

Capstone Foster Care (South West)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jim Palmer
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Setting address	Suite 5, Zealley House, Greenhill Way, Kingsteignton, NEWTON ABBOT, Devon, TQ12 3SB
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Telephone number

Email

Registered person

Registered manager

Responsible individual

Date of last inspection

Capstone Foster Care Ltd

Heather Isabella Jackson

Paul Richard Mills

23/10/2007

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Capstone Foster Care (South West) is part of Capstone Foster Care, an independent fostering agency with branches across the South of England and the Midlands.

The agency provides a range of foster placements and services for children and families. These include specialist therapeutic foster care placements, standard foster care placements, parent and child placements, sibling placements and placements for unaccompanied minors. The service includes a range of therapists led by a director of therapy; all carers receive training in therapeutic skills, some provide specialist therapeutic placements, and receive specialist support and additional professional development.

The agency has an education service that provides individual education programmes for children and professional educational specialists to liaise with schools and provide training and support. The agency also provides additional services.

At the 1st of April 2011, the Capstone Foster Care (South West) had 119 approved foster carers

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an announced inspection of the fostering service. The service provides outstanding standards of care in four outcome areas and a good standard in the remaining two. Strengths of the service are the very strong focus on children and the achievement of successful outcomes throughout all areas of work within the agency. This is reflected in the range of placements offered, excellent matching of children and carers and outstanding support and training provided for carers. Most young people make excellent progress. The service engages young people in planning and decision making both for their day-to-day living and their future lives. The agency provides outstanding services to meet the emotional and psychological needs of children, and excellent support in order to promote educational outcomes for young people. Young people are supported in developing the skills they need in making a successful transition into adulthood.

Management of the service and leadership is strong; there are excellent systems for monitoring the quality of the service. There is a very strong commitment at all levels to seek continuous improvement. Not all carers had detailed placement plans for each young person and not all young people had personal health plans, however all carers spoken with had a very good knowledge of children's needs and how those needs are to be met. The foster care agreement issued to new carers does not

reflect the recent change in legislation. The agency is aware of this and is in the process of issuing new foster care agreements.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection three recommendations were made. The agency has introduced measures to ensure that each of the recommendations is now met.

Since the last inspection the fostering approval panel has been re-constituted and now meets the requirements of the current regulations and standards. The venue for the approval panel has changed and there are now good facilities for prospective or carers to wait in privacy while attending panel.

The agencies safeguarding procedures have been reviewed and re-written, and now fully accord with current government guidance.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The physical and emotional needs of children are extremely well promoted by the service. Foster carers are all very aware of their role in promoting good health outcomes for children and young people. The importance of this is a feature of the initial training and assessment of foster carers, and reinforced in regular supervision with supervising social workers. The assessment of prospective carers includes an assessment of their attitude to a healthy lifestyle and how they will promote this with children, and of the range of leisure activities undertaken as a family. Young people looked after and foster carers are supported by the agency in specific areas of health promotion such as giving up smoking. The matching process includes any special skills held by foster carers in meeting individual young people's medical needs. Specialist training to meet specifically identified medical needs can be arranged prior to or shortly after placement; foster carers say that this is always made available in a timely manner.

All carers are issued with a list of medical information checks to be asked at the time a young person is placed with them. The company has introduced a new policy stressing the need to gain medical information prior to placement to ensure foster carers have information to enable them to meet children's health needs. Despite this some foster carers do not always receive full medical information at the time a child is placed. Appropriate medical consents are obtained as part of the placement planning process which reduces any delay in gaining emergency treatment. All carers receive training in first aid, and any accidents, injuries or medical interventions are recorded by carers, along with any medicines taken by young people. The agency is pro-active in pursuing any gaps in medical information.

All children are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician. Foster carers are very aware of the need to consult with children about any preferences they have about choice of practice. Where appropriate children may retain their own doctor, dentist or

optician. The agency is very aware of the importance of choice for young people. The agency excels in meeting the emotional needs of children by the provision of carers who are specifically trained to meet the therapeutic needs of children. All carers receive training in an introduction to therapeutic foster care as part of the initial training. In addition to ongoing regular supervision, foster carers receive further training and advice or guidance from regular consultation groups. These are highly valued by carers; they provide an excellent forum for carers to share experiences and gain an understanding of the underlying emotional issues behind, often challenging, behaviours. The meetings are facilitated by the director of therapy and a visiting therapist. Foster carers also have close links with child and adolescent mental health services, specialist health professionals and counsellors and therapists; this ensures that a range of professionals are available to meet the emotional needs of children and young people. This area of work is a strength of the service.

