

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC020594
Inspection date	04/05/2012
Inspector	Dawn Bennett / Jo Stephenson
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	13/03/2012
--------------------------------	------------

© 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

The home provides accommodation for up to 10 young people aged from 11 to 17 years, most of whom are placed on an emergency basis following a recent history of placement breakdown and difficult or high-risk behaviour. The home undertakes assessments, for up to three months, of young people in crisis.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service 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**.

This is a good service that impacts positively on young people's lives. The home's key strength is stabilising young people in crisis by using outward-bound activities. The professional staff team help young people effectively to address their short-term needs. This is evidenced by consultation with young people, feedback from social workers, staff practice and care planning.

The leadership and management of the home is adequate. There is an effective management team in place at the service. They are skilled at supporting a large specialist staff group who are constantly working with young people at various stages of crisis.

Three recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. Although the management is strong and induction training is adequate, training does not currently incorporate specialist courses that reflect the statement of purpose of the home. Assessments of risk are being undertaken but are not always being recorded. The staff team advocate on behalf of the young people but do not always record the actions they take.

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 there is a good quality learning and development programme which staff are supported to undertake. In particular, staff should receive specialist training to equip them to fulfil the aims of the home, as stated in the statement of purpose (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that the home implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (NMS 4.5)
- ensure that each child's placement plan is monitored by a key worker within the home who ensures that the requirements of the plan are implemented in the day-to-day care of that child. (NMS 25.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make good progress and achieve positive outcomes. This is achieved through a full programme of outdoor pursuits and camping, which effectively stabilises high risk patterns of behaviours and promotes young people's active participation.

From the point of placement, young people make good progress in developing a positive self view. They participate in a range of activities that are new to them, such as camping, caving, mountain biking, walking, rock climbing and kayaking. Each activity results in them achieving an educational qualification equivalent to GCSE entry level. Successfully completing the activities, as well as achieving good educational outcomes, develops young people's confidence, focuses them on age-appropriate, healthy activities and results in them learning new skills.

The co-operative nature of the activities mean that young people re-engage with adults and develop positive relationships. Young people have to listen to instructions, respond responsibly and communicate clearly to complete a task or participate in an activity. Their success in doing so results in them experiencing personal achievements as well as praise from their supporting staff.

Young people make good educational progress from the point of placement. Education is integral to the home's assessment programme and is tailored to meet individual's needs. Many young people have not been attending or engaging with education prior to their placement. Where this is the case, education is reintroduced through qualifications linked to the activity programme. Over the assessment period, formal classroom time is introduced and gradually increased. Where young people have been attending education, the home will support them to continue to attend either their current school or the company's registered school. As a result, school attendance increases and educational outcomes are improved.

Young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and take responsibility for their own health. The importance of leading a healthy life is successfully integrated into the ethos of the home. For example, healthy eating is promoted,

exercise and outdoor activities are the key focus of the assessment process and there are clear incentives to understand and stop unhealthy practices, such as smoking. Health issues are explored in day to day discussions, key worker sessions and through education. The healthy principles of the home are promoted as soon as a young person arrives and goes on their initial four day camp. One young person said that she hadn't smoked since she had been on the camp site and knew that the staff were really proud of her for this.

Quality of care

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

Young people continue to receive a proactive service that assesses and meets their needs and circumstances. There is a positive ethos that embraces diversity and promotes participation. Young people receive an individual service, which is designed to assess their personal needs and make clear recommendations for their future. All staff develop good knowledge of the young people they are working with, ensuring their safety and needs are identified and met. Staff work effectively in partnership with parents and other professionals to ensure a good quality service and positive outcomes.

Staff have constructive relationships with young people. These develop as staff support young people to experience very challenging and new activities. Staffing levels are high, initially two staff supporting one young person. Activities include the young people staying away from the home, sometimes in an isolated rural area, either camping or at bunk houses, without other peers. This practice promotes appropriate discussion, which is not hampered by distractions such as televisions, radios or computers. Staff are supportive and encourage young people to communicate their experiences, views and opinions. This positive engagement creates respectful relationships which enable staff to have sensitive conversations with young people. These day-to-day discussions and key worker sessions support young people to address difficulties and learn new skills to progress socially, emotionally and physically.

Staff allocation and the nature of the activity are carefully planned at the beginning of each shift and takes into account the views of each young person. Staff experience and qualifications are matched to young people's developing interests. The staff are enthusiastic and have high aspirations for young people. This results in young people, who might not like the idea of the activities or camping at first, becoming active participants. By replacing previously inappropriate activities with positive activities, staff prepare young people to have the skills to successfully move on. New hobbies have also enabled some young people to re-establish or develop family links. For example, one young man has learned to enjoy his father's love of fishing.

Young people develop strategies appropriate to their situation and circumstance to stop high risk behaviours. The assessment process takes each young person through three progressive stages. Each stage has very clear aims and objectives that need to

be achieved before a young person can move on to the next stage. Staff are consistent in their approaches and have clear expectations with regard to appropriate behaviour and interaction and tolerance towards others. Staff are positive role models, respecting young people's need for privacy and confidentiality, promoting an open approach to complaints and successfully supporting young people to make their views known.

