

Ansacare Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number SC406245
Inspection date 26/09/2016
Inspector Ms Juanita Mayers
Type of inspection Full
Provision subtype

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Date of last inspection 26/02/2014

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Ansacare is based in the London Borough of Croydon. It is a privately owned, independent fostering agency providing services for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The service aims to provide safe and nurturing foster placements that meet the assessed needs of children. At the time of the inspection, there were 13 approved fostering households with 23 children and young people in placements. The agency aims to provide, short-term, long-term, permanent and emergency placements.

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: **Requires improvement**

This is an agency which operates from the heart, has a commitment and aims to provide good outcomes for young people. However, organisational failings and lack of cohesive systems contribute to the requires improvement judgement. There is insufficient staffing and a lack of knowledge and expertise in the leadership and management team. This has led to inefficient governance of the organisation.

The agency has appointed four managers in recent years and, prior to the appointment of the current interim manager, it experienced a 10-month period with no one in post. This has led to instability in the organisation and inconsistencies in the development of the service. Not all recommendations from the last inspection have been met and the agency has not demonstrated sustained improvement.

Safeguarding procedures are not robust. Risk assessments and safer care plans do not fully identify risks and how carers will be supported to manage these. Proactive and prompt action is not taken in regard to safeguarding young people, including those who have a history of child sexual exploitation and missing episodes. The matching criteria are unclear and do not adequately identify how decisions are made to place young people with carers who can meet their diverse needs. The agency does not always take account of foster carers' experience and training needs prior to placing young people, and this threatens the stability of placements and the safety of young people.

Recruitment of staff is not rigorous and systems do not evidence good practice. The current interim manager and the sole supervising social worker both have no previous experience of working in a social work or fostering capacity with children and young people.

Learning and development programmes for foster carers and social workers are not in place. As a result, the agency cannot identify how they will equip staff and foster carers with the skills to work with a diverse range of needs.

The systems for reviewing the quality of care do not include consultations with children, parents and placing authorities. They also fail to provide the registered person with the quality of information needed to improve the service

The agency lacks recording systems for monitoring the educational achievements, progress and school attendance of young people.

Despite the areas of improvement, the agency has strengths. A consistent group of experienced foster carers has maintained good parenting, stability and outcomes for young people. Social workers and commissioners are complimentary and positive about the work of these carers. A commissioner said, 'The placement does exactly what is asked of it, which is testament to the carers aided by the agency.' Generally, young people are progressing across all areas of development. They are in stable placements through having developed secure relationships with their foster carers. Consequently, the agency is able to demonstrate positive working relationships that benefit young people.

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 (NMS). The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that the fostering service provider produces a written guide to the service ('the children's guide') which includes a summary of the statement of purpose, the procedure ('the representations and complaints procedure') under 18 (1), the address, including email address and telephone number of the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 3 (3)(b)(i)(c))	30/12/2016
The fostering service provider must implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16 (2)(a))	30/12/2016
Ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purpose of the fostering service, having regard to the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a)(b))	30/12/2016
The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purpose of the fostering agency unless the person has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform. (Regulation 20 (3)(b))	30/12/2016

<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals and for improving the quality of care provided by the fostering agency. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(3))</p>	<p>30/12/2016</p>
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 take place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the person or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. This is with specific reference to informing the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 36 (1))</p>	<p>30/12/2016</p>

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- The service must implement a proportionate approach to risk. This particularly refers to ensuring that individual risk assessments take into account known and potential risks and implement strategies to prevent these to ensure that children’s welfare and safety are promoted and that children are protected from abuse, including child sexual exploitation. (NMS 4.5)
- Ensure that foster carers are trained in appropriate safer care skills. In particular, that safer care policies are devised which meet the specific needs of each individual child including care for children who have been abused. (NMS 4.6)
- Ensure that where a child is missing and there is concern for their welfare, the fostering service considers with the responsible authority and foster carer what action should be taken to prevent the child going missing in future. (NMS 5.9)
- Ensure that foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. (NMS 20.4)
- Ensure that foster carers’ personal developmental plans set out how they will be supported to undertake training and development that is appropriate to their

development needs and experience. (NMS.20.5)

- Ensure that supervisory meetings have a clear purpose to assess the carers' performance and develop their competencies and skills. (NMS 21.8)
- Ensure that suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person. (NMS 24.3)

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

Judgement outcome: good

Young people benefit from good levels of support in their placements. They form secure attachments to their foster families and are helped to develop positive relationships. One young person said of her foster carer, 'She loves and accepts me for who I am.' Young people are overwhelmingly happy in their placements, they refer to carers as 'aunty and uncle' and say that they are included as members of the family. Young people speak of attending family weddings, birthday celebrations and other occasions. A 'staying put' young person commented, 'If you had met me two years ago you would have seen a completely different girl. She has helped me to grow and become who I am today.'

