

# City of Salford Family Placement Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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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

Salford Family Placement Team provides the fostering and adoption service. It is part of an integrated multi-disciplinary service for looked after children. The fostering team recruits, trains and assesses prospective foster carers and provides ongoing support and supervision. Services for children include short term planned and emergency placements for those who need to be looked after and short breaks for children with disabilities and children at risk of entering the looked after system. Long term and permanent placements, including those with friends and family, are provided for children who cannot return home. In addition a multi-dimensional treatment foster care scheme, 3D, provides short term placements for young people aged 11 to 16 with complex needs. An intensive scheme, Focus Foster Care, offers medium to long term placements for children and young people aged five to 18. Both of these schemes are supported by a multi-disciplinary team.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced key inspection considered all standards under every outcome area. This is a good service with some outstanding aspects. Outcomes for children are good and demonstrate individualised care. It is a well managed, child centred service where staff work co-operatively to provide a range of placements which benefit children and young people. Effective matching, high levels of support and effective supervision result in low levels of unplanned endings.

Foster carers are thoroughly assessed, well trained and supported. They are meeting the needs of children in their care and keeping them safe. They work together with parents and professionals to ensure that young people access appropriate services and make progress in all areas of their lives. Young people are consulted, involved in decisions about their care and have a voice.

Diversity and equality are well promoted. There is a robust quality assurance system and a strong commitment across the service to continuing improvement and development. Shortages of placements, which decrease placement choice, have been managed to lessen their impact on the overall service, as have staff vacancies. Annual reviews have not all been carried out within the required timescales and foster placement agreements do not contain all the necessary information.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

The one action and one recommendation made at the last inspection have been acted upon. Appropriate and detailed panel policies and procedures are now in place. The service has re-located to a building which is fit for purpose.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service promotes the health and development of children and young people. Rigorous care planning and assessment ensures that their emotional and physical needs are identified and met. Fostering social workers, support workers and foster carers work in partnership with health professions to the benefit of young people. The health needs team who are based in the same office as the fostering service, hold children's records and provide advice, consultation and training to foster carers and social workers. A high percentage of looked after children have annual health assessments. This results from the flexibility of the health team who co-ordinate services and identify the most appropriate person to encourage meetings and discussions with young people.

Young people have access to a range of services to meet their emotional needs. In addition to flexible and wide ranging provision through looked after children services, young people placed on the specialist fostering schemes have inbuilt access to psychologists and therapeutic services. This is also available to their foster carers and others involved in their care. Services provided directly to young people include life story work, preparation for moves and therapy.

Foster carers promote healthy living and receive a range of training to assist them. They encourage attendance at health appointments and inform young people about local health resources and agencies which they can access directly. Young people who completed questionnaires said that they are encouraged to eat healthily and take exercise.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service is well managed and efficiently run. The managers are suitably qualified and have a wide range of skills and knowledge in family placement and management. An effective monitoring system is in place to ensure that Criminal Record Bureau checks are renewed every three years and records are kept of checks and references for all staff and foster carers. Well-established procedures and monitoring systems ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Staff are interviewed as part of the selection process and references are routinely verified by telephone. All social work staff are appropriately qualified and registered and those who undertake foster carer assessments have received training.

Foster carers provide safe, healthy and nurturing environments. Checks and references are taken up on prospective foster carers, members of their families and frequent visitors to the home, prior to approval. Their preparation and training covers health and safety issues and these are monitored through supervisory visits and unannounced visits. Safe caring policies and safety inspections of the home are carried out as part of the assessment, and revisited when a child is placed. At the request of young people the service has a monitoring system in place which enables them to use social networking sites with greater safety. Young people are further protected by comprehensive risk assessments which include strategies to manage and minimise risks. These provide effective guidance to foster carers who work with older young people to raise their awareness and take responsibility for their own safety.

Thorough and robust matching considers children' and young people's individual needs. Information sharing is effective and through planned matching meetings where possible. The specialist schemes assess whether young people will benefit from placements. The service's long term permanence policy provides appropriate and comprehensive guidance and is cross referenced to special guardianship and friends and family policies. Six monthly reviews of permanence decisions ensure that family finding is actively pursued and children do not 'drift'. Where possible introductions are planned and carried out sensitively with the needs of the child at the centre. Immediate placements with friends and family are agreed by the service manager for looked after children and children are safeguarded by the monitoring procedures in place which track the progress of assessments. Where the service cannot place children in house, independent fostering agencies are used to meet children's needs and their welfare is monitored.

