

Orchard House Family Assessment Centre

Inspection report for residential family centre

Unique reference number	SC066535
Inspection date	29/06/2015
Inspectors	Jennifer Reed/Tina Maddison
Type of inspection	Full
Setting address	ORCHARD HOUSE, FONS GEORGE, TAUNTON, SOMERSET, TA1 3JS
Telephone number	0845 021 2700
Email	info@orchardhousefac.co.uk
Registered person	Orchard House Family Assessment Centre Limited
Registered manager	Ms Nancy Sullivan
Responsible individual	Dr.Freda Gardner
Date of last inspection	12/10/2010

© Crown copyright <CopyrightYear>

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

Orchard House is a residential family centre for up to six families, who are referred for assessment to the centre by the Courts or Local Authority Children's Services. The centre enables children to live safely with their family while care from their parent(s) or carers is assessed. This is with a view to developing parenting skills and a better understanding of the child's needs. The centre provides evidence based assessments which will enable informed decisions to be made about whether or not it would be in the child's best interests to remain in the permanent care of their parent(s) or carers. The centre's multi-disciplinary team liaise and work with local agencies and services to provide support to meet the identified needs of families. Staff work to empower families who require support in order to enable their child/children to remain in their care. The residential family centre's location provides residents with easy access to the town's facilities.

The inspection judgements

Outstanding

Good

Requires improvement

Inadequate

The overall experiences of children and parents

The overall experiences of children and parents are good.

Clear communication between the centre's staff and parents and their children helps parents to fully grasp why and how they are being assessed. Staff help parents to understand professional workers and/or the Courts' concerns about their abilities to safely parent their children, and help them to realise the importance of their full involvement in their assessment. Parents are clear that the focus of their assessment is an evaluation of their parenting capacity and potential to respond to their children's needs and keep them safe. Parents understand that staff will offer them advice and support to assist them in developing and increasing their parenting skills.

Wherever possible, the centre assures that planned admissions of parents and children take place. Prior to admission, parents receive clear information about the centre, presented in a format that they understand, giving them some idea about what to expect during their assessment. Parents have the opportunity to visit the centre before admission, to help them to decide if taking part in an assessment is what they wish to do. Once the assessment is completed, families are not kept at the centre any longer than is necessary. Placements are appropriately ended by the centre, ensuring that the focus of every placement is the completion of an accurate assessment. The welfare of parents and children is always promoted and safeguarded.

Families are empowered by staff listening to their views and collaboratively working with them. A Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) worker highlighted how the centre's skilled members of staff show a compassionate understanding of the difficulties experienced by parents and children. They noted that, 'staff make families feel valued and liked'. Generally, very positive relationships based on openness and trust exist between parents and staff, facilitating the assessment process. Parents said, 'staff are nice and friendly' and, 'staff do their best to help me'.

Families receive sensitively delivered care and advice that take into account individual need and diversity. They appreciate that staff understand the challenges they face each day, living in an environment where close supervision with closed-circuit television (CCTV) is in operation. The individualised assessment of each family gives parents every chance to succeed, rather than be set up to fail, with the paramount consideration being the safety of children. A solicitor wrote to the centre, praising the team's approach to assessment. They said, 'I am expressing my appreciation for the work done by you and your colleagues to offer the child and their parents the best appropriate opportunities for assessment. The assistance of therapy is key to the service'.

Parents say they feel safe during their assessment. However, three shortfalls in staff practice identified by leaders and managers of the centre since the previous inspection in October 2010 have resulted in a poor experience for one parent and two children.

Parents and children live within a caring, nurturing and educative environment. Parents attend structured workshop sessions that increase their knowledge of child development, childcare and keeping safe issues, helping them to develop their abilities. Parents are also able to learn practical skills, for example, budgeting, healthy eating and cooking. The multi-disciplinary assessment includes the identification of parent's personal issues and needs. Where appropriate, parents have ready access to specialist support to help promote their emotional well-being and their self-esteem. One parent said, 'I have learnt a lot and I know stuff I didn't so I am grateful'; another said, 'being here has helped me be the best dad I can be'.

