

St Michael's Fellowship, 52 Palace Road

Inspection report for residential family centre

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Inspector Sharon Payne
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Registered manager Elizabeth Mitchell
Responsible individual Susan Pettigrew
Date of last inspection 5 November 2010

Service information

Brief description of the service

St Michael's Fellowship is an established independent charity dedicated to improving families' lives. Part of its services are four residential family centres within South London. The centre at 52 Palace Road is able to offer a residential assessment for up to six young mothers and their children. Fathers are unable to reside on the premises. Currently, the setting provides a service for a maximum of five families.

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

Requires improvement: a service that may meet minimum requirements but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement.

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall experiences of children and parents

Overall experiences of children and parents Outstanding

The centre continues to evolve innovatively to meet the needs of families. Children and their parents benefit from a personally tailored service, excellent assessments, dynamic leadership and innovative partnership arrangements. Leaders and managers demonstrate exceptional leadership and purposeful strategic vision. There is a culture of excellence, continual reflection and analysis to inform service development.

The centre excels in its involvement in research, which is having an impact on families within the centre, the organisation, the locality and nationally. The organisation has an exceptional commitment to tackling issues. The organisation is widely respected by a significant range of professionals and agencies. There is national recognition of the organisation's work. This was exemplified when the responsible individual recently received an honour for their work with families.

The centre offers a safe space for young women to explore their past and the impact of their violent or abusive relationships. The way of working positively minimises any unnecessary risks to children's safety and welfare. Parents learn the importance of safeguarding themselves and their children. Staff are highly attuned to issues due to the extensive level of research-based safeguarding and child protection training.

Final reports are analytical, significantly research-informed, and relevantly reference social theories and serious case reviews. Staff methodically evaluate parenting,

incorporating evidence-based and multidimensional assessment tools. Staff work in a highly transparent manner, and parents benefit from daily reviews and logs. They additionally benefit from copies of simplified reviews and court reports.

Families receive research-informed teaching which deepens their level of understanding. This provides the potential for improving their parenting and life skills. The extensive range of support is life enriching, and there is significant consideration of their personal development, and social, emotional and physical needs. Staff undertake excellent age-appropriate work with children to enable them to express their thoughts and feelings.

Staff are aware of the intensive nature of the assessment process and the constraints. They try to combat this through organising external and internal activities. However, the current families had not had these opportunities, which normally take place once a month.

The well-qualified, self-motivated, considerably experienced registered manager brings great energy and creativity to their role. Children and their parents receive assistance from a highly skilled staff team. The team's diverse experience includes social work, teaching, mentoring, and working with children and adults with mental health and learning needs. Staff excel in court due to their comprehensive court preparation sessions. They commend the extensive training opportunities which enable them to develop professionally and personally.

The centre consistently exceeds the standard of good. There is significant evidence of change and improvement for children and parents, because of the actions of the staff working at the home. The only shortfall relates to maintenance issues which relate to the garden fence and treatment for dry rot. This does not have a detrimental impact on families and the work is scheduled for completion.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

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

Provide a well-maintained environment (Residential Family Centres NMS 11.2).

This particularly relates to the dry rot treatment and the broken garden fence.

Inspection judgements

Quality of assessment

Outstanding

The centre produces consistently high-quality reports which receive positive acclaim from placing authorities and judges. A social worker stated that 'reports are in-depth and clear, and definitely supported my decision making'. Another social worker highlighted that 'evidence was highly praised' by a judge. Other social workers describe assessment reports as 'excellent' and 'of a high standard that clearly sets out the relevant points succinctly'.

The centre consistently collates feedback from parents and all involved professionals to improve the quality of their assessments further. There is significant professional satisfaction with the centre's work. A children's guardian highlighted that they would go only to St Michael's for a residential assessment.

Final reports are analytical, significantly research-informed, and relevantly reference social theories and serious case reviews. They concisely interweave extensive evidence, professional opinion and methods of working. Reports eloquently focus on children's needs, and the local authority and court requirements. Staff make firm recommendations based on the capacity of parents to protect and prioritise the welfare of their children. They confidently conclude with the suggested legal order and the identified future support. The organisation is also able to offer ongoing resettlement work.

The centre uses a three-stage assessment approach. Staff methodically evaluate parenting, incorporating evidence-based and multidimensional assessment tools. Surveillance equipment is not used. The centre prefers direct observation. Parents benefit from key work, play and development, individual background, parenting, role modelling and life skills sessions. Care planning actively incorporates the views of parents. Substantial time is given to enable them to gain insight and to reflect on their circumstances and behaviour. A parent described the process as being 'intense and hard'. Another confirmed that it 'has been a roller coaster, but I have learned a lot'.

The transparent way of working includes daily verbal and written feedback. Pictorial and large-print simplified records help parents who have a learning disability to understand information fully. Daily logs and meetings enable parents to see clearly their strengths and areas of development, and to challenge viewpoints. Parents remark on the helpfulness of daily meetings, acknowledging they are 'here for a reason'. An excellent innovation is the production of summary reports for parents. These correspond with the first, second and final reports. The bullet-pointed, personalised format enables parents to see the main issues, strengths and worries.

