

# Integrated Services Programme

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	13/07/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Integrated Services Programme (ISP) Kent is a 'not for profit', independent fostering agency, with additional registered offices based in Buckinghamshire, Sussex and Enfield. The head office for the entire organisation is based at Sittingbourne in Kent and centres serving the Kent region are located in Teynham, Whitstable and Rainham.

All of the centres have a centre manager and a team of qualified social workers. Foster carers receive additional support from fostering advisors. The organisation provides a wide range of services, including social work support for foster carers, a range of therapeutic services, educational support and assistance with transport via an internal transport department. There is also a dedicated contact house where children can have good quality contact with their birth families. Foster carers provide long term, short term, task centred, respite and permanent care. There is also a provision for parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the Kent provision has 168 approved households providing 253 approved foster places, with 171 currently filled.

### 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 **outstanding**.

This Independent Fostering Agency provides an outstanding level of foster care for the young people accommodated. This is achieved by the implementation of a therapeutic model of care which is organised by a central therapeutic team of professionals and which is understood and applied by all staff and carers of the agency. Additionally, young people's educational progress is supported by the agency's educational provision which also works in line with the therapeutic model. The agency support young people's contact with their birth families and this is advanced by the provision of the agency's 'Contact House' which allows contact to be carried out in a safe and private space. Further, the agency have their own transport fleet which supports not only contact visits but a wealth of necessary visits and

appointments which looked after children need to make. Thus reducing the stress and costs of transport. There are no action requirements or recommendations made as a result of this inspection.

## **Outcomes for children and young people**

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

Young people benefit from stable placements where they feel secure and made to feel part of the fostering family household and part of the organisation. One young person commented,

"It's just like one big family."

There are excellent arrangements in place to ensure that young people are actively encouraged to take part in all aspects of their care planning and to make a contribution to their ongoing care plan. There are numerous arrangements in place to consult children about their proposed placement. Children say they are given the information they need about their foster carers both verbally and in writing. Carers construct written personal profiles about themselves and their households which help children in making decisions about their choice of placement. There are clear protocols in place to ensure that children are asked what they think about their ongoing care and that they are able to express their wishes and feelings about the care and placement plans and the way that these are reviewed. Young people always attend their care plan reviews. Birth parents are generally invited to attend the review meetings unless this is otherwise thought to be detrimental. Young people stated that they have access to an advocacy service provided by their placing authority if they wish to have support with their involvement in care planning. Additionally, the agency have appointed a 'Young Person's Coordinator' who is a qualified social worker and to whom they can go to for support and advice. The Coordinator also conducts regular forum meetings for young people where they are able to share their views about both their own placements and the development of the fostering service in general. All of these numerous built in resources mean that children have good avenues of support and representation whilst they are being looked after. They said that these services were easily assessable and responsive. Children say that they experience a wide range of activities and holidays in their foster placements. Several young people spoken to were members of social or sporting clubs. This helps children to integrate into their local community and improves their self confidence.

There are excellent arrangements in place for the foster placements of children with disabilities. A number of mainstream fostering households have a nursing qualification or are skilled in caring for children with disabilities. The agency will ensure that carers receive specialist training which is specifically related to the children that they are caring for. There is a support group for carers of children with autistic spectrum disorders. These carers receive training, advice and guidance from national organisations who lead in this area of work. The agency has a high commitment to the provision of therapeutic services. A director of the organisation heads a team of therapeutic professionals which includes a psychiatrist, child and educational psychologists, and speech and language, art and music therapists. This

means that children requiring therapeutic services do not have to wait to be seen by the health authority, child and adolescent mental health services teams who often have lengthy waiting periods. The therapeutic provision links with every aspect of the agency fostering service which includes carer's consultancy forums, having therapy rooms in each of the three office centres where direct work is provided for young people, and there are therapy rooms in both of the agency's school provisions. These various training and support mechanisms and the therapeutic provision are outstanding and ensure that disabled children and children with special needs who are fostered by the agency will have access to a high level of care provided by well trained professionals and carers.

