

# SWIIS Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 25/01/2013        |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Monica Hargreaves |
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| <b>Registered manager</b>      | Kim Leighton / POST VACANT |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Gurdev Singh Dadral        |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 19/03/2008                 |

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. is an independent fostering agency based in Darlington. The agency assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children and young people. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 61 children and young people placed with approximately 41 foster families.

### 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**.

The service works effectively, making good quality placements that offer stability and consistent care for children and young people.

Systems for recruiting and assessing carers ensure that they are safe and suitable individuals to look after children and young people. Arrangements for the supervision, support and on-going training of carers are strong and help to sustain placements, providing stability for children and young people.

Overall, the outcomes for children and young people placed with carers in this service are good. Children and young people are healthy and enjoy taking part in a range of activities that promote their physical, social and emotional development. They enjoy very good relationships with their carers and report that they are well looked after and happy with their carers. Children and young people make good progress in education from their starting point on placement with carers. Attendance levels are excellent. Young people are well supported to prepare for adulthood. Foster carers help them to learn independence skills and they are supported by carers and staff to progress into further education, employment or training. This helps to improve their chances in later life.

Children and young people are fully involved in their own care planning and they and foster carers are regularly consulted about the work of the agency. Placing social workers and commissioners are very happy with the quality of the service provided by the agency. One social worker said 'I would have no hesitation in recommending

the fostering service to any social worker or any other local authority. They provide an excellent standard of care to our looked after children.'

Managers and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the continuous development and improvement of the agency. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of the service are robust and ensure that good standards are maintained.

There are no breaches of regulation. One recommendation has been made as a result of this inspection. This relates to the information that is given to children and young people before they are placed with foster carers.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that all young people are given information about the foster carer before arrival. (FS 11.3)

### Outcomes for children and young people

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

The service has good arrangements in place to ensure that children and young people are able to participate in the decisions that are made about their lives and to contribute to the development of the service. For example, children and young people attend and contribute to their own reviews. They also contribute to their foster carers' annual reviews which enables them to give feedback on how they are looked after. Through participation groups young people are also encouraged to talk about the fostering service and to give their opinions about developments or improvements that they think could be made. Young people report that their views are listened to and they identify things that have changed as a result of consultation.

There are few unplanned endings to foster placements, which means that young people are able to benefit from the security that a stable placement offers them. This helps them to feel settled with their foster family and to form attachments and consequently supports their progress. Young people make many positive comments about their foster carers that reflect how they feel, such as 'my foster carers are brilliant', 'I am treated as part of the family', 'I have friends and I am valued and loved' and 'my foster carers are one of the best things that have ever happened to me'.

Children and young people understand about healthy lifestyles and they report that they are fully supported to be healthy. Carers make sure that children and young people eat healthily and they encourage them to exercise. They ensure that all children and young people are registered with primary health care services and

attend routine appointments and health checks. The fostering service has a health advisor, who undertakes an initial health assessment of each young person when they are first placed. From this assessment, a health action plan is developed to ensure that children and young people's identified health needs are met. The advisor has a lead role in monitoring young people's on-going health needs and health outcomes.

The health and well-being of children and young people are also promoted by the training that is done with carers to develop their understanding of health issues. Carers report that they have benefitted from attending specific training on substance use and sexual health. The health advisor is involved in various aspects of carer training and has good links with other health agencies, such as the looked after children's nurse and the child and adolescent mental health service. This ensures that carers and young people have access to additional health support when a need is identified.

Children and young people report that they take part in a range of activities that they enjoy. These promote their physical good health through exercise as well as their emotional well-being and learning. Activities include football, rugby, dance, drama, swimming and membership of clubs such as guides and cub scouts. In addition, staff from the service organise large group activities for all the children and young people who are looked after as well as their foster carers and carers' own children. These activities are chosen by the children and young people themselves. Recent examples have included a Christmas party, picnics, days out to theme parks and most recently, a day of celebration of all the different achievements of the young people. These activities offer children and young people and their carers enjoyable family experiences. Carers encourage children and young people to identify individual interests and talents and support them fully to develop these as far as they are able. For example, some carers take young people to athletics meetings around the country and others have ensured that young people have musical instruments and are able to take music examinations outside of school hours. Carers speak with pride of the achievements of the young people they care for.

There are robust arrangements in place to ensure that children and young people have an appropriate educational placement and that they are supported to achieve. The service benefits from having a dedicated education advisor who has regular input into carer training programmes. The advisor takes a lead role in making sure that each young person has a personal education plan and that their attendance and progress at school or college is closely monitored. Children and young people have an excellent level of attendance, with almost all achieving over 95% and a number achieving 100%. This level of attendance maximises their opportunity to achieve. Children and young people make good progress in education from their starting point at the time of placement and achieve success in national examinations.

Young people report that they feel they are developing the knowledge and skills they will need as adults. Carers recognise that the support they give to young people to help them to prepare for independence has to be appropriate to their age and stage of development. They provide this support within the context of a normal family life.

Carers and staff have high aspirations for children and young people and there is an emphasis on promoting further education and training in order to broaden the opportunities that are available to young people in later life. At this inspection, all young people over the age of 16 years were in education, training or employment. The organisation works closely with placing authorities to enable young people to remain with their foster carers past the age of 18, where this is agreed with the young person, their carers and the placing local authority. This contributes further to supporting young people into adult life.

## Quality of service

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

The agency works closely with local authorities with whom they have commissioning arrangements to secure sufficient carers to meet the identified need. Recruitment is targeted effectively to provide suitable and stable placements for children and young people. The assessment process for carers is thorough, ensuring that they gain a very good understanding of the fostering task and their role in the fostering team.

