

Newington Manor Family Support Service

Inspection report for residential family centre

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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Responsible individual	Linda Hall
Date of last inspection	14/09/2010

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately owned service is registered to conduct residential assessments for a maximum of eight families. Parents usually have a learning disability diagnosis; some have additional mental health needs. Community based assessments are also undertaken; as well as outreach support when this is requested.

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 **outstanding**.

This highly effective service provides comprehensive assessment recommendations which are steeped in strong, high quality evidence that have the very best interests of the child at their core. Parents receive a care package which gives them every opportunity to demonstrate their parenting skills alongside their capacity to improve. This aspect is achieved through tailor made assessments and teaching programmes which are highly personalised.

Parents are treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect. Notwithstanding, they also receive explicitly clear and directive on-going feedback about their progress. Positive comments from parents include, 'I know exactly what I need to do' and 'All of the staff have really helped me.' One parent who keeps in regular contact says, 'I left here with my child because I learnt to become a good mum. I can't thank them enough.'

The service's many strengths are championed by its safeguarding awareness and promotion. Appropriate risk is balanced by a clear sense of responsibility to the child. Every effort is made to creatively support keeping families together. However, the service also measures its success by making recommendations for children to be removed when this is in their best interest.

A continued strategy of driving improvement includes the persistent chasing of local authorities, families and court representatives for on-going feedback. The service

strives to meet the demands of all of its stakeholders and adapts its provision in response to such findings and suggestions.

Quality of assessment

The quality of assessment is **outstanding**.

Thorough and rigorous referral processes are followed by assessments which are in line with the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families. Given the presenting needs of the majority of parents; additional assessment models may also include psychometric, behavioural and cognitive analysis. Agreements with placing authorities and the courts are explicit in determining the assessment models and tools to be used. This results in clear, well written, evidence-based reports and recommendations which withstand close scrutiny. External professionals commend the high quality of the service's work. Comments from local authority commissioners include, 'very thorough and professional' and 'very responsive and helpful.'

From the onset of a placement, the safety and protection of the children are integral to placement plans with risk assessments capturing potential areas of concern. Regular reviews and updates ensure the accuracy of these documents is maintained. Parents understand why and how specific safety measures are in place. These are bespoke and highly personalised to the individual families. Parents talk about settling into the assessment process quickly. A parent said, 'I thought I would be watched all time but I'm not.' The use of surveillance is understood and agreed by all relevant parties. The service is committed to balancing safety with a family's right to privacy.

Parents confirm that their experience of the service is inclusive and informative. Great emphasis is placed upon the known and preferred communication styles and needs of parents. Excellent speech and language therapy provision is integral to the overall service. Parents are fully enabled to contribute to and challenge the assessment process. They are empowered and grow in confidence. This engaging style encourages participation with the concurrent teaching and support plans. Parents say, 'I know I have to show what I can do but I am also getting a lot of help' and 'The staff here have taught me the things I didn't know.'

The assessment team is comprised of a range of well qualified, experienced professionals. Alongside the core support team, such members work within the daily shift system in order to fully observe and interact with families across the day and evening. Assessment data is therefore rich in direct evidence. Final reports and recommendations are overseen by the Registered Manager. These are precise, authoritative and include well informed judgements upon a parent's capacity to change.

Quality of care, support and guidance

The quality of the care, support and guidance is **outstanding**.

The service is very strong in its referral and placement viability processes. This

involves the whole team. Families routinely enter the service in a planned and informative manner. As a well established provider, with a strong reputation, the service maintains excellent links with local community resources. This includes a health centre, play groups and primary schools. Parents get used to working with, and being supported by, a range of external agencies. The team strikes an excellent balance in supporting such interactions while encouraging parents to take responsibility for themselves. Under planned circumstances, parents are encouraged to independently access the local area. Nearby train and bus routes are easily accessible. This factor also enables extended family members to visit those in placement. Contact arrangements are routinely facilitated and supervised where necessary.

The service occupies a large 16th century mansion house which sits within its own spacious grounds. Robust maintenance systems take into account the quirky nature of a listed property; health and safety procedures are robust and diligently monitored. Excellent use is made of the accommodation and the placement of families within. Dependent upon need and risk assessment, options include rooms which are close to sleep-in staff and a self-contained flat. The latter has proved invaluable for parents preparing to leave the service in getting ready for this next step. Spacious communal areas are well used. Families have their own kitchen and storage space. They learn to take responsibility for good hygiene and safe care practices. One parent said, 'I'm also working on my budgeting and eating healthily myself.'

Excellent placement plans fully capture the specific needs of each family. Key workers are conversant with the fine details of these. They demonstrate an educated understanding of the wider factors, including the historical, social and cultural influences upon an individual's parenting capacity. Such plans, and the practice which is subsequently delivered, are non-stigmatising and reflective of the parent's own learning styles. Throughout the assessment process, a keen eye remains focused upon the development of positive attachments. All staff are well trained in this regard. Detailed observation records readily identify any concerns. Swift action is readily taken and parents receive an honest appraisal which is delivered to suit their own understanding.

The service is explicitly clear about its educative provision for parents. Assessment work is conducted in tandem with individual support, teaching, and where necessary, therapeutic interventions. The energy and pace at which this work is conducted draws swift conclusions. Each staff member is professionally accountable for their own part. Team meetings are very well used to review progress, identify areas of concern and where necessary, make changes to increase the chances of success. This results in a range of endings; parents leaving with their child, parents choosing to end the process and in some cases, the recommendation for the early intervention of removing a child. Integral to all recommendations is the welfare of the child; in both the short and longer term.

