

# Barnardo's Fostering Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC068456
<b>Inspection date</b>	12/03/2015
<b>Inspector</b>	Stella Henderson
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	

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<b>Setting address</b>	Unit 6, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, LEEDS, LS12 6AJ
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**Telephone number**

**Email**

**Registered person**

**Registered manager**

**Responsible individual**

**Date of last inspection**

Barnardo's  
Sarah Anne Whittington  
Alison Joy Rowland  
26/05/2011

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Barnardo's Family Placement Service is an independent fostering agency based in Yorkshire. It incorporates adoption, fostering and short breaks. It aims to provide long-, medium- and short-term family placements, emergency foster care and parent and child placements. The agency also offers a short breaks service.

On approval, foster carers receive ongoing training and are supported by a designated, qualified and experienced fostering social worker.

The agency currently has 35 children looked after by 25 fostering households. It recruited 8 fostering households in the last year.

### 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**.

At the last inspection in 2011, the agency was given an overall quality rating of good.

The fostering agency succeeds in delivering permanence, safety and stability for children and young people, some of whom have experienced significant previous placement breakdown. Quality of care is outstanding and results in excellent outcomes for children and young people. Their voice influences practice in their day-to-day lives and at a strategic level of the organisation.

Foster carers provide nurturing homes and offer children and young people a chance to experience positive attachments and good parental role modelling. Short break carers work in partnership with parents to offer continuity of care to children and young people with complex needs. Foster carers are part of the 'team around the child', and work very effectively alongside other professionals to get the best for children and young people.

A committed and experienced management team ensures that the fostering agency is organised and managed in a way that delivers the best possible care and safeguarding to children and young people. Supervising social workers are equipped with the skills, competences and understanding needed for the task of supporting foster carers.

Areas for improvement are identified in relation to the fostering panel and aspects of monitoring the agency's performance. None of these procedural shortfalls has any adverse impact on the welfare of children and young people. The provider took immediate steps to address these shortfalls to ensure continued high quality care.

## 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
24 (2011)	improve the written record of the fostering panel proceedings and specifically record the reasons for its recommendations (Regulation 24)(2)	14/04/2015

### Recommendations

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

- ensure the decision-maker makes a considered decision within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes (NMS 14.9)
- ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends (NMS 25.2) This is with specific reference to improving electronic information gathering and auditing systems
- ensure the executive side of the local authority of the independent fostering service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members

monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children. (NMS 25.7(b))

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

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Children and young people make significant progress and enjoy long-term permanent placements with foster carers who are highly committed to them. This includes children and young people who receive short breaks, some of whom have been with the same carers from infancy to young adulthood. The agency reported just one unplanned ending this year, which is line with previous years. At 3%, this is below the national comparator for all independent fostering agencies (IFA) of 8%.

Long term stability for children and young people begins with very careful matching and gradual introductions to their foster carers. This gets placements off to a strong start and underpins the excellent outcomes that are achieved, given children and young people's starting points. It provides a firm foundation for children and young people to experience stable and secure family life with foster carers who are loving, nurturing and who understand the impact of neglect, trauma and complex needs.

Children and young people develop very strong attachments to their carers and are well-integrated into their foster families and local communities. In the majority of cases they are placed with their brothers and sisters. Speaking of the progress of children and the quality of attachment, a professional noted that, 'the young person has thrived in their care, and clearly has a close attachment to them and vice versa.'

Another commented that a placed child, 'has made significant progress in all areas of his development. His carers are proactive in trying to promote the child's best interests and ensure he develops to his full potential. He has developed a strong bond with both carers and the other members of their family.'

The majority of children and young people gain permanence through adoption, long term fostering or special guardianship orders. With the emotional reassurance of long-term security, and carers who are not going to give up on them, children and young people begin to develop trust in adults. One professional commented on the, 'highly committed carers who've stuck by (the young person) over the long term.'

Particular health needs which may impact on future outcomes are identified at the earliest opportunity. Securing the good psychological and emotional health of children and young people is seen as a priority. There is an impressive level of focus on children and young people's emotional health, resilience and sense of self-worth.

The agency's 'nurturing attachment' model of parenting has real impact on meeting children and young people's emotional and attachment needs. This is supplemented by bespoke training for foster carers to meet the specific individual needs of children and young people. Specialist interventions, such as therapeutic play, are also

employed if children and young people need this.

Children and young people are also referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) when required. The agency works well to ensure children and young people get the best out of these specialist interventions, and clearly challenges other professionals when these are not meeting children's needs.

The effective support for emotional health and well-being enables children and young people to get on with their lives. The majority of children and young people have 100% attendance at school. Any absences are explained through illnesses or hospital visits. Positive relationships between foster carers and schools assists this progress.

The fostering agency gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of children and young people, and in doing so promotes social inclusion. Children and young people make good educational progress, with some exceeding expectations. One educational professional noted the, 'improving attainment in reading, writing and maths' for one young person.

Children and young people with complex needs succeed in achieving their individual milestones. One young person's school report reflected on, 'the confidence gained over the year and the excellent progress made in all areas of the curriculum.' For some, progress is measured in achievements such as greater eye contact, or the ability to make choices. For these children and young people, this represents small but significant change.

