

Safehouses

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC036888
Inspection date	02/12/2013
Inspector	Diane Thackrah
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

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Date of last inspection	25/11/2010

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Safehouses is an independent fostering agency that is privately owned. The agency has 40 current fostering households with 44 young people placed. The types of placements offered include task-centred, long term, parent/child, respite, sibling groups, asylum seekers and children with special needs. A total of three new foster carers applications were approved in the last year.

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: **outstanding**.

This is an outstanding fostering agency. A real strength of this agency is the high level of support offered to foster carers. This results in young people benefiting from high quality care which supports them to make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives. The robust package of support offered to foster carers includes high levels of contact with the agency and tailor-made training. This results in young people living in families that they feel part of and in which they thrive.

There is a vigorous approach to matching which results in high levels of placement stability. Many young people benefit from permanence. A commissioner said, 'There is higher placement stability, much higher than most providers. This is down to very careful matching.' A foster carer said, 'Safehouses work really hard to place the right child with the right carers.'

Safeguarding is at the centre of all the agency does. This results in young people feeling safe and secure and able to form strong attachments to their fostering families. Instances of young people going missing are considerably lower than national averages.

There is excellent leadership and management which is insightful and focuses on development and improvement. The views of young people and foster carers are valued and used effectively to drive improvement. There is a highly motivated staff team who are effective in ensuring that the lives of young people are improved.

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

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Young people make outstanding progress and benefit from stable and appropriate placements where permanence is achieved. They enjoy trusting relationships and form attachments to their foster families. They feel valued and welcomed into fostering households and this helps them to feel integral to family life. A young person said, 'They always take us on holiday and do things that we all like to do together.' A stakeholder said, 'I have seen very positive outcomes for a particular young person placed through this agency.' Another said of a young person, 'She has flourished and now feels secure.'

There are strong arrangements in place for introductions between young people and foster carers. Individual profiles and welcome books for each fostering household are given to young people before their placements along with information on DVDs. Introductions are made over a period of time, dependent on young people's individual needs and circumstances. A young person said, 'Before I moved in with my foster carers I had a meeting where I was able to ask them any questions and they had an opportunity to ask me any questions.' These measures are highly effective in helping young people understand how they will be looked after and this helps them settle.

Young people have a wide range of opportunities and support which helps them to develop a positive identity and mature successfully. They are supported to understand their pasts and maintain positive contact with their family members where this is appropriate. Young people make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives. They make excellent progress in education from their starting points and enjoy good quality education. Extra support and tuition in school is provided when needed and this supports their progress in learning. One young person has progressed from below national expectations to just above these expectations in the year since being placed with carers. Many young people go on to higher education and university. Younger children are quick to catch up with their developmental milestones after being placed with foster carers.

Young people lead healthy lifestyles and their health and well-being improves. Psychological and therapeutic help and joint working with the child and adult mental

health service ensures that young people's emotional health needs are well addressed. Young people who have disabilities receive the care they need and as a result thrive.

Excellent progress is made in helping young people to take responsibility for their behaviour. Risk taking amongst young people is low and reduces significantly from the point of moving into foster carers' homes. Young people's views, wishes and feelings are valued and the agency is proactive in ensuring that these views are heard. As a result, young people feel heard and valued. One young person said, 'I chair my own reviews.'

High importance is given to preparing young people for adulthood. This includes embracing the 'staying put' agenda. This means that young people move on from their placements when they are ready, and do so with the skills and confidence to lead successful lives in adulthood.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The central focus of this agency is the welfare and safety of young people. This results in sustained improvement in the lives of young people. The preparation and assessment of foster carers focuses on the needs of young people. It ensures that foster carers have an in-depth understanding of the young people placed with them.

There is high quality and regular support to carers that promotes the welfare and safety of young people. Foster carers work effectively with the agency and with young people's social workers. Support focuses on the needs of young people and helps ensure that foster carers have a strong understanding of these needs. A foster carer said, 'Our supervising social worker is fantastic and has helped us deal with many situations. She explains the children's behaviour in a way that helps us to understand much more and be able to deal better with situations ourselves.'