Staff receive extensive training in a wide range of assessment methods, and have a significant working knowledge of child development, theoretical models and current research. The use of attachment-style interviews is an excellent example of the open and reflective way of working. This was welcomed and found to be particularly helpful by some parents. Parenting role interviews also complement and supplement direct observations of parenting. Staff use renowned parenting assessment software for their work with vulnerable parents and those with learning difficulties. A parent stated that they 'feel more natural as a mum, now'. Another stated that they have become 'a better person and parent'.

How well children and parents are protected and helped

Outstanding

Children and their parents benefit from an exceptional level of life-enhancing support. A parent stated that they were 'having the support I have always needed my whole life'. Another confirmed that being at the centre has built a 'strong bridge between not just a mother and son, it affected a generation'. A placing authority reported that the 'placement exceeded expectations in terms of provision for the child and mother'. Staff are constantly adapting their practice creatively to help and protect children and parents.

The ways of working positively impact on children, minimising any unnecessary risks to their safety and welfare. The centre offers a safe space for young women to explore their past and the impact of their violent or abusive relationships.

There is an exceptional understanding of the need to address the emotional well-being of children. Children have a resource pack which helps them to understand why they are living at the centre. An age-appropriate guide explains the process, roles and responsibilities in a clear and sensitive manner. Staff work with children, providing a safe place for them to discuss their wishes and feelings. There are examples of children using these sessions to disclose their experiences of abuse. This information has a significant impact on the assessment, contributing towards the decision-making process.

Parents learn valuable independence skills, which has a positive impact on their children's life chances. They benefit from a considerable number of sessions devised to give them the tools to parent and live independently. Key-work sessions explicitly detail the areas requiring further development. These include budgeting, cooking, negotiation skills and working successfully with professionals. Free Internet access and the provision of a computer tablet enable them to increase their learning. Parents also receive peer motivation through the parents' forum. This is co-led by a former resident and aims to encourage parents throughout the assessment process.

Parents learn the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle, which includes physical,

emotional and sexual health. The centre provides them with free fruit, including exotic varieties. Parents learn to make simple, nutritious, economically priced and appetising international meals, cakes and desserts. All staff are trained in sexual health and the centre is an accredited site for condom distribution. The centre has an attached health visitor who undertakes weekly visits. Parents learn the impact that substances have on their body and mind. They also have access to a drug and alcohol worker.

Parents receive significant support with their personal development. To combat the stressfulness of the process, parents enjoy pampering sessions and learn wide-ranging relaxation techniques. The latter include deep breathing, stretching, meditation and mindfulness. The organisation can also provide access to an independent counsellor. Self-reflection enables them to explore their backgrounds and challenge their core beliefs. The links to social theories, research and use of inspirational quotes enhances their self-esteem and emotional intelligence. They also increase their knowledge of current affairs and learn to communicate effectively through debating workshops. A parent stated, 'it has changed my life in terms of parenting and self.'

Children benefit from stimulating interactive sessions with their mothers through specific activities, an example being the literacy group. Parents can also use arts and crafts sessions to make meaningful items for their children, such as a memory book. Families receive extensive practical support. This includes a start-up pack of bedding, cutlery, crockery, pots and baby equipment. Emergency items are available if needed, such as milk, nappies and sanitary protection. Parents are also referred to a food bank, where necessary.

Several parents remarked that the centre 'feels like a prison'. Staff are aware of the intensive nature of the assessment process and the constraints. They try to combat this through external and internal activities. Families enjoy trips to a museum, cinema, farm, theme park, seaside, theatre, seasonal fetes and picnics. Children can visit a specific adventure play facility and parks within the local community. Within the centre, activities include movie and pizza nights, and massage. However, the current families had not had these opportunities, which are usually held once a month. There is a celebration of birthdays, and secular and religious festivals, examples being bonfire night, Mother's Day, Easter and Christmas.

The centre has exceptionally strong safeguarding arrangements. Parents gain valuable insight into the need to protect their children. Mothers actively participate in a specific domestic violence programme. A parent stated that it 'teaches you to see the signs of an abuser and it's been the making of me'. Another parent confirmed the life-changing impact of this learning in enabling them to recognise that they and their 'children deserve the best'. Parents learn immense lessons from child deaths from

serious case reviews. Their paediatric first aid training also gives them the knowledge and skills to respond in health-related emergencies.

A placing authority highlighted the 'excellent strategies in place to manage risks'. Another highlighted the 'clear boundaries' as being a significant strength. The high level of safeguarding and child protection training enables staff to respond actively to potential and actual welfare concerns. These include culturally specific issues, such as female genital mutilation. A social worker commended the centre for terminating a placement which resulted in 'a positive end for the child'. Families benefit from highly effective health and safety arrangements. There are efficient risk management systems and regular checks by certified engineers. Safe recruitment practices ensure that unsuitable people do not have the opportunity to work with vulnerable families.

