

Barnardo's Fostering South East

Inspection report for independent 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

Barnardo's Fostering, South East provides full time, holiday and short-break placements for children and young people across London and the South East. The service can also provide task-centred placements for limited periods, where specific work with a young person is carried out. This can range from intensive assessment to planned rehabilitation with parents

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Young people enjoy positive outcomes and individualised care that reflects their unique needs. They play a strong part in decision making, and consultation with them informs developments in the service. There are outstanding arrangements for young people to learn and partake in a wide range of activities and this broadens their horizons. Education is highly valued, supporting young people to reach their full potential. A strong emphasis is placed on close support to foster families and young people, and this helps young people to make good progress in all areas of their lives. Good emotional and practical support is provided to young people who are making the transition to adulthood.

This service is well managed with good record keeping. Staff are competent, skilled and keep up to date with relevant legislation, good practice guidance and research. They receive good support and have good opportunities for learning and development. Practice is creative and reflective, and a quality assurance process helps to ensure that problems are put right. Equality and diversity are well promoted in all areas of the service. This all helps to ensure that young people's welfare is promoted.

Areas for improvement include the need to ensure that all young people have a placement plan and the need to ensure that annual reviews take place without delay and cover health and safety checks within the homes of carers in order to fully promote young people's welfare.

Improvements since the last inspection

The registered provider was asked to: maintain an up-to-date record of children and young people's health which is transferable with the young person; make specific reference to matching in any foster placement agreement; ensure that safe caring guidelines are in place for each foster home; provide an ongoing programme of training and development for foster carers; and ensure that foster carers keep up-to-date records of the children and young people they care for. Positive action has been taken in all of these areas. This helps to ensure that young people benefit from good

quality safe care that reflects their needs.

The registered provider was also asked to: ensure that advice is provided to young people about healthy living; monitor the panel's quality assurance functions; ensure all educational information is up to date; and complete and ensure the data system and case files accurately hold the required information. Positive action has been taken in all of these areas and this helps to ensure that young receive good quality care.

No action has been taken in relation to ensuring that a yearly health and safety check is taking place in foster carers' households and this does not fully promote safe care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people have their physical, emotional and psychological health well met and thrive in healthy environments. They are supported, along with their carers, to understand their individual health needs and this ensures that these needs will be met. For example, each young person has a health care plan which they take with them to any new placement. Placement plans are in place for most young people and these help to ensure that carers are clear about their responsibilities in terms of promoting young people's health and who is responsible for making decisions. One carer confirmed that the parent of the young person placed with them held responsibility for agreeing to a recent immunisation. Young people are also supported to obtain medical appointments and register with a local General Practitioner, and this helps to ensure their good health.

Young people receive counselling when this is thought to be beneficial to their well-being. The service has made good links with other organisations such as the child and adolescent mental health service and the medical foundation. This helps to ensure that young people benefit from their emotional and psychological needs being well addressed. Young people's views are central to all decisions made about their health and they are regularly consulted. One carer said that the decision to receive counselling was completely the young person's decision. Another carer said that they had arranged for a nurse to visit a young person at home in response to the young person's concerns about visiting a hospital. This helps young people to feel valued.

Young people are encouraged to participate in a range of positive activities that contribute to their physical and emotional health. For example, one young person is a keen cricketer and this activity is funded and supported by carers. A cycle club has been established by the service and this provides young people with an opportunity to benefit from the use of a bicycle as well as gain support from being in a group. A wide range of other sporting activities are on offer, depending on young people's needs, wishes and abilities. Carers are offered training in a wide range of health issues. They say that this gives them the skills and confidence they need to promote young people's health. Recent training has included nutrition and healthy eating,

attachment, sexual health and first aid. The safety and welfare of young people are promoted through the safe handling of medication. This includes providing carers with training in the handling of medication and clear policies and procedures about its use within fostering households.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The safety and welfare of young people are central to the work of the service. Young people say that they feel safe and secure and know that carers have their best interests at heart. Carers understand how to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people as they attend child protection and internet safeguarding training. They also have access to the service's policies and procedures in this area. The service works with some young people who have been trafficked. Joint working with the police and social workers takes place in relation to this, and this helps to protect these young people from harm. The child protection policies and procedures have been drawn up with the needs of trafficked young people in mind, and this helps to ensure that staff and carers know how to keep them safe.

