

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Bridgette Lowe
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a local authority children's home that provides care and accommodation for five children and young people of either gender. The home aims to provide a period of stability for children and young people with complex needs in an environment with a therapeutic emphasis. In addition, there is multi-agency involvement in addressing their needs. Children and young people stay at the home for periods in excess of six months. They are helped to return to their families, move to substitute family placements or to more independent placements. The home is located in a rural setting with local facilities in close proximity.

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**.

Young people live in a home that provides them with highly individualised and personalised care. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about the individual needs of young people providing good outcomes for them. The views of young people are taken into account in all aspects of their care and futures. The quality of the relationship between staff and young people in this home is excellent. Staff are extremely child-centred in their work and use humour along with firm consistent boundaries to manage young people's behaviour well. This results in young people being safe and learning how to keep themselves safe. Young people have a good understanding of healthy living, although some young people put their health at risk by continuing to smoke. Smoking initiatives have proved successful in stopping young people smoking within the home. However it is unclear whether these initiatives have helped to reduce young people's smoking habits overall. Social workers report, since young people have joined the home they have seen a dramatic reduction in young people engaging in high risk behaviour. An extremely experienced and effective Registered Manager ensures the staff team continually reflect on their practice to ensure improved outcomes are achieved for young people. Rigorous monitoring undertaken by the Registered Manager ensures that areas of development are highlighted and acted upon in the best interests of young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- evidence how young people's physical health is being promoted. This specifically relates to initiatives being undertaken to further reduce young people's smoking. (NMS 6.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Since joining this home young people have achieved good outcomes. They have formed positive and warm relationships with staff which is clearly evident. Staff work hard to raise young people's self-esteem and promote their positive personal identity. This has proved successful with young people taking a pride in their appearance and reducing harmful behaviours. Young people demonstrate a good understanding of their backgrounds and are able to express what they have achieved well since being at the home. Some young people have recently achieved greater attendance at school, or have completed their education and undertaken a range of exams. One young person was clearly proud of being awarded an educational achievement award and reflected that they had been doing better at their educational placement. Young people have clear aspirations about their futures. Some young people were able to discuss future career goals and ambitions. Young people are supported to achieve these goals by an extremely dedicated and child-focused staff team. Young people are continually encouraged to try new and stimulating activities or hobbies, such as filming, or music projects, which they have embraced. DVD's that they have produced, showing their experiences, provide a positive memory that they can take with them when they leave.

Young people have grown in confidence through learning independent living skills and preparing for adulthood. Young people have bank accounts, learn how to cook, budget and prepare meals with support from staff. They are involved in household chores and receive incentive rewards when they undertake these chores within the home. Young people preparing to leave and move on to independent living have clear plans in place which they are well aware of and involved in. They are very well equipped with the necessary skills to move into independence and to prepare them for adulthood. Young people that had recently left the home were doing well in their new environment and were maintaining positive contact with staff. Staff supporting this young person complimented the home on what a good job they had done to prepare him for independence.

Young people demonstrate a clear understanding of healthy living. They are fully involved in menu planning, and are educated about the importance of a healthy balanced diet. Staff complimented young people on how well they do at cooking,

with young people saying, 'I enjoy cooking, I'm quite good at it!' Some young people attend the gym regularly, and others are encouraged to access health and fitness classes. Generally young people are very healthy, although some choose to smoke. Incentive awards are in place which have proved successful in stopping young people smoking in the house. Although there is not a strong culture of smoking amongst the young people, it is unclear what work is undertaken to reduce their smoking further. Young people are constantly educated by the staff team about the risks of smoking and the effects on their health, although it is unclear whether this has had much impact. Young people are fully supported to receive any support that meets their physical and emotional health and well-being.

Young people benefit from appropriate contact with family friends and people important to them. Young people have had friends over to stay for a sleepover at the home which they enjoyed. Young people are able to maintain positive contact with family as staff work well with families, and other professionals to ensure that young people get to spend time with the people they choose to.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from excellent relationships with staff. A truly dedicated and committed staff team work tirelessly to ensure young people receive an excellent standard of care. The staff's knowledge and understanding of each individual young person and their commitment to the young people provide them with security and consistency. Professionals, working with the staff team, stated, 'the team have an excellent understanding of the young people's needs and emotional well-being.' Staff demonstrated consistently high aspirations for young people and their future developments with young people being at the centre of their daily practice.

Young people's views are sought on all aspects of their lives. Each young person has a key worker with creative key worker sessions in place to ensure young people engage with staff. These sessions prove successful as they are less formal than the young people's meeting. They ensure that young people have the space and time to discuss any issues they wish. Staff also use these sessions productively to address behaviours that may be detrimental to the young person and their future development. A day trip out or an activity may be the basis of an informal key work session, providing a relaxed opportunity for young people to chat. Open and honest communication between staff and young people has enabled young people to communicate in a positive manner. Staff ensure they listen to young people's needs and act on any requests made. Staff ensure that young people are clear about the reasons why certain wishes cannot be acted upon. This provides young people with trusting relationships with staff. It is very evident that young people are informed and are able to raise a complaint or concern should they wish. Complaints made are taken seriously and acted upon swiftly. This provides young people with the confidence to raise concerns in the future. Written and verbal responses to complaints are given to ensure young people are clear about the outcome of any complaint raised, thus keeping them well informed.