Of the 37 children placed during the year, the agency reported that 17 had some level of disability. At 46%, this is substantially higher than the national average for all IFAs of 7%. Foster carers are effective at ensuring children and young people with complex needs get equal access to additional resources and receive their full entitlement to benefits, such as disability living allowance. One professional noted, 'This is an excellent foster home. The foster carers are highly focused on meeting the extensive needs of the child placed with them. We are very pleased with their commitment and dedication to this child.'

Short break arrangements acknowledge the primary responsibility of parents for their children's health and education. Foster carers work well with parents to ensure that continuity of care is effective. This results in children and young people receiving care that is seamless, consistent and predictable.

Routine health checks and immunisations, good nutrition, and support for active lifestyles ensure that children and young people enjoy good physical health. Appropriate medical consents are obtained in order that foster carers are able to act quickly to assist the well-being of children and young people.

Children and young people of all abilities enjoy a very wide range of enriching activities and experiences. This includes travelling across the globe, swimming with dolphins, playing football, and attending scouts and dance classes. Children and young people also appreciate nurturing activities such as being read to. In common

with most of their peers, they also enjoy playing computer games.

Children and young people have opportunities to express their wishes and feelings and influence how they are cared for. For those with complex needs, this includes using objects of reference and signing to communicate their views. One example of this is a change of specialist appointments at the request of a young person, to avoid having attention drawn to them because they had to leave school early.

At a more strategic level, some children and young people are contributing to recruitment of foster carers by coming up with ideas of 'why foster for Barnardos?' Foster carer views also impact on agency decisions, for example where and when support is provided. This conveys to children, young people and their carers to feel they are valued by the agency and that their views carry weight.

Foster carers understand the strength of emotional ties that children and young people continue to have with their birth relatives. Complex contact arrangements are managed well to ensure that they are a helpful and fulfilling experience for all concerned. A professional noted, 'the foster carers are child-centred in their approach, and have been very reasonable and understanding regarding progressing contact issues with birth family. An excellent placement.'

The profile of children and young people currently fostered by the agency is that of a younger age group, none of whom are ready to begin planning for adulthood. Children and young people, including those with complex needs, develop independence skills at some level commensurate with their age and abilities, through helping with household tasks or managing more of their own personal care for example.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The quality of care that children and young people receive is excellent. A foster carer also noted the, 'high standards and high expectations,' balanced with, 'excellent support and a focus that is totally, totally on the child.'

The agency is able to achieve this consistency through meticulous screening and assessment of potential carers. It is hard to be approved as a foster carer for this agency. They want only those people who can give a very firm commitment to supporting extremely vulnerable children and young people through thick and thin.

For example, although recruitment continues at a steady pace, over the last year the agency rejected 48 enquiries for every 1 they took forward. Newly approved foster carers, and those more experienced in the role, agreed that the assessment was very thorough and searching, but understood the need for very high thresholds and were positive about its value. One foster carer noted, 'it made us really question and reflect on why we wanted to do this and what we had to offer.'

Prospective carers suitability to foster, their motivation for doing so and what they can offer children and young people is tested at every juncture. Initial screening processes are effective in counselling out those who do not meet basic requirements or may need further experience. Assessments are timely and rigorous and incorporate effective analysis of strengths and risks. Equality and diversity issues are covered very well and consideration is given to the views of birth children. Safeguarding checks include scrutiny of social networking sites to identify whether these elicit any cause for concern about the applicants.

The fostering panel is highly effective in ensuring only those who can provide safety, stability and a positive impact on children and young people are recommended for approval. Two minor shortfalls are noted in panel procedures. Panel minutes need to more clearly reflect the rationale and specifically record the reasons for recommendations. The Agency Decision Maker does not always make her decision about approval within seven days. These are administrative matters that have no adverse impact on children and young people but are important in terms of accountability.

Foster carers receive strong support, training, advice and guidance. This is part of the reason why foster carers stay with the agency, which has an excellent retention rate. Foster carers say they feel very much part of 'the team around the child'. Foster carers are given the maximum flexibility to take decisions relating to children in their care within the framework of the agreed placement plan.

Foster carer training develops the skills and knowledge they need for their role. They are trained to use a range of direct work techniques to get to know and understand children and young people well, build emotionally satisfying relationships with them and provide well-tailored packages of support. One professional noted, 'I have always been impressed by standard of care given by carers to (young person). They are very attuned to her needs and have used their knowledge and skills to maximise her developmental progress.'

The support foster carers receive also helps them to develop emotional resilience, to work through problems and ultimately, maintain stability in placements. The diversity of need of individual children, young people and their foster families is well recognised. Staff ensure that the level and intensity of help and support provided is responsive to those changing needs. One professional noted, 'I am very happy with the placement. It meets the needs of all three children, even though those needs are very different.'

