

Ansacare Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Date of last inspection	01/11/2010

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Ansacare 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.

At the time of inspection there were nine approved foster carers and eleven children and young people were placed through the agency. Different types of placements are available, including short term, long term and emergency placements.

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: **requires improvement.**

Children receive an adequate service with is judged to be good in outcomes and safeguarding. The agency effectively meet's children's individual needs. Children are thriving; they feel safe and also feel part of a family. Foster carers demonstrate a great commitment to helping children flourish. Foster carers feel they are valued as professionals and that their views are respected. Children benefit from a range of culturally reflective carers who are focused on providing the best outcomes. Children and professionals provide positive feedback regarding their placements. Relationships with partner organisations are effective and focus on promoting the best outcomes for children.

Safeguarding is at the heart of the service, ensuring that all decision making promotes children’s best interests. Fostering panel arrangements are robust. The recruitment and preparation of foster carers result in a limited range foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children. Foster carers’ assessments are competency based; ensuring potential foster carers are not lost because of deficits in the process. Foster carer’s vocational training is in progress and they have access to further training to equip them for their role. Staff have regular supervision and performance appraisals. This enables them to adequately support foster carers.

Leadership within the agency is visible and effective and there is a strong, stable Registered Manager.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to fostering. They are aware of the minor shortfalls and are vigorously working towards improving outcomes. Shortfalls do not impact on safeguarding or promoting children’s welfare. There are seven recommendations and one legal requirement. These relate to quality assurance and the need to produce a service development plan. The agency must ensure foster carers attain their vocational training and receive further training in promoting independence. Social workers responsible for completing prospective foster carers assessments should receive the necessary training. The Registered Manager should also obtain the relevant management qualification.

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
35 (2011)	maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 and improving the quality of foster care. (Regulation 35)	01/06/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure the registered manager obtains a management qualification (NMS 17.2)
- take into account the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them when developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting

young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood (NMS 12.3)

- ensure foster carers attain the Training, Support and Development Standards qualification (NMS 20.2)
- ensure supervisory meetings have a clear purpose to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills (NMS 21.8)
- produce a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the service, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the service's current operation and resource (NMS 18.2)
- ensure any staff involved in assessing the suitability of persons to be foster carers are trained in assessment. (NMS 23.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children state that they are 'happy' and they feel 'loved' and valued'. They describe the quality of care as 'good'. Professionals highlight that 'children have learnt the benefits of having structure and security in their lives'. They state that children are 'thriving'. Children flourish and mature within a stable, nurturing, life-enhancing environment. They gain greater confidence and emotional resilience which contributes to their increased self-esteem. Children understand their personal circumstances and the reasons why they are in foster care. They have a very positive forward thinking attitude, stating they 'want to put it behind me and focus on the future'. Children highlight that they have 'learnt to be happier, have fun and feel free'. Children also benefit from direct work being undertaken with supervising social workers; which helps them make sense of their past and current circumstances.

Children enjoy positive attachments to their immediate and extended foster family. Children warmly refer to their foster carer as 'Aunty' and state they are 'more like a mother'. Children confirm that they 'feel part of the family'. Professionals state that they 'like the way the carers have involved the children with their wider family'. They highlight that foster carers have 'always treated the children as members of their family'. A good example of this is taking part in their foster family's wedding ceremony. Prior to moving in, children receive comprehensive profiles of their proposed foster family. Profiles help to alleviate anxiety and enable children to familiarise themselves with their prospective foster family. Children benefit from remaining with their foster carers for as long as they need; this includes assisting with rehabilitation home or extending the placement to permanency.

Children maintain meaningful and appropriate contact with their relatives and friends. The agency facilitates contact within their premises, which offers a familiar environment for children. Foster carers work positively with birth parents who are complimentary of the 'high level of care' provided to their children. Foster carers and

staff advocate to ensure contact arrangements are changed to promote the best interests of children. Professionals comment on foster carers being 'considerate to the emotional impact of being away' from their parent. Foster carers sensitively support contact arrangements, as detailed in each child's care plan. Within the agency children have opportunities to create new friendships with other children in foster care. Children enjoy social events together, examples being a trip to a theme park and bowling.