The service is particularly strong at advocating for the rights, as well as the responsibilities of its service users. Independent advocacy services are very pointedly

advertised to parents and complaint's information about the service is further supported by joining and exit interviews. Formal complaints are rare. Those which are made, receive the full attention of the senior management team and are effectively used to shape continued improvement. There is an embedded organisational culture which strives for placing authorities to consider that some families can remain together, albeit they may require creative support packages upon leaving. The service is commended for its tenacity in challenging final decisions in this regard.

Safeguarding children and parents

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and parents safe and feeling safe.

Central to all of the service's activities is the welfare and protection of the children. Staff effectively promote the service's procedural guidance around the conduct and behaviour of everyone within the service. This includes the rules and expectations for parents, alongside the anti-discriminatory guidance in place for staff to follow. Issues of conflict between resident families are rare but appropriately and immediately challenged when they do occur.

Staff robustly implement child and adult protection policies and procedures which are congruent with local authority protocols. They make appropriate referrals and consultations with local and placing authorities in the best interests of the children and their parents. Staff demonstrate a heightened understanding and awareness of the specific safeguarding concerns in relation to children, vulnerable adults and parents who are children themselves. Examples of chasing and pursuing local authority decisions and external agencies' poor practice is demonstrative of the service's committed approach to safeguarding.

The team is trained to implement de-escalation techniques but physical restraint is not used. Conflict situations are sensitively handled and parents receive teaching and support to learn about managing difficult relationships. Staff are particularly good at role modelling positive conduct; this includes the appropriate management of children's difficult behaviours. The service enjoys a productive relationship with the local police and there have been occasional instances of their appropriate use.

Individual risk assessments accurately identify safeguarding risks. These are diligently monitored and changed as the need arises. Staff are proficient with their implementation. They recognise the subtle indicators that parents may not be attending or responding to their child's needs. Indicators of potential or actual emotional neglect or harm are swiftly identified and acted upon. Parents learn to think more widely about keeping their children safe. Topics including safe handling, sleeping arrangements, domestic violence, play and household hazards are all covered within teaching programmes.

Robust health and safety procedures protect the premises and occupants. Maintenance systems are precise and include the routine testing of equipment. The fire evacuation plan is routinely practised; everyone knows what to do. Parents say

they feel safe and secure. Some struggle with their individual placement arrangements which may include not leaving the premises unsupervised. Rationales are carefully explained and there have been no instances of unauthorised absences since the last inspection. Staff are vigilant but not obtrusive in their supervision practices. All visitors are checked and appropriately supervised and thorough staff recruitment procedures serve to protect the parents and children.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the residential family centre are **outstanding**.

Consistently strong and effective leadership arrangements remain unchanged since the last inspection in 2010. The Registered Manager is well qualified and very experienced. She leads a team of dedicated, professionally qualified staff who bring a strong theoretical base to the work of the service. Support workers are equally long-standing; new appointments are uncommon because staff rarely leave. Their own lines of responsibility and accountability are explicitly defined and clear. They receive high quality supervision and training; for example, attachment theory and accurate record keeping. The superior quality of their work reliably informs the assessment team.

Staff throughout the service speak of 'outstanding support.' This is evident through the regularity of team meetings and one-to-one supervisions. In this regard, the Registered Manager continues to ensure the provision of external clinical supervision for the professionally qualified team members. The high quality of final assessment recommendations is achieved because of a thorough and rigorous team approach which includes debate, rigour and on occasion, in-house professional challenge.

Since the last inspection, the organisation has conducted detailed research, including a thorough review of the wider industry and its own services. This incorporated extensive dialogue with placing authorities. Assessment packages are creative and adaptable in terms of length and where and how they can be conducted. The number of community and home-based assessments has significantly risen. This flexible approach is applauded by commissioners and causes less disruption, and potential distress for the children and their families.

In addition, the service readily prepares for legislative and regulatory changes prior to their implementation. As a forward thinking organisation, succession planning has been methodical and systematic. The voluntary closure of its other centre resulted in some staff re-deployment but this was transparently shared and explained. No placement has been disrupted or negatively affected during this time.

Families and commissioners are assured of the aims and objectives of the service. This is made clear through the Statement of Purpose and resident's guide. Numerous formats are available to ensure prospective parents' understanding. Non-the-less, the service is continuing to review and update these documents. The ethos of inclusion and providing support to parents in challenging situations is embedded within the organisation's culture. This begins and ends with effective communication.

A particular strength of the service is its own self-critical analysis. Rigorous internal monitoring systems fully incorporate feedback from external sources and the families undertaking the assessment process. Quality assurance audits include parent exit interviews, complaints and placing authority feedback. These lead to planned changes which drive continuous improvement. The service monitors its success by following and tracking families wherever possible when they leave the service. There are many examples of the service continuing to provide outreach support after a successful placement. Conversely, the service also applauds its own achievements when parents themselves make the decision to discontinue with an assessment. This difficult and emotive process is handled with immense sensitivity and support. Two recommendations were made from the previous inspection and have been fully implemented. This includes full attendance of all relevant personnel at review meetings and the updating of the fire risk assessment and fire evacuation plan.

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 residential family centres.