

Children Of All Nations (COAN)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Date of last inspection	17/12/2010

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Children of All Nations fostering service is based in the London Borough of Croydon. It is a privately owned, independent fostering agency providing services for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The service aims to provide safe and nurturing foster placements that meet the assessed needs of children. Carers are recruited from cultural backgrounds that reflect the racial mix of the children and the local community. The volume of recruitment has been minimal due to the need to stabilise the agency due to organisational changes.

At the time of inspection there were nine approved fostering households and 12 children were placed through the agency. Different types of placements are made available, including bridging placements, emergency, respite care, long term, permanent and parent and child placements. The agency is able to accommodate sibling groups, they can also facilitate supervised contact and provide an after-care service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children flourish within a good agency which actively meets their individual needs. Children are happy, they feel safe and enjoy being part of a family. Foster carers feel they are valued as professionals and that their views are respected. Children benefit

from stable, culturally reflective placements, which enable them to maximise their potential. Children and professionals provide very positive feedback regarding their placements. There is a strong emphasis on advocating on behalf of children and challenging poor practice. The agency maintains positive relationships with placing authorities, ensuring children's best interests are promoted.

Children feel safe and secure; they also know how to complain. The agency focuses on promoting positive behaviour. Children receive appropriate guidance, boundaries and discipline, which contributes to their increased maturity. Safeguarding is at the heart of the service, procedures, practices and decision making protects children and promotes their best interests. The agency takes a key role in monitoring children who engage in risk-taking behaviour. They ensure placing authorities take the necessary action to instigate change.

Fostering panel arrangements are robust. The recruitment and preparation of foster carers result in a wide range of skilled foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children. Foster carers' assessments are competency based, highlighting the strengths of each candidate. Foster carers are part of the team working with the child and they benefit from personally tailored training and support to equip them for their role. This includes counselling and consideration of their birth children. Staff benefit from good professional development, a wide range of training opportunities, regular reflective supervision and performance appraisals.

Leadership within the agency is highly visible and dynamically effective. Leaders and manager have a clear understanding of the areas for development. Quality assurance, new guidance and legislation all help to shape the service development plan. The agency has a strong foundation and there is capacity to further improve. The agency has good links with a wide range of partner organisations. This includes universities and colleges, charities, statutory and voluntary establishments. There are two good practice recommendation; regarding children further influencing the service and on-going preparation for adulthood training.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- take the wishes, feelings and views of children into account when developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- provide appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. (NMS 12.3)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children describe the agency as 'good'. They blossom within an agency which operates as a family and offers stable life-enhancing placements. Children feel valued as they become part of a foster family and they enjoy positive relationships with birth children and extended family members. Children state that their foster carers 'treat you like Mum and Dad'. Professionals comment on the 'close bond' between children and their foster carers. They state that children 'enjoy a high level of emotional warmth and stimulation within the foster household'. They also highlight that children 'are loved and feel nurtured'. Children highlight that they 'feel part of the family' and the 'would not change anything'.

Children familiarise themselves with their proposed foster families at introductory meetings and through reading the family profiles. The latter contains extensive information and photographs of the family and their home. This includes their interests, skills, training and information on the local area. On arrival at the home children receive their children's guide and a gift, which also helps to alleviate any anxieties.

Children maintain appropriate contact with their relatives and friends. Foster carers play a key role in facilitating contact within their home, at specified centres or out in the community. Agency staff also assist with supervised contact, a good example being accompanying families for a meal and a trip to the museum. Within the agency children have opportunities to create new friendships. Children regularly meet as a group and they enjoy social activities and going on holiday together. An example of this is the agency's summer holiday in Tenerife, where children, foster carers, birth family members and staff had the opportunity to spend quality time together.

Children live with foster carers who are able to effectively meet their diverse needs. This includes their emotional, psychological and physical needs and those in relation to their ability, age, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, religious belief and sexuality. Children are sensitively able to discuss personal issues regarding their sexuality and they receive pamphlets in relation to their sexual health. Children benefit from their foster carers receiving dedicated training, which addresses culture and identity. When there is not a full cultural or religious match foster carers receive specific support and guidance. Children enjoy sharing their tradition and give examples of sharing recipes with foster carers.

Children are making positive progress in relation to their personal development. There is a strong promotion of their heritage and helping children understand their personal circumstances. This contributes to their positive self-view and increased resilience. Children are more confident, independent and self-sufficient. Professionals describe them as being more 'reliable' and 'conscientious'. Children have extensive opportunities to share their views. They participate in the agency's annual consultation day, express their views at supervising social worker visits, at their statutory reviews and in day-to-day discussions at home. Children contribute to their foster carers' annual review and the staff appraisal process provides a section for them to share their thoughts on individual workers. Children, however, do not formally influence the development of the fostering service

Children's educational achievement, attainment and school attendance is very good. Children are surpassing expectations. Professionals comment that children are making 'excellent progress' and are 'exceeding their educational target levels'. They highlight that children receive the encouragement 'to exceed themselves and try out new activities'. Children's progress is being recognised within their schools and acknowledged through the presentation of specific certificates. This is significant due to their low starting points. Children enjoy the opportunity of doing their home work, using computers and engaging in topical debates. Children explore their interests in extra curricular activities; examples are art, drama and film clubs. They also benefit from donated computers and book vouchers.

