

# Tower Hamlets Fostering Team

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

The London Borough of Tower Hamlet's Fostering Team provides fostering which keeps the needs of the children and young people central to its activities as in the line with legislation and government guidance. The fostering service places high importance on the training and support of foster carers, regarding them as part of the professional team, entrusted to provide and advocate the physical, emotional and educational needs of children and young people.

The fostering service comprises of Recruitment and Assessment Team, Fostering Development Team, Kinship Care, Specialist Fostering Team and The Access to Resources Team.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team assesses, prepare and trains applicant who wish to foster. The team works with the marketing and publicity officer in identifying a recruitment strategy to meet the needs of children and young people.

The Fostering Development Team aims to support foster carers through supervision. Support is provided through regularly visits, weekly telephone calls, regular training sessions and support groups.

Kinship Care works with carer and special guardians who are known to the child or young person.

The Access to Resources Team has a range of functions, which includes processing foster carers' payments and liaising with the Fostering Development Team to match placements within house or with approved Independent Fostering Agencies.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets was successful in its bid for a grant to develop a 'Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care programme'. Its aim is to develop a locally based service to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people who have serious behavioural difficulties or other complex needs. The funding for this project ends in March 2009, but there are future plans to develop this service further.

## Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The purpose of the announced inspection was to assess the service against key National Minimum Standards and gauge the service's success in addressing issues highlighted at the last inspection.

Overall, Tower Hamlets Fostering Team is judged to be an outstanding service. The fostering service has expertly matched Children Looked After with foster carers who are able to address well their identified needs. The service seeks to recruit and train high quality foster carers. Training and support to foster carers is good and placement progress is carefully monitored and reported upon. The assessment process of prospective carers is thorough as is the vetting of all staff working for the service. Keen attention is paid by staff to the Every Child Matters outcomes. The last and this inspection commend the fostering service for continuously running an outstanding, proactive service. Children and young people's welfare is enhanced by the good relationships that exist between the social workers and foster carers and this is evident throughout. High emphasis is made on ensuring equalities and diversity is incorporated into all aspects of the service being delivered and this was also evident throughout each outcome area.

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

From the last inspection there were no actions outstanding. However there were four recommendations made relating to training and supported in listening and responding to children's views; Supervising Social Workers to be given management supervision on a regular and planned basis; Foster carers to be given sufficient notice about forthcoming training and this was evident as the training programme is now produced in two formats, one of which is a calendar highlighting all forthcoming training events and foster carers' files are to be dated accordingly. All recommendations addressed in the last report have now been met.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service provides each child and young person in foster care appropriate health care which meets their physical, emotional and social development needs.

Before a placement begins, the foster carer is provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of a child or young person placed and clear procedures governing consent for the child or young person to receive medical treatment. The role of the foster carer is emphasis as part of the induction. Foster carers ensure once a child or young person is placed, they are registered with a GP, health appointments are maintained and healthy diets, personal hygiene and health issues are promoted. Each foster carer is provided with a written health record for each child or young person placed, and this is updated during the placement and moves with the child and young person. Foster carers spoken to know their roles and responsibilities with regard to health care and they ensure all relevant health information for a child or young person is presented at each review.

The fostering service also provides a 'Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care Programme'. The service at present has two specialist trained foster carers supported by a multi-disciplinary team, providing a 24 hour on call service, regular supervisory visits and weekly clinical consultation. The fostering service ensures that no

placement is made which prevents a child or young person from continuing to receive the specialist health care services they need. The fostering service has good links with Children Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and there is clear guidance in place to reduce the disruption rates within a placement.

Each foster carer is given basic training on health, hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion for the children and young people. This training also extends out to foster carers and their own health and lifestyles. The Foster Carer's Handbook provides clear advice and guidance on health matters. The fostering service also provides training on sexual health, teenage pregnancy, caring for babies affected by parents with drugs and alcohol problems and advice on drug misuse is provided through a helpline called 'Lifeline'. Good link is provided by the Children Looked After (CLA) nurses and one of the CLA nurses is a member of the fostering panel. The fostering service is proactive in realising that support is needed for those foster carers who smoke and there is clear guidance in place to support carers wishing to stop smoking. All foster carers' health is reviewed every two years as part of the annual review.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering manager has been in post for approximately three years and was approved by Commission of Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The fostering manager has a clear objective approach on ensuring safeguards and promoting the welfare of children and young people is high on the service's agenda and this was evident throughout the inspection.

Children and young people are safe in the home provided by the foster carers. Health and safety checks are undertaken annually or when the need arises. Part of the overall induction training includes health and safety training, which is updated annually. Additional information with regards to health and safety is addressed in the Foster Carer's Handbook. Those foster carers who have their own transport, checks are undertaken. The supervisory visits ensure any changes are addressed and updated straightaway.