Written foster placement agreements do not contain all the required information, nor do they outline the support in place to compensate for any gaps in matching. However, positive support is provided in practice, for example to meet the needs of children with disabilities and those who are not culturally or racially matched to their foster carers.

Children and young people are protected and their welfare is safeguarded. Policies on bullying, behaviour management, absence without authority and safeguarding provide appropriate guidance. Practice is thoroughly monitored through supervisory visits and the manager's auditing systems. Children and young people are routinely seen alone and are given opportunities to voice any concerns. Foster carers are well trained and supported to manage challenging behaviour, which contributes to the stability of placements. Staff in the service understand the role of the safeguarding board and the local authority designated officer.

The fostering panel is organised efficiently and effectively to ensure good quality decisions are made based on full information. The panel chair and members have a wide variety and range of relevant experience which contributes to their robust scrutiny and quality assurance role. Panels are well chaired to allow all members to contribute to discussions and ensure that any queries are fully explored. Applicants attend panel and have given positive feedback about the experience. Panel

administration ensures that members receive papers in good time and minutes record clear reasons for decisions made.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Promoting equality and valuing diversity runs through the policies and practices of the service. Foster carers receive training and work with social workers and other professionals to enhance children's self confidence and self worth. The local authority is committed to enhancing the life chances of children in the looked after system and works to increase a wider understanding about the specific issues they face. Specialist equipment is provided for foster carers caring for children with disabilities and adaptations have been carried out to homes where necessary. The service provides training and support to ensure that education is valued and carers support children and young people to maximise their opportunities.

Education is promoted and young people are encouraged and assisted to attend and achieve. The service accesses appropriate education placements and works with schools and colleges to the benefit of children and young people. Personal education plans outline needs for children in nurseries and schools, and they are regularly reviewed. The specialist fostering schemes include an education worker who works with schools, foster carers and young people and further support is provided through the post of virtual head. Young people can access personal tuition for example, music lessons and preparing for public examinations. They are supported and encouraged to take up leisure interests and participate in community activities. Fun days are organised by the service which include foster carers, their own children and children placed.

Short break services for children with disabilities recognise that parents retain prime responsibility for their care. Foster carers work together with parents to provide continuity of care. The service has a contract with an independent agency to provide the placements.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The service promotes contact with children's families and friends. There is a commitment to children being accompanied by people they know on contact visits and staff and foster carers are involved in, and committed to, complex and time consuming arrangements. Foster carer training includes the importance of maintaining contact and the service makes clear their expectations that foster carers will work with parents to the benefit of the young people. Examples were given where positive relationships have been maintained between foster carers and children's families. Also examples of parents and families being kept up to date with the progress of their children and involved in decisions about their care. Decisions about overnight stays with friends is normally delegated to foster carers and

managed in a way which does not discriminate against looked after children.

The fostering service promotes consultation. Groups for children in care have been effective in gaining their views and giving them a voice. They have met with elected members and are involved in recruitment and foster carer training. A Children in Care Council has recently been launched. Children's rights services, including advocacy and independent visitors, ensure young people are supported and know how to make a complaints. As far as possible there is consistency in independent reviewing officers who ensures that the views of children and their parents contribute to decision making. Children and young people are encouraged to contribute to reviews of their foster carers' approval and a pictorial format allows a wider range of children to do so. Young people say they are listened to and they are asked for their opinions. Foster carers own children have access to a support group and have been involved in creating a welcome pack for new foster families.

Foster carers contribute to the development of the service. There is a well established foster care association and representatives attend the foster carer forum which addresses issues of common concern with the aim of improving communication and consultation between foster carers and directorate staff. Complaints have been taken seriously and dealt with in a timely manner. Complainants are kept informed about the progress and the outcomes of their complaints.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are prepared for adulthood and are encouraged and supported to develop life skills in a gradual way which builds their confidence. A joint protocol with adult services and relevant agencies ensures that children with learning difficulties are supported at the transition stage. The leaving care team, Next Step, provide training for foster carers and run groups to promote young people's skills which include interview techniques, decorating and design, film and photography and an annual football tournament. Examples were given where young people had moved on to further education, independence or supported living and remain in regular contact with their foster carers, who continue to provide support. Financial support is available to foster carers who continue to provide care after eighteen years of age.