The development of the 'family focus' approach to assessment assists parents in being able to have a real say in setting and reviewing their own targets to demonstrate the positive changes they may make in the parenting of their children. Weekly meetings provide parents with the opportunity to reflect on any new skills they have learned and to evaluate how well they are able to sustain any improvements they may have made. This collaborative approach to assessment ensures there are 'no surprises' for families when they read their assessment report and its recommendations for their children's futures. Parents develop a clear understanding of their own capacity to improve and change and know how their behaviour affects their children.

Parents and children live in a comfortable and well maintained setting that provides them with a home base during their assessment. Workshops, meetings and professional visits take place at another of the organisation's buildings, located a short walk from the centre. This recent development improves the quality of daily life

for families, who appreciate having a space they can call 'home' and the additional privacy these arrangements offer them. The centre is well placed within the town centre, enabling parents and children to easily walk to local shops, parks and leisure facilities.

Parents use the anonymous suggestion box and know how to make a complaint to raise any concerns they may have about the operation of the centre and the assessment process. Parental views are valued, empowering parents to speak up and participate, while helping them to take responsibility and become more assertive in their own and their children's lives. Their opinions contribute to the development of the centre to bring about improvement in resources and practice. One former parent is being involved in the recruitment of new staff.

Areas for 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, Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
16	The registered person shall not employ a person to work at the residential family centre until full and satisfactory information is available to them in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2 (Regulation 16(3)(d))	31/07/2015

Recommendations

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

The registered person provides staff with regular supervision; in particular, progress the plans in place to ensure the frequency of supervision meets the timescales stated in the service's policy (NMS 17.4)

The registered person has an effective system in place to notify the appropriate authorities within 24 hours of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with Regulation 26. The system includes what to do when a notifiable event arises at weekends. (NMS 21.2)

Quality of assessment

The quality of assessment is outstanding.

The quality of assessments and reports is consistently and exceptionally high. Leaders and managers strive for continual improvement in the assessment process and recent changes in practice evidence improvements in the quality of assessment processes. The assessment team's structured and reflective case management, leads to the provision of tailor-made assessments that strongly capture the needs and abilities of parents and children and identifies the appropriate level of support parents require to effectively care for their children.

A particular strength of the centre is its good adaptability in using rigorous assessment processes and robust reports within shorter timescales in response to the recent legislative requirements of local authorities and the Courts. Assessments are focused and take account of the requirements made by local authorities and/or the Court's directions within their Letters of Instruction. Assessments respond to the concerns and questions raised, resulting in the provision of strong evidence and robust evaluation that support informed decision-making. A social worker commented, 'Orchard House, through their residential assessment and psychological reports, provided crucial, fair and comprehensive work, reports and evidence which was pivotal to the Judge's decision'. Furthermore, a Judge commended the abilities of the responsible individual and the clarity of the evidence they provided to the Court.

The centre provides comprehensive evidence-based assessments, undertaken by a skilled, multi-disciplinary assessment team. Assessments are competently completed using established theoretical models that staff fully understand and are trained and experienced in working with. For example: the Department of Health's 'Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000)'; and elements of 'Signs of Safety' (UK 2012) and the 'Parenting Assessment Manual (PAMS)'. Assessments are carried out in accordance with assessment guidance as outlined within 'Working Together to safeguard children (2015)'.

The family agreement and family placement plan is one document. It is extremely well written and is easily understood by parents. It clearly outlines how the centre will assess parenting skills and capacity for change, and how CCTV will be used in the assessment process. All professionals working with the family are engaged in effectively contributing to the assessment framework, to provide a thorough, collaborative process that assists effective decision-making for children. One placing authority social worker said, 'there was a good outcome for the child placed at the centre which followed good working together between our department and the assessment centre'.

Assessment processes, led by qualified social workers, provide a high level of objectivity, analysis and accuracy and show an excellent understanding of each individual's case history. The multi-disciplinary assessment team's range of training and expertise enables the centre to provide additional specialist assessments, as

required. For example, practitioners undertake cognitive assessments, capacity assessments and psychological assessments of adults and children.