Very robust assessments on the homes of foster carers and a thorough matching process ensure that foster carers' homes are able to meet the needs of children. Any structural changes to the home or adaptations needed are considered by the agency. The agency has plans to ensure the further development of good practice in the promotion of good health outcomes, such as increasing the funding of a range of physical activities that are aimed at promoting good health and self-esteem. Foster carers' supervising social workers regularly monitor developments in children's placements, including any health needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The safety of young people is very well promoted by the agency. All foster carers and staff receive regular training in safeguarding awareness; this is renewed regularly and most staff and carers have received refresher safeguarding awareness training within the last 12 months. Young people say that foster carers help to promote their safety and give them good advice about ways to keep themselves safe. This includes keeping safe when using the internet and mobile telephones, where appropriate. Foster carers are very aware of the role in promoting the safety of children and young people and work jointly, as part of the professional team, in ensuring young people's safety. This work is reinforced by supervising social workers and in the regular carers' meetings and clinics.

All young people have detailed individual risk assessments which are regularly reviewed and updated. They are supported, in consultation with placing social workers, in taking controlled risks as part of taking more self-responsibility thus gaining greater independence.

The safeguarding policy has been reviewed and now ensures that prompt referrals to the local safeguarding team are made. The agency has developed strong contacts with the local authority designated officer. The team of supervising social workers and managers are very experienced practitioners in the area of child protection.

Relationships between carers and young people are consistently open and honest and young people are encouraged to discuss personal issues that may have an impact on their safety, including bullying and issues arising from differences in race or culture. Foster carers are very clear about procedures for reporting any safeguarding concerns to the agency or the local authority. The out of hours support is good, and all carers spoken with confirmed they thought it is excellent.

Children who are missing from home are protected by an agreed protocol between the agency and the police which is known and understood by all carers. Carers say that they are confident that they know how to respond in the absence of a young person; including who to contact should they need advice. Carers are aware of and do not exceed the limits of their authority to prevent a child from leaving the home. The numbers of children missing from home are very small and all return after a short period. The agency has robust systems for monitoring any absences and strategies for reducing the number of incidents, including thorough follow up by supervising social workers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are encouraged and supported by the agency in developing positive behaviours. All foster carers receive introductory training in therapeutic foster care and value the on-going support and training highly. They regularly report that this input has enabled them to work much more successfully in addressing the behavioural and underlying emotional needs of children and young people. Feedback from placing social workers indicated that many children have made significant progress since being placed within this agency. Foster carers describe their training and supervision as excellent. The agency provides in-house therapeutic guidance for carers and staff. It also has strong links with external specialist services, enabling young people's emotional needs to be met, thus having a significant positive impact on behaviour management. Young people's behaviour is managed in a highly personalised manner and takes into account individual differences based on race, culture, age and understanding. Practice in this area is outstanding and is an area of significant strength.

Young people are supported in participating in a wide range of leisure activities. The agency places a high priority on recruiting foster carers with an active lifestyle and a wide range of interests. Young people's personal preferences are also considered, when making matching decisions, to ensure that the family lifestyle is able to meet the leisure activity needs of young people. The company also funds a range of activities, including a sail training ship holiday. This gives young people the opportunity to experience, a sailing ship experience which provides them with a memorable holiday experience. It also helps to develop their self-esteem and confidence and take responsibility for themselves and others.

The agency has excellent systems in place to promote the education of young

people. All young people looked after by the agency have an individual educational programme. Foster carers are very aware of the importance of good educational attendance and attainment by young people. All young people have personal education plans and liaison between carers and school is very good. The agency employs an educational support consultant who monitors and reviews all young people's personal education plans. Any concerns are identified quickly and the support consultant manager is able to liaise directly with schools and carers to ensure that young people's educational needs are able to be met. The educational support team also provide training for carers and ensure that staff and carers are kept up to date with current legislation and good practice. Additional home tuition can be provided by the educational support team if required. Teachers employed directly by the company may also teach English to young unaccompanied asylum seekers who may not speak English as a first language.

