

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Date of last inspection	02/02/2012

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This independent fostering agency is owned by a private company. It was registered in 2007. It provides a range of placements for children and young people needing short, medium and long term care, as well as emergency, remand and mother and baby placements. The agency currently has 33 children placed in 32 fostering households. In the last year the agency has recruited 6 new fostering households.

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 receive good quality care and are safe in their foster placements. Foster carers are emotionally warm and nurturing, with clear boundaries and routines. This provides children and young people with secure foundations from which they make good progress across all aspects of their development.

Foster carers are part of the team around the child and receive good quality support from well-qualified and experienced staff. This helps them fulfil their role in improving experiences and outcomes for children and young people. Partnership working is effective. Foster carers work confidently alongside other professionals to safeguard children and young people.

Consultation and participation is a strength of the agency. The views of children and young people have influence, both in terms of their individual care planning arrangements and the agency itself.

The agency has sufficient carers to meet the needs of children and young people

requiring placements. Prospective foster carers undergo thorough assessment to determine their suitability to foster. The agency sets high standards and turns away more people than it approves.

The Registered Manager post is vacant and recruitment is underway to fill this post. The Responsible Individual has ensured that in this interim period the agency is suitably managed. New in post, he already has a very good grasp of what needs to change in order to secure further improvement.

Recommendations are set to address areas for improvement. These are procedural matters that have no impact on the care and welfare of children and young people. The Responsible Individual took immediate action to address these.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

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

4: Safeguarding children

The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (NMS 4.5). In particular ensure that risk assessments detail individual risks, set out clear strategies to manage complex and challenging behaviours and are reviewed in a timely manner.

14: Fostering panels & decision-maker

The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation (NMS 14.6). In particular, improve panel minutes to ensure that concerns raised by panel members have been addressed and taken into account in making their recommendations

25: Managing effectively & monitoring

The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the services policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2). In particular, improve strategic monitoring systems.

25: Managing effectively & monitoring

The executive side of the local authority or the independent foster 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). In particular, improve the quality of reports presented to the board and the board's response to outcomes and effectiveness.

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people experience emotionally rewarding and nurturing relationships with their foster carers. They enjoy stability and integrate well into their foster families. One young person said, 'I do feel included (in the foster family) – I'm going to Barbados with them!'

Children and young people gain a positive experience of family life and relationships. This helps them begin their journey of developing trust in adults and building emotional resilience. Over time they enjoy improved educational and health outcomes. The overwhelming majority of children and young people are in full time education. They make good progress in relation to their individual starting points. Health problems are quickly identified and addressed; those with more complex emotional and physical health problems are promptly referred for specialist services.

A wide range of extra-curricular and leisure activities are available to children and young people, such as archery, swimming and football. This helps to enhance their confidence, gain new skills and make friends. The agency also offers a number of activities to foster children. This helps to reinforce a positive sense of being part of the wider 'fostering family' and offers opportunities for consultation with children and young people.

The agency's Statement of Purpose states, 'we take the time to listen.' This is evident in practice; the views of children and young people have an impact on both their day to day care arrangements and the running of the agency. For example, young people requested and were provided with first aid training and they have recently been included on interview panels for staff. The majority of children and young people attend their statutory reviews; when they don't their views are clearly represented by their foster carers.

Many children and young people achieve permanence through long term placements with their foster carers or through adoption. Throughout their stay with their foster carers, children and young people are helped with 'life story' work and to gather mementoes of their time with their foster families.

Older teenagers are helped to get the skills they will need when they leave care, although a number remain under 'staying put' arrangements. Preparation for independence goes at the pace a young person can manage. One young person said, 'My carer is helping with my independence. I'm not good with budgeting and she helps me. I have moved back to having daily money rather than weekly as I just spend it all at once.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Thorough and detailed assessments are undertaken on prospective foster carers. There is good analysis of their motivation, skills and suitability to foster and 'second opinion' visits are routine. The agency's fostering panel rigorously scrutinises these applications. This ensures children and young people are given the best start by carers who have a clear commitment to the task.

