

Shared Care Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC416392
Inspection date	02/07/2012
Inspector	Sandra Jacobs-Walls
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

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Date of last inspection	18/02/2011

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Shared Care Services (Fostering Division) is an independent fostering agency. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements and short breaks for disabled children and young people. The service provides in individual and sibling group placement, bridging, emergency and short- and long-term placements. The agency also provides a short break service. The agency also runs and manages a well established domiciliary care service for children, young people and adults living with disability, which can act as a support service to its fostering service.

The agency's aim is to recruit, supervise and support foster carers in meeting the needs of looked after children living with disability and complex medical needs.

Currently the service has one approved fostering household. The agency's first placement of a newborn baby occurred just days prior to this inspection.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

This fostering service was registered with Ofsted in February 2011 and this is the service's first inspection since registration. Given the service has only one approved fostering household looking after one child, there are limitations to the scope of the inspection enquiries and findings.

The fostering service has made a promising start in meeting the placement needs for disabled children. The service provides an adequate quality of care, and the outcomes for children are satisfactory. There is evidence of very thorough practice by staff and foster carers particularly in relation to health care matters. Children receive personalised care that meets their individual needs and they are kept safe. The service pays good attention to equality, diversity and identity issues.

This agency has many strengths; including the excellent support and supervision provided to foster carers. Managers and staff have extensive experience of child

protection, the disability field and the fostering task. Staff and foster carers demonstrate a keen commitment to providing quality care to children and young people with very complex medical needs. There are recruitment strategies in place and strong procedures in place to support the assessment process.

The leadership and management of the fostering service are satisfactory. The roles of Registered Manager and responsible Individual are held by the service's two directors who are also both qualified and experienced social workers. The fostering service provides all interested parties with clear and detailed information about the service and facilities provided, managers ensure that all key policies are in place; safeguarding policies and procedures are comprehensive. Foster carers' training opportunities are excellent and they have access to specialist training focussed on disability. The service's fostering panel operates effectively.

This inspection found some areas for improvement. These include improvement to management monitoring systems, improvement to some key records and the review of the service's development plan. The children's guide is not available in communication formats other than the written word and the Registered Manager is yet to complete required management training. Foster carers are also yet to complete all the required formal training.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
4 (2011)	keep under review and, where appropriate revise the children's guide. In particular, to ensure that information is available in suitable alternative methods of communication (Regulation 4(a))	01/10/2012
17 (2011)	provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interest of children placed with them, in particular the required Children's Workforce Development Council's Training (Regulation 17(1))	01/10/2012
7 (2011)	ensure that the Registered Manager has the required management qualification necessary for managing the fostering agency (Regulation 7(2)(b)(i))	03/12/2012
35 (2011)	maintain a system for monitoring matters set out in Schedule 6 and provide the chief inspector with subsequent written reports (Regulation 35(1)(a) & (2))	01/10/2012
15 (2011)	promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents. In particular the service must develop and implement policies and procedures with regards to HIV and	01/10/2012

	AIDS. (Regulation 15(1))	
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that children know how to make complaints. In particular, for information to children about making complaints is available in alternatives methods of communication (NMS 1)
- ensure that written assessment reports are accurate, up-to-date and include evidence based information (NMS 13.7)
- ensure that the decision of the agency decision maker is forwarded in writing to applicants within five working days of the panel recommendation (NMS 14.10)
- devise a development plan for the service that is reviewed annually identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service. (NMS 18.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **adequate**.

The scope of this inspection in making judgements about outcomes for children is limited since the fostering service at the time of the inspection had negotiated only one very recent placement of a baby. The inspection finds that outcomes for children are adequate.

Children benefit from the service's strong focus and expertise in the field of disability. They have access to independent advocates who act on their behalf. Children have the opportunity to participate in life story work, appropriate to their needs that provide them with an understanding of their life histories. There are clear policies in place that outline the fostering service's complaints procedure. However, this information is available only in the written word. The service's failure to produce this information in other communication formats acts to limits children's access to this information if they make use of alternative methods of communication. The fostering service is in the process of developing feedback forms for the use of children and young people who are in placement to solicit their views about the service. Young people can participate in the development of the service, ensuring it promotes positive outcomes for them.

Children benefit from very personalised care provided by the fostering service in accordance with the placing authority's care plan. Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster carers, who clearly enjoy caring for them. Children receive very individualistic care that addresses well any identity issues. This is crucial in ensuring the needs of children and young people living with disabilities or who have complex medical needs are expertly addressed.