Thresholds for risk and change, and how change in parenting capacity is measured, are well considered aspects of the assessment. This clarity enriches the assessment process and parents are kept well informed about areas of parenting that they need to improve. Staff make sound decisions about the on-going, appropriate level of support or surveillance required by parents to safely look after their children.

Information gathered from staff observations and interactions with parents and children is recorded systematically. It is a transparent and collaborative process with information checked and discussed with parents and children as appropriate, keeping them up to date with their progress or any emerging concerns. Differences in staff and parental views are recorded and noted within reports. Parents feel able to challenge the effectiveness of the assessment process at the regular weekly review meetings where plans are updated in accordance with changing circumstances, or the rate of progress.

The quality of assessment reports is excellent. They are clear and concise; include a chronology and robust evidence about parental capacity, while telling the story of children's experiences and the impact of their parent(s) behaviour on their well-being. Reports include clear recommendations from the centre for children's futures, based on their best interests and strong evidence. Parents know the content of their assessment reports and understand how recommendations have been reached by the assessment team. Placing authorities commend the quality of the assessment reports provided. A social worker summed this up by saying, 'the centre's reports were really comprehensive and clear and I found them invaluable'.

How well children and parents are protected and helped

The service is good at how well children and parents are protected and helped.

Parents say they feel safe living at the centre. They know how to raise any concerns that they may have and they make suggestions that influence positive change.

Robust family agreements and care plans and the collaborative risk assessments drawn up by professionals for each assessment, protect parents and children. Plans clearly identify the impact of risk and parenting capacity, and identify what support the centre will provide to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from harm. Parents are fully included in the planning and reviewing of their assessments.

On admission, parents and children receive structured close supervision to ensure their level of risk while living at the centre is accurately evaluated. Possible and fluctuating risk is clearly defined throughout the assessment process and the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is always the centre's priority consideration. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding procedures. Strong management oversight and the centre's out of hours 'on call' system provide

staff with good support and advice that assists them in effectively dealing with and safely managing any arising concerns or risks to parents and children.

Staff work collaboratively with parents, encouraging and supporting them to take responsibility for their choices and actions. Staff challenge inappropriate and anti-social behaviour and support adults to form and sustain positive relationships with each other. When arguments and tensions arise between different families at the centre, staff work with parents to help them to manage their feelings and to find ways to resolve their differences. Staff understand the particular vulnerabilities of children and parents that are inherent living within a residential setting. The centre provides clear guidelines and expectations of behaviour that is known to both staff and parents, aimed to keep everyone safe.

Staff closely monitor the progress parents are making in developing their parenting skills. Direct work with parents helps them to safely care for their children. For example, workshops help parents to bond and develop secure attachments with their children.

The centre aims to provide a safe and nurturing environment for parents and children, with comprehensive support focused on promoting the well-being of children. This objective has been robustly met for most families. However, since the previous inspection four years ago, the Registered Manager and the responsible individual have identified three shortfalls in safeguarding practice; there has also been one complaint received regarding two of these issues. The Registered Manager and responsible individual have taken rigorous action to remedy these errors in practice and ensure parents and children are protected. Consequently, safeguarding policy and practice within the centre has been significantly improved following staff mistakes. The centre now provides sound safeguarding policies and practice in line with Local Safeguarding Children Board guidance.

Senior staff have attended Safer Recruitment training. Leaders and managers know how to inform the Disclosure and Barring Service if a member of staff is found unsuitable to safely work with parents and children.

Working with partners to improve outcomes

The service is outstanding at working with partners to improve outcomes.

Staff work effectively in partnership with other professionals and agencies. Strong, collaborative working relationships are established between the centre's staff and placing authority social workers, Cafcass workers, solicitors and local services. These positive links help to ensure parents and children receive effective support during their assessment and in planning for their future.

Local authority commissioners and the Local Authority Designated Officer report that the centre has worked speedily and effectively with them to bring about improvements in safeguarding practice within the service.

