

Breakaway & Dudley Shared Care Project (Midlands region)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Christine Lancashire / Linda Brown
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Address	Barnardos Trinity House Trinity Road DUDLEY West Midlands DY1 1JB
Telephone number	0121 550 5271
Email	Julia.tanner@barnardos.org.uk
Registered person	Barnardo's Midlands Region
Registered manager	Ann Tanner
Responsible individual	David Andrew Baker-Price
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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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

Barnardos Breakaway Family Placement Services has developed from a project which has been in operation for 21 years. The aim is to provide long term/permanent family-based placements for children aged between birth and 16 years who have various degrees of learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities. The service also provides family-based short breaks, sitters and befrienders for children and young people living with their long term foster carers. The project includes the Dudley Shared Care Project, which provides short term breaks for children with disabilities for a time limited or bridging placement or at short notice on an emergency basis. A range of services are available for children with disabilities who live at home with their families and are not accommodated by the Local Authority. This includes sleepovers, sitting, befriending or day care in the child's home or local community. Breakaway also provides a service through Hereford shared care which links disabled children with individuals and families for short-term care on a regular basis and sessional support to children and young people who have been assessed as needing this service.

Summary

This service continues to provide a very good service to children, their parents and carers. The service provides good, detailed information, to carers and other interested parties, outlining its aims and objectives and describing how it operates. This information is in a range of formats, to meet the range of communication needs of the children and young people. There is information about how to complain and comments are welcomed. The service is well-managed, with appropriate policies and procedures which are known to and implemented by staff. There are sufficient staff, who are well trained and competent and who receive a good level of support and ongoing training. The managers value the staff and carers, listen to their views and provide them with good opportunities for training, so that children's needs are met. There are appropriate checks on carers and staff and good systems for assessing and recording risks, so that children are protected by the adults who care for them. There are very good arrangements for ensuring that the high standards of performance are maintained and developed, in response to comments from children and carers, so that the service to children is continually improved. Carers and staff feel that the staff provide them with an excellent level of support and that they feel part of a large, caring, family community which works to enrich the lives of children.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Breakaway has added a small office in Hereford, since the last inspection. This has enabled them to provide a locally based service to people in that area. This work is progressing well and the office is appropriately staffed. The name of the service and the Statement of Purpose have been changed to reflect the work carried out. Work has been undertaken to update the policies and procedures and this continues, so that they reflect the five outcomes for children. The service has improved and updated its children's guides to include versions in Makaton and an interactive guide on CD. These have made the information more accessible to the young people who use the service. The service has expanded its range of training to carers to ensure that children and young people receive appropriate care. Barnardos now has a participation officer to provide advice and support and the service has identified a worker to take the lead

responsibility for participation, so that children's views can be taken into account. The service has increased the payments made to carers.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

This service has a variety of policies and procedures which provide guidance to workers and carers on how to promote the holistic health care needs of the children. Recording systems also enable workers to check that carers promote healthy lifestyles. For example, the daily recording sheets used by carers include relevant prompts. The workers and carers have developed good relationships with health professionals in various fields. Children with specific health needs are enabled to access appropriate professional support from, for example, the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. There are good systems to ensure that carers are well-informed about the health care needs of the children in their care. The social workers ensure that they obtain the relevant information from the placing authorities. Files contain these medical details and each child has a passport, which provides very good information about their health needs and the ways in which they prefer to be cared for. For children on short-term breaks, carers communicate with the child's parents or usual carers to obtain up to date information. Carers have a good understanding of the health needs of the children in their care, so that children's health and welfare are maintained and promoted.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There are very good arrangements to ensure that children are kept safe. The service carries out appropriate checks on workers and carers, so that children are cared for by suitable people. Carers and workers are trained in child protection and safe-caring. They are provided with an outline of the action which needs to be taken when child protection issues have been raised. Carers who are subject to allegations are well-supported after the investigation has taken place. There are risk assessments and safe-caring guidelines in relation to the foster carers' homes and the activities in which the young people participate. Carers use written behaviour management strategies with specific children. There are appropriate systems to ensure that children are matched with suitable carers. Carers confirm that they feel confident that the workers are aware of their strengths and attributes so that the children who are placed will benefit from these. Social workers who supervise the carers see the children during supervision and read the notes which the carers have written about their progress. They demonstrate up to date knowledge of the children who are placed. Children and carers are provided with clear information about the action to take, should they wish to complain. Managers in the organisation investigate complaints thoroughly. The panel is appropriately constituted and well organised. It carries out its duties effectively, to ensure that children are placed with appropriate carers where they will be safe and well cared for.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service recognises and values diversity and education so that all children are enabled to achieve to the best of their ability. The service works specifically with children with disabilities and they are enabled to access services in the community so they can participate in a range of activities. The service recruits from diverse backgrounds, in order to meet the needs of children from various cultures and religions. The referral and matching process incorporates equality