Children benefit from a service which effectively meets their diverse needs. This includes social, emotional, psychological and physical needs and those in relation to their ability, age, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, religious belief and sexuality. Professionals comment on transcultural placements and cultural differences being 'handled extremely well'. The agency offers training on diversity and children's guides are available in a wide range of different languages. Children take great pride in their cultural heritage. Children are able to follow their religious traditions and they maintain their own culture and learn about others. Children enjoy sharing their traditional dishes with their carers and vice versa.

Children state that the agency staff 'listen' and constructively respond to 'any criticisms'. Children appreciate that they can regular share their views and feelings. Children have a good relationship with supervising social workers and share their thoughts during their visits. Children highlight that the agency plays 'more of an active role and do more to meet your needs' compared to other agencies. Children also participate in activity based consultation days, they complete questionnaires and contribute to their own statutory reviews. Children also share their thoughts, influencing foster carers' annual reviews and staff appraisals. Children instigate changes in practice, an example is the age appropriate increase in pocket money. Children know how to complain and they have the contact details of external agencies, including Ofsted and advocacy services.

Children feel that they are 'doing better in school'. Their educational achievement in relation to their starting points is very good. School attendance is excellent. Professionals state children are 'doing well emotionally and academically'. Children receive good educational support, this includes being transported to school. They also benefit from the agency funding additional tuition in Maths and English. Children are taking external exams and have realistic aspirations for the future. They are pursuing further education, going to college and have plans for university. Children engage in a wide range of life-enhancing experiences and are able to pursue their hobbies and talents. They enjoy going on boat trips, meals out, to art galleries, museums, sightseeing, to theme parks and other places of interest.

Children benefit from improved health outcomes. Professionals comment on children's 'good emotional and psychological health'; stating this is 'traceable to placement stability'. Children attend all relevant health appointments. They learn to manage their moods and they are able to make informed choices regarding their health. Children enjoy a nutritious diet and engage in various forms of exercise. Some children go power walking with their foster carer, others go to the gym and are also learning karate. Foster carers also undertake general and individualised

training, enabling them to meet specific health needs.

Children state that they are 'helped to prepare for independence'. Their daily routines include undertaking age-appropriate household chores. Children learn how to clean, cook, budget, undertake their own shopping, do their laundry and prepare their meals. Children are also developing their personal awareness and emotional intelligence. They benefit from specific monies being saved for them, which is a valued bonus for when they move on. Children state that they 'love to save to meet my future needs'. Foster carers receive a checklist to help with the transition, into adulthood. They, however, do not receive specific training in this area.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Specific elements of the agency require further development; this relates specifically to foster carer's assessments, vocational training and supervisory visits. Shortfalls do not impact on the quality of care. Children benefit from foster carers, who effectively meet their complex needs. The agency is acutely aware of the types of foster carers needed and their recruitment strategy is targeted to address this issue. Children describe foster carers as 'kind', 'helpful' and they 'care about you', they describe their placements as being 'very nice' and 'comfortable'. Foster carers enjoy their role and feel that they are 'valued' and 'treated as a professional'. Social workers highlight that they are 'very pleased with the standard of care'. The praise foster carers, wishing to 'commend them on the hard work they have done'.

The agency has adequate arrangements for the preparation, assessment, support and training of foster carers. Foster carers raise their awareness and understand the expectations of their role during preparatory training. On-going training enables them to develop an in-depth understanding of the children and how to improve their quality of care. Assessments are competency based, however, the level of exploration and quality of reports are variable. Foster carers benefit from personal development plans and post approval training. The sound training and development programme equips them for their role. Foster carers report that they receive 'essential knowledge that has helped us look after' children. They also receive additional assistance from specific national agencies dedicated to supporting foster carers.

Foster carers describe the agency as being 'very supportive'. They enjoy meeting as a group and engaging in practice based learning. Foster carers receive guidance from their own handbook and they have regular meetings with their supervising social worker. These discussions follow the Every Child Matters outcome areas. The meetings do not consistently address concerns in an empowering manner. An example is appropriate record keeping. Foster carers highlight problems in this area, however, there is limited consideration of effective solutions. Foster carers work in partnership with all agencies. The agency has a sound two stage matching procedure, which focuses on children's needs and preferences. Placement care plans are subject to regular reviews. Professionals state foster carers are 'fully co-operating

with the local authority plans'.