Young people are making good progress in education. They are committed to achieving, with some exceeding educational expectations. A social worker said, 'When (name of young person) was placed with these carers he was out of education and had no interest in returning. The foster carers robustly advocated on his behalf, resulting in a return to education and he is now completing A levels and is on track to attend university. However, the agency does not have a system in place to monitor the educational achievements, progress and attendance of young people.'

Young people grow and gain in confidence due to the nurturing care they receive. Young people enjoy life and get the chance to develop their interests and engage in a range of activities. Those who may have experienced trauma have insightful care from foster carers who make a long-term commitment to prepare them well for their adult lives. A number of young people have remained with foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. Commissioners spoke of an agency which is always prepared to 'give a child a chance', irrespective of their history.

Young people do not routinely have information about the foster carers before arrival. Information on how decisions are made to place young people with foster carers is not in place. Many of the placements made by commissioners to the agency are on an emergency basis. All foster carers are from an Asian background. This means that the agency has a limited range of carers to meet the diverse need of young people. However all young people say that they are encouraged and supported to practise and celebrate their chosen faith and foster carers are supportive in helping young people to understand and develop pride in who they are and their heritage.

Many young people placed with the foster carers are unaccompanied minors. Once

living with carers, their health outcomes improve. Long-standing health problems are addressed, they receive inoculations promptly, dental health is monitored and healthy lifestyles are encouraged.

Where possible, young people enjoy meeting their parents, brothers, sisters and extended family members in accordance with placing authority directions and when it is safe for them to do so. This ensures that young people maintain a sense of their heritage and promotes positive identity.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: good

Foster carers are primarily recruited by word of mouth within the local community. Given these limitations it is often not possible to match the cultural and religious needs of young people with foster carers of similar backgrounds. There are no plans in place to recruit foster carers to meet the diverse and complex needs of young people.

Matching and placement processes do not prioritise either foster carers or young people. The registered person's system for placement matching and planning appears to stem more from the availability of carers and less from their expertise to meet the identified needs of the individual young person. As a result, young people with complex needs are placed with foster carers who have limited fostering experience where there are unclear arrangements and unidentified responsibilities. Consequently, young people are placed with carers where their assessed needs are not fully met and where they are vulnerable to exploitation.

The agency has poor provision for the supervision of placements. The supervising social worker, while qualified, is new to the service and has no previous experience of social work. Foster carers describe him as supportive. However, the quality of supervision and recording is poor and fails to identify the needs of young people or the developmental needs of the foster carers. Support is offered to him by the interim manager who, while holding a social work qualification, is also new to the agency and has no fostering experience. The registered person is known to all the carers and is seen by them as a source of valuable support. However, the lack of social work and fostering expertise in the agency means that the support offered to young people and foster carers is ineffective, with the progress of young people poorly monitored. A lack of safeguarding skills and knowledge leaves vulnerable young people at risk due to trends and patterns in behaviour not being recognised or monitored.

Overall, the initial preparation, training and assessment of foster carers is thorough. Assessments are evidence-based and contain clear social work analysis about the likelihood of the applicants being able to undertake the fostering task. Prospective and approved foster carers are positive about the process and say, 'The process was good and the report reflected us and what we said.'

A strength of the agency is the fostering panel. The panel is well organised and quorate, and has a diverse and experienced membership. The panel chair is an experienced fostering individual. The chair and the panel undertake appraisal and contribute their views for the development of the agency. There is good practice and the panel provides effective scrutiny of the cases presented to it. It challenges the agency where necessary. For example, it recently deferred the annual approval of a foster carer due to poor performance in taking up training. This provides suitable checks on the quality of the agency's development and practice. Panel minutes are thorough and provide the independent agency decision-maker with clear recommendations based on the panel discussions. This means that the decision-maker has a full understanding of panel reasoning when making his decision.