The centre works closely with the local medical centre and health visitors, to ensure parents and children receive the health services that they need. Proactive and positive working relationships with the local police ensure that potentially volatile or high risk situations are well managed at the centre, minimising any risk of harm.

The centre has, and is continuing to develop strong relationships within the local community and this enables families to access local resources and services. The centre innovatively utilises funding streams, and seeks partnerships with others. This demonstrates a commitment, beyond their remit, to providing an increased range of services designed to improve the parenting ability of vulnerable adults.

Other agencies and workers commend the professionalism of the centre's staff, its sound ethos and transparency. The setting is held in high regard for its focus on the best interests of parents and children, and achieving the best outcomes for them. Strong partnership working is summarised by feedback received at the centre from professionals which includes; 'Thank you all so much for your help and hard work with my family and the subsequent good result for the child'; and, 'Thank you for all your support and communication over the past 8 weeks of the assessment - it was really helpful for decision-making'.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement.

Leaders and managers identified two weaknesses in staff member's safeguarding practice. They immediately notified the placing authority and took effective internal action to remedy these omissions in practice to ensure that parents and children's well-being was promoted and secured. However, their decision to take this course of action did not follow Local Safeguarding Children Board procedural guidance. Moreover, leaders and managers incorrectly notified Ofsted about a shortfall in safeguarding practice, by noting it within the provider's monthly visit report to Ofsted. This matter required a prompt notification to Ofsted and also referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer, to ensure an external oversight of safeguarding.

Leaders and managers have not demonstrated sufficient robustness in recruitment and selection processes. They have learned from one incident evidencing a lack of good judgement, to never again accept a testimonial instead of a requested reference. The centre's recruitment and selection policies and procedures have been updated and improved to comply with Safer Recruitment guidance.

Leaders and managers show genuine remorse for these errors in judgement and they have taken immediate and satisfactory steps to rectify the unsatisfactory management decisions made.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have been instrumental in bringing about significant improvements in the operation of the centre, to reflect changes in legislation and practice, and in improving the quality of assessment processes and reports. Leaders and managers demonstrate an excellent understanding of the work of the centre, and the strengths and weaknesses of its operation. They have a clear vision and development plan in place which focuses on consolidating best practice and fulfilling the high aspirations they have for parents and children to succeed.

The responsible individual and the Registered Manager are both very knowledgeable about their respective areas of work and they are suitably qualified. Their combined wealth of experience underpins the focused and reflective development of the service. This has raised the quality of assessment and made a positive difference to the lives of parents and children

The manager was registered with Ofsted to manage this service in January 2014. Within this short time-span, they have ably demonstrated their competence and commitment to improvement. Leaders and managers undertake a comprehensive review of the service. The results from their internal monitoring processes and family and stakeholder feedback drive continuous improvement. The centre has satisfactorily met the two recommendations made at the previous inspection, relating to the effective recording of fire drills and the provision of a range of responses to foreseeable crises to keep parents and children safe.

Leaders and managers are very clear that they will only undertake assessments when it is in those parents and children's best interests and when it is assessed as safe to do so. Admission decisions take account of parents and children's needs, and the needs of families already in residence. The centre works closely with other agencies and professionals to support families when they leave.

Following a period of re-structuring and recruitment, the centre is now fully staffed and provides satisfactory levels of staffing and sufficient resources to support parents and children. Staff have access to a good range of relevant training which is regularly updated to reflect current best practice. The supervision arrangements provide staff with individual, reflective and practice supervision sessions. However, leaders and managers acknowledge that supervision is not always provided within the timescales outlined within the centre's policy. Plans are in place to remedy this shortfall. Staff also benefit from group supervision to support them in their assessment tasks.

The centre's documentation and records demonstrate a high standard of recording. The centre's Statement of Purpose contains clearly written information about the ethos and objectives of the service. It is regularly updated to reflect current information and is available to families, professionals and commissioners. The Resident's Guide provides a summary of the Statement of Purpose and parents find this version very readable. Assessment records are clearly written to provide parents and children with easily understood information about their stay at the centre.

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 the inspection of residential family centres.