Young people benefit from positive relationships with carers and live in warm and caring environments. This helps to build a culture of trust and openness, which helps carers to be aware of signs that may indicate that young people are in danger. Young people say that they know how to keep themselves safe, as carers talk to them about this. Each household has a safe care policy which is reviewed annually, and this helps to ensure that all household members know how to keep themselves, and young people safe. Clear written risk assessments are drawn up where risks to young people are identified. This helps to ensure that these risks can be reduced and that young people learn how to manage risks themselves in order to keep safe.

There are effective policies and procedures for keeping young people who go missing from care safe. Carers say they are given clear instructions about what to do if young people go missing. One carer said that if a young person goes missing: 'You call the on-call service and they do it all for you, it's great'. Young people are responded to appropriately when they return from being missing. Carers treat them warmly and ensure that they have access to a meal and clean clothing, and this helps to ensure that young people feel safe to return.

Young people live in homes that provide them with physical safety. Carers are required to undergo training in health and safety practices, and this helps to ensure that young people remain safe. Checks are made to ensure that there are good levels of cleanliness, warmth and décor in carers' homes and that avoidable hazards are removed. Some of these checks are unannounced to ensure consistent high standards of safety in households. Some checks are not, however, made on an annual basis, and this does not fully promote the safety of young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people thrive in environments where carers have high expectations of them. Carers are provided with excellent support for them to manage young people's behaviour through training, support groups and supervision. One carer said a placement would not have continued without the support of the supervising social worker. Carers confirm that there are clear expectations of them in relation to behaviour management. This helps them to provide young people with consistent and high quality care. Young people benefit from living in environments where there is an ethos of respect, and this helps them to develop confidence and resilience. They are supported to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and are responded to appropriately when they have inappropriate behaviour. This helps to ensure that they benefit from sound relationships with others and to resolve conflict successfully. Bullying is taken seriously and addressed appropriately, and this ensures that young people stay safe and are happy.

Exceptionally high levels of support provided to young people helps them to enjoy their interests and contribute to the community. There is an in-house grant system which is used to enable young people to benefit from holidays, gym membership and music lessons. The specific needs of young people who are asylum seekers have been identified and well addressed. For example, the service runs a volunteer project which offers young people one-to-one support to engage in leisure and community activities. Clubs are facilitated by the service, such as the bicycle, allotment and book club. These help to ensure that young people gain consistent support from adults, gain support systems from their peers and learn new skills. Young people's cultural needs are also taken into consideration when planning activities. For example, one carer took Vietnamese young people in their care out for a meal in a Vietnamese restaurant. Placement plans, in most instances, provide clarity about the decision-making processes and this helps to ensure that there are no delays in accessing day-to-day activities.

The education and achievement of young people are actively promoted, and young people are supported to achieve their educational potential. A carer said: 'We received excellent support from the service to find the young people suitable education. Both are now thriving in education.' Carers confirm that they are clear about the expectations of them to promote young people's education and advocate on their behalf. They say that they are in close communication with schools and education providers. Additional support in education is provided as required, for example, some young people receive additional lessons to improve their English where this is not their first language. These measures help to promote young people's welfare. Young people benefit from maintaining positive contact with their families where this is possible. The practical and emotional support provided by carers ensures that young people benefit from constructive contact with significant people in their lives. The service has helped some asylum-seeking young people to successfully re-establish links with their families in their home countries, and this strongly promotes their well-being.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people feel listened to and know that their views are taken seriously. One young person said: 'They always listen to me'. Young people are able to communicate their views regarding all aspects of their care. They are consulted with before every looked after children's review, and concerns and significant wishes are acted upon. Translators are provided to young people for whom English is not their first language. This helps to ensure that young people feel valued and have their opinions respected. Young people have access to independent advocates as information is made available to them in the young people's guide about this. This guide also provides young people with information about how to make a complaint. These measures help to ensure that their rights are upheld.

Young people are treated as individuals and receive care that meets their individual needs. There are generally strong arrangements for ensuring that carers have clear information about young people's needs. This includes up-to-date placement plans and close communication with supervising social workers and children's social workers. This helps to ensure that individual needs are well addressed. However, there is no placement plan in place for one young person and this does not fully promote their welfare. Young people say they feel part of the family. They say they can make choices about most things, such as the clothes they wear, the food they eat and the way they spend their leisure time. This helps them to feel that their opinions are valued and to start to prepare for adulthood.

