

# Sankofa Care Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Juanita Mayers
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	19/11/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Sankofa care is a private independent fostering agency. There are currently 24 children and 35 foster carers. Services provided by the agency include: short-term and emergency placements; placements for children with special needs; parent and child placements; education support; and preparation for adult life.

### 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 and young people live in safe fostering households. They are suitably matched with foster carers who undergo thorough and timely assessments. Children and young people are made to feel welcome, loved and part of the fostering family. Stability and security are the key factors which enable children and young people to experience improved outcomes in all aspects of their lives.

Foster carers feel that they are respected as fellow professionals and are an essential part of the 'the team around the child'. They feel that the support and training they receive gives them confidence to work with and where necessary challenge partner agencies on behalf of children and young people.

Children and young people feel safe and are well cared for. The agency's social workers know the children and young people well. They closely monitor placements and support children and young people with their foster carers. This helps to ensure

they receive the support they need and are safe and well with their foster carers.

Safeguarding practice is at the heart of this agency. There are clear procedures and systems in place to ensure that children and young people are kept safe. Safer-caring plans are carried out. Individual risk assessments are in place to promote children and young people's welfare. However, some of these are not always robust enough in identifying and minimizing risks.

Children and young people make good progress. Some take part in a range of activities which helps them to engage with other people, learn skills and develop relationships. Their health needs are met well so their health improves. Their educational achievements are good when compared to their starting point at placement. Where contact with families is appropriate, they receive good support to help ensure this is a positive experience for them.

Leadership and management of the agency are good. Changes to the current management structure are imminent. The agency employs experienced social workers who are supervised well and have access to appropriate training. The managers and staff work closely with placing authority's commissioners and social workers; this helps to ensure that children and young people live in stable placements, receiving the support they need. Managers and directors of the agency give close oversight to its operation and the quality of its work. This helps to ensure that the care delivered to children and young people is consistently good. The fostering panel provides a comprehensive quality assurance function for the agency's work. It consistently makes clear recommendations with appropriate reasons cited.

Requirements and recommendations are raised to address a number of procedural shortfalls. These do not impact on children and young people's safety or quality of their care.

## Areas of 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.

Requirement	Due date
The registered must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector and place a copy on their website. (Regulation 3(2))	14/09/2015
Ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, with	14/09/2015

specific regard to ensuring risk assessment are regularly reviewed and are up to date. Regulation 11(a))	
Provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))	14/09/2015

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people make good progress and have positive outcomes and experiences during their time in foster care.

The agency works closely with local authorities when placements are requested and made. Children and young people are carefully matched with foster carers and they make sure that moves to their new homes are well managed and supported. Foster carers warmly welcome them and fully integrate them into their families. Moves are well-planned where possible and, where this is not the case, good information sharing and placement agreement meetings help ensure placements are well supported. Placement breakdowns are rare, with only two in the past year which is well below the national average. This means the overwhelming majority of children and young people, once placed, have a very high chance of remaining with just one foster family throughout childhood to adolescence.

The agency has been successful in converting several foster placements to permanent long-term arrangements. They view this transition positively, promoting the best 'forever home' for several children and young people, who have been seen to flourish through the care provided to them by their foster carers. This adds to the 'sense of family' which the agency actively promotes.

Children and young people are making good progress at school. They are achieving good levels of literacy and numeracy. They enjoy life and get the chance to develop their interests and explore new activities.

Children and young people develop a sense of belonging to their foster families. They build trust in adults and become willing to be soothed and accept help from them. A local authority social worker comments, 'My young man, in a short space of time, has made tremendous progress, he is flourishing and has progressed in ways that were not expected or foreseen for him.' One young person says of his foster carer, 'I respect her, as for the first time someone listens and helps me. She gets things done and does not see a "prison future" for me.' These are examples of the improved emotional attachment that allows children and young people to get on with their lives in a positive way.

Children and young people have opportunities to express their wishes and feelings. Supervising social workers regularly meet with children and young people in private to gain their opinion on a number of matters, including how placements are progressing. Children and young people contribute to foster carers' annual reviews. They receive good information about making complaints. They say they have no cause to make any complaints, but should they need to, they have an identified adult to talk to.

Children and young people's health outcomes improve. Health problems are addressed: they receive their inoculations promptly, dental health is monitored and healthy lifestyles are encouraged.

Fostering arrangements for the care of children with disabilities are very good. Carers receive specialist training related specifically to the children they are caring for and guidance from organisations who lead in this area of work. This means that their disability is not a barrier to success and enjoyment of life. Progress for some of these children is measured in small but nonetheless significant achievements. For example, a social worker said, 'This child has moved from being a floppy baby to a happy smiling little boy, who is able to, through his carers' efforts, communicate his needs to them.' Other children and young people have learnt skills, become more mobile and have a better quality of life.

The agency staff and foster carers help children and young people to maintain important family ties. Foster carers work well with birth families where this is required. They help children and young people to maintain contact with family members when this is assessed as appropriate and support them to maintain good relationships. This helps children and young people to stay connected to their families, cultural heritage and maintain a sense of identity.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency recruits carers from all walks of life. This inclusive approach helps them to meet the diverse need of the children and young people who need placements with loving, and understanding foster carers. Current carers are mainly from black and other ethnic backgrounds. There is careful matching and close attention to children and young people's individual needs which ensures that carers can meet the needs of those from a variety of backgrounds. This rigorous matching process also ensures that children and young people are placed with carers who have the right experience and resources for their care.