Fostering panel minutes reflect the range of views, concerns and debate between panel members. The minutes do not always show how queries and concerns arising from these discussions are reconciled to inform the final recommendation. This does not have any impact on the safety and welfare of children, but would better capture how differences were resolved.

Foster carer recruitment draws on all sections of the community. This helps to match the unique needs of children and people with a diverse selection of foster carers. Transracial placements are managed well. They offer children and young people the opportunity to experience the rich heritage of other cultures while maintaining their own customs and traditions.

The agency ensures that care is delivered to children and young people in accordance with its Statement of Purpose. Foster carers understand the content of care and placement plans and are good advocates for the children they look after. Foster carers manage contact arrangements well and in circumstances that are not always easy. They understand that family connections are still very important to the children they look after, but are prompt in reporting any issues of concern.

Placements are stable and successful because foster carers are part of the 'team around the child'. A social worker noted that foster carers, 'attend the children's reviews so are up to date with outcomes.' Family support workers make a valuable contribution to the stability of placements and management of behaviour. They also undertake direct work with children and young people which helps to enhance their personal, social and emotional development.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people enjoy safety and security in their foster placements. Foster carers have a good understanding of the complexities of children and young people's lives and how that impacts on behaviour and development.

Some young people put themselves at risk through their own behaviours. Risk assessments do not always detail specific risks and strategies to be used to reduce

rather than simply manage risk.

This has no direct impact on children and young people; missing from home incidents have reduced and young people's offending behaviour has decreased. The safety and assessment of the very low number of children at risk of sexual exploitation is managed well. There is good communication with safeguarding agencies on this matter and again, risks are diminished.

Behaviour is managed well with the importance of communicating clear boundaries and routines assisting in this. Children and young people learn about respect and the give and take of family life. One young person said, 'It's great here. My carer keeps me in line, she gives me good advice and is a good influence. My criminal behaviours have calmed down and I'm not getting into trouble as much and I could have.'

A shift in the nature of referrals means that the numbers of older teenagers needing placements have increased. Foster carers have adapted well to meet their more complex and challenging needs. An independent reviewing officer (IRO) said, 'I feel (the carer) understands his needs. Anyone can tell you what you want to hear but she knows when to try again and try a different approach'.

Children and young people are protected because allegations and complaints are swiftly responded to. The fostering panel give these consideration along with other 'critical incidents', such as physical interventions. This enables the panel to keep track of any emerging patterns and trends.

Unannounced visits, health and safety checks on foster carer homes and vehicles and sound recruitment procedures are additional measures employed by the agency to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency is currently without a Registered Manager. Recruitment is underway to fill this vacancy. Suitable management arrangements are in place with an experienced and suitably qualified senior worker taking the helm during this interim period. A new Responsible Individual has also been appointed who has a good grasp of the strengths and areas for development. He has identified a number of areas needing improvement and the agency's development plan addresses these in a timely manner

Evidence that children and young people do well is embedded in a range of documentation, such as school and health reports, statutory reviews and reports to social workers. Strategic management oversight is hampered by a lack of efficient monitoring systems to capture this information centrally. This makes it difficult for the agency to fully evaluate children and young people's progress from a base-line assessment through to specifically defined and measurable outcomes.

In addition, quarterly monitoring reports to the Board contain little analysis of the

information presented. It is not clear from Board minutes that they are satisfied that the agency is effective and securing good outcomes for children and young people. This limits the ability of the agency to further drive forward improvement in the quality of care for children and young people.

Successful outcomes are achieved for children and young people because foster carers receive effective support, training and supervision. They appreciate this support, even when they are very experienced and confident in their abilities. One carer said, 'When we go to meetings it feels good having them with me when I walk in. It makes me feel safe.' Another commented on the, 'prompt advice and action' to secure services and resources for children.

The team of supervising social workers and family support workers are very well qualified with a wide repertoire of skills and expertise. They comment positively on the support and guidance they receive from management and the mutual support and sharing of ideas within the team.

The agency works to the aims of its Statement of Purpose to provide stability for children and young people and support for foster carers. This and the children's guide is under regular review and assists others to hold the agency to account.

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.