Children benefit from improvements in their mental, emotional and physical health. They are also learning to successfully manage their health conditions and emotions. Children understand key health concerns and are able to make informed choices regarding their health. Children attend health appointments, their medicals and immunisations are up-to-date. Children enjoy a nutritious diet and engage in various forms of exercise. This includes excelling in sporting activities, playing in teams, entering competitions, winning trophies and medals. Children play football, rugby, cricket, basketball, go swimming, trampolining, horse-riding, to the gym and take dance classes. Foster carers also undertake general and individualised training, enabling them to meet specific health needs.

Children successfully prepare for adulthood, in an age-appropriate manner. Their daily routines include undertaking household chores. Children learn how to clean, cook, do their laundry and ironing. Children are able to earn additional monies by undertaking specific chores. Children learn how to budget and save, which is a valued bonus for when they move on. Children benefit from good continuity of care. On leaving, the agency promotes contact with foster carers, where appropriate for a further six months. Professionals describe this as being an 'excellent outreach service'. Foster carers do not routinely receive specific life skills training to effectively prepare children for adulthood. Children, however, successfully make this transition.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children benefit from an agency which prides itself on having a warm, nurturing, family atmosphere. The size of the agency enables staff to know all the children and form positive relationships with them. There is a strong emphasis on offering individualised support. Children receive presents in recognition of their achievements, at festivals and for their birthdays. Children receive consistently good parenting and professionals highlight that placements are 'very stable'. Children's birth family members also compliment foster carers on the care arrangements. Professionals describe foster carers as being 'excellent role models' and 'proactive'. They state that children have 'positively flourished as a result of the quality of care'. Foster carers are described as being 'child focused and positive, despite the difficulties which they have faced'.

Children benefit from good matching, which enables them to develop a positive identity. Foster carers help children to develop the necessary skills to combat discrimination. The agency also raises their awareness of current affairs, institutional and internalised racism. There is a strong emphasis on helping children to maximise their potential. Foster carers receive resource packs and specialist support to manage health issues and disabilities. The agency has a diverse range of foster carers, who effectively meet children's complex needs. The agency is actively addressing the need to recruit suitable foster carers. There is a realistic recruitment strategy and assessments are in progress for prospective foster carers.

Children benefit from efficient and effective panel arrangements. The panel is chaired by a highly experienced social worker, who has a background in fostering. Panel membership reflects a wide range of professions, backgrounds, cultures, religions and it is relatively gender balanced. The panel also has access to medical and educational expertise. Panel members work collaboratively considering each case and highlighting the strengths and vulnerabilities. The panel is self reflective, they evaluate each meeting and understand their duty of care. The panel understands their function, which includes being used for their expertise, quality assurance and challenging the agency to further improve practice. Panel members have an opportunity to develop through training and annual performance appraisals.

The preparation, assessment, support and supervision of foster carers, enables them to effectively meet children's needs. Preparatory groups provide the necessary knowledge, enabling foster carers to understand the fundamental needs of children and promote their best interests. Assessments are completed within the relevant time frames, which ensures potential foster carers are not lost because of deficits in the process. Assessments are competency based and highlight the positive attributes of each candidate. Foster carers receive guidance from their own handbook and regular structured supervisory visits. The agency provides personalised support packages for each placement, which includes senior management involvement. All levels of the workforce demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring children receive good outcomes.

Children benefit from foster carers who receive continuous professional development. All foster carers have the necessary vocational qualifications. They receive further complimentary training, which positively equips them for the fostering role. Foster carers benefit from individual training on specific topics and on-line training. Foster carers receive training at the weekends and onsite child care is available for children. The agency has joint training events, which enables foster carers and staff to learn alongside each other. Foster carers appreciate the 'wide scope of training', which they find 'enjoyable'.

Foster carers would score the agency nine and a half out of ten. They described the agency as being 'really supportive'. Foster carers receive a great amount of job satisfaction and take pride in the positive difference they are able to make in a child's life. They gave examples of instilling routines, discipline, setting boundaries, recognising each child's individuality and nurturing their strengths. The agency

recognises the need to positively support placements; foster carers receive paid respite every year. There is a good awareness of the impact of fostering on the birth family and the need to provide personalised support. An example is ensuring birth children have quality time with their parents. Foster carers feel valued as professionals. They work in partnership with all agencies and strongly advocate for children.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children feel safe and secure. Children are taking responsibility for their behaviour, which contributes to their increased maturity. Children receive appropriate guidance, boundaries and discipline. The agency focuses on promoting positive behaviour and relationships. The emphasis is on praise, rewards, incentives and sharing experiences. Children know how to complain and they have the contact details of external agencies. Management have an 'open door' policy and children are able to approach them with any concerns.