and diversity issues. Carers and staff receive training in diversity as part of their induction and additional sessions are held periodically, such as at team away days. There are focussed support groups for lesbian and gay staff and carers. There are efforts to provide same race placements where possible and when transracial placements are made, these are supported by specialist training for the carers. Carers demonstrate their commitment to enabling children to understand and follow their culture and religion. This service encourages children to achieve educationally by choosing carers who are committed to enabling them to succeed to the best of their ability. There is a good relationship with the local Looked After Children in Education Service (LACES). Children are consulted about their education and their successes are shared in the newsletter and celebratory events. Carers also take children on holidays and provide them with support to engage in activities and interests of their choice. The service organises occasional outings and celebrations, such as the recent twenty-first anniversary outing to the Black Country Museum. These are well attended by carers, their families and children. The arrangements for short-term breaks are suitable. There is a good level of communication between the carers and the usual carers or parents, so that the children feel well cared for and supported in both environments.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The carers provide a good level of support to enable children to have contact with people who have played a significant role in their lives, where appropriate. The views of the children are taken into account when arranging contact and carers demonstrate a good understanding of the possible effects which such contact may have on the children in their care. Carers maintain records of the child's reactions to contact with family or significant others so that supervising workers and carers work together to ensure that children have positive experiences at times of contact. There are a wide range of mechanisms for listening to children and young people. Barnardos has a participation officer and there is one member of the team with a specific responsibility to promote participation. Due to the communication needs of many of the children who are placed, workers and carers receive training in a variety of methods such as Makaton and 'Sign A Long', communication with symbols and signs. Link workers make time to see children independently of their carers and independent advocates are also used. There are examples of changes being made to children's care and placement plans in response to children's comments. There are plans to improve the feedback forms used by children at the time of the carers' reviews. The agency continues to develop better arrangements so that each child is enabled to express their views and contribute to decisions made about their care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The service ensures that the carers assist young people in preparing for adulthood, although they recognise that many will never live fully independently. Carers provide many examples of progress made by the young people in their care in terms of daily living skills and social interaction. There are examples of young people who have been enabled to remain with carers longer than first planned due to their ongoing needs and wishes. Young people are helped to prepare for their future by developing relevant skills, competence and knowledge according to their abilities. The service pays allowances and fees according to their policies and procedures. These are clearly laid out and the carers are informed about their entitlement. The fees have

increased this year by varying amounts. Extra money is allocated at times to meet specific needs. This ensures that children receive the services which they require to thrive.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is a clear and detailed Statement of Purpose and this is updated to reflect changes and developments. This is complemented by information for children, which includes an interactive CD with cartoon characters. This ensures that children and young people know what they can expect from their carers. The workers recognise that the children have a range of communication difficulties and they are constantly working to revise materials, develop improved systems and seek ways to improve practice, so that children and young people receive a more individual service. The registered manager is supported by local deputies in Dudley and Hereford and there is a good level of communication between the management team. The service is well-staffed with competent workers who have a good knowledge of the aims and objectives of the organisation and the procedures which they follow in their work. All staff receive regular supervision, annual appraisal, encouragement to reflect on their practice and very good opportunities for training, so that they are well-equipped to undertake their roles. There is a clear strategy for working with carers and this includes providing them with opportunities for training and support. Supervising social workers provide a good level of support to carers. Training and support is offered at various times and locations to encourage carers to attend. Carers value the training which is provided. There are social events, such as the recent celebrations of 21 years of the project and the recent opening of the office in Hereford, which are well-attended. Staff and carers feel valued by the organisation and their comments are welcomed when planning improvements. They feel able to contribute to the development of the service by providing ideas and opinions. There are questionnaires which are completed at the time of reviews and carers feel that their supervising workers seek their opinions at visits. Staff and carers describe their experience of Breakaway as a caring family. The records, in respect of children and carers, are maintained in very good order and are audited on a regular basis. They are well-organised, up to date and appropriately structured. Workers chase up information which local authorities have failed to provide. This ensures that children's and carers' details are easily accessible so that suitable decisions can be made. There are good arrangements for quality assurance, so that the children receive a good service which is continuously being improved.

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 meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.