Leaders and managers describe the panel as being 'quite dynamic'. Panel arrangements are centred on promoting equality and the best outcomes for children. The panel is chaired by a very experienced social worker and therapist. This individual brings an extensive level of drive and expertise to their role. Panel membership is culturally diverse and includes people from a wide range of professions and backgrounds. This includes a young person who has lived in foster care. The fostering panel carefully considers each case and they evaluate each meeting. The agency decision maker robustly considers recommendations in a timely manner. This individual appropriately challenges the panel and the agency, the panel and the agency decision maker evidence a commitment to their quality assurance function; providing regular feedback to further improve agency practice.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding arrangements are strong, the panel and management highlight that their primary aim is to safeguard children. This ethos underlies practice and decision-making. Children feel safe and they know how to complain. They benefit from the fostering agency's strong focus on promoting their welfare. Children's guides include information on charities dedicated to safeguarding them. The agency has a comprehensive safeguarding procedure which complies with regulations. The agency manages any allegations or standards of care issues in an efficient manner. There is a high incidence of referring quality of care issues to panel, which highlights the agency's commitment to protecting and safeguarding children.

Children receive the necessary protection and support as a result of comprehensive risk assessments. These complement personalised safe caring policies which include necessary follow up action. Supervising social workers routinely discuss children's welfare on their visits. Staff undertake annual unannounced visits to foster carers and regularly interview children, which offers them the opportunity to discuss any concerns. Children respect the rules and boundaries, within their placements. Foster carers explain the impact of their behaviour and they receive appropriate sanctions. Children state that if foster carers 'reprimand, it is for the best'.

Foster carers and staff receive a wide range of training, which focuses on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This includes safer caring, managing allegations, child protection and recording and parenting children who have experienced sexual abuse. Foster carers are aware of their duty to protect and promote the welfare of children. Children do not report bullying as an issue. The agency has a comprehensive procedure if children are missing from care. Children are happy within their placements and do not usually have unauthorised absences. On the rare occasions, when this does occur there are effective management and monitoring arrangements in place.

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 ensures their professional status and accountability.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Children benefit from an agency which is striving to further improve. The agency has experienced the loss of key staff members, which has impacted on the growth of the agency. There is a good awareness of shortfalls and a commitment to improving the service and effectively meeting children's needs. The agency's current quality assurance system does not meet regulatory requirements. Although records are monitored they are not collated into a report and there is no focus on further improving the quality of care. Staff describe the Registered Manager as being a 'strong leader' and 'very knowledgeable'. This individual is a highly experienced social worker, however, they do not hold the necessary management qualification.

Foster carers, staff and involved professionals express their satisfaction with the service. Placing social workers comment on the 'high level of support', foster carers receive from the agency. Foster carers state the quality of support is 'very good'. Professionals highlight the impressive manner in which the agency manages issues. The agency has a sound foundation, which includes a dedicated, competent staff team and expertise from external social work professionals. The agency provides a sufficient range of foster carers who are predominately from an Asian background. This enables them to provide culturally reflective care to children who share a similar heritage. The agency, however, wishes to expand and are working towards recruiting from a wider range of communities.

The fostering agency has a website which includes a comprehensive Statement of Purpose. Children benefit from clear, age-appropriate guides. The agency has strong links with specific local authorities. The agency receives numerous compliments from children, foster carers and involved professionals. They also learn from complaints, an example being improving their protocol when recruiting carers from other agencies. The agency understands their duty to notify Ofsted of significant events and they appropriately comply with this regulation.

This is a small organisation which enables the responsible person to be aware of issues. The agency is financially viable and a service development plan is in progress. A written plan, however, has not been finalised. The agency keeps updated on developments within the sector. They have links with universities though offering placements to social work students. The agency's practice and policies refers to relevant research; an example being the need to give greater consideration to the needs of birth children. The agency has adopted the Foster Carers' Charter. The agency is adequately staffed; staff receive relevant training that enables them to effectively supervise and support foster carers. Staff are effectively supported

through professional supervision and performance appraisals.

Leaders and managers feel that they have made 'tremendous improvements' since the last inspection. The agency has addressed the majority of actions and recommendations. The agency is better managed, effectively safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The fostering panel has developed their quality assurance function. The diversity of foster carers and matching procedures meet children's needs. The agency needs to further address the quality of prospective foster carer's assessments and ensure the manager obtains a relevant qualification. The agency has a capacity for continuing improvement. A computerised information system is being introduced, this will enable the agency to better monitor the outcomes for children and measure their success.

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.