Written information and foster care agreements give clear information about financial issues. The payments for skills scheme is well established and is based on demonstration of competencies and attendance at training. Foster carers are paid regularly and on time. They commented that their professionalism is recognised in that they can apply directly for allowances rather than going through placing social workers.



## Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. An appropriate policy is in place which signposts to services available in the area. Individualised care is provided including holistic needs assessment and strategies to meet children and young people's needs. Young people's religious, ethnic and linguistic needs are being met. Foster carers collect mementos and photographs for children to take with them when they move on and life story work is carried out. The service's policies, procedures and practices are underpinned by valuing diversity, anti-discriminatory practice and equality of opportunity.

The service has a Statement of Purpose which outlines the services provided and states its aims and objectives. The children's guide is appropriate and has been produced in consultation with young people.

The service is well managed and organised. The head of service exercises effective leadership of staff and they are positive about her knowledge, skills, and management style. She and the team managers ensure that staff are well supported, effectively supervised and have manageable caseloads. There has been consistency of managers and all staff are involved in, and take responsibility for the improvement agenda which is directed to improving outcomes for looked after children in Salford. Staff are experienced, skilled, well motivated and work in flexible and innovative ways to provide a high quality service. Lines of accountability are clear and staff are positive about the local authority as an employer. They are aware of the relevant policies, including whistle blowing, and can access them through the intranet. The service is actively recruiting to fill vacant posts and has used independent assessors, as an interim measure, to minimise the effect on the service. Clear strategic planning is evident in relation to the staffing situation and increasing demands on the fostering service.

Effective monitoring of the service is evident. Robust quality assurance and auditing systems are maintained.

Foster carers inform the service promptly about significant events and the manager collates these for monitoring purposes. Information reports provided by the administrative support team inform the managers of response times and the effectiveness of the foster carer recruitment system. A recruitment strategy based on the needs of children in Salford, includes detailed planning, targeted recruitment and analysis of the effectiveness of strategies. Promotional material values diversity and information is clearly presented, avoiding jargon.

The service has systems in place to respond to enquiries from people thinking about fostering in a timely way. Foster carers are positive about their first contact with the service and the pace of the assessment process. Thorough assessments of prospective foster carers are undertaken which analyse their parenting abilities and potential to care for looked after children. Foster carer reviews have not all taken place annually and the services is working to remedy this.

Appropriate policies and procedures inform the work of the service. A foster carer handbook provides comprehensive guidance and is a useful resource. The effectiveness of foster carer training is evident in their practice and their ability to understand and meet the needs of looked after children. Pre-approval training is mandatory and includes input from experienced carers and young people. Foster carers value the opportunity to increase their skills and knowledge and there is a wide range of ongoing training including workshops to help them complete the Children's Workforce Development Council standards. Staff have annual appraisals and are encouraged to identify areas for professional development. The service supports them to attend external courses where appropriate, and team meetings have a training element.

Foster carers are well supported to meet the needs of children and young people in their care. Foster care agreements outline the expectations of the service and the support and supervision they can expect. They have access to 24 hour support, regular supervisory visits and support groups. Under the specialist schemes regular meetings are held to discuss progress and strategies. The fostering social workers are clear about their supervisory role and ensure that children's needs are continually monitored. Experienced and skilled support workers provide a range of services to foster carers and children. Foster carers are positive about the levels of support they receive.

Case records are well organised and provide detailed information. Child permanence reports and support plans are compiled for all children in long term care. The premises are fit for purpose and provide appropriate work space, storage and equipment in addition to conference and meeting rooms. Security systems ensure that only people with legitimate access can enter the offices.

Policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the contributions made and the particular needs of family and friends as carers. A dedicated team works with family and friends carers, and they have considerable expertise and skill in this area. Carers are positive about the service they receive, which is in line with that provided to mainstream carers, and which is sensitive to pre-existing family relationships.

## **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 that foster placement agreements cover the matters specified in Schedule 6 of regulations (breach of regulation 34(3))
- ensure that a range of carers is recruited to meet the needs of children and

young people (NMS 17)

- recruit an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the service (NMS 17)
- review the approval of each foster carer at intervals of not more than a year. (breach of regulation 29(2))