

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC028598
Inspection date	18/10/2012
Inspector	Tola Akinde-Hummel
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	20/03/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is privately operated and provides long-term residential placements to four young women. The home extends its services to now offer care and support to expectant and young mothers. Young women are able to reside at the home with their babies. The service offers an outreach support service to young people who have moved on to independent accommodation.

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 **good**.

This is a good service for young women. The management and staff have a clear idea of how they want to help the young people develop for the duration of their stay. Young people are able to work on their communication skills, pursue their education and raise their self-esteem.

Staff provide a safe environment for young people who report that they feel safe in the home. Young people understand any potential risks they may place themselves in and rehearse strategies to avoid finding themselves in difficult situations.

The home enables young people to form attachments and work through difficult emotions that have had an impact on their relationships with others.

Staff are well supported by managers. The home has in place a system for continuous development of staff through internal and external learning. The requirement made as a result of this inspection focuses on the inappropriate use of activity and takeaway money as a sanction. Recommendations made focus on: the need to increase involvement of young people as a group having a say about all matters relating to the home; having access to and making comments about reports written about them by the home; and following up recruitment references through telephone verification.

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, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
17 (2001)	do not impose any financial penalty, other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum (which may be by instalments) by way of reparation. (Regulation 17.2 (g))	16/11/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support, (with specific reference to residents meetings) (NMS 1.3)
- ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references (NMS 16.1)
- ensure children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than confidential or third party information and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are supported to address the areas of their life that cause them anxiety and frustration. They use the time they have with staff to develop mechanisms to deal with difficult issues in a mature and reasonable manner. They enjoy good relationships with the staff and always have someone to talk to if they want support.

Young people have made good progress in taking responsibility for their own health. They are up to date with medical appointments and are more willing to access specialist services as required. The reduction in the consumption of young people's alcohol, drug and cigarette intake has resulted in young people engaging in fewer episodes of behaviour that is detrimental to their health and safety.

Young people improve their self-image and self-esteem through positive reinforcement and gentle encouragement. They grow in confidence and begin to

make decisions that have a positive impact on their lives. For example young people have made the conscious effort to manage their anger in order for other people to change the way in which they are perceived.

Young people have every opportunity to attend college and apprenticeship courses. They are supported to explore their areas of interest such as art and cookery and pursue these through learning or work. Young people living in the home are presently in education or employment. Staff use their own skills and contacts to assist young people with preparation for interviews and applying for jobs. One young person when asked, stated, 'I rate the support from staff at eight out of ten.'

Young people maintain positive contact with families and friends. They learn to manage the demands of all their relationships whilst in the home and are taught to evaluate their contribution to any given situation. Family members and friends visit the home and are made to feel welcome.

Young people who have left the service return to seek additional advice and information from staff. They understand that this is a safe nurturing place to go to when they need help. The home sets appropriate boundaries with previous users of the service to ensure their presence does not impact on the young people currently living there.

Young people understand that they need to work towards living independently. They are given guidance to manage areas of their life such as making appointments, managing their money and communicating with public bodies such as job centres and children's services. Another young person stated, 'I want to stay here until I am 19 so I can finish my education.'

Quality of care

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

Young people are safe in the home. There are always staff available to offer support and advice when young people need it. This is reflected in the number of one-to-one sessions young people have with staff. Young people are welcomed into the office if the door is open and knock when it is closed. The office has a settee which enables young people to have a relaxed conversation with staff.

Staff take time to get to know young people and develop ways of working with them that are firm and fair. One social worker stated: 'the young person has a good relationship with staff. They have been able to contain, settle and keep her despite the number of previous placements.' The home has questionnaires for young people to complete. The questions include what positive changes there have in their life, their dreams for the future and where they see themselves in three years. Such information gives staff additional material to work with and further engage young people.

Young people make their views about the home known to staff. This is done on an

individual basis. Young people do not discuss their views as a group. This has partly been due to the personalities of the young people in the home at present. Plans are in place to increase the opportunities to do this and offer additional activities in the home during the evening to bring young people together more on a social level.

Care plans are detailed and give a good picture of young people. The plans and progress reports allow easy tracking of the positive steps young people have taken and their level of achievement. Reports are written in an honest way that address the pertinent areas of young people's lives whilst also identifying if they have not made any progress. Reports identify how the home seeks to address this with young people and specific target dates are set to achieve the desired outcome. Whilst young people have good communication with staff and the opportunity to share their thoughts with their social workers and independent reviewing officers; they have limited opportunities to add their comments to these records .

Staff have good relationships with educational establishments. They identify courses that match young people's aspirations. Staff continually instil the belief in young people that they can achieve their wishes through hard work and determination. Staff support this by waking young people up in the morning to attend courses, ensuring that young people have the equipment they require to complete their work and encouraging them to do set homework. In addition they ensure that young people in the house are considerate of other young people's need for study and rest time. One young person stated, 'they have really helped me with college and to find a job'.