The agency screens enquiries from potential foster carers carefully before applications are invited. Once an application is made, the assessment and preparation process are child-focused. The assessments are carried out in a timely manner and provide a clear evaluation of the applicant's capability, competence and attitude towards fostering. The birth children of prospective foster carers are involved in the assessment process and this helps to ensure that there is a balance between the fostered child and fostering family's needs. The process concentrates entirely on the needs and safety of children and young people. Existing foster carers are fully re-assessed following any significant changes in their fostering status or circumstances.

The constitution and membership of the fostering panel is a strength of the agency. The panel has a very experienced chair and the panel composition is appropriate, with a central list of members in accordance with regulations. The panel works effectively and provides a good scrutiny of the cases presented to it. It challenges the agency where necessary. For example, the panel recently deferred making a recommendation on a case as it considered that further verification of some information was required. This provides a suitable check on the quality of the agency's practice. Panel minutes provide

the agency decision maker with a clear recommendation and record the reasons the panel reached this.

Panel members receive supervision. An annual performance appraisal of panel meeting records is carried out, in rigorous detail, looking at the discussions of issues raised by panel members and evidence of the extensive consideration given to the approval of carers.

Following approval, foster carers have access to a wealth of training, focused supervision and a well-informed foster carer's support group. Foster carers say that they find this useful in extending their knowledge and understanding of the needs of the children and young people they care for. Supervising social workers and managers are described as excellent, 'always available and never off duty'. This gives foster carers' confidence in being pro-active members of the fostering agency. Additional support is provided to carers when needed and this is particularly helpful in supporting care for children and young people with complex needs. A commissioner said, 'They have a flexible approach and focus well on young people's individual needs.'

Foster carers participate in planning and making decisions about the children and young people in their care; they act as strong advocates. Foster carers can see the difference their efforts make to children and young people's lives, in helping them to fulfil their expectations and feel safe and valued. They work closely with health, educational professionals and social workers to meet the care and emotional needs of those who are fostered. As a result, the stability of placements is enhanced. A social worker says, 'The agency is managing the needs of a young person exceptionally well.' There is a high level of satisfaction among foster carers about their work and they are proud to say 'we are Sankofa'. This has a positive and favourable impact on children and young people's experience, progress and outcomes.

Not all foster carers fully participate in the training on offer to them. Foster carers have not always attained the required Training, Support and Development Standards.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**



Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people's welfare is strongly promoted and safeguarded. Young people confirm that they feel safe in their foster home. They know who to turn to if they feel vulnerable or have concerns about anything and confirm that they know who to speak to if they want to make a complaint.

Despite this, some children and young people continue to place themselves at risk against the advice of adults who care for them. In the rare instances where children and young people go missing from their foster home, the agency works closely with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm.

Children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation are quickly identified. These cases are rigorously monitored by the agency and clear protocols are adhered to. The agency's policies on safeguarding, child protection and children who are missing are comprehensive to guide foster carers and counteract risky behaviour. Risk assessments are not always robust enough and often do not reflect up-to-date risks and procedures to follow.

The agency has a good track record for looking after children and young people who are 'hard to place'. The behaviour of children and young people is managed well with foster carers setting clear expectations and establishing good routines. A young person said, 'My foster carer has sat me down and discussed with me the choices I have made about my past life. I now understand if I turn left...that is trouble. So I choose to go right and be safe'. Foster carers' perseverance helps children and young people to manage their behaviour better and shows them that, in the words of a foster carer 'we do not give up on you'.

Foster carers understand that they have a significant role in keeping children and young people safe and protecting them from harm. The agency ensures that foster carers are properly trained in their safeguarding responsibilities. This equips them with the competence and skills they need to care effectively for children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of abuse. This gives them the confidence in their ability to work with others to reduce risks.

The number of allegations against foster carers is low. There is a positive response to complaints and allegations. Any allegation is dealt with quickly and efficiently, with lead agencies and professionals being involved at all stages. An independent reviewing officer said, 'The agency is transparent and honest.' This contributes to improving children and young people care.

Children and young people are protected by a range of practical measures. This includes extensive vetting of staff, foster carers and panel members. Unannounced visits to foster carers' homes takes place on a regular basis. This further promotes the safety and well-being of children and young people in placement.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The fostering agency is led and managed by individuals who are experienced and possess in-depth of knowledge of long-term fostering and attachment in fostering. This knowledge is highly visible throughout the service. The registered individual is in the process of seeking registration to become the Registered Manager. She has suitable management and social work qualifications, with over 30 years' experience of fostering

There are several action plans in place to identify areas the agency wants to build on and further develop. The statement of purpose is clearly written, regularly reviewed and describes in detail the aims and objectives of the service, which is financially stable. The children's guide is accessible and inclusive for children with differing needs.

Managers continually monitor the experiences of children and young people through annual reviews, supervisory visits to foster carers, speaking to children and young people and through progress noted in 'looked after' children reviews. Local authority commissioners and stakeholders reports confirm the agency is delivering a safe quality service to children and young people.

Managers and social workers have developed positive and close working relationships with placing authorities, education and health services. They challenge other agencies when there are shortfalls in the service they provide, or, for example, where placing authorities fail to provide essential information in a timely manner.

Good and regular supervision along with accessible managers effectively support staff. Supervising social workers operate to high professional standards. Foster carers appreciate the support they get from this confident, experienced and skilled staff team, which enables them to have a good sense of effective teamwork and the shared understanding that their task is to 'provide the highest quality of substitute family care for children and young people who cannot live with their birth families'.

The management team have met the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection, indicating capacity to improve.

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 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.