

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC011972
Inspection date	21/08/2012
Inspector	Roy Bega
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	27/02/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

A private organisation owns and manages this home. The home offers residential placements for up to six children of either sex, who are between the ages of eight and 16 years. It specialises in providing therapeutic care for children who have experienced trauma in their lives and display a variety of behavioural problems.

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 **outstanding**.

The extent of work undertaken with young people provides an environment where they can rise to new challenges and reach their desired goals. This is not always easy but the persistence of the staff team and their strong relationships with young people helps ease young people's anxieties and maximises their possibilities.

Excellent support is provided for the meeting of health care and developmental needs. Education is valued and achievements are very well supported and celebrated. Young people are positively encouraged to make their views known about their care plans and their experience of life in the home. Young people benefit from support structured to make contact between young people and their families an enjoyable and meaningful experience.

The home has an experienced and stable staff team which is very well managed, trained and supported so that they are able to provide very consistent care for young people. Excellent systems are in place to monitor the quality of care in the home and the staff are always keen to examine and improve practice.

The arrangements for promoting positive behaviour are extremely effective. Young people are clear about these arrangements and are fully committed to them. While sometimes behaviours are not in line with expectations young people are aware and understand the consequences of this. However, records of sanctions for unacceptable behaviour need to be clear to avoid possible misunderstandings.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all staff understand and clearly record sanctions for young people's unacceptable behaviour. (NMS 3.8)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people benefit from and enjoy highly individualised care that enables each to develop at their own pace. The relationships between young people and the staff team are excellent and provide young people with a secure platform on which to build the skills they need in day-to-day life, providing a framework for their future.

Young people's physical and mental health is effectively promoted through attendance at health care appointments. Meal times are social occasions, providing young people with opportunities to discuss wide-ranging issues, from the news headlines to household duties.

Young people enjoy food that is freshly prepared, nutritious and meets a range of dietary requirements. They also have opportunities to participate in menu planning, shopping and preparation. During lunch time, the kitchen was buzzing with young people preparing their meals. Wanting to ensure that the inspector was being looked after, one concerned young person stated, 'the inspector is sitting at the table on their own, isn't anyone looking after him, bless him'? They then promptly ensured that he was.

Young people's educational achievement and attendance is exceptional, taking into account their attainment level at the commencement of their placement. They appreciate the support and guidance given by staff who are proud of them and care about their futures. Key workers talk to them about the importance of school, going to college and being able to get a job. They feel good about themselves as they are consistently congratulated and rewarded for their efforts and achievements. One young person is eagerly waiting for the results of the seven GCSE exams. A social worker commented 'the staff have high aspirations for young people and encourage them to have these for themselves'. Achievements are recognised and celebrated enthusiastically.

Young people make decisions about their placement plans, reviews and running of the home. They feel confident to say what they think and they can read what is said about them. Staff support them to become involved in monthly house meetings and weekly key-worker sessions. A lot of discussion also takes place during social occasions, such as meal times. They enjoy discussing a wide range of issues,

including food, personal activities in the local community, holidays, sanctions/house rules and the decoration of the home. Young people commented, 'we have community meetings to talk about food, activities, what goes on in the home, what we've done in the week and rules and stuff ', 'I am able to talk to any staff at any time about things that happen in the home', 'we are asked about the decoration of the home'.

Where appropriate, young people freely make contact with family members and friends. They are also aware of the reasons when it is necessary to agree planned and supervised contact with their families. These include visits to the home, telephone contact and planned overnight stays with parents. Exceptional staff commitment in providing emotional and practical support enables young people to maintain and re-establish relationships with their families in planning a possible return home. A placing authority social worker explained that: 'staff willingly facilitate supervised contacts, have a clear understanding of their role at this time and always report on how a contact session has gone'.

