

Sankofa Care - Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Date of last inspection	22/06/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Sankofa Care is a private independent fostering agency. There are currently 52 children and 52 foster carers. Services provided by the agency include short-term and emergency placements; placements for children with special needs; education support and preparation for adult life.

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 **good**.

Young people have their needs met and make good progress in all areas of their lives. They make secure attachments and develop a strong sense of self. There is a focus on achieving permanence and this helps young people to feel secure. Young people are also well supported to develop skills that help them make a successful transition into adult life. There is a careful recruitment and assessment process with a focus on safeguarding. This ensures that young people receive safe and effective care. Carers feel valued and well supported by the agency. As a result they are strong advocates for young people. Staff are motivated, professional and child focused. They are generally well supported by management and as a result provide support which ensures that carers meet young people's needs. There are good measures for keeping young people safe and these result in young people feeling safe and being safe. Young people are generally well safeguarded through checks on the suitability of carers and staff. Some panel members have not been vetted in line with regulations and this does not fully promote young people's welfare. The service has however demonstrated a capacity to improve in this area. There are minor shortfalls in relation to record keeping, risk assessment and staff supervision. The promotion of young people's welfare is less robust in these areas. However, the impact of these shortfalls on young people is minimal. There is a focus on development and improvement from management and this goes some way to ensuring that young people benefit from high quality care.

There were no applications to the independent reviewing mechanism as at March 31 2012. This compares with 81 nationally. No complaints were received from young

people during this time compared to 233 nationally. These low rates demonstrate that the agency is performing well in relation to national trends in promoting the welfare of children and young people.

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
20 (2011)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available, in relation to each person employed to work for the purpose of the fostering service, in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1 (Regulation 20)	22/12/2012
11 (2011)	ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, particularly in relation to providing risk assessments. (Regulation 11 (a))	22/12/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them are legible, clearly expressed and are signed and dated (NMS 26.5)
- ensure that staff have access to support and advice, and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. (NMS 24.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are safe and comfortable and are treated as part of the fostering family. Young people say, 'I like my carer, I am happy.' There are regular monitoring and supervisory visits during which young people are consulted privately about the standards of care they receive. Furthermore, there are systems in place to collate feedback on the placement's progress and this promotes placement stability. Young people say they participate in planning for their care and are involved in their reviews. Carers are active in supporting young people to share their wishes, views and feelings. As a result, young people feel valued and cared for.

Carers are knowledgeable about young people's needs and how to meet these. As a result young people make good progress in developing a positive self-view. Young people benefit from stability in their lives. Good support is provided to carers to help prevent placement breakdowns. A commissioner said, 'They held the placement together.'

Young people are assisted to live healthy lifestyles and understand how to take care of themselves. They say carers make sure they have access to health care professionals. The agency works with agencies such as the child and adolescent mental health service in order to promote the emotional health needs of young people.

Education is valued by the agency and support is provided to make sure young people are well educated. Carers say that this results in young people making good progress. For example, a taxi service is provided to drop off and collect young people from school as a measure to improve their attendance and punctuality. Additionally, there is home and online tuition provided to support homework and GCSE preparations. Achievements are celebrated at annual awards ceremonies.

Staff advocate on young people's behalf and said, 'We push and push.' Young people engage in a wide range of experiences that broaden their horizons. They say they enjoy playing football, going shopping and going on trips with their carers. This enables them to become confident and settled.

Quality of service

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

The fostering service recruits a range of carers who are able to meet the needs of young people. Current carers are mainly from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. There is careful matching and close attention to young people's individual needs which ensures that carers can meet the needs of young people from a variety of backgrounds. This rigorous matching process also ensures that young people are placed with carers who have the right experiences and resources to meet their needs.

The preparation and assessment processes are child focused. They involve a two day skills to foster course and regular home visits, usually over a three month period. This ensures that foster carers have an in depth understanding of the needs of young people being fostered. The birth children of prospective foster carers are involved in the assessment process and this helps to ensure that there is a balance between the fostered young person and fostering family's needs.

The constitution and membership of the fostering panel helps to ensure that timely, appropriate and quality decisions are made in the best interests of young people. Panel members have the skills, knowledge and experience which ensure that they make knowledgeable recommendations to the responsible individual.

