

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Putnam
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately owned children's home is registered for up to three children or young people who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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**.

Young people flourish in a comfortable and homely environment where they feel safe and secure. They are genuinely proud of where they live and see it as natural that their views are valued and contribute significantly to the things that happen each day in their home. Young people communicate a sense of belonging and being valued. As a result they settle, make dramatic, demonstrable progress and take the opportunities provided to them to turn their lives around.

As the self-esteem of young people blossoms, their personal confidence grows. The individual needs of young people are accurately assessed, prioritised and planned for. The independence of young people is carefully and safely managed within a clear structure. As a result young people have new and different experiences that were previously considered improbable.

A committed and passionate staff team is purposefully led by an experienced Registered Manager. Well established procedures are efficiently utilised to monitor all aspects of the home. An earnest desire to provide the best possible service to young people drives improvements in the home and influences practice across the wider organisation. Parents and placing social workers express gratitude and praise for the quality of care young people receive.

No breaches of regulation are identified. However, recommendations are made to improve the quality of some records and include night time practices of the home's emergency escape plan.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure there is an emergency escape plan that all staff and children are familiar with and have practiced so they know what to do in an emergency; in particular ensure that night time fire drills are undertaken in addition to ones during the daytime and evening (NMS 10.9)
- ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (NMS 22.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people make exceptional progress across all areas of their lives. They recognise changes in themselves which they are able to attribute to living in this home. One said, 'Without these people looking after me and teaching me how to grow up I would be lost.' Parents describe how their children 'come on leaps and bounds' since moving to this home. Placing social workers feel that young people make 'tremendous progress' when compared with how they were prior to living in this home. In particular they describe dramatic improvements in the attitudes of young people towards how they care for themselves. Social workers also identify how improved self-esteem and social skills lead to significant changes in the communication skills exhibited by young people.

Prior to moving to this home some young people had limited opportunity to participate in education. Others demonstrated reluctance to engage in schooling provided for them. However, all young people now benefit from full attendance at school or college. One young person said of their school, 'It's really good; I just like it.' Young people overcome significant barriers to their education resulting from recognised learning disabilities or caused by personal circumstance. They are justifiably proud of the formal qualifications they now attain. Such outstanding achievements inspire them to continue their education further.

Young people enjoy good health. Health needs are met through registration with all relevant health professionals. Young people demonstrate good understanding about their own health and openly discuss healthy options and choices at mealtimes. No young people smoke, drink alcohol or take drugs. However, they have access to information about the effects of such risk taking behaviours in a format that is accessible to them. This supports them to make informed choices for themselves.

Young people extend their life experiences through involvement in a wide range of activities in the community. Parents recognise the encouragement their children are given to participate, commenting, 'He's nervous, but he's trying new things.' Young

people share experiences with new friends they make through joining uniformed organisations. They relish opportunities such as these and demonstrate an ability to manage their own behaviour. This enables them to take part in residential trips away from the direct support of staff, whereas this could not have been considered previously. This enhances their sense of achievement and builds confidence through increased independence.

Young people benefit from innovative work to maximise their independence. Programmes to achieve this are highly personalised. Risks to young people and potentially others in the community are carefully assessed and managed. Young people who previously required constant support and supervision are now able to travel to and undertake their education independently. Parents highlight the progress their children make in developing independence as one of the best features of the home. They recognise their children's need for routine and acknowledge that the independence their children experience is provided within a strict structure.

Some young people come to this home following significant episodes of offending behaviour exhibited in other residential placements. These young people settle in their current home and purposefully engage with the community sentences that are handed down. Following placement in this home their offending ceases, providing them with the opportunity to put these incidents behind them and move on with their lives.

Young people enjoy positive contact with their family and others who are important to them. Young people and their families benefit from an extremely positive approach to contact from the home and senior managers in the organisation. Parents confirm that they have used a facility provided by the organisation to stay in a hotel locally when they come for contact. This makes it easier to travel at reasonable times, reduces the difficulties of long journeys and adds to the quality and duration of contact visits. Placing social workers use words such as 'brilliant' and 'excellent' to describe what they see as a unique service.

Quality of care

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

Young people describe staff as 'kind', 'very understanding' and 'great at giving advice.' One said, 'If you've got something on your mind you can talk to them; they listen.' As a result young people establish and maintain excellent relationships with each member of staff.

Young people compare this home positively with those where they have been placed previously. They say, 'Here is more calm, more relaxed and more homely.' They explain that after initially visiting the home they could not wait to come to live here. Relationships between young people are positive and comfortable. This contributes to young people's sense of belonging.

Parents and placing social workers provide numerous accolades praising the quality

of care provided. Several say that they cannot fault the home and do not have a bad word to say about it. Some parents say the home is 'really good'; others describe it as 'brilliant'. One parent described the staff team as 'angels', another elaborated saying, 'The staff are fantastic, each and every one in their own way.'

The quality of care received by young people results in a sense of homeliness where young people feel genuinely loved and cared for. This feature is a fundamental strength of the home and something that is noted by placing social workers and parents. Social workers say, 'When you go there it feels like family. It is a very positive placement. I would recommend this home.' Comments from parents include, 'Here it feels like home' and 'I feel there is love here.'

Staff consistently communicate unquestionably high aspirations for all the young people in the home. As one member of staff said, 'We just know we want the best and know that they can achieve it.' Carefully considered and constructed care plans inform ways in which the individual needs of young people are met, behaviours managed and potential risks minimised. Placing social workers express confidence that the individual needs of young people are met within the home.