Young people develop age-appropriate self-care and practical independent living skills, achieved by the excellent support, the clear routines and expectations that are in place. Where moving on takes place in a planned way, young people achieve very successful transitions to independence. They build on the social networks they have been supported to establish while at the home and they maintain their education. Even when young people choose to leave in an unplanned way, they keep in contact with the home and use the staff's support to move forward.

Quality of care

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

Young people are cared for in line with their detailed and comprehensive placement plans. Individual needs are identified and well understood by staff. Young people have a clear understanding regarding the aims of their placement and what they need to achieve those aims. Comments from young people include, 'I can read what is said about me at any time', 'I go through written stuff with my key worker' and 'I go to reviews and have a say about what happens to me and I have it put on my care plan.' A placing authority social worker commented 'when I see my young person, they say to me that they are happy and that the staff respond to them well'.

Young people benefit from outstanding supportive relationships with staff that are based on mutual respect. Interaction is generally informal, good humoured with appropriate boundaries being maintained. Young people describe staff as being, 'cool' and 'brilliant' and express confidence in being able to talk through problems with them.

There are well-established forums, including regular residents' meetings and key-working sessions. Young people use these to express their views on aspects of how the home is organised and run. They confirm that this helps them learn to negotiate and develop confidence in expressing themselves. They also say that they are

listened to and their views valued in effecting changes on matters that are important to them. Comments from young people include, 'we can't always get what we ask for, sometimes we have to wait or help save up for it' and 'my key worker tells me when my review is and helps me go over what it is about and how important it is to be there.' Placement plans show evidence of the young people's input with comments and signatures added. A placing authority social worker commented 'I am extremely happy with the service provided for the young people. The staff are always professional and they put the young people first.'

Young people know how to report any concerns, but rarely make use of the formal complaints process. They have confidence in taking issues directly to staff and feel listened to. Staff are supportive and proactive in helping young people raise issues with agencies and organisations outside of the home. Comments received include, 'when I have a moan, staff deal with it quickly' and 'I know I can't always have what I want, but I have to have a go. When I do, staff are always fair and explain things.'

Management and staff are vibrant in promoting young people's physical and emotional well-being and welfare. Young people are encouraged to routinely attend appointments with their doctors, dentist and opticians. They also benefit from having access to a range of specialist services providing medical and psychological support. Staff have excellent knowledge of the home's robust procedures for the storage, administration and recording of medication.

Education is positively promoted and young people are rewarded for regular attendance and commitment. Care staff work closely with schools to ensure that they are conversant regarding the educational abilities and goals of each young person. Staff are proactive in advocating educational opportunities for young people. Young people confirm staff talk with them about their aspirations and academic strengths and liaise with teaching staff to improve their life chances. Examples of comments made include, 'staff help me with my education' and 'I meet weekly with my key worker to discuss what I think is or is not happening.' Relevant work experience opportunities are actively sought by both care and education staff to ensure young people have the best opportunities for entering the world of employment.

Young people are actively encouraged by staff to participate in suitable leisure activities within the home and the wider community. Staff promote new experiences aimed at providing the opportunity for young people to learn new skills, develop new interests and gain confidence. Comments made by young people include, 'staff are always trying to get me to do different things'.

Management and staff are highly active in ensuring that diversity is celebrated and valued, whilst being resourceful in challenging any form of discrimination. High regard is given to young people's particular needs arising from their heritage, culture, or linguistic backgrounds. Young people have equal access to all of the opportunities provided by the home. Comments received from young people include, 'they treat me as me' and 'I'm helped to do what I'm interested in.'

Young people's privacy and dignity is well respected. A house telephone enables

young people to make private calls where appropriate. Young people benefit from having a private and secure room in which to enjoy their personal space. Comments received from young people include, 'I was told about my right to privacy when I moved in and it is in the welcome information', 'I can go to my room whenever' and 'staff know when I want to be on my own and always knock on my door and wait to be asked to come in'.

