

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC036081
Inspection date	31/01/2013
Inspector	Jacqueline Malcolm
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

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Date of last inspection	12/12/2007

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Service information

Brief description of the service

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. is an independent fostering agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne. The agency assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children and young people. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 58 children and young people placed with approximately 42 foster families.

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 fostering service is effective and provides good quality placements for children and young people. Good matching arrangements support placement stability and minimises placement disruptions. Foster carers are provided with high quality support, supervision and training. This ensures that children and young people are well cared for and are valued as part of the family. Children and young people say that they feel safe and happy with their foster carers and have developed strong attachments and emotional resilience.

Overall, children and young people make good progress from their starting points with their foster carers in all aspects of their welfare and development. They are fully involved in their plans and feel that their wishes and feelings are listened to and acted on. Children and young people enjoy excellent school attendance, good attainment and are working towards their future goals. Their health needs are actively promoted with some excellent outcomes. Significant examples relate to children and young people with profound health needs who have an increased life expectancy and improved prognosis as a direct result of their quality of care. Children and young people enjoy a range of activities that enhance their confidence and give them a positive outlook on life. Stakeholders are satisfied with the quality of service that children and young people receive. Similarly, young people express high levels of satisfaction. Typical comments include, 'You definitely make progress with swiis.' 'They get things done quickly.' 'I think swiis are amazing, honest to god!'

The service is well managed and it continues to make sustained progress following a significant restructure. Good standards are maintained and supported by good administrative support and monitoring systems. The fostering service has capacity to improve. One statutory requirement is made to ensure that the service submits their monitoring report to Ofsted. One recommendation is made concerning foster carer's involvement in the development of young people's pathway plans.

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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
35 (2011)	ensure a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) is provided to the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 35(1a)(2))	01/03/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that carers contribute to the development of each child's care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an 'eligible' child, and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal advisor in implementing the plan. (NMS 12.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people are actively involved in the decisions that affect their daily lives and the developments in the fostering service. Young people confirm that they feel listened to and are involved in complex decisions about their lives. For example, they attend and contribute to their own statutory reviews and their views contribute to their foster carer's annual reviews. Changes have been made to some of the resources available at the fostering service as a result of listening to children and young people. Children and young people are involved in developing questions that fostering panel can address to potential foster carers. They are involved in the review of the young people's guide and participate in the 'skills to foster' training. This level of consultation and participation ensures that children and young people's views are taken seriously and influence their care and support.

Children and young people feel cared for in safe and comfortable foster homes. Their care is supported by safe caring plans, risk assessments and clear boundaries that promote their safety. Children and young people who are involved in risky behaviours are protected and supported to ensure reduced incidents. Children and young people say that they feel valued and loved by their foster carers and that life with their carers makes them feel 'normal'. Good attachments and affectionate relationships are developed between children and young people and their foster families. This ensures that children and young people develop a good sense of security, stability and a positive experience of family life.

Some children and young people have experienced unplanned endings. When this has occurred children and young people are supported to ensure a positive transition where possible. The majority of children and young people benefit immensely from stable placements. Children and young people understand the reason why they are in foster care. They have developed high levels of resilience, self-confidence and feel that they have made good progress as a direct result of the care they receive.

Children and young people benefit from excellent education and health support. This promotes their welfare and social inclusion. Children and young people benefit from excellent school attendance and alternative educational placements. Staff from the fostering service work hard to ensure that children and young people meet their educational potential. Older young people say that their grades would not have improved if they did not have individual support. One young person said, 'I wouldn't be in school if it wasn't for SWIIS.' Ten young people have been successful in attaining GCSE grades 5A* to G. A number of young people have high aspirations to study at university and further their education. They are on target to reach their educational goals. Children and young people's achievements are recognised and celebrated at an awards ceremony. This promotes children and young people's self-worth and confidence. Children and young people say that they are involved in a range of activities that stimulate their interests. The service has a full calendar of activities throughout the year that is well attended. Children and young people enjoy healthy activities, such as swimming, cycling, football, dance, outdoor pursuits, cookery class and club memberships. Children and young people enjoy holidays with their foster families, which broaden their outlook. Some young people are involved with the services allotment project, growing fruit and vegetables. This enables them to learn where food comes from and may use the produce in their cookery classes. This provides young people with a good sense of achievement. They also make a positive contribution when they participate in donating some of the produce to a local food bank.