The agency is rigorous in ensuring that the assessment process for carers includes the suitability of each foster carer's home to provide appropriate accommodation for young people. The agency has strong expectations about the suitability of home environments. All foster carers initial training places a strong focus on carers' responsibilities for promoting the health and safety of children. All carers receive detailed health and safety assessments as part of their annual review, and there are robust risk assessments in place for the physical environment and for specific items of equipment and pets. Minutes of fostering approval panel minutes evidence detailed scrutiny by panel members of health and safety issues. Feedback from young people confirms that most young people enjoy where they are living and they say that their privacy is respected.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people's views and wishes are sought in several ways. For example, through contributing to the annual review of their foster carers, their own placement reviews and via regular individual visits from supervising social workers. Additionally, the agency has a participatory group which includes children in foster care and birth children of foster carers. The work of this group is publicised in regular newsletters. However, despite this some young people and foster carers are not aware of the existence of this group. Young people say that they are consulted by their foster carers about their individual needs and preferences but are less aware about how they are able to influence the service. The agency is currently seeking ways of improving their consultation with young people. Young people are aware of the reasons why their views and wishes cannot always be acted upon.

All young people are given an information pack which includes what action they can take if they are unhappy about any aspect of their care. This includes how they can access independent advice and support should they wish to. All young people spoken with and most who responded to questionnaires say that they know who they would speak with if they had any concerns.

Every young person is provided with highly personalised care which is designed to respond to their individual needs. Foster carers show a high level of understanding about children's needs and how they will be met. Excellent support is provided to carers in enabling children to develop emotional resilience and to promote their self-esteem. All carers are trained in the promotion of equality and diversity. This is explored as part of the initial assessment, and challenges to attitudes and practice are made as part of ongoing supervision. Young people are actively supported in maintaining local community contacts through involvement with community groups. Young people are encouraged to develop personal and social skills that will enable them to live within the wider community and make a smooth transition from childhood to more independent living. Young people are encouraged to maintain any hobbies and interests and to participate in a wide range of activities including sailing, day excursions and trips to woodland parks. The range of activities the foster family take part in are considered as part of the assessment process.

The matching process between carers and children is rigorous. Introductory visits for young people are arranged prior to placement, whenever possible. Some carers say that they do not always have full information on young people at the time of placement; however, the agency does have a policy on the importance of gathering background information and is pro-active in chasing any shortfalls in information provided by the local authority. All carers are aware of the contact arrangements for young people. In the case of emergency admissions the supervising social worker or a manager will attend the foster carer's home at the time the placement is made.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are encouraged to take individual responsibility for developing social skills informally in accord with their age and level of understanding. As young people approach leaving care, foster carers work with them to developing their leaving care plans; they also liaise closely with leaving care workers or other agencies such as connexions. All foster carers receive training to raise their awareness of the importance promoting independence skills. The agency is pro-active in supporting young people and carers, by the provision of funding for items such as rent deposits and driving lessons. All children over the age of fourteen receive a handbook containing information on developing independence skills and are encouraged to take greater personal responsibility. This may include arranging their own appointments, using public transport, shopping and cooking.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All foster carers receive training in the importance of the awareness of equality and diversity. The agency's policies and procedures underpin the inclusive approach taken by the fostering service in its approach to working with foster carers and looking after young people

in placement. Foster carers who provide placements for unaccompanied asylum seekers show great personal initiative in researching information regarding the young person's cultural background. They receive additional training about ways in which they can promote young people's cultural heritage. The agency has good links with specialist agencies providing services for unaccompanied asylum seekers and is able to provide an interpretation service. The ethos of the company provides strong leadership in the promotion of equality and diversity which is reflected in practice in all outcome areas.

The managers provide excellent leadership and consistently promote good outcomes for children and young people. The manager and staff team are enthusiastic in monitoring the quality of the service and in seeking ways to improve the quality of the service. The commitment to meeting the individual needs of young people is evident throughout the agency.

The agency is very good at ensuring that prospective carers undergo rigorous and thorough assessments. All foster carers complete a pre-approval training programme and evidence is recorded as to how they meet the Children's workforce Development Council's competencies for foster care. Foster carers say that they find the assessment challenging and thought provoking. In addition to the preparation to foster course, all prospective carers receive four days training in therapeutic foster care. Some receive further training if they go on to provide therapeutic placements. All carers have detailed health and safety checks undertaken as part of their initial assessment, and all references are confirmed by follow up contacts. All statutory and local authority checks are completed prior to prospective carers being presented to panel. All assessments are completed by experienced, qualified social workers who are registered with the General Social Care Council.