There are strong planning arrangements which help to ensure that young people move into, and on from placements in a sensitive way. This includes enabling young people to make visits to carers prior to placements being made, and supporting young people to familiarise themselves with the places they are moving on to. Carers say that they trust the service to give them as much information as they can about the needs of young people before placements are made, and this helps to ensure that placements are successful.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people receive good support to help them prepare for the future, and this helps them on their way to reaching their full potential. All young people are supported to develop independent living skills in a way that meets their individual needs, abilities and developmental levels. For example, some young people have been supported by carers to get part-time jobs. Others are responsible for their own laundry and keeping their bedrooms clean and tidy. One young person said that they enjoyed cooking for the whole family. Education is viewed as a way of ensuring that young people have good prospects for the future, and all young people are in full-time education.

Young people are supported to gain life skills as part of their placement and pathway plans. This helps them to develop positive outcomes in areas such as establishing appropriate social and sexual relationships, developing positive self-esteem, preparing for work and understanding practical skills like shopping, cooking and taking responsibility for their health care. The service runs a supported lodgings scheme for young people who are over the age of 16. This allows young people to remain with carers into adulthood and develop appropriate life skills before moving on.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There are strong arrangements in place for the recruitment and assessment of new carers, and this helps to ensure that young people are cared for by people who can meet their needs well. Carers feel well prepared to become foster carers and say that the assessment process is thorough but fair. There is an effective foster panel that carries out a quality assurance function. This helps to ensure that young people's best interests are considered in relation to all placements. The review of carers' approval takes place, in most instances, annually, and this helps to ensure that placements remain appropriate. Some carers have not been reviewed annually and this does not fully promote their welfare. Strong matching processes within the service ensure that young people are placed with carers who can meet their needs well. This helps young people to thrive in stable placements.

The service operates within the terms of its Statement of Purpose, and this helps to ensure that young people and all other stakeholders are clear about what to expect. A child-friendly version of this guide is available, and this helps young people to understand their rights and to have access to people such as the Independent Reviewing Officer. This is a generally, well-managed service that is well staffed and financially viable. Appropriate action is being taken to fill the recently vacant Registered Manager's post. This helps to ensure that the service runs smoothly. There is careful selection of staff, volunteers and carers, and robust suitability checks are carried out prior to anybody working with young people. This protects young people by helping to prevent unsuitable people having contact with them.

This is a learning organisation that values training and staff and carer development. A staff member said: 'There is good quality training for staff and carers.' Carers say that they value the training they receive and that it helps them meet young people's needs. Good efforts are made by the service to try to provide training and support groups at times and venues that suit all carers. This currently means that training sessions that run during the week are repeated at weekends. Carers feel extremely well supported. One said: 'They always have the answer and help you no matter what.' Another said: 'The service is fantastic, I have received excellent support from everyone.' One carer said that the service had: 'Provided excellent support to help me cope'. The high levels of communication that carers and young people have with the service helps to maintain stable and successful placements.

There are policies and procedures in place regarding child protection that help to keep young people safe. These include the regular training of both staff and carers in this area. Any significant events are notified to the relevant authorities in order to ensure the protection of young people. A high value is placed on the training and development of staff and this helps to ensure that young people benefit from care provided by decision makers who are competent to meet their needs. Staff have been supported to obtain Masters degrees and social work qualifications recently. Professional supervision and team meetings occur regularly and this promotes the professional and consistent running of the service. There are good arrangements for record keeping and systems in place for quality assurance, such as in-house audits, which ensure that the service is delivered in a way which meets the needs of carers and young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service recruits carers from all sections of society and this helps to ensure that they have a range of skills and knowledge to address the differing needs of young people. Young people receive individualised care that meets their needs. Specific cultural needs are identified and detailed in placement plans. This helps to ensure that carers know how to address these needs.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
28 (2011)	ensure that the fostering service provider reviews the approval of each foster parent at intervals of not more than a year, and sets out in a written report whether the foster parent's house continues to be suitable. (Regulation 28 (2) and (4)(a))	19/11/2011

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that young people are cared for in line with their placement plan. (NMS 31)