Children and young people understand their health needs and the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. They say that carers encourage them to eat healthy meals and support them to attend their health appointments. Foster carers ensure that children and young people are registered with health professionals and can access specialist services. The fostering services health advisor undertakes non statutory initial health needs assessments for children and young people when they are first placed with foster carers. This is a very effective intervention, because it enables

children and young people's health needs to be promptly identified and addressed. Children and young people who have disabilities, complex and life limiting health conditions receive excellent care and support from their carers, health professionals and the fostering service. Children and young people's health outcomes are considerably enhanced as a direct result of these interventions. In some examples, their life expectancy has exceeded expectations.

Older young people say that they are helped with smoking cessation and understand the risks of smoking to their health. Carers are well trained in matters relating to mental health, drugs, alcohol and sexual health issues. They use their learning to promote children and young people's emotional, psychological and mental health needs and receive excellent support from the health advisor to access these services.

Young people benefit from good contact with their family and friends. Foster carers facilitate contact as appropriate and are committed to developing positive relationships with parents. This enables children and young people to maintain relationships with significant people in their lives and promote their sense of identity.

Young people are actively supported to develop independence skills. Young people receive high levels of support from their foster carers to ensure that they take responsibility for their lives as they develop into young adults. All young people over the age of 16 years are in education or training. Foster carers have high aspirations and ensure that young people are supported to reach their goals. A number of young people have chosen to remain living with their foster carers at 18 years old. This is good because it enables young people to move on at their own pace and makes for a steady transition into adulthood.

Quality of service

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

The fostering service recruits foster carers who can effectively meet the needs of the majority of children and young people that local authorities want to place. Recruitment of new carers intends to ensure the availability of a diverse range of suitable foster carers. The preparation and assessment of newly recruited foster carers is child focussed and very good. It is thorough and enables carers to start to understand the fostering task. Good participation from looked after young people and foster carers gives the initial training process more credibility. Good education and health awareness is provided by the services education and health leads. Their interventions enhance potential foster carer's awareness of the impact of education and health on children and young people's life chances. Assessments are written to a high quality standard and evaluate foster carers competence and suitability to care for children and young people. Foster carers spoke positively about the assessment process and value the experience. Fosters carers say, 'I really enjoyed it.' 'I loved the process and found it rewarding.'

The fostering panel provides efficient and rigorous scrutiny of foster carer's approvals and reviews. The fostering panel's quality assurance function also has a positive

impact on childcare practices. The fostering service benefits from a very experienced independent panel chair. Panel members from the central list provide a range of diverse skills and expertise and their views actively contribute to recommendations made to the agency decision maker. Fostering panel minutes provide clarity and demonstrate the deliberations made in reaching the recommendations. The fostering panel is well integrated in developing the quality of service received by children and young people.

Good matching ensures placement stability in most instances and result in relatively low numbers of unplanned endings. Fostering staff have excellent knowledge of the foster carers and consider their strengths and ability to meet children and young people's needs. This leads to clear matching considerations. Information about children and young people is promptly made available to carers in the main. Skills gaps are identified and met. For example, foster carers who care for children and young people who have needs arising from their race, identity, religion, disability receive the appropriate training, resources and support to enable them to meet children and young people's assessed needs. Children and young people thrive in these placements.

Foster carers are involved in children and young people's care planning and their views are valued and considered. However, foster carers are not consistently included in the development of young people's pathway plans. This means that local authority expectations from them are not always clear. There is minimal impact on outcomes for young people due to the existing support they receive. Foster carers say that the support and supervision that they receive from the fostering service is excellent. For example, a foster carer said, 'I couldn't do my job without the support from SWIIS. They are always at the end of a phone no matter what day or what time. I cannot sing their praises enough.' Foster carers say that they feel valued as part of a professional team and their contributions are acknowledged. Foster carers positive feedback supports the view that they have a good relationship with the fostering service.