The home is decorated and furnished to a standard which creates a domestic homely environment. Young people are proud of their surroundings and have been actively involved in the choice of décor and the personalisation of their rooms with possessions and posters. There is an excellent maintenance and repair programme for the building. Any reported faults are swiftly rectified by the company's own maintenance team. A placing social worker commented, 'this is one of the best homes I have had a working relationship with and so homely'.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

All young people are safe and say that they feel safe living in the home. The excellent relationships between all associated with the home ensures that young people always have a trusted adult they can talk to. Allegations or disclosures are taken very seriously. Staff are trained and confident in the use of the procedures. They are especially astute at identifying and considering risks for each young person in relation to their diverse needs and in relation to the group living arrangements. These are documented and reviewed when circumstances change.

Effective action is taken in relation to any bullying. Bullying is rare in this home because of the high level of personal respect each young person and member of staff has for each other. In the rare event of bullying occurring, this is treated very seriously and dealt with effectively. Both the bully and the bullied are very well supported. Detailed work is carried out with the bully to ensure that they really understand about bullying and its effects.

The arrangements for promoting positive behaviour are extremely effective. Young people are clear about these arrangements and are fully committed to them. While sometimes behaviours are not in line with expectations young people are aware and understand the consequences of this. The recording of sanctions for unacceptable behaviour however, need to be clear to avoid possible misunderstandings.

Young people are involved in setting their own behavioural targets which supports the development of a sense of responsibility for their own actions. Physical restraint is rarely used and clear records are maintained of any incidents. Young people are clear that physical restraint is used as a last resort and only used to protect them or other people from harm or damage to property. All of the young people feel that staff follow all the rules all the time showing that they feel there is a strong sense of fairness. Young people rarely go missing from the home, because they feel safe and

cared for. Clear arrangements, including protocols with the police and young people's placing authority, are followed should this occur.

Young people live in a very safe and very well-maintained environment that supports all of their developmental needs. The investment in the home in terms of décor, furnishings and equipment is exceptional; this sends a clear message to young people that they are valued.

Staff working with young people in the home are carefully selected and vetted. The robust recruitment process ensures that suitable people who have the ability to care effectively for the young people and invest in the ethos of the home are employed.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **outstanding**.

This is an organisation that shows a consistently high level of commitment to providing excellent, individualised care to children and young people. The enthusiasm for the task permeates from the strategic level to the ground level. The Registered Manager leads her staff with a high level of professionalism and passion and values the input of staff at all levels. She provides very effective leadership to the staff teams and has a strong sense about how she can further develop the already excellent care. She is open to new ideas and implements these in line with children and young people's diverse and often competing needs.

The home is effectively monitored externally and by the manager, which ensures that success is celebrated and areas for development are identified. Young people's views are gathered on a monthly basis and fed into the business planning. To further improve the monitoring aspects of the service, the manager is considering a more integrated approach in using the monitoring information. A clear Statement of Purpose underpins the work in the home and the home operates in line with this. A professional who has a child placed commented of the manager and staff, 'nothing is too much trouble for them.'

The home is exceptionally well resourced, in all areas. For example the environment, the equipment, the staffing arrangements and the services commissioned are resourced to ensure that the highest quality of care is provided to each young person at all times. The way in which staff teams work provides young people a high level of continuity. There is a relatively stable long-serving group of staff, some of whom have been in post for several years.

Staff are of an exceptionally high calibre and all are totally focused on meeting each child's specific needs. Staff are extremely well supported in their, sometimes difficult, task via regular and good quality supervision, effective and relevant training, team meetings and group supervision for the therapeutic work. Less formally, the manager is extremely supportive of the staff and they all speak very highly of her support and of her compassion for her role.

A young person said of the staff 'I am happy with what they do' and another stated that the home is 'amazing.' Comments from a placing social worker include, 'the homeliness of the home and the warmth of the manager and her staff has helped the young person grow, develop and become far more stable. They always go one step beyond to ensure their needs are met...I would not hesitate to recommend this excellent home to anyone thinking of placing. It has an excellent reputation within this local authority.'

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 *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.