Highly individualised and personalised placement plans, clearly detail the care and support needed for young people to grow and develop. Young people commented that they are fully involved in all aspects of their care planning and futures. An Independent Reviewing Officer reported that, 'young people are fully involved in their review process with staff advocating on their behalf should the young person wish.' Excellent relationships exist between the staff team and other professionals to ensure that young people receive the support that they need, with swift action to update care plans should their needs change.

Young people's educational achievements are highly promoted and celebrated. School leavers have been successful in completing their education and have undertaken a range of exams. Young people recognise the importance of their education and were positive about the achievements they have accomplished with completing their school education and sitting exams. Staff work effectively and closely with educational provisions to ensure that attendance levels remain good if a young person is struggling with their education. Creative placements have been sought which have increased attendance for those young people previously struggling.

Young people live in a home that has recently been completely refurbished. The home now provides young people within an excellent standard of accommodation. Young people are very proud of their bedrooms, which are highly personalised to their individual tastes. The home provides a spacious environment, with rooms for relaxation, watching TV or use of computers. A large kitchen which young people have open access to provides opportunities for independent living skills. The separate kitchenette area next to the main kitchen is a great resource for young people to use and practise their cooking skills. Young people commented they enjoy the outside space with new basketball rings installed, and a large football goalpost for them to enjoy. The home provides a warm and homely feel, with young people taking a pride in their environment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in an environment that is safe and keeps them safe from harm. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about the risks that young people pose to themselves when they engage in high risk behaviours and work extremely well with young people to reduce these behaviours. Staff awareness of child protection issues ensure they act promptly should they have a concern to promote and protect the welfare of young people. Recent months show a dramatic reduction in young people going missing or being absent without authority. The majority of incidents recorded are where young people fail to inform the staff they will be returning later than the agreed time. Strong relationships exist between the staff team and the local police. Staff work well with the local police to ensure young people are returned safely should they go missing. Social workers spoken to commented that young people's behaviour has vastly improved since being at the home, and there has been a

dramatic reduction in them taking illegal substances or drinking alcohol. There does not appear to be a culture of young people engaging in these kind of behaviours outside of normal teenage experimental behaviour. Staff continue to educate young people about the risks of this behaviour in order to keep them safe.

Positive and proactive behaviour management is evident in staff successfully engaging with young people. Staff work as a coherent and consistent team delivering consistent and firm boundaries which young people generally respect. Professionals working with the staff team complimented the team on their insight into young people and how well they understand and manage their behaviour. An Independent Reviewing Officer commented the staff always appeared 'very skilled in their management of the young person with very complex needs.' Physical intervention is very rarely used and only as a last resort to protect young people or others from harm. Staff are well trained in behaviour management strategies and use restorative justice techniques to reflect with young people following a behaviour incident. This provides young people with the opportunity to learn from their experiences.

Recruitment practice within the local authority is robust providing all the necessary checks to ensure staff are safe to work with young people. The Registered Manager also keeps copies of all checks undertaken as part of her monitoring duties to ensure suitable staff are recruited to support the young people. Young people play an active role in the recruitment process meeting with prospective staff, asking questions of candidates and sharing their views following their visit to the home. This makes young people feel valued and confident they have a say about who works with them.

Leadership and management

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

Young people and staff have recently returned to the home following major redevelopment and refurbishment of the home. Due to the works undertaken the home has not been inspected since March 2011. At this inspection the Registered Manager was asked to improve the accommodation provided to young people and ensure appropriate safety checks are undertaken. Both these requirements have been fully met with young people's safety and comfort being central to the new development of the home. The home now provides an excellent environment for young people that has been refurbished to a high standard. Young people were fully involved throughout the development, with visits to see how their new home was coming along. This made young people feel part of the development and that their feelings were fully considered at the time of change in their lives.

Staff and young people are supported by an extremely effective and experienced Registered Manager. Staff confirm excellent support is provided by the management team with high quality supervision to reflect on their care practice. The management team and professionals working with staff have high expectations of staff practice and engagement with young people. The recent introduction of the therapeutic approach, 'pillars of parenting', has been successful in raising staff practice even further. Staff are enthusiastic about the training and have welcomed the group

sessions to look at their day-to-day work in order to support and nurture the young people, providing them with a very caring, skilled staff team.

The Registered Manager has a very comprehensive system to monitor all areas within the home to ensure young's peoples welfare and development are central to all aspects of the staffs work. Any areas for development are quickly highlighted with action taken to improve outcomes for young people. Comprehensive quarterly reports are produced identifying trends or issues and highlighting areas for improvement. These reports feed into the Registered Manager's development plan to ensure outcomes for young people continue to be improved.

This child-focused staff team are extremely skilled at supporting young people with complex behavioural issues. This was echoed by professionals spoken to throughout the inspection, with high praise given to their standard of work and engagement with young people. The stable and dedicated staff team are well trained and qualified to ensure they continue to offer a high standard of care to young people.

Young people are central to the staff's planning, ensuring they fully meet the homes Statement of Purpose. Extremely detailed records are maintained giving full chronologies of young people, highlighting the highs and lows in the young person's life. These are well maintained, clearly recorded with all records stored confidentially. It is clear that young people can access information written about them at any time and have full input into their personal records. Staff are creative to ensure young people have recorded memories of positive activities or moments in their lives. For example, producing digital photos on a disc for young people to keep and cherish.

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.