Parents describe the premises as 'nice' and 'comfortable'. Their accommodation comprises a bedsit-style room with a kitchenette. They share the bathroom, laundry room and communal areas. They can relax with their children and visitors in a choice of two lounges. The main lounge has a vast selection of toys, equipment and books for children. Children can ride on tricycles, and play on slides and other recreational equipment. Parents can also enjoy the fresh air sitting on outdoor furniture. There is the opportunity to grow their own vegetables and herbs, as part of a gardening project. The only shortfall in the garden relates to the broken fence, which is scheduled for repair. The premises is currently awaiting treatment for dry rot. A period of refurbishment will follow, to ensure that families live in a well-maintained environment. This shortfall did not place children or parents at risk of harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

Children and their parents benefit from an excellent service which is continually evolving to meet their needs. Leaders and managers demonstrate an exceptionally strong commitment to the service. The organisation is forward-thinking and has a commendable reputation within the social care field. The responsible individual has received a recent honour for their work with families. As a charity, this is having a positive impact on fundraising.

There is a clear, strategic vision influenced by analysing the centre's work and feedback from parents and stakeholders. The ethos of the centre is highly aspirational for children and their parents. The aim is to provide the best outcomes for children by innovatively supporting and guiding families. The comprehensive statement of purpose is available on the organisation's website. Parents have their own residents' guide, which is available in accessible formats to accommodate those with various learning needs'

Service development is incessant. Leaders and managers know the centre's strengths

and shortfalls. There is a highly effective quality assurance system. This includes monthly monitoring visits and a comprehensive annual evaluation of the quality of care. Annual audits, mapping compliance with the national minimum standards, add to the process. Parents actively use the complaints procedure to highlight their grievances. There is a prompt response to any concerns, which includes holding mediation meetings, where necessary. The meticulous analysis of complaints also contributes to the quality assurance system.

There is continuous improvement over a sustained period of time and good compliance with regulatory requirements. The centre has addressed the three recommendations from the last inspection effectively. This results in more extensive staff training, a prompt notification system and a better-maintained garden. Parents substantially influence day-to-day practice and service development. This results in a wide range of improvements to the accommodation, staffing and the overall assessment process.

The registered manager is a dynamic, creative, highly qualified and experienced social worker. This individual leads on the assessed and supported Year in Employment programme for newly qualified social workers. They have worked at the centre since 2005 and describe themselves as a 'house mother'. They take pride in the team's ability to 'make a difference' and instigate 'change in someone's life'. Senior management describes this individual as being a 'very strong manager' who is 'very committed to the house and good practice'.

Children and their parents receive assistance from a highly skilled staff team. Their diverse experience includes social work, teaching, mentoring, and working with children and adults with mental health and learning needs. Parents describe staff as 'nice' and 'welcoming' and they appreciate the support. A parent said, 'I want to thank everyone for supporting me, pushing me and believing in me.' Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to their role. One described themselves as being a 'cheerleader'. Their practice is creative and research-based. This leads to demonstrable improvements to the lives of children and parents.

Staff receive excellent support, which they describe as helping them develop 'personally and professionally.' They benefit from regular reflective supervision, observation of their practice, appraisals and practice-enhancing team meetings. Staff commend the high-quality training, which covers 'an extensive range of highly relevant topics. This ensures they remain updated on legislation, research and good practice. An innovative training exercise is court preparation, which enables staff to role play the perceived dynamics and questions relating to each assessment. Staff highlight how this makes the court experience comfortable and gives them valued confidence.

Working with partners to improve outcomes Outstanding

Children and their parents benefit from excellent, highly effective partnership arrangements. These are having a dynamic impact on families within the centre, the organisation, the locality and nationally. The organisation has an exceptional commitment to tackling issues. It is inspirationally influencing wider family centre and social care practice.

The organisation has an innovative relationship with Middlesex University and its Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies team. Staff benefit from an enhanced level of assessment training by this team. The organisation's substantial collation of data contributes to academic and governmental research. The organisation is also working with an international educational charity dedicated to reducing the root causes of interpersonal violence, child neglect and maltreatment. The focus will be on improving mental health and bonding in the first year of a child's life.

Staff have well-embedded relationships with a considerable range of partners. This purposefully contributes to the high-quality support, assessment, care and protection of children and parents. Agencies and professionals offer in-house training and consultation with parents. This includes dental hygiene, literacy, and careers and employment advice. A specialist workshop educates parents on child accident prevention and the importance of safe sleeping arrangements. The local children's centre is two doors away, and parents positively engage in groups, especially on the domestic violence programme.

The organisation offers a wide range of specific groups to cater for young mothers, young fathers and pregnant teenagers. A small charitable clothing bank is available at head office. Parents can also receive children's clothing and practical equipment, for example cots and baby bouncers.

The centre has highly effective relationships with local authorities. There are extensive links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The responsible individual is also a member of the Children's Improvement Board in Lambeth. A placing authority describes the centre's 'excellent' communication. Another highlights the organisation as being their preferred provider when seeking a residential assessment. They commented how the centre 'persevered to keep the placement going where possible, but remained child-focused'.

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 for the inspection of residential family centres.