Young people's physical and psychological good health is well promoted by a Principle Advisor, Health and Leaving Care who is a trained teacher who has a psychology degree. Children are provided with a 'Children's Health Record' which they may keep and which contains a record of their full medical histories and which carers have a responsibility for updating. Each child placed has completed the agency's 'Health Information Form' which draws upon the information contained in their Looked After Child's Health Record. Children placed receive an initial medical examination from the medical practitioners attached to their placing authority and the agency have a system for chasing this if it hasn't been done. Carers link with Looked After Children's nurses from the placing authorities. A Medication Log has been produced by the agency for the use of carers who care for disabled children who need to receive extensive medication and carer's also receive training on the administration of medication. All carers receive mandatory training in first aid. There is a 'Smoking Policy' in place which dictates that children under 5, or with respiratory conditions should not be placed with carers who smoke. Carers must not smoke in front of young people, or in the house or car. There are effective policies in place to assist young people with smoking cessation, addressing drug and alcohol misuse, promoting sexual health and healthy lifestyle programmes.

Children receive excellent support in making educational progress. This is achieved by the provision of the agency's own school and it's attachment to the therapeutic support. The overwhelming majority of young people fostered by the agency attend school or college. Many of these young people were previously non school attenders, or were failing to make educational progress. There have been no long term school exclusions. Young people have personal education plans in place and these plans are appropriately reviewed. Older children and young people are being prepared for independence through an extensive independent living skills programme based on helping them cope with the practical issues of everyday living. Pathway plans are in place for young people nearing the end of mandatory school education and these are appropriately reviewed.

There are excellent arrangements in place to ensure that young people are supported in maintaining contact with their birth relatives as directed by their care plans. The agency have their own 'Contact House' which is suitably furnished and equipped to provide children and families with a safe and private place to repair and nurture family relationships. The agency also have their own transport fleet which ensures that both children and parents are able to access contact without the stress

of lengthy and expensive travel. Birth parents are extremely appreciative of this provision. There is bank of approved carers specifically assessed and trained to provide parent and child placements. This foster care provides placing authorities with an assessment of parenting capability and provides families with a parenting skills service which helps children to maintain links with their birth families whilst at the same time keeping children safe. These services are exceptional.

Young people say that their cultural and racial differences are respected. Carers show consideration and awareness of the religious and cultural beliefs of the young people in their care and young people report that they have been supported in attending faith services and community events related to their culture. The service arranges for carers to receive advice and guidance related to children's racial and cultural needs. The agency recently were involved in the national Black History month which was promoted within the service.

### **Quality of service**

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

Carer's are recruited, prepared, assessed, trained and supervised to an extremely high level. The service recruits a range of carers who are specifically able meet the needs of young people for whom the fostering task may be more challenging and who will be able to engage in the agency's therapeutic approach to care. Carer's come from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences and include single carers, same sex carers and carers who are both full time dedicated to the fostering task. The fostering households within the agency are generally individuals and couples who have been with the agency for many years and who are committed to the agency approach of care. Assessments are rigorous and the preparation training and ongoing training are of a high standard. The assessment and preparation process for carers is thorough and informative and several carers commented that this was of benefit later when they were approved to care for children. Carer's assessments are completed within recommended timescales. Carer's undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council qualification immediately after approval.

The ongoing support of carers is of a high standard. The levels of supervision that carers report indicates that it is regular and within appropriate timescales. Carers are provided with free membership of an organisation that gives them personal advice and guidance about fostering and this enhances their knowledge and understanding of the fostering task. The service now actively recruits carers from minority ethnic communities. This ensures that children will be placed in homes which reflect their racial identity and birth culture.

The fostering panel has an experienced chair and decisions made by panel adhere to clear policies and procedures. The composition of the panel is appropriate and there is a central list of members in accordance with regulations. Panel members are well trained and supervised with an annual performance appraisal being undertaken. Minutes of panel meetings record clearly the detail of the discussions of issues raised

by panel members and give evidence that there is due rigour in their considerations of foster carer's approval.

Foster carers have good access to a range of health and education services and to the heads of the agency school and of the therapeutic team. Carers are well trained and kept well informed about the therapeutic approaches planned for the young people that they care for and they are actively involved in the areas of educational and therapeutic support provided by the agency. This collective approach helps to meet looked after children's and young people's overall needs. Young people's physical and psychological health is further promoted by a range of medical support services and the educational support they receive from the agency is exemplary.