The support staff give young people enables them to make genuine, positive and lasting changes. For example, young people are pro-actively supported to overcome difficulties they experienced prior to moving to this home. Young people who initially require around the clock support and supervision progress to a point where they are trusted to enjoy the benefits of controlled independence. Furthermore, staff strongly advocate for the rights of young people who are initially rejected by educational establishments. Staff from the home agree to provide personal support within the education setting to promote the learning of young people. This has the effect of removing barriers to education, meaning that young people are able to access appropriate resources and further their education. Over time the need for this level of support gradually reduces. Subsequently, young people not only attend education on their own but are empowered to travel independently, building confidence and self-esteem in the process.

The compassionate and dedicated staff team went above and beyond expectations in providing continuous support to one young person through hospital treatments for a serious condition. Tragically the treatments were ultimately unsuccessful. However, staff from the home remained with the young person through to the end of his life. In doing so, managers and staff ensured that requests made by the young person were respected fully and met completely. Young people and staff alike continue to be provided with support to help them come to terms with their bereavement.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

A proportionate approach to risk assessment ensures the safety and wellbeing of young people, but allows them to engage with aspects of life that have previously

been unavailable to them. Simple tasks such as walking to school or using public transport now allow young people the opportunity to have the same experiences as their contemporaries. Detailed reports provided by staff enable placing authorities to make decisions that expand the experiences of young people within safe parameters. Placing social workers state that, 'Staff do an absolutely superb job of balancing the needs of young people and managing risk.'

When behaviours of young people do give cause for concern managers and staff do not seek to terminate the placement, like others before them. Instead they take prompt action to reduce or eradicate any risks or dangers. This enables young people to experience stability and continuity in their placement, avoiding what they may perceive as further rejection. Since the last inspection managers have prioritised changes to the layout of the building and the use of particular rooms. This has ensured that the environment remains physically safe for the specific young people being cared for.

All young people strongly communicate that they feel safe, happy and content within the home. Parents acknowledge that their children are happy living here. This enables young people to feel secure enough to make the positive changes in their lives which result in outcomes for them being outstanding. Bullying is simply not identified as an issue by young people. However, they are confident that staff would deal with this should it arise. Similarly young people do not tend to make complaints because they are confident that when they raise any issue with staff it is dealt with effectively.

This sense of safety and well-being results in extremely limited occurrences of young people going missing. When this does happen staff take immediate and robust action to find the young person concerned and ensure that all relevant people are informed. The actions taken by staff are set out in a policy that has been agreed with specialist local police officers with responsibility for missing children. Individual vulnerability assessments are shared by the organisation with the police whenever a child is placed or their circumstances change. This positive and pro-active relationship between the organisation and the police helps to ensure a prompt and effective response if young people do go missing.

The Registered Manager has distinct ethos that restraint is only ever used as a last resort. He clearly states his opinion that no one likes to be involved in a restraint. The attitude of the Registered Manager is communicated successfully and shared by the staff team. Consequently although staff are trained to safely and effectively restrain young people, this is avoided whenever possible. As a result restraints are used extremely rarely. Since the last inspection, records reflect that the first restraints have occurred since 2011. Effective monitoring of records relating to these restraints highlighted that these incidents were focussed during a short period. The Registered Manager acknowledged these as a bereavement response and identified other ways to meet the needs of the young people concerned. As a result the behaviours that led to the need to restrain immediately dissipated.

Robust and effective recruitment procedures are managed from the head office of

the organisation. These are effective in helping to prevent inappropriate people being able to harm young people. The Registered Manager and other senior managers in the organisation carefully select any new staff, matching them to the needs of the home. The views of young people about prospective candidates are fed back to managers and contribute to the selection process.

Leadership and management

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

An experienced Registered Manager has been in post for several years providing confident and consistent leadership to a small, but stable team of motivated staff. Limited changes to this staff team provide young people with a strong sense of continuity. Placing social workers identify this small number of key staff as an important element in meeting the needs of young people. They acknowledge that while still troubled, young people are able to build strong relationships with a dependable and reliable group of staff.

The period since the last inspection has been dominated by a backdrop of extreme sadness brought about through the illness and death of a young person. Leaders and managers in the organisation ensured that support was made available to young people and staff who were affected by this loss. Throughout his time in hospital managers ensured that staff provided continuous support for the young person. At the same time the needs of the other young people were also met through the continuity of staffing arrangements.

While no requirements or recommendations were set at either of the last two inspections the Registered Manager continues to consider ways to develop the service. A dynamic development plan for the home is in place highlighting clear aims and objectives, suggested actions for achieving change and performance measures to identify success. Independent visits are routinely undertaken every month by the same visitor. Reports from these visits lead to action plans that deliver immediate improvements. The Registered Manager separately undertakes regular reviews of the quality of care in the home. Reports from these reviews result in good levels of monitoring and the identification, particular areas of strength as well as matters requiring further development. Consultation with young people, parents and social workers is beginning to be incorporated into these reports, indicating that the views of others are considered important. An administrative oversight meant that the most recent documents had not been forwarded to Ofsted. However, this had no impact upon young people and was rectified during the inspection.

While most records are completed to a high standard, there is room to improve this in certain areas. In particular, effective work to promote the independence of young people is not consistently assessed or recorded in individual pathway plans. Without clear assessment, work can lack direction or purpose. Without regular recording personal achievements, growth and development can be missed. A recommendation is made to establish and maintain a system for monitoring all records and taking action to improve them when necessary.

The home is maintained to an extremely high standard. Well established systems ensure that maintenance tasks are prioritised. The organisation employs specialist maintenance staff. When necessary they respond promptly to any emergencies that occur. Health and safety arrangements are efficiently overseen by the Registered Manager and other senior managers within the organisation. Fire drills are held regularly and always when new young people or staff come to the home. However, some months have elapsed since the last night time drill. A recommendation is made to ensure young people practice the action they need to take should an emergency occur while they are in bed.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.