There is a strong commitment across the service as a whole to ensuring that carers are well trained. There is a very good training schedule for foster carers to prepare and support them in their care of children and young people. The education and health advisors both contribute regularly to training events. Carers have individual development plans and discuss and agree their training needs with supervising social workers. Core training such as safeguarding and safe care, is regularly refreshed and carers said that they have access to a number of different training events that they find beneficial. At the time of this inspection, almost all carers had completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care portfolio, with clear plans in place to ensure that this is achieved by all carers within the required timescales.

The foster panel works effectively to ensure the safety and suitability of foster carers. Panel members have a range of experiences and skills and they provide a rigorous oversight of the approval and reviews of carers. The panel chair and members give regular feedback to managers about the quality of assessments and reports. This contributes to the development of the service.

Placement matching is good, as is evidenced by the overall stability of placements and the very low number of unplanned endings to placements. Staff have an excellent understanding of the strengths of individual carers and there is a robust process for ensuring that the agency has sufficient information about children and young people's needs. This enables staff to make safe and appropriate decisions about suitable matches. The continuity of care that is experienced by the overwhelming majority of children and young people helps them to achieve positive outcomes. Carers prepare booklets describing their households that can be given to children and young people before they are placed. However, a number of young people reported that they had not received this written information prior to placement and said that it would have been helpful to have had it.

Stakeholders report that the quality of the support provided by the service to carers and their families is very good. For example, one placing social worker said 'The agency has ensured that appropriate support, advice and training has been given to each of their foster carers and they continue to engage well with all professionals involved with the children. They have ensured that the voice of the child is heard by suggestions that will help and support the children to reach their full potential in life'. Carers too reported that they are supported very well by all staff in the agency, making comments such as 'there is always someone there if you have a problem or need to sort something out' and 'I have excellent support from my link worker'. Supervising social workers visit carers very regularly and provide an on-call service to carers that is highly valued by them. This level of support helps to sustain placements and in turn provides stability for children and young people.

Foster carers report that they have very good working relationships with the service. They say that they are treated as professionals and that they feel they are valued as core members of the team working with children and young people. Staff ensure that carers have detailed information about the needs of the children and young people they look after and that they are fully involved in all the planning for their care. Foster carers are expected to attend all meetings that are arranged for and about children and young people and their participation and commitment are very good.

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

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

Children and young people report that they feel very safe in their foster homes. There have been no issues of bullying reported and children and young people say that they are confident that if they were being bullied, they could talk to their carers who would advise and support them. Children and young people understand how to make a complaint. They have information about independent agencies that they can contact if they wish. They are also given a form and stamped addressed envelope that they can use to contact the service manager independently if they want to raise an issue.

There are very few incidents of children and young people going missing from their foster homes. The agency has a clear protocol that carers follow should such an incident occur. This helps to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people. Carers said that they have excellent support from all the staff in the fostering team and that there is an effective on-call system which ensures that there is a social worker they can contact for advice at any time. This supports them in their care of young people.

The agency has robust systems for vetting prospective staff and carers which ensures that they are safe and suitable individuals to work with and care for children and young people. Carers are carefully assessed and prepared for their role and are trained in safe care and safeguarding. The service has a clear safeguarding policy and procedure that carers and staff understand and follow.

Carers have clear information about children and young people and plans in place to promote their safety. They develop a safe care policy for their homes and have an individual risk assessment for each child or young person placed with them. Concerns that are identified by or are brought to the attention of the service, are responded to promptly and investigated thoroughly in order to keep children and young people safe.

Supervising social workers visit carers very regularly, both announced and unannounced, to monitor their care of children and young people and to offer support to carers and their families. Young people report that social workers from the service talk to them during their visits. This contributes to the monitoring of children and young people's safety and welfare.

## **Leadership and management**

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

The service was without a permanent manager for some months during 2012. In agreement with Ofsted, the organisation had put in place suitable interim arrangements for the period in which they were recruiting a permanent manager. This included the appointment of an experienced principal practitioner and a temporary manager who was also very experienced. These interim arrangements were effective and carers and stakeholders reported that the service was well managed during this period. The organisation has appointed a well-qualified and very experienced manager who has recently started work and who has begun the process of registration with Ofsted.

The organisation demonstrates a clear commitment to training and all of the staff who work in this service are appropriately qualified for their different roles. Without exception, they are enthusiastic about the work they do and committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Staff benefit from good quality supervision which enables them to discuss their work with foster families and their own training and development needs. Staff across the service demonstrate an excellent knowledge of the foster carers who work for the agency and of the children and young people who are looked after. Foster carers feel that they are valued as members of the team supporting children and young people. Their views about the service are regularly sought in various ways, such as during their own reviews and through the support groups. This feedback informs the development of the service.

The agency benefits from having specific health and education advisors. These individuals make a very good contribution to the work of the service through their involvement in training events, by maintaining an excellent overview of the progress of children and young people in health and education and by offering targeted support to foster carers.

The systems for monitoring the work of the service are robust. Carers are required to give written updates on different aspects of the care and welfare of children and



young people they look after. These records enable supervising social workers and health and education advisors to track the progress that young people are making. Robust electronic recording systems that are kept up to date enable managers to have a very good overview of the work of the agency. Regular detailed reports on the service are provided to senior managers in the organisation. These arrangements ensure that there is good oversight of the agency. Information from this monitoring activity is used to develop and improve the service.

This service is part of a larger organisation and is adequately resourced. There are sufficient permanent staff in post to ensure that foster carers are appropriately supervised and supported and able to meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them.

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the last inspection which was the first since this service was established.

## 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.