Children live in healthy environments that very effectively address their medical and health care issues. Children have excellent access to primary care services, but moreover, a range of specialist health care services to address identified health care needs. Children benefit from the expertise of hospital consultants, paediatricians, health visitors, specialist cardiologists, who work effectively with staff of the fostering service and foster carers to help maximise children's healthy lifestyles. The service is yet to develop and implement policy and practice guidance that relates to HIV and AIDS. This is important since the service accepts referrals of children and young people who are living with these health conditions. Children who have significant feeding difficulties enjoy food that is prepared and provided appropriately and in a sensitive and safe manner. Children enjoy access to appropriate play and learning materials for stimulation and recreation.

Children benefit from the agency's policies and procedures that promote educational achievement. Staff and carers have good insight to the impact some forms of disability have on academic progress and of the consequential barriers. Children benefit from the service's social model of disability approach to addressing barriers which acts to promote individual potential.

Children enjoy good access to their parents in accordance with local authority or court ordered directions. The fostering service ensures that contact arrangements are adhered to by foster carers, who in turn receive practical support, for example taxis to help facilitate contact arrangements. Children, where required, have supervised contact in appropriate facilities to ensure their safety.

Children enjoy a sense of belonging within their fostering families and are valued and genuinely loved as members of the household. A foster carer said of her looked after child, 'We all love her, straight from the beginning. We couldn't wait to get her home. She's a member of our family now.' Children benefit from clear policies and procedures that outline sensitive introduction to their foster families and the preparation for placements are well considered by the service. Children benefit from clear policies and procedures that outline funding and personal allowance issues and policies that promote independence as young people prepare to leave local authority care.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

The quality of the fostering service's provision is adequate. The organisation has existing support services, including a domiciliary care service, that address the care needs of disabled children, young people and adults. The organisation's fostering service therefore has access to a range of supplementary services that enhance the range of specialist care services available.

The fostering service has been registered with Ofsted since February 2011 and currently has one approved fostering household. The service continues to build upon

its efforts to recruit more foster carers to offer placements to children and young people living with disabilities. The service has clear and robust systems in place that promptly and efficiently manages all initial enquiries. The fostering service provides potential foster care applicants with a clear and comprehensive information pack. This followed up with an initial home visit that further explains the fostering purpose and task. The service provides preliminary training, a skills to foster programme that support applicants understanding of the role and responsibility of the fostering task. These pre-assessment measures are effective in outlining the competencies and strengths applicants will need to demonstrate in order to become approved foster carers.

The fostering service's assessment process is robust and includes the completion of all vetting checks as outlined in the regulations. The assessment process explicitly explores applicant capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way. However, improvements are needed to the quality of written assessments presented at the fostering panel. This is important to ensure that assessment reports proactively assist the panel's decision-making. The fostering service has clear procedures for the conduct of foster carer reviews. To date no foster carer reviews have been held.

The fostering panel functions efficiently and effectively in making recommendations about the suitability of potential foster carers. The fostering panel is comprised of qualified and experienced practitioners in their appropriate fields of expertise. These fields include social work, education, child health and an experienced foster carer. The fostering service has relevant policies and procedures in place and panel members receive an induction and training. The fostering service ensures that the vetting of panel members is robust and that members are suitable to participate in the process. Foster carers and children benefit from the service's clear policies and procedures with regard to the purpose and operation of panel meetings. The fostering panel performs well its quality assurance function. Since the service's registration with Ofsted, one fostering panel meeting has been convened. This meeting was appropriately attended and its administration was sound. The responsible individual is the agency decision-maker. Written confirmation of decisions made at panel is not forwarded to prospective applicants in a timely manner.

Foster carers receive comprehensive background information from the staff and placing authorities about children seeking foster care placements. Foster carers and have good opportunities following the agency's robust referral process to discuss fully potential placements. This is important to ensure that foster carers have clear information about the needs of children and are able to explore how the placement is to effectively meet identified needs.

The fostering services matching process is efficient and effective. Children and foster carers benefit from clear and comprehensive written guidance to support staff's decision-making about matching considerations. Staff are careful to ensure that the service and foster carers receive detailed information about the specific needs of children seeking placements. The service ensures foster carers have the required knowledge, skill and expertise to meet the needs of children prior to placements being negotiated. This ensures that effective placements are made that meet the

needs of looked after children. Staff maintain clear records of matching considerations and decision-making. The fostering service's matching process explicitly considers issues of individual identity. This includes issues of race, gender, religion, age and moreover disability and implications for safe caring.

The service provides high quality training, supervision and support to its foster carers. Foster caring households benefit from a comprehensive and varied range of relevant training opportunities. These include mandatory safeguarding training at varying levels. The service also provides, where necessary, training specific to the health care needs of individual children. For example, managers ensure that hospital health care professionals provide expert medical training to foster carers before children's discharge to foster care households. Such training includes, tube feeding and essential medication regimes. However, foster carers are yet to enrol onto and achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council training standards in foster care. This is essential to ensure foster care are equipped with current knowledge, skills and practice as required.

