

West Sussex County Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Unique reference number | SC041960 |
| Inspection date | 27/11/2012 |
| Inspector | Diane Thackrah / David Coulter |
| Type of inspection | Full |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Setting address | West Sussex County Council, Director of Social Services, County Hall, Tower Street, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1QT |
| Telephone number | 01243 777100 |
| Email | ian.forbes@westsussex.gov.uk |
| Registered person | West Sussex County Council |
| Registered manager | Ian Paul Forbes |
| Responsible individual | Stuart Gallimore |
| Date of last inspection | 04/08/2008 |

© Crown copyright 2012

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

West Sussex County Council fostering service is a local authority service which provides a range of placements for children and young people including emergency, respite, short term, long term, permanent, short breaks and parent and child placements.

The service has 573 approved foster carers in 329 households offering 487 placements, including 122 that are short-break placements.

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

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

Outcomes for individual young people are good and demonstrate individualised care and support are provided that address needs exceptionally well. This is reflected in increased placement stability. Young people are placed without avoidable delays and make good progress from their starting points. Young people are integral to decision making and their views make a difference to the service. Diversity and equality are promoted effectively in all aspects of the service. Carers feel valued and well supported and have a good understanding of young people's needs. They are carefully selected and are well prepared and trained. As a result, young people make good progress from the start of their placements. The service is effectively managed and staff are motivated and professional. There are strong quality assurance measures in place and there is a focus on development and improvement. This means that young people benefit from good care which enables them to make progress in all areas of their lives.

Ninety three per cent of care leavers were living in suitable accommodation by the end of 2011 compared to 90 per cent nationally. This demonstrates that the service is performing well in promoting the welfare of children and young people.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Young people are happy in their placements and are supported to move forward with confidence. A social worker said, 'We want the best for our children.' There is a focus on helping young people to develop resilience and become emotionally mature. Young people make significant progress in all aspects of their lives. An independent reviewing officer said, 'Carers help young people build emotional resilience and cope with past rejections.' A carer said that the support provided to a young person, 'had a huge impact on his self-esteem.'

There are low numbers of placement break-downs; placement stability is supported by strong and appropriate matching. The stability of placements is also promoted through incentives to provide continuity in care beyond the age of 16.

Young people are consulted with and contribute significantly to the development of the service. There is an active children in care council. Young people involved have recently helped in the development of a new guide to foster care. As a result young people feel their views are valued.

Young people achieve in their education. Carers say that the support provided means that schools view young people more positively. Young people have good attendance at school and are making good progress. Exam results indicate significant progress in attainment in recent years. There is a virtual school and this has a positive impact on young people's learning.

Young people are actively involved in activities in the community. A carer said a young person, 'Would not participate in any activity at the beginning of the placement, but by the end was enjoying swimming, kayaking and took part in a school trip to France.'

The health needs of young people are identified and systems are in place to ensure they are met. There is strong partnership working with looked after children's nurses. Their membership on the fostering panel ensures that health issues are given a high priority. This means that young people understand the importance of good health and know how to keep healthy.

There is an effective short-break service which supports young people to acquire new skills and develop confidence. Young people are well prepared for moving on. There is a strong focus on preparation for independence through carer training and clear written independence plans. As a result, young people feel confident about their futures.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **outstanding**.

The service has developed a holistic approach to the delivery of care which

acknowledges the important contributions from young people, carers and professionals. Foster carers who can meet the needs of young people are recruited. There is a clear focus on recruiting carers who are capable of growing and developing new skills. Consideration is given to the whole fostering family and the context in which care will be offered. As a result, young people are placed with families who can meet their needs exceptionally well.

The assessment and training of carers is thorough and has an emphasis on safeguarding. It includes inputs from a range of professionals who provide an insight into the complex needs of young people. There is an effective panel system that promotes high quality and rigorous assessments. Effective mechanisms exist for the panel and decision maker to discuss issues and differences. This means that young people benefit from high quality care.

The service has developed specific responses to the needs of young people. Needs are addressed within a continuum that provides both flexibility and diversity. The service has a number of specialist programmes that support placement stability dependent on individual needs. For example, the Leapfrog programme provides intensive 24-hour support to carers and this results in many young people achieving permanence through adoption or long-term fostering. The Keep project has supported permanence for young people placed in kinship care. Young people have placement plans that are subject to regular review and are updated in response to changing circumstances. This ensures that needs are well addressed.

Foster carers feel exceptionally well supported. They say they have excellent working relationships with fostering service staff. There are regular supervision sessions which focus on ensuring that placements are promoting the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of young people. A social worker said, 'There is an emphasis to work alongside carers.' A carer said, 'We have a very good working relationship with West Sussex. It really makes me feel listened to.' Another said, 'They really value us.'

There is a culture of training and development and the achievements of carers are acknowledged and celebrated. Foster carers are provided with a range of training to meet the specific needs of the young people in their care. They have completed their Children's Workforce Development Council's induction. The views of foster carers are regularly sought and they contribute to decisions relating to the young people in their care.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Staff and foster carers are clearly aware of the vulnerabilities of the young people with whom they are working and have developed a range of safe working practices. There are robust systems in place to assess and recruit foster carers. This reduces the likelihood of unsuitable individuals gaining access to vulnerable young people. Risk assessments are used effectively in relation to young people's behaviour and

their environment. These help to keep them safe. Foster carer's homes are subject to regular health and safety checks which ensure environments are safe. The needs of household members are always considered prior to the placement of a new young person and these are kept under review. Family placement support workers provide regular support and supervision to carers which can be accessed at all hours. As a result, the safety of young people is enhanced.

All carers receive safeguarding training that is regularly updated. This means that child protection issues are safely handled. Carers are successful in breaking patterns of absconding and anti-social behaviour. Clear protocols are in place to promote this. Young people do not report bullying as a problem and are confident that their carers will support them. Appropriate support is provided and independent advice is available to young people. Accidents are prevented and monitored. As a result of all of these measures, young people feel safe and are safe.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the local authority fostering agency are **outstanding**.

There are excellent arrangements in place for managers to monitor the delivery of the service. The results are used to drive improvements and promote positive outcomes for young people. For example, data is collated in a range of areas such as placement breakdowns, unannounced visits and annual reviews. This information is then used to inform and target practice. Fostering assessment times are monitored with an aim to ensure that young people are matched and placed in a timely way in the right placement. The service has robust support systems such as the out-of-hours helpline which supports carers who are in difficulty. Complaints and concerns are acknowledged, investigated and responded to within appropriate timescales. This promotes positive relationships with stakeholders. There is an effective independent reviewing process that ensures that the experiences of young people are aired and addressed at reviews.

The service operates with a team of experienced and motivated staff who feel they can contribute to the development of the service. Staff feel exceptionally well supported. They receive regular formal supervision and say there is lots of informal support. One social worker said, 'The manager is very positive and supportive.' Another said, 'There is a lot of interworking. I feel very supported and really enjoy my role.' Staff say that managers are very accessible. There is a real focus on training and development. A social worker said, 'We have a wealth of resources to deal with difficulties and to develop the service.' There is a strong integrated management structure and co-ordination and communication between different teams are effective.

There is an extremely effective quality assurance system that permeates all aspects of the service and contributes to continuing improvement. There has been a positive response to the shortfalls identified at the last inspection of the service. This means that social workers liaise more effectively and regularly to share information relating

to young people's progress. There is also better support for young people who are preparing to move on and better training for carers in health and safety practices. The service strives to improve and seeks out developments and best practice from a range of sources. New initiatives are informed by research and the experiences of others.

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 and the evaluation schedule for local authority fostering agencies.