Young people's diverse needs are very well considered by staff. These needs cross the spectrum of race, culture, religion and identity. All young people are unique and treated as such. A number of young people are exploring their religious beliefs and embracing faiths previously unfamiliar to them. This exploration is respected by staff. Staff understand the cultural differences between all the young people in the home, their attitudes to sexuality, family relationships and roles within society. Staff offer alternative ways of thinking and behaving to ensure young people live together harmoniously. Discriminatory attitudes, language and behaviour are quickly challenged with the consequences of this made clear to young people from the outset.

Members of staff describe a big part of their job as 'getting to know the person who so much is written about.' The deputy manager stated, 'we challenge the behaviour and give them love.'

The home is domestic in size and fairly-well presented. Young people's bedrooms are personalised and they enjoy en-suite facilities. Young people like their bedrooms and feel very comfortable in their space. The lounge area is well presented but does not give the impression that young people have contributed to decisions about the décor. Young people have said they would like more involvement in this. The kitchen/diner allows young people to have meals together but this does not happen on a daily basis. Repairs are swiftly reported and acted upon.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they feel safe in the home. Staff understand the vulnerabilities of young people and try to keep them safe both in and outside the home. Safeguarding training, the homes policies and procedures and open communication within the staff team and their external partners contribute to staff understanding their responsibilities to protect young people. One social worker said of child protection concerns related a young person's safety, 'the home report and deal with incidents quickly. In my opinion they did an excellent job in getting the young person to understand the risks and keeping the young person safe.'

Detailed risk assessments are in place and change over time depending on the increase and decrease in risk. Staff talk to young people about risks that they take. Staff work on young people's self-esteem and establish open communication to help minimise the need for young people to take risks. The reduction in anti-social behaviour is testament to their working practice. One social worker said, 'the young person tests people and boundaries as a way of checking how safe they are'. Young people talk proudly of their changed behaviour. There have been very few incidents of assaults on staff or other young people.

The home has good procedures and practice for dealing with complex and destructive behaviour. The use of restraint is rare and staff have received training in de-escalation techniques. Staff use sanctions sparingly and give young people the opportunity to make comments following a sanction. However, a few records show that some behaviour such as smoking in the house has resulted in a withdrawal of activity or takeaway money which is disproportionate and does not relate to the misbehaviour. 'I have never been sanctioned and I don't intend to be'. Another young person stated, 'I have been sanctioned and I do think it has been fair'. Staff have recently discussed that young people sometimes use activity money as an extension of their pocket money. The team recently agreed that they will no longer provide the money to young people. Instead they will ensure it is properly spent on leisure.

The incidence of young people going missing has reduced considerably. Consistent practice between the home and the local police means that young people understand what will happen if they go missing. As a result, young people advise staff of their movements and keep the lines of communication open if they are going to be late home. Curfew times are reasonable and age appropriate leaving little room for conflict between the home and the young people. All times are agreed by staff, social workers and, where relevant, parents.

Fairly-good arrangements are in place for the selection and employment of staff. However written references of two recently employed staff have not been verified by telephone to ensure their authenticity.

All visitors to the home are signed in and out and escorted to communal areas of the

building. This ensures that young people's privacy is not compromised. The building is secure from intruders. Regular health and safety checks take place and any maintenance is properly reported, assessed and repaired. Individual staff take on particular areas of health and safety to ensure consistency is maintained and responsibility is shared. Fire drills take place regularly so that young people and staff are familiar with the home's evacuation procedure.

Leadership and management

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

The management of the home is good. Staff feel exceptionally well supported on a day-to-day basis by the manager and deputy. Additional mechanisms include team meetings, supervision, appraisal and training. Courses relevant to supporting young people are identified and staff share their learning with the whole team. Team meeting minutes show the homes commitment to exploring alternative ways of working with young people and understanding the complex issues they bring. One staff member said, 'We feel like a family here, we all support each other.'

Staff spend most of their time in direct contact with the young people, making themselves available and building relationships. They build up young people's self esteem to help minimise the incidences of a crisis of self confidence. The staffing levels are good ensuring that staff can attend to the needs of young people without feeling stretched. Changes to keyworkers are possible and sensitively considered for the young person and the member of staff. One member of staff said, 'I find working here stimulating and challenging.'

The home works to the statement of purpose ensuring the aims and objectives of placements are met. The managers in the home explore the suitability of all referrals in the light of the young people currently in the home and properly assess any impact a new person may have on the group or individuals.

Monitoring visits on behalf of the provider are conducted monthly with reports sent promptly to Ofsted as required.

Requirements from the previous inspection have been met. These related to records of appraisals, the duty rota and staffing information in the statement of purpose.

The home has a development plan which focuses on looking at young people in more depth. The plan includes strengthening the key worker system, increasing staff understanding of the reasons why young people enter the care system, exploring how staff behaviour is received by young people and understanding the depth of damage some young people arrive with.

Records kept of young people in the home are securely stored and in good order.

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.