The fostering service takes matching seriously with regards to ethnicity, race, faith, linguistic needs and disability. Where trans-racial match is made appropriate support and guidance is given to each carer. Trial and emergency placements are made and reviewed regularly to ensure the right support is provided to the foster carer and child or young person placed. If a match can not be made in-house one of the 23 Independent Fostering Services is considered. Files evidence the consistent completion of documented matching tools which outline placement objectives and how the proposed match seeks to achieve these. Any identified gaps are carefully explored with all parties. Foster carers confirm that they receive good information about children and young people in need of foster care placements prior to placement negotiations; this is to ensure that foster carers are clear about placement objectives and are appropriately skilled to provide a successful placement.

The fostering service has comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures in place. Foster carers confirm that they receive written guidance and quality ongoing training that address issues of child protection. Additionally, the safeguarding of children and young people in placement is a consistent agenda item of supervisory visits. There are clear management systems in place to collate and evaluate information on circumstances, numbers and outcomes of allegations. Files evidence discussion and guidance provided by staff that address issues of safeguarding and all files evidence safe caring policies. The specialist foster carers ensure that all information regarding the child's or young person's care is documented especially with regards to the child or young person going missing. There is a clear and comprehensive rewards system in place for children and young people in the multidimensional system which is managed by the foster carers and discussed within the team. All notification regarding any child protection is addressed straightaway and Ofsted is notified at each stage of the investigation. The bullying policy in place is linked to CLA services and schools agenda.

There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff which follow good practice in safeguarding children and young people. All social workers in the Family Placement Service hold professional qualification and are registered with the General Social Care Council and these are renewed every three years. All social work staff have an appropriate knowledge and skills and an ability to promote equality, diversity and the rights of individuals and groups. Checks for other professionals working within the team are also undertaken.

The fostering panel is organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that a good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people in foster care. Clear written policies and procedures, implementing the practice about the handling of the functions are in place. No panel members are allowed to begin work until all checks have been satisfactorily completed. Clear guidance is in place with regards to panel members' term of office and this is strictly adhered to by the Fostering Service. The fostering panel is constituted according to the Fostering Service Regulation and has 10 members, the chair is independent. From observation foster carers and social workers are given clear constructive feedback at the end of each assessment by the chair. There are good links between panel adviser, chair and decision-maker. The fostering panel is quorate with expertise from health and education. The fostering panel provides a quality assurance in relation to the assessment process to ensure that there is a consistent approach in assessments across the service that is fair to all applicants. Although there is a good diverse cultural mix of panel members represented, not all the different equalities groups are represented within the overall make-up.

## Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service clearly values diversity and this aspect of the fostering task is keenly demonstrated at all levels. Valuing diversity and addressing issues of equality is clearly a strength of the service and children and young people seeking placements benefit from the agency's well established policies and practices. Foster carers confirm that they receive written guidance and training that address issues of diversity and equality. The fostering service does not stop any potential carer from becoming a carer due to their linguistic needs, additional support is given and the expectation is that the carer undertakes courses to support them with this need. There are good links with the local college to ensure this need can be met. Foster carers spoken to found this helpful. Files evidence consistent exploration of children and young people's self-identity issues particularly during supervisory visits. There is good documentary evidence to support the view that the service has a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice at all levels; policy guidance is consistent in addressing varying issues related to equality and diversity including sexuality, disability, gender and race amongst other areas. The service's recruitment, assessment and review of foster carers pays good attention to issues of diversity and there is an expectation that foster carers demonstrate an ability to value diversity in their care for children and young people placed.

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that this is encouraged to attain their full potential. There is good written guidance available to carers regarding their roles and responsibilities in ensuring children achieve educational expectations. Files evidence and foster carers comment upon their keen commitment to encourage the best educational outcomes for children and young people in their care. The fostering service has good links with the schools. Foster carers are very involved in children and young people's educational progress, by attending parents' evening and personal educational planning (PEP) meetings. One teacher commented on how efficient the fostering service was with regards to ensuring PEP meetings are held within the specified allocated time. Supervisory visits, formal statutory forums monitor and address the individual educational needs of children and young people in placement. One young person spoken to said that 'keeping the same school was important, but the difficulty was the travelling, but it was worth it in the end'.

The fostering service provides short break and day foster carers for children and young people. Children and young people are matched with a carer according to their need. Many of the short break carers look after children and young people with disabilities. The fostering service recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child or the young person being placed.



## Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers understand the importance of children and young people in their care maintaining contact with their families and foster carers receive guidance and are very supportive of agreed contact arrangements. Supervisory visits encourage foster carers to explore and comment on the impact of contact on children and young people in their care. Files evidence foster carers' comment on the intricate arrangements in place to ensure that children or young people in placement maintain contact with their parents and siblings. Views of the children and young people are taken into consideration before each contact is made. In assessment and training of foster carers, the fostering service stresses the importance of foster carers helping a child or young person to maintain appropriate contacts. Foster carers said 'that contact can be sometimes hard for them as well as the child or the young person placed, however, they do understand their roles and responsibilities about ensuring contact is made'.