Training is highly valued by the fostering service and foster carers. This ensures a competent group of foster carers that recognises them as professionals. Foster carers attend a range of mandatory and specialised training courses. This enhances their learning and skills, helping them to continue to meet children and young people's needs. This includes behaviour management training and support that enables foster carers to effectively minimise children and young people's challenging behaviours. The majority of foster carers have completed an appropriate professional training course. Foster carers' families are supported and encouraged by the fostering service to participate in the lives of the children and young people. This promotes a positive family experience.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people say that they feel safe and protected in their foster

homes. Some young people say that the rules and boundaries in their homes contribute to making them feel safe. One young person said, 'I feel safe because my carers care about me.' Children and young people do not identify bullying as an issue and they develop strategies to keep themselves safe. Children and young people know how to complain and they know how to access independent advocacy services for support. This empowers children and young people and ensures that their concerns are listened to and addressed.

Safeguarding children and young people is taken very seriously by the fostering service. It is integral to child care practices and service delivery. Good safe caring plans, individual risk assessments, health and safety risk assessments and very good working together practices with safeguarding services promote children and young people's safety and welfare. Foster carers are trained in safeguarding so that they understand the importance of safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare. Foster carers are regularly visited by supervising social workers and young people confirm that staff talk to them during the visits, which provides an additional safeguard. Foster carers understand the reasons for unannounced visits and they co-operate with this safeguarding mechanism. Foster carers who cannot keep children and young people safe are dealt with through appropriate safeguarding mechanisms. Young people who go missing from home are protected by the fostering services policies and procedures that carers follow. The recruitment and vetting of adults is robust to ensure that suitable adults care for children and young people. Allegations and complaints against foster carers are taken seriously by the fostering service. They are promptly investigated and the outcomes effectively protect children and young people.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **good**.

Children and young people benefit from a well-managed, efficient and resilient child focussed fostering service. A recent restructure of the service has not impacted on the quality of care and support provided. The Registered Manager has been in post since 2010, having worked in the fostering service for several years. She is well qualified, experienced and competent, providing effective leadership and management.

The Registered Manager is appropriately deputised. She is also supported by a highly motivated, skilled, supportive, experienced and qualified team. They are very passionate about their work and provide a high standard of support to foster carers, children and young people. This is reflected in their practice, often going the extra mile to support fostering households. Their excellent knowledge of foster carers, children and young people is commendable. The important contribution of the health and education advisors enhances the lives of children and young people through their involvement in delivering training to foster carers, support, advice and guidance. Staff feel that the management support they receive is excellent. They are well trained and appreciate the benefits of enhancing their knowledge to inform their practice and professional development. Staff consider their work to be manageable;

they receive regular formal supervision, peer support and appraisals.

Foster carers speak highly of the fostering service and feel like part of the team. Children and young people influence developments in the fostering service. They say that they enjoy their inclusion in activities and feel consulted and listened to. Stakeholders generally have a positive view of the fostering service and very good relationships are developed with partner agencies in health and education services, safeguarding, local authorities and commissioning services. Comments from stakeholders include, 'The support social worker has been very helpful. The agency is able to support the child as well as the foster carers. A good service.' 'The member of staff that I have worked with has a very good understanding of safeguarding issues.'

The Registered Manager has a good system in place to monitor the fostering service. They are clearly aware about the strengths of the service and areas for development and they drive continuous improvement. Foster carers are actively involved in the monitoring process. They submit information to the fostering service about all aspects of children and young people's care and welfare. This ensures the tracking of children and young people's progress and outcomes. However, the monitoring report has not been sent to the regulatory body, Ofsted. This impedes Ofsted from carrying out its regulatory duties.

Matching, placement breakdowns, complaints and allegations are promptly and sensitively managed in the best interests of children and young people. Efficient administrative support and the recently implemented electronic system ensure that information can be efficiently accessed. This provides the Registered Manager with a very good management oversight. The fostering service has the capacity for improvement and has met all of the recommendations made at the last inspection.

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 inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.