Foster carers ensure that young people feel part of their families. They have a strong understanding of the importance of young people's own families and help young people to maintain positive relationships with significant people in their lives. Respite is used as a way of promoting placement stability and does not exclude young people from families. A foster carer said of a young person, 'We would never use respite, he is part of the family.'

Foster carers receive exceptionally high quality training which provides them with the skills and confidence to improve the lives of young people. Most carers attend a training session on a monthly basis and say that they always learn something new. A foster carer said, 'We have fantastic training days and learn so much each time; we look forward to them.'

There is an effective fostering panel that promotes safe and stable placements. The skills and knowledge of panel members ensures that panel provides a rigorous

quality assurance function. Attention is paid to the training and developmental needs of panel members and this ensures that high quality decisions are made based on up-to-date research and good practice. There are excellent arrangements for matching which result in placement stability for young people. Decisions about matching are always made in the best interests of young people. This supports young people, they thrive. There are high quality relationships with young people's social workers and independent reviewing officers. This ensures that care plans are reviewed as required and changing needs are well met.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding is at the centre of all practice within the agency. Young people feel safe and benefit from safe care that promotes their welfare. Robust child protection policies and procedures are in place and this means that staff and foster carers respond to safeguarding concerns effectively. They understand the impact neglect and abuse has on children and young people. As a result, young people are protected from harm.

There are effective risk assessments undertaken that help to support young people to make age appropriate risks. Young people feel listened to and are confident about making complaints. The agency is proactive in ensuring that young people have a voice, for example, they meet with agency staff regularly and have access to advocacy groups such as 'Voice of the Child'.

Effective care plans ensure that foster carers are clear about what action is required to protect young people. There are low levels of young people going missing. Good systems for monitoring going missing levels ensure that the right action is taken to protect young people when needed. Effective working with the police supports young people's safety when they are missing.

There is vigorous recruitment, assessment, preparation, supervision and training of foster carers. These focus on safety and protect young people's well-being. This work ensures that foster carers are fully aware of how to protect and support young people. The arrangements for staff recruitment help to prevent the wrong people from working with the agency. Thorough checking of past histories through references and police checks help to protect young people from harm.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The leadership and management of this agency are effective and this ensures that there is clear vision and ambition for young people. The directors and management are highly driven and demonstrate a real commitment to improving outcomes for young people. The inspirational leadership motivates foster carers and staff members. This makes an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of

young people.

Professionals working with the agency describe highly positive working relationships. They value the agency's ability to be influential in improving the lives of young people in a consistent way. There are robust systems for monitoring and tracking the progress of individual young people. These contribute to young people's welfare being promoted and ensure that action is taken to support progress where it is not being made. A commissioner said the agency is, 'Very good at measuring outcomes for young people.' A continuous improvement action plan is in place and this ensures that improvements are made and action is taken if progress is not being made. For example, placement stability has been improved by the increased support given to carers in placement planning. A thorough annual review of the service is informed by the views of foster carers, young people and stakeholders. As a result, their views are embedded within the service and this means the service is delivered in the best interests of young people.

Young people are clear about the aims of the agency as high quality children's guides are provided in a variety of formats that suit various levels of ability and age. These include highly individualised information packs about fostering households that young people receive before they move into their new homes. Any concerns that young people have are dealt with effectively, are welcomed and used to make improvements to young people's care.

The agency is run by well qualified and experienced staff and panel members. Staff feel exceptionally well supported. Learning and development is valued within the agency and used to improve the service offered to young people. Training is of good quality, for example, one staff member is currently undertaking a qualification in social work. A member of staff said, 'We have a very comprehensive staff induction pack as well as guidance from our line manager.' Staff are extremely well motivated and effective in supporting foster carers. As a result, foster carers have the right skills and competencies to fulfil their responsibilities to local authorities. A staff member said, 'I like the ethos here, there is core belief in quality of relationships. It's not about profit.'

Administrative records and case files are maintained to a high standard and are very well organised. Appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering service and the individual foster carers and young people.

Effective action is taken in relation to recommendations set from previous inspections. As a result, foster carers are better prepared to promote the safety of young people who use technology.

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, 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.