information about how the needs of children and young people would be met. Training is made available to all family and friend carers and they are able to attend support groups.

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):

- continue to develop and promote training and support that meet the needs of family and friend carers (NMS 32.3)
- ensure that safe care guidelines are provided, based on written policy for each household, relate to the individual young person and agreed with the individual child's social worker (NMS 9.3)
- ensure that the the personal education plans for children and young people reflect the current education needs of the young people (NMS 13.3)
- ensure that all files contain a detailed and comprehensive chronology (NMS 24.1)