There is an excellent 'out-of-hours' support service ran by service managers and fostering social workers which carers say provides them with an excellent level of support. The provision of a 'Contact House' and the support with transport further enhances the support given to birth families and to children in maintaining these important links.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

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

Staff and carers are well trained in safeguarding children and this training is regularly updated. Young people comment that they feel safe and that if they are unhappy about any element of their care they know how to complain and how to talk to people to express any concerns. A protocol is in place within the agency to deal with any incidents of bullying experienced by looked after children and they know where they can go to get help in this regard. Children felt confident that any bullying incidents reported to the agency would be dealt with effectively. Young people can also access an independent advocacy service provided by their placing authority. The service also has a Children's Coordination Officer to whom young people may raise any concerns or complaints. Complaints are investigated and responded to within determined timescales. Foster carers' receive a high level of training as part of their preparation and ongoing training which includes a focus on safeguarding, safe caring and current child protection practice; this is refreshed over time and takes place before and after approval. Foster carers also receive training on the effects of attachment and loss and birth trauma on children; this ensures that carers have a clear understanding of safeguarding and that they demonstrate an awareness of current practice and the impact of abuse on a child's development. The number of allegations of abuse raised by young people against foster carers is low and these are dealt with effectively and children and carers are well supported by the process of enquiry. The agency have a contractual arrangement with an independent counselling service to provide support for carers and staff who may be affected by events encountered in undertaking the fostering task. A clear process for dealing with allegations ensures that they are handled in a manner which is in the best interests of looked after children and foster carers.

In order to check that the care of young people is safe, unannounced visits to foster carers' homes take place more than once a year and there is a system to record this. Children are always seen alone by placing social workers and asked if they feel safe in placement. Any concerns about foster carers' care practice which is identified by supervising social workers is shared with management and this can result in the reconsideration of carers' approval. Staff and carers' recruitment and vetting is thorough and organised to ensure that staff appointed and carers approved are vetted correctly and are aware of their responsibilities to keep looked after children safe. Staff and carers files are subject to periodic audit to ensure that vetting practice is kept up to date.

There are few incidences of children going missing and foster carers are aware of their responsibilities to report children missing from their care and the procedures to be followed should this occur. The manager of the service states there is a good collaborative relationship with the local police in place and that they take seriously the safety of looked after children who go missing and will actively search for looked after children who have gone missing.

### **Leadership and management**

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

The performance and delivery of the fostering service is well monitored and is reported upon to the board of directors at least every two months. This ensures that the level of care that fostered children receive within this agency is constantly being scrutinized by senior management. There are action plans in place which identify areas of necessary service development including the expansion of the service to South London where the agency hope to recruit carers from black and minority ethnic groups thus expanding choice of placement for young people from these groups. Children and young people are involved in the service development through their attendance at consultancy forums. This ensures that their voices are heard in developing the service.

In order to help to make sure that fostered children's needs are properly attended and practice is professionally applied, social work staff in the fostering service are appointed with relevant child protection knowledge, experience, qualifications and are registered with the national social work body for practitioners. There is an extensive induction process for new staff which acquaints them with the therapeutic ethos of the agency. Appraisals of social workers and managers competency take place at least annually. There is mandatory training for social work staff in the areas of equality and diversity and safeguarding children.

Fortnightly staff supervision takes place and there are fortnightly team meetings. Social workers in the fostering service have access to a good level of ongoing training provided by a training coordinator and are supported in undertaking higher social work qualifications. Intensive clinical supervision is provided for the social work teams by the professionals in the therapy team and this improves practitioners knowledge and support for young people. The manager of the service is a



professionally qualified social worker who is registered with the General Social Care Council and who has many years experience in child care management and has an appropriate management qualification. Ongoing staff training and supervision ensures that children receive good quality care from carers whose work is supervised by skilled professionals.

Foster carers are trained and engaged in the therapeutic approach of the agency and say that they feel part of a professional team in working with and helping children and young people. Support group meetings and ongoing training and information events are available for foster carers and this further ensures that children are cared for by an informed and professional service. Managers of the service have developed a working relationship with other agencies including the placing authorities, police, education and health services to ensure that there is a joint approach when assessing and meeting looked after children's needs.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guides are now clearly written, frequently reviewed and describe the service aims and objectives. These are also contained on the fostering webpage on the agency's website. The children's guide is available in different formats that make it more accessible and inclusive for children below reading age, or who have a reading difficulty for whatever reason. The guides were produced in collaboration with young people and they are of an extremely high quality and provide an excellent information resource for young people. Young people can also access their own information page on the website to keep them abreast of service developments and events. The agency arrange forum meetings for young people and there is an annual 'Fun day' event for young people, carers and birth parents which is enjoyed by all. These arrangements ensure that all stakeholders are kept well informed about service provision and development and add to the 'sense of family' that the agency promote.

There was one action requirement and one recommendation made at the last inspection which have both been addressed. This has resulted in a positive improvement in the service for young people who are fostered. No action requirements or recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection.

## 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.