Foster carers understand the need to explore openly the wishes and feelings of children and young people and this is achieved sensitively and consistently. Children and young people indicate that they spend much of their time speaking with their carers and that the focus of many of these conversations is in regard to their happiness and well-being. The fostering service has recently introduced counselling courses for foster carers to enable them to understand the importance of listening. There are a number of consultative groups for foster carers, children and young people looked after to attend. The fostering service also runs twice a year a 'Sons and Daughters groups' for children of foster carers and these groups are positively received. The fostering service has a mentoring scheme for new carers which is working well. Part of all supervisory visits is to consult with children, young people and carers. Foster carers are encouraged to attend monthly support groups which enable them to share experiences of fostering. The Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Associations is deemed the voice for all foster carers in the borough and in April 2008 the Annual General Meeting 2007/08 along with the Foster Carers Award Ceremony was held. Upon visiting foster carers their awards were displayed proudly. In addition to this, support is given to Bangladeshi, Black African and Caribbean foster carers to meet separately once a quarter. Outside of this there are many support groups for children and young people to attend and these have been successful with regards to ensuring they have a voice within the system and are heard.

Questionnaires received prior to the inspection were positive about the service being provided to carers, children and young people. One of the groups observed was well attended by foster carers from all over the borough and outside. One comment received stated that 'I feel free and independent living with my carer. I am friendly with aunty and able to talk to her about my good and bad feelings. She always advises me on healthy eating and other issues'.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

There are clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. Each young person preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living is consulted about their future and encouraged to be actively involved in decision making processes and implementation of the Pathway Plan. The fostering service ensures that foster carers understand that they need to provide all children and young people in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. This has been successful as a number of young people who are preparing to leave care have stayed with their foster carers and this is supported by the Leaving Care Team. This has impacted on the types of training now provided which addresses 'enabling foster carers to support young people of 16+ to move children on'. The Leaving Care Service has very good links with the fostering service and they have received an excellent review of their Charter Mark in December 07. Foster carers are positive about the support they receive from Leaving Care Team.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The fostering service Statement of Purpose set out clearly the service's aims, objectives and function of the service. The fostering service works to ensure that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of the service being delivered. This was evident throughout each outcome area inspected. The Children's Guide is suitable for all children fostered through the service. Each foster carer also produces their Children's Guide. Both Children's Guides accurately describe what services are provided, are user friendly and can be translated in other languages if needed.

The fostering service is part of the Family Placement Service and has a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. There are four teams within the structure providing a high level of quality foster carers to children and young people looked after by Tower Hamlets. Staff are managed and monitored by people who have appropriately skilled and qualified. There is sufficient staff to support the numbers of foster carers and children placed and the cultural mix of social workers is diverse which is a reflection of the community they represent. Within the fostering service there is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support. The fostering service has systems in place to determine, prioritise, monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff. The structures and systems in place ensure assessments, approvals and reviews of foster carers are managed and implemented effectively. Access to Resources Team ensures that all approved Independent Fostering Agencies are registered with Pan London and this is monitored and reviewed regularly.

Staff and foster carers undertake on-going training and appropriate professional and

skills development. Foster carers maintain a training portfolio. Training for staff and foster carers is high on the agenda. An improvement to the foster carers' training programme has been made since the last inspection. A number of new training courses are now on offer and some courses are now scheduled on the weekends. The impact is that the attendance for each course has increased and the evaluation feedback is mainly positive. Foster carers spoken to stated that since the appointment of the training officer, the types of training being offered have changed and the venue location has improved. Foster carers now have the opportunity to gain more skills and qualifications through the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and NVQ training. Those carers whose first language is not English are given appropriate support to undertake some of the courses in their own language with additional support given to improve on their linguistic skills. The fostering service also meets the travel and childcare cost for foster carers who attend training or any of the support groups. Foster carers reiterated this when spoken to. Some young people are also involved in training at the preparation stage for foster carers and this has provided potential carers with a good insight into what caring is about.

Foster carers are managed by named social workers from the Fostering Development Team. Annual reviews are undertaken within the timeframe of each carers' approval date.

The fostering service is part of the North East London Fostering Consortium is a multi agency consortium composed of seven fostering agencies working together to secure the successful delivery of outcomes for children through coordination of services, shared training and recruitment events and developing good practice.

Children's case records are comprehensive and information is appropriately detailed. The introduction of Framework I has improved the management information and practice. Foster carers indicate that they feel that the information that they received is good. Information recorded by foster carers was found to be relevant and appropriate.

The Kinship Team have clear policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training suitable family or friends as foster carers. Where this has become a permanent arrangement, the relatives are encouraged to apply for a Special Guardianship Order. This has been successful over the last year.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets Team has continued to demonstrate an impressive commitment to developing and delivering comprehensive services to foster carers, kinship carers and children and young people in placement. The management of the service exercises effective leadership and the service has a fully committed and experienced staff group. Foster carers are well supported and the developmental needs of children and young people are largely being met. Foster carers are offered comprehensive support and training which is adapted to the needs of the applicant. The fostering service also demonstrates a culture that is proactive, motivated and innovated and is willing to change.

## **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):

- have clear strategies in place to ensure all the diverse groups are represented on the panel. (NMS30)