Carers and staff are very strong advocates on behalf of children and young people. They provide respectful but firm challenge to other professionals where necessary and are tenacious in getting the support and resources that children and young people need and are entitled to. An independent reviewing officer (IRO) commented on the willingness of the carers to go the extra mile: 'We are very pleased with their commitment and dedication to this child. It is realised that there will be significant disruption and stress arising out of the need for extensive adaptations to the home which will require moving out temporarily and then returning and it is much



appreciated that they are prepared to endure this. We are fortunate indeed to have them as carers.'

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Foster carers safeguard the welfare of children and young people in their care. Children and young people do not engage in risky behaviour or go missing from their foster placements. There are no incidents of child sexual exploitation or criminal behaviour. If children and young people should abscond from foster care suitable policies and procedures are in place to inform the agency response.

Foster carers act as any concerned parents would on a number of safeguarding issues. For example, they work through and support young people, who are faced with the usual risks associated with adolescence, to take safe, sensible decisions. They visit the homes of friends to get sense of whether these are suitable for young people to visit.

Children and young people are protected by a range of agency safeguarding measures. Supervising social workers ensure that they see the children and young people alone and listen to what they have to say. They have access to a number of professionals to whom they can turn if they have a complaint. The agency learns from and makes appropriate changes to practice in response to complaints from adults.

Behaviour management strategies in the home are positive and overall incidents of restraint are very rare. This only occurs if it has been agreed by the placing social worker, is part of an agreed behaviour management plan and if the foster carer has been specifically trained in these methods. Appropriate monitoring is in place to alert Ofsted to any significant incidents.

Safe caring strategies used in foster homes are reviewed as necessary. Policies are in place which give information to foster carers on issues such as bullying, safe care, transport and the use of car seats and missing from home, for example.

Foster carers confirm they receive unannounced visits. These are described as, 'very thorough' with, for example, supervising social workers checking the contents of the fridge, wardrobes and bedrooms. This ensures that children and young people have safe and secure places to live as well as maintaining high quality care standards.

A prompt and effective response is made to allegations of harm involving professionals. As a result children are safeguarded from adults who may present a potential threat to them. All statutory checks are carried out prior to foster carers having children placed and there are systems in place to monitor when these need to be renewed.

A similar system is in place for panel members. Annual reviews and supervisory visits

focus on the provision of a safe and healthy environment and comprehensive health and safety assessments are updated annually.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has recently appointed a new manager who, during this inspection, was recommended for registration with Ofsted. She has social work and appropriate management qualifications and brings a wealth of experience and skills to the post. Capacity to improve is demonstrated in the agency meeting requirements from the last inspection to improve monitoring and ensure that notifiable incidents are sent to Ofsted. Recommendations relating to unannounced visits, health and personal education plans and improving the 'missing from home' protocol are also met.

The new manager and responsible individual have good oversight of the areas of strength and those needing some development but electronic systems are not being utilised to their optimum potential. This makes the retrieval of information time consuming and impedes the accurate auditing of electronic data. This has no impact on the quality of care that children and young people receive but a recommendation is set to support the provider to improve practice in this area.

A wealth of information is presented to scrutiny committees at various levels of the national organisation. It is not clear whether the board of trustees is satisfied that this specific agency is effective in meeting the needs of children and young people. This shortfall has no impact on children and young people but would improve the process of governance and help drive forward improvement.

The agency is working to the objectives of its Statement of Purpose and has adopted the Foster Carers Charter. It is effectively managed and organised around the needs of children and young people. Regular monitoring is instrumental in highlighting where they or their carers need additional support.

There is fruitful collaborative working with placing authorities, schools and other professionals. Foster carers feel that they are important components in the 'team around the child'. One foster carer said the agency, 'treats us as equals.'

The agency also reaches out to support looked after children and young people and their carers in the wider community. For example, an apprenticeship vacancy was widely advertised amongst local authorities and other services for looked after children. Some specialist support groups, such as those for carers for children with disability, are open to foster carers from other agencies.

Placing authorities are very satisfied with the service that their young people receive. The agency has a reputation for providing, in the words of one professional, 'a consistently high quality service.' This is achieved through very effective support for staff and foster carers.

One foster carer reported that the support they receive is, 'excellent. I can't fault them. We are supported in every way - practically, financially and emotionally.' Another described the staff team as, 'a very caring and conscientious team who aren't afraid to challenge us' and, 'they are always at the end of the phone and do what they say they will.'

Staff say they are very well supported. They have manageable caseloads, have regular supervision, appraisal, team meetings and a wide range of training opportunities. They feel they work effectively as a team. They find management approachable and open to their ideas and suggestions as to how to improve the service.

Training for foster carers and family and friends carers also helps equip carers to address the needs and attachment difficulties of the children they care for. A recommendation made at the last inspection to improve the number of foster carers achieving their Training Development Standards within suggested timescales has been met.

Recruitment continues at a steady pace and advertisement is managed nationally. There has been a shift in percentages of short-term versus long-term placements, with 76% of placements long-term in 2013-14, compared to only 38% in 2012-13. Realistic and achievable targets are set to continue to increase the availability of foster carers and to meet the increasingly complex needs of children and young people needing foster care.

## 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.