The agency demonstrates a strong commitment to safeguarding and child protection. This includes advocating on the behalf of children to ensure their best interests are effectively promoted. The agency has links with the local safeguarding children board. The agency's safeguarding procedure and practices complies with regulations, standards and national guidance. Supporting documentation had been updated to reflect changes and new terminology, an example being child sexual exploitation. Each child has a safe caring policy, which outlines specific hazards and behavioural support. The aim of these individualised plans is to minimise the risk of harm and promote each child's self esteem and well-being.

Foster carers receive at least one unannounced visit every year. It is the expectation that supervising social workers routinely meet with children, enabling them to discuss any concerns. The agency effectively manages any allegations or standards of care issues. This includes liaising with other agencies and referring cases back to the fostering panel. Children feel safe and secure within their placements, enabling them to disclose issues of past abuse. Foster carers and staff receive comprehensive training which enables them to protect children. This includes training on safeguarding, physical interventions, managing challenging behaviour and first aid.

Foster carers regularly discuss personal safety and vulnerability with children. Children do not report bullying as an issue, there is a bullying policy should instances arise. The agency has in the past successfully worked with children who bully, resulting in a positive change in their behaviour. Children are happy within their placements and do not have unauthorised absences. The agency has a comprehensive procedure if children are missing from care. In the past the agency has worked closely with the police to address issues and foster carers have actively tracked down children, until they returned home. The agency takes a key role in monitoring children who engage in risk-taking behaviour. They ensure placing authorities take the necessary action to instigate change. A good example of this is

advocating for a child to move into residential care, for better protection.

Children receive protection from the agency's recruitment system. Staff and panel member recruitment and vetting processes are thorough and comply with statutory requirements. No one is able to work for the agency unless all the necessary checks have been completed. This helps prevent unsuitable persons from working within the agency. Social workers have the relevant registration with the Health and Care Professions Council, which verifies their professional status and accountability.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children benefit from strong child-focused leadership and management arrangements. There is a positive commitment to effectively meeting the needs of children, their foster carers and birth children. This includes advocating on the behalf of children and ensuring that their voice and feelings are heard. Professionals highlight that the agency is run by 'friendly', 'caring, competent staff'. The agency's key strength is their personal approach and aim to provide a family style service. Leaders and managers actively support foster placements, an example is responding to an emergency on Christmas Eve. Leaders and managers value foster carers, panel members and staff an example of this appreciation is funding hotel accommodation for a week in Tenerife. Children, birth children, foster carers and staff highlight this as one of their best moments over the past year.

Leaders and manager are up-to-date on the new legislative changes within fostering. They cascade this information down to staff and foster carers, which ensures they are all aware of developments within the field. The agency has strong links with numerous local authorities, universities and colleges. Leaders and managers positively contribute to the social care arena through sitting on numerous panels, assessing practice and providing placements to social work and social care students. They also offer administrative placements for school aged children. The agency has links with charities, resulting in them receiving sponsored activities. They also reciprocate by making charitable donations and sponsoring local authority achievement events.

The agency's aims and objectives are comprehensively detailed in their prospectus and Statement of Purpose.

The fostering agency has a website which includes their Statement of Purpose and an enquiry form for prospective foster carers. The latter assists with gate-keeping and assessing the suitability of each enquiry. Children benefit from their own concise, vibrant guide. This booklet provides children with the contact details of a wide range of national agencies. It also outlines children's expectations and clearly explains frequently asked questions. This enables children to understand why they are unable to live with their birth parent and highlight the positive aspects of being in foster care.

The agency demonstrates a positive commitment to providing a high quality service. The agency has adopted the Foster Carers' Charter and they monitor and evaluate children's progress. The agency is currently creating a monitoring template which will enable the agency to better map and track children's progress. Placing authorities state that the agency is 'very open' to their needs and there is an 'immediate response to referrals'. Quality assurance systems meet regulatory requirements and assist with continuous improvement.

The agency employs and retains well qualified, experienced staff. Staff receive extensive training that meets their needs and professional requirements. This includes post qualifying training for social workers and leadership training. Staff have the opportunity to attend relevant conferences and external training events. This broadens their knowledge base and ensures they are aware of best practice. Staff are effectively supported through regular reflective, individual supervision, team meetings and performance appraisals.

The agency is rapidly recovering from unforeseen organisational changes; the result being the depletion of foster carers, funds and management changes. Foster carers are kept up-to-date on organisational changes.

The agency has a strong foundation and there is capacity to further improve. The agency has a good reputation with placing local authorities; they are able to flexibly meet the needs of children. The agency is financially viable and there is a commitment to sustained improvement. The agency has a good target driven and outcome based development plan. The agency positively uses consultants and there is a heartfelt enthusiasm to promote good outcomes for each child.

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, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

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.