

Banya Family Placement Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC033818
Inspection date	09/03/2013
Inspector	Bridget Goddard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	Unit 1, 6 and 7, 286a-288 Croxted Road, LONDON, SE24 9DA
Telephone number	020 8678 5330
Email	ngwatidzo@banya.co.uk
Registered person	Banya Family Placement Agency
Registered manager	Nyasha Gwatidzo
Responsible individual	Paul J.R. Soper
Date of last inspection	08/12/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Banya Family Placement Agency (Banya) is an independent fostering agency which is run as a private limited company with two directors. The agency meets a range of placement needs for children and young people, including sibling groups, and parent and child arrangements. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 94 fostering households and 98 young people in placement.

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 independent fostering agency is an adequate agency overall, with a good quality of service provision.

A major strength of this agency is its diverse range of foster carers. This enables good matching and means that children and young people rarely experience unplanned endings to their placements. Children and young people's educational attendance and progress is insufficiently monitored, and children's complex health needs are not always promptly met. Although social workers and foster carers attend looked after children's reviews, the agency does not produce a written report on children's progress.

The fostering panel is effective, and has appropriate concerns over the quality of a small minority of foster carer assessments. The support offered to foster carers is another major strength of this agency. This enables them to carry on with some very demanding placements, and helps give children and young people stability. Foster carer training is also effective, and gives some foster carers good skills to deal with complex behaviour.

The fostering agency does not have a clear policy on the use of restraint, and insufficient emphasis is placed on offering assistance to young people who go missing. The agency does not have an effective system for monitoring the quality of care offered involving consultation with key people. Staff recruitment and vetting is appropriately completed, and supervising social workers do at least annual

unannounced visits to foster care household. Staff training, supervision and appraisal is of appropriate quality, but is insufficiently monitored.

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
16 (2011)	ensure that the fostering service provider implements a procedure for monitoring and promoting the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents (Regulation 16 (2) (a) and (b))	29/05/2013
35 (2011)	ensure that the system for improving the quality of care provided by the fostering agency provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (Regulation 35 (1) (b) and (3))	29/05/2013
21 (2011)	ensure that all persons employed by the fostering service provider receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4) (a))	29/05/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals including specialist services (in conjunction with the responsible authority) when they need these services (NMS 6.4)
- ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information (NMS 13.7)
- ensure that the fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes the service's approach to de-escalation of conflicts and the use of restraint (NMS 3.8)
- ensure that children are helped to understand the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission and are made aware of where they can access help if they consider running away (NMS 5.8)
- ensure that the fostering service contributes effectively to the statutory review of

the child's care plan. (NMS 31.7)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Children and young people benefit from stable placements and rarely experience disruptions. They are generally placed in foster placements that reflect their ethnicity and culture, which helps them feel comfortable and part of their foster family. Children and young people are usually placed with their brothers or sisters which helps them maintain and build on important family relationships. They are supported to share their views on their foster placement at their review time, and some young people have an opportunity to express their views on the Christmas, summer and half-term activity day. Young people with a disability are also helped to express their views and encouraged to communicate.

Children and young people are generally healthy, but some young people have complex health needs, especially psychological needs and they may have to wait a considerable time to get help for those needs. Some children and young people make significant progress in their school attendance and their learning. For example, some young children's reading age dramatically improves and other young people successfully move onto higher or further education. However, the service does not systematically monitor young people's attendance at school, nor their attainment and educational progress from their starting points. This means that although the service is usually aware of children and young people's school attendance and achievement, it is not regularly and rigorously tracked, which means some young people may not be making the progress that they could.

Children and young people generally say that they like living with their carers and they feel safe. They say that they are, 'happy to talk to their carers about things.' They feel supported in gaining some independence skills, and a small minority of young people who are part of a special scheme, stay with their carers after they reach 18 years old. For other children and young people, the positive relationships their carers have with their parents mean they are more likely to go back and live at home. Some children and young people enjoy going on family holidays, and most benefit from contact with their families which helps maintain important, sound relationships.

Quality of service

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

The service recruits from a wide area, and is particularly effective at recruiting within particular cultural and ethnic groups. This means that children and young people have a better chance of being matched to suitable placements. The matching process is carefully done by specific staff who consider both children's needs and foster carer skills. Foster carers receive all the information about a prospective placement, which helps them make an informed decision about whether they can

meet that child's needs. Local authority colleagues say, 'their matching is very good and all the young people we have placed have really settled'. Disruption rates are low, and this gives children and young people the best chance of achieving good outcomes in all areas.