The accommodation is in the process of undergoing major redecoration and refurbishment. The timescales for completion of this work are clearly set out in a development plan, which is being adhered to. Work is being completed to a good standard. This work will improve the standard of accommodation as areas have become worn and tired. Since the last inspection, walls and woodwork have been prepared ready to be painted.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say that they feel safe. They are systematically protected from harm by robust arrangements for safe welfare. For example, there are effective policies on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of young people, which are known to young people, parents and staff. These underpin a programme of induction and training for all staff that includes promoting positive behaviour. This ensures all policies are implemented successfully in practice.

One of the primary aims of this service is to break cycles of high risk behaviour. The service is successful at achieving this and there are significant reductions in young people's previous patterns of behaviours, such as going missing from care, sexual exploitation, criminal activity and violence towards others. Care plans clearly identify individual young people's issues at the point of admission and monitor aims, objectives and progress made throughout the placement. This ensures all staff are very aware of the vulnerability issues for young people who put themselves at risk. There is continual debate and discussion with regard to the important balance between promoting independence and keeping young people safe.

In partnership with other agencies, such as police and youth offending services, staff support young people to develop tools to self-moderate their behaviours, equipping them for progression from the home. One social worker stated 'the care was very intensive, as the young person needed a lot of supervision and staff imposed sanctions when necessary. Staff who came to discuss the placement were very friendly and helpful. I would recommend this home again.'

Safeguarding young people continues to be a high priority within the home. All staff have completed training in safeguarding. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place and regularly reviewed. This ensures that staff understand what they should do if there is a safeguarding issue. For example, they are familiar with the referral process to the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Staff do not tolerate bullying behaviour and when issues arise, they are addressed.

Young people continue to be protected by the home's robust recruitment systems that ensure all staff employed complete the necessary recruitment checks and are deemed suitable to work before commencement of employment. Proactive monitoring of visitors to the home takes place, so as to prevent young people being exposed to unsuitable adults. This excellent practice further safeguards their welfare.

Leadership and management

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

The managers and staff team are clear of the aims and objectives of this service. In turn they communicate this effectively to placing local authorities and the young people who come to the home. This is supported by an informative statement of purpose and children's guide. One social worker stated, 'I felt that the care was very good. They were very good at managing the young person and the communication was good. I would recommend the placement.'

Staff monitor the good progress young people make and the positive outcomes they achieve. They are successful at breaking cycles of challenging behaviour and providing stability prior to future placements. They continue to develop records and methods that inform other professionals of the current and future needs of young people. They advocate on behalf of young people, chasing paperwork and future placement arrangements, but this proactive practice is not always clear in written records. This means they do not have evidence of these positive interventions when challenging local authorities on behalf of young people.

All recommendations made after the last inspection have been met or, in the case of the major refurbishment work, is in the process of being completed within clear timescales. The Registered Manager is motivated and well respected by the enthusiastic staff team. The core staff team are experienced and competent in line with their roles and responsibilities. Since the home has been purchased by the provider, the number of permanent staff on each shift has increased. As new staff complete the company's induction and probation, it is anticipated that the use of bank and agency staff will continue to decrease.

All staff have personal training plans and receive the company's established programme of induction, mandatory training and refresher courses. These programmes do not, however, provide staff with specialist training in assessment or emergency crisis intervention. This means that although staff are well prepared to meet the basic needs of young people, new staff are not formally equipped with the specific skills related to assessment, emergency and crisis care. Long-standing members of staff are very professional and have received training with previous owners of the service. They are not, however, being supported to maintain and develop this knowledge.

This home's staff size and structure is different to other services operated by the same company. This means that senior members of staff take on more responsibility,

including line management roles. There is currently no formal or additional mandatory training for seniors, for example they are responsible for supervising team members but do not receive supervision training. This means they are not being supported to develop the skills they require to deliver a professional service in line with their job description.

There is an effective programme of refresher and development training that ensures the staff team's outdoor pursuits qualifications are maintained and developed. There is also a well-organised in-house process for observing, quality assuring and authorising the leadership of outdoor activities. This ensures that each individual staff member continues to provide a high standard of leadership practice in line with company policies and procedures. This effective process also seeks young people's views of the staff member and the activity being run. This feedback is positive.

The managers and staff team ensure that health and safety requirements are met. They gather information on each young person effectively. Due to the emergency nature of placements, information from the placing authority is sometimes limited. Staff are resourceful at building upon information through discussions with family members, the police, health services, other professionals and the young person. This information is used to risk-assess activities, practice and inform all aspects of care. The staff team are qualified and experienced at balancing outdoor activities and the quick changing nature of crisis intervention and emergency placements. The well-informed decisions made are not, however, always reflected in the written risk assessments.

The Registered Manager has a clear overview of the strengths and weakness of this service. There are established systems in place to monitor matters under Regulation 33 and Regulation 34. These are robust and provide detailed information that is used to inform practice. The baseline of good practice in this home is maintained and there are systems in place to continue to improve the quality of care. There is a development plan and training programme for the service that is reviewed periodically by the Registered Manager. There is a strong commitment to ensuring the quality of care offered to young people. For example, the manager identified and ensured that all staff received training in supporting young people who self-harm, so that staff can ensure the safety and well-being of these young people.

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.