Panel constitution now meets the requirements of the current foster care regulations. The panel minutes provide confirmation that panel discussion is thorough and that medical and legal advice is available to panel. All approved foster carers are issued with a foster care agreement; however, these do not accord with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The panel provides quality assurance information on the quality of assessments and reviews presented to panel.

There are extremely thorough systems in place to ensure rigorous matching between children and foster carers.

Placement decisions are made after thorough consideration of each child's needs, on occasions this is limited by a shortage of information provided by the placing authority. When this is the case the agency are pro-active in seeking any missing information. Despite these efforts by the agency, some foster carers say that they do not always have full information on children at the beginning of a placement.

The views of children and young people are actively sought through a variety of methods including, questionnaires, a young people's consultation group and contributing to their foster carer's annual review. Young people are invited to visit prospective foster placements and where possible introductions are well planned and sensitively managed. Young people are also spoken with regularly by supervising

social workers and any concerns identified and raised in supervision with carers. Despite these measures, some young people do not feel they are fully consulted. They do, however, say they are fully involved in the planning for their care and that their views and wishes are listened to and respected.

Local and regional managers are suitably qualified and experienced practitioners. They have substantial experience in managing family placement services and provide very strong leadership and direction for the staff. The manager is suitably qualified and is currently registered with the General Social Care Council. The Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed and accurately describes the range of services provided by the agency. It has a very positive child focus and describes how the service intends to achieve successful outcomes for children. There are children's versions of the Statement of Purpose and alternative versions can be produced if required.

The service is very well monitored and there are excellent management information systems. The manager produces weekly monitoring reports for senior managers and there are regular finance meetings to ensure that appropriate management action is taken to ensure the financial viability of the agency. The manager regularly reviews the quality of care and monitors patterns and trends. To date a report has not been made available to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

Young people's safety is promoted by rigorous recruitment systems for carers and staff. Thorough checks are undertaken to ensure that carers and staff are suitable people to work with children. Carers say that the quality of training opportunities and supervision is excellent. Staff all receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal. There is a comprehensive training programme available for staff to further their professional development.

All staff and carers receive regular training in safeguarding children. Allegations or complaints are recorded on the electronic recording system, which provides numerous statistics for management information concerning the management of allegations and complaints. There is good practice guidance for staff and carers. Carers are provided with an on-call duty system or an on call duty manager to contact out of office hours. Details are entered on the electronic data system. There have been no allegations or child protection referrals in the last year. There is good evidence of detailed investigations of any complaints. There are excellent contacts between the agency and the local Authority Designated Officer. All supervising social workers and managers have excellent knowledge of child protection procedures. There is a robust system for monitoring that appropriate notifications of significant events are made to appropriate agencies.

Two office locations were visited during the course of the inspection. Both provide very good facilities, to meet the needs of the service. The offices are secure are accessible for people with mobility difficulties. All records are kept electronically and are automatically backed up and have suitable security measures to ensure that data is secure and cannot be lost. However, the electronic recording system can at times be slow to access and on occasions the internet connection is not available. All

external staff who have access to sensitive data are Criminal Records Bureau checked by Capstone Care.

Carers report that payments are usually accurate and paid on time. Any errors are usually able to be rectified in a timely manner. Feedback from carers regarding the payments system is that it was generally very efficient.

All young people are invited to attend their placement review and contribute the planning for their care and future lives according to their age and understanding. Young people indicate that their views and wishes are actively sought and taken into consideration by the agency in relation to their care.

All young people's case records are held electronically and contained most of the key information to enable foster carers to meet their needs. Young people's records are well maintained and monitored, however not all young people have placement plans in place.

What must be done to secure future 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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
27 (2011)	ensure that all foster care agreements cover all the matters specified in Schedule 5 (Regulation 27(50 (b))	30/08/2011
35 (2011)	provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of schedule 6 of these regulations. (Regulation 35 (2))	30/08/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all children have personal health plans in place, which detail their physical, emotional and psychological health. (NMS 6.5)
- ensure that all foster carers are given a copy of the child's placement plan. (NMS 31.1)