The agency provides foster carers with appropriate training. This is provided in-house or is accessed from external providers. Training covers a range of topics, including safer care, skills to foster and safeguarding. However, there are no systems in place to identify current training needs of foster carers and future learning and development. Individualised training based on the needs of carers and young people is not in place. For example, relevant training has not been provided for carers who are currently caring for young people at risk of child sexual exploitation and those who are persistently missing. All relevant foster carers have completed the training and development standards.

Systems are not in place to show how many young people have up-to-date local authority care plans or a record of the most recent child in care review on which to base the fostering tasks. For some young people with complex and safeguarding needs, the agency has not effectively challenged the placing authority to ensure that plans are in place. Foster carers said that the agency gives them enough information to meet the day-to-day needs of the young person. However, they are often unaware of the long-term plans for young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: requires improvement

The recruitment of staff and panel members is thorough and complies with statutory regulations. However, the agency cannot evidence its interview and decision-making process and continues to recruit staff who do not have the expertise for the role in which they are employed.

Young people confirm that they feel safe in their placement. The agency has in place risk assessments for each young person. However, the quality of these assessments is poor and they do not contain good enough information on known and potential risks. Safer care policies are generic to the agency and are not individualised to ensure that foster carers implement protective strategies to keep young people safe and curb risky behaviour. This is particularly concerning where inexperienced carers are caring for vulnerable young people where the assessment process does not have a clear focus on safeguarding.

Where young people go missing carers keep in touch and visit known friends, ensuring that lines of communication remain open. When young people return, they are welcomed back and carers give a clear message that they are concerned for the safety of the young people. However, the agency is not working collaboratively with placing authorities and the police to instigate meetings and to share information. As a result, young people continue to place themselves at risk and important safeguarding messages are missed. The agency does not have a safeguarding lead.

The children's guide is not child friendly and is out of date. The guide fails to include information on how to make a complaint, or information on how to contact outside agencies, including Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner. The guide is available in differing versions. However, these are predominantly Asian languages. As a result, clear and accessible systems are not available to young people and this does not represent robust and safe practice. Safeguarding policies and procedures are adequate and comply with regulations. However, the agency is not fully aware of how to manage safeguarding incidents in line with regulations. An example of this is the failure to inform the regulator of a recent serious safeguarding incident.

Monitoring of foster placements and foster carers' supervision and reviews are not robust and fail to monitor the young people's safety and well-being appropriately. Reviews do not always fully capture and consider full information on events over the past year. In many cases, input from the placing authority on the placement is missing

and how the views of young people were sought is unclear. Therefore, key information is not taken into account.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: requires improvement

The leadership and management of the service lacks effectiveness and efficiency. The progress of service development and improvement since the last inspection has not been robust in ensuring a good quality service. The agency has had a number of changes in managers and key staff over the past few years and this has affected its development. The current manager is qualified in social care, but lacks experience in working for or managing a fostering service. The supervising social worker, while qualified, has no social work experience. Therefore, management oversight and support to placements is weak and key functions of the fostering service are not robust in ensuring a quality service. For example, the agency systems for monitoring placements and the care needed to meet young people's needs are unclear. They are unable to evidence how they track young people's progress and how they identify additional input when necessary. This means that vulnerable young people do not consistently receive adequate resources to ensure that they are safely cared for. The agency has recently employed an administrator. This is improving the effectiveness of the agency's administrative systems.

Quality assurance reviews of the agency do not sufficiently address the quality of the service and the actions needed to improve. The agency has a development plan in place. However, it fails to identify a cohesive action plan on the direction of the agency and plans for its improvement.

The agency is inadequately staffed and cannot meet the needs of young people or support foster carers in a safe way. When the manager is away, appropriate arrangements are not in place to support carers and young people. Resources are not in place to develop and grow a fostering agency. Insufficient relevant experience and knowledge among managers at all levels has a negative impact on the agency's governance and its ability to develop and deliver good services.

Supervisory arrangements are in place for the manager. However they do not provide insight into the development of the role or of the agency. This is particularly concerning as the manager has no experience of managing a fostering service or the supervision of social workers. Supervision of social workers lacks insight into performance and shows little understanding of staff practice or performance. Personal developmental and

training profiles are not in place.

The manager demonstrates a desire to further develop and improve service provision. However, due to lack of expertise she is overly reliant on consultants to pave the way forward in both learning and development for the agency, and to secure improvements.

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.