People interested in fostering have an initial visit; this is effective in sifting out those who are clearly unsuitable. Preparation and training appropriately prepares carers to meet children and young people's needs. Foster carer assessments are generally clearly written, but the fostering panel reports repeated problems with a minority of reports. The fostering panel is effective. It is a diverse panel, and contains people from a wide range of suitable backgrounds. The panel has appropriate access as required to specialists, but generally has sufficient expertise to make well-founded recommendations. It usually operates in a timely manner, and has an appropriately child-centred approach. Foster care feedback forms are very positive. The panel produces an annual report which provides a useful quality assurance function to the service, particularly in respect of quality of assessments.

Foster carers feel well-supported by their social workers and give examples of what they see as, 'fantastic support'. This can vary from acting as a regular sounding board, to effectively liaising with local authorities to trouble-shoot complex placements. Foster carers are also very positive about the service's management, seeing it as accessible in crises and, 'not distant'. They also appreciate the peer support they get from carer colleagues, and the valuable mentor arrangements from more experienced carers.

Foster carers are positive about their training and say that they are, 'actively encouraged to do training'. Some foster carers have completed a therapeutically based course which has helped them to see the context behind the immediate presentation of challenging behaviour. This has been a powerful tool in helping foster carers understand children and young people better. Other agencies refer to foster carers helping children make, 'fantastic progress with their behaviour, less aggressive and less damage to equipment'. Other carers have been offered courses to reflect the particular needs of their foster child for example, learning Makaton and working with Asperger's syndrome. This tailored approach to training helps not only develop foster carer skills but also helps young people make progress in placements.

Foster carers feel very much part of the fostering service team, and the whole fostering family enjoys the social opportunities on offer. Some foster carers have worked for the service for a very long time, and generally there are very good working relationships between carers and the fostering service.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people generally feel safe in their placements, and know who they would talk to about any concerns they may have. All children and young people have a copy of the appropriate children's guide at the start of their placement, which

details in picture and text form how to complain. No complaints have been received. Young people do not usually go missing from their placements, and when they do foster carers generally report this in line with the service's policy. However, young people do not always have access to appropriate support and advice to help them understand the risks involved.

Staff recruitment and vetting is detailed and clear and helps ensure staff are fully aware of their responsibilities to protect children and young people. Unannounced visits to foster carers are made at least once a year, and children and young people are encouraged to safely contribute their views about the placement at review time. Allegations are appropriately reported to the local authority, and foster carers feel that the service is both, 'supportive and fair in managing these'.

Foster carer's preparation training in particular has a focus on safe caring, and this is supplemented by routine, on-going safeguarding training. Social workers make at least monthly visits to foster carers and safeguarding issues are appropriately considered at each visit. Some placements require particular preparation because of specific safeguarding issues. For example, some foster carers have padded furniture and equipment to help with an appropriate response to children's needs. However, the service's policies do not exclude foster carers from making use of restraint techniques; however, foster carers are not trained to use this safely. There are no reported episodes of the use of restraint, but this lack of clarity does not promote children's optimum safety.

Leadership and management

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

The core leadership team consists of the Registered Manager, responsible individual and business manager. The group works closely together to ensure the viability and quality of the service. They are well-supported by a competent administrative team who play an important role in working directly with foster carers and local authorities. Administrative staff use electronic systems to identify shortfalls in meeting foster carer visit requirements and other key milestones, and this provides a baseline of useful monitoring to ensure broad compliance with basic service expectations.

Although there is important information about young people available on file, details of their progress is not collated or tracked. This means that there is not a systematic focus on children's outcomes within systems for improving the quality of care. In addition, the service does not routinely consult with, for example, placing authorities or other key people to get their views on the quality of care offered. This limits the capacity of the leadership team to drive continuous improvement in outcomes for children and young people and in service provision.

The service has good relationships with commissioning staff in local authorities which results in repeated requests for placements. However, foster carers do not always

feel an important part of the various professionals forming the team around the child. Independent reviewing officers are positive about what the service has to offer children and young people, but note that the service does not produce its own report on the child's progress at the child's review. This means that the important role foster carers offer in the lives of children and young people may not be fully reflected.

Generally, social work staff are highly committed to meeting the support needs of their placements. For some this means contact outside working hours, and direct links with troubled young people. Regular team meetings are seen as valuable opportunities for the service to meet together. Social work staff are generally positive about the appropriate training available on request, but a systematic training programme is not currently in place. This means that there is no overall planning of training needs to fully support the delivery of a quality service. Planned supervision sessions and appraisals are usually helpful in enabling staff to effectively support foster carers in offering good quality safe care to children and young people. However, monitoring systems are not in place to track frequency.

There were three requirements at the last inspection and these have been met.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.