Carers are happy with the support provided by the agency. One carer said, 'The support is excellent.' Supervising social workers carry out an average of four weekly visits to carers. Carers say, 'These help to let off steam.' Additional support is provided to carers when needed and this is particularly helpful in supporting positive care for young people with complex needs. A commissioner said, 'They have a very flexible approach and focus well on young people's individual needs.' Another said, 'The agency is managing the needs of a young person exceptionally well'. As a result, the stability of placements is enhanced.

Good arrangements exist for training carers which means that young people are cared for by confident and effective carers. Training venues are sourced to meet carers' needs and encourage participation. Support such as baby sitting and home visits also promote carers' attendance at training. Carers are actively involved in the planning of young people's care and say their views are valued. Staff understand the importance of carers feeling valued and listened to and make sure that there are plenty of opportunities for this to occur. As a result, young people benefit from carers who are confident and advocate on their behalf.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Safeguarding young people is at the centre of all that the agency does. A commissioner said, 'The agency is very strong in relation to safeguarding.' Young people are confident about the support they receive and do not report bullying as a problem. Young people know how to make a complaint. There are age appropriate young people's guides that have been well designed to help young people know what to do if they have any concerns.

There is a focus on safeguarding in the recruitment and training of carers and staff members. This also takes into account family and friends of foster carers. As a result, young people benefit from effective safeguards to ensure that unsuitable people do not have unsupervised contact with them. However, there is a less attention to detail in relation to the recruitment of panel members. For example, there is not always verification of references and checking of employment history and qualifications. The agency has clear plans to address these shortfalls and the impact on young people is minimal.

There are unannounced visits to foster carers' homes on a regular basis which help to keep young people safe. Child protection is treated seriously and allegations and disclosures are well handled. Carers and staff receive training in child protection to help achieve this. There are low levels of young people going missing. Carers work closely with the agency and other professionals to help reduce incidences of young people going missing. As a result, young people are kept safe. A panel member said, 'On the whole, children and young people do not go missing from their foster placement.'

Leadership and management

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

There are good arrangements for monitoring the delivery of the service and this drives continuous improvement in the outcomes for young people. For example, there are regular file audits and these prompt the agency to push placing authorities for any missing paperwork on young people's files. This helps staff and carers to be clear about how young people's needs should be met. There is a focus on service improvement supported by a clear business plan.

The agency works in partnership with young people and supports them to have a strong influence and contribute to the development of the service. Young people play an active role in developing documents such as newsletters and an independence guidance. This helps to ensure that the service is well focused in delivering the best outcomes. Carers feel valued and play a significant role in planning for young people. A carer said, 'I feel listened to.' This supports a professional approach to young people's care.

There is a positive response to complaints. Stakeholders are provided with guidance about how complaints can be made. This promotes an open culture within the agency and contributes to stakeholders feeling confident that they will be listened to. The agency has developed positive relationships with some other agencies. A commissioner said, 'The agency is open and honest, we enjoy working with them.' This contributes to improving the care of young people who are fostered.

The staff team are motivated and professional. They are generally well supported by management and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to young people. However, there are some inconsistencies in the provision of formal supervision. Some staff do not receive formal supervision on a monthly basis in line with the agency's policy. This means some opportunities for development are missed, however, the impact of this is minimal as staff say they feel well supported. In other areas there are good arrangements for the professional development of staff. Up to date training is provided in a range of relevant subject areas including counselling skills, caring for sexually abused children and the management of violence and aggression. This means that carers are well supported to meet young people's needs by knowledgeable and confident staff.

The agency places young people at the centre of all it does and this supports its capacity for continuous improvement. A positive approach has been taken in response to shortfalls made at the last inspection. As a result there are improved arrangements for promoting young people's positive progress into adulthood. Furthermore there are improved arrangements for monitoring the quality of the service which help to ensure that the agency is run in the best interests of young people. Some shortfalls exist regarding record keeping. Risk assessments do not always reflect up to date risks and documents are not signed and dated in some instances. These shortfalls do not impact significantly in the way that young people are cared for. However, they do not demonstrate that there is a robust approach taken to ensuring that there is a clear, up-to-date record that contributes each young

person's understanding of their lives.

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.