Staff's support and supervision of foster carers is excellent. Foster carer's communication with staff of the service is consistent and meaningful; staff make themselves available to support foster carers emotionally and practically. The agency has an effective out-of-hours service, staffed by managers. Staff maintain consistent records of formal supervisory visits that focus on placement progress and issues. This is important to ensure that the needs of children remain paramount throughout the duration of the placement. A foster carer said 'Training here is really very good. It all makes sense and has helped me a lot. We've received excellent support, my manager is brilliant. There's constant communication through emails and phone calls. We feel very well supported.'

Foster carers understand explicitly the importance of working in partnership with the fostering service and other professionals and do so well. This ethos is promoted in agency literature and training made available to foster carers. Foster carers confirm and files evidence the effective partnership working between staff, foster carers and other involved professionals such as the child's social worker and medical experts. This is important to ensure that all professionals are appropriately informed of placement progress and issues and participate in decision-making about children's lives. One local authority representative said 'I look forward to working with Shared Care Fostering as I found (the manager) to be very supportive of his foster carer which then produces good placements. Carers are listened to, supported and able to reflect on their own practice.'

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The fostering service views effective safeguarding a priority for all placements and has this ethos at the centre of its function and operation. The service acknowledges and accepts the particular vulnerability faced by children living with disabilities and staff are committed to keeping children safe. Children benefit from the fostering

services clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. Foster carers receive good written guidance and training to assist them keep children from harm and abuse. Foster carers receive excellent safeguarding training that focuses specifically on caring for disabled children. The fostering service ensures that all fostering households have safe caring policies in place to support safe practices.

The fostering service have had no incidents of children going missing, being the victims or perpetrators of bullying or exhibiting challenging behaviour. This is also the case for allegations; none have been received against the service. No notifications of significant events have been initiated by the service. The fostering service has in place comprehensive policies and procedures to help inform and guide staff and foster carers' practice to keep children safe.

Children benefit from the fostering service's robust recruitment and vetting practices. This ensures individuals working with the service are deemed suitable to work with children. The service has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures in place that ensure the careful selection and vetting of staff, foster carers and those identified on the agency's central list. The fostering service's personnel files for these individuals evidence full vetting checks as required by the regulations.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

The leadership and management of this fostering service are satisfactory. The managers are committed to providing quality foster care placements for looked after children and young people who are living with disabilities and complex medical needs.

The fostering service is managed by individuals who are well experienced and qualified to do so. Both the responsible individual and Registered manager are experienced, qualified social workers with a strong background in child care, child protection and disability. However, the Registered Manager is yet to enrol onto and achieve the required management qualification.

All stakeholders and interested parties have access to clear and comprehensive information that outlines well the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The agency's Statement of Purpose is informative and explicit about what services and facilities the fostering service provides. The fostering service's children's guide is a useful summary of the agency's aim, objectives and services and is geared towards the use of children and young people. However, the information is currently only available in the written word and so is not accessible to children and young people who access information thorough alternative methods of communication.

The fostering service is financially sound and its business plan, dated 2010, broadly outlines plans for the service's future. However, the service has not devised a

development plan, which is explicit in identifying service development, how this is to be achieved and the anticipated impact on outcomes for children. The agency is a fair and competent employer with sound employment practices. Managers provide good support and supervision to its staff; relevant training is available to independent foster care assessors and those on the service's central list. The service ensures any specialist advice and support is made available as required.

The fostering service is generally well run by the agency directors. There are clear procedures in place for the monitoring and controlling of the activities of the service. However, these procedures are not sufficiently effective as managers do not systematically monitor all aspects of the services operation as required. For example, policies do not accurately relate to current legislation and revised national minimum standards. The service is yet to set up monitoring systems to consider the running of the service and improving the quality of care.

The fostering service's premises and administrative systems are generally suitable to meet the aims of the service and staff case file records are generally well maintained. However, the manager's monitoring of case files is not robust to ensure a good standard of staff record keeping. Also the signed original of one foster care assessment appears misplaced by the service and was not produced for review. Foster carers receive good information and training in relation to record keeping and maintain detailed and clear documentation of placement events. This is important to ensure there is an accurate record of events that help children and young people understand their care histories and general development.

The fostering service has clear financial systems in place and foster carers have access to comprehensive policies and procedures that relate to payments and allowances. Foster carers confirm that they are paid promptly and at the rate expected. The fostering service also makes available to foster carers additional funds to support practical activities such as travel arrangements for family contact and essential placement equipment.

The fostering service ensures that its referral, matching and care planning processes are very robust. As a result children are cared for in accordance with local authority care plans and their identified needs are well met by placements. Managers of the service ensure that partnership working with professionals is effective and that statutory processes are consistently conducted.

Despite identified weaknesses in the management of the fostering service, the service is generally well run. The shortfalls in this area of the agency's operation does not negatively impact on the outcomes for young people.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.