

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC045408
Inspection date	16/05/2012
Inspector	Gavin Thomas
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	05/01/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority managed children's home is registered for two young people of either gender. Most young people have planned admissions but the home does accept crisis placements.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service 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**.

The vast majority of young people are admitted to the home with little or no time for preparation. However, they go on to make remarkable progress in developing their confidence, self-esteem, learning and education and adjusting their behaviours. This is supported through the significance which staff place on building strong and trusting relationships with young people. In exceptional circumstances a very small percentage of young people do stay for longer periods than others and their outcomes are very positive. For instance, one young person said 'I am not sure what would have happened to me if I had not come here because of my behaviour.'

The quality of care planning and risk management processes is wide ranging and very personal to the young people. Young people are kept fully informed about the content of their care plans and support processes. This openness gives young people a clear sense of understanding and ownership about their care needs. The coordination of care planning is realistic and this takes into account young people's holistic needs and what is achievable for the duration of their stay.

Behavioural management systems are robust and monitored in detail for effectiveness. One young person said that although they found it difficult adapting to life in a children's home, staff have helped them a great deal in managing their behaviours and keeping out of trouble.

Diversity is embedded in written policies, practice, staff recruitment and training. The culture of the home is accepting to a wide range of needs. In doing so, staff are skilled and undertake relevant training for supporting young people with highly complex needs and difficult backgrounds.

Young people's safety is central to the day-to-day running of the home. The dynamics of the staff team contributes to a safe environment and helps reduce risk taking and anti-social behaviours exhibited by young people. This includes: effective communication between staff, communication between staff and young people, shift planning and engaging young people in meaningful activities. External professionals praise the work of the staff for keeping very vulnerable young people safe including times when young people are missing from care. Professionals say staff 'go the extra mile for making sure that the young people are safe.' Young people and external professionals have great trust in the staff team and these views are very consistent.

The Registered Manager has overall responsibility for two children's homes. The management structure for this service however is very well established; all staff feel that they are well supported and motivated by the senior management team for the home. There is a strong commitment to developing the service through the use of quality assurance and monitoring processes. Although some of these are in infancy stages, there are marked signs of development since systems were implemented.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- retain copies of written consents for medical treatments at the home. (NMS 6.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Outcomes for young people are exceptionally good. Because of their circumstances, young people often have very little or no time for preparing to move into the home. The vast majority of young people settle and make good strides for the duration of their stay. Staff encourage young people to believe in themselves and instil confidence in young people as they come to terms with issues relating to relationships with significant others, separation and having to move on.

Young people's tolerance of intense support and individualised care is beneficial to their health and general well-being. This includes a significant reduction in high risk behaviours in and away from the home, incidents of being missing from care and involvement in substance use such as smoking and other substances. The positive energy shown by staff and their caring examples of respect and persistence, are incentives for young people to change their behaviours. Staff are proactive in their work with relevant health professionals and this has a positive impact on young people's outlook and views about their well-being. For example, one young person can now reflect on anger related issues and how these have changed over time.

The quality of care planning and deployment of staff on each shift gives young people a good range of opportunities for spending their time constructively. One young person is of the opinion that only now can they understand their past more, including difficulties with relationships and contact. Staff are very swift in intervening with young people when they are showing signs of anxiety or struggling with difficult issues including contact arrangements. This intense support and nurturing helps young people develop coping skills and improves their self-esteem.

Young people's education and work-related skills are fully supported by staff for the duration of their stay. The extent of staffs' input gives young people the confidence and motivation to attend school or alternate education provisions. Young people are engaged in specific programmes designed to help them prepare for moving on. These plans are effective in practice because young people are included in the planning of their goals and the criteria for achievement.

Young people's contact arrangements are carefully planned and supported because of the anxiety and heightened emotions this often causes. Staff are very sensitive and empathetic towards young people in these situations. Extensive work is undertaken to help young people cope with their feelings and to overcome emotions often linked to behaviours because of past experiences. Life story work and advice taken from health care professionals are excellent examples of helping young people work through these issues.

The home is ideally located in a residential area where young people integrate with peers of a similar age. Play and social interactions are encouraged and very good links are established with local neighbours. Young people entertain their friends at the home and according to one young person, having their mates around for tea or chilling out is a good thing. Local facilities and amenities are within close proximity and this encourages young people to make constructive use of their time.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit immensely from the positive reinforcement they receive from staff. Young people refer to staff as being 'firm' but 'fair' and value staffs' persistency and patience in engaging them in meaningful activities. Staff are very skilled in getting to know young people and forming trusting relationships with little or no time before admission. Boundaries are quickly instilled on or soon after admission and although young people find this very challenging, they respect what is required of them for the duration of their stay.

Young people are fully aware of the home's policies and commitment to equality. For example, young people say they are not forced to do anything but staff encourage them to get involved in the running of the home. Equally, young people praise the different opportunities they have in fulfilling their hobbies and interests.

Staff create a very open culture about healthy lifestyles including prompts, guidance and support for young people on matters such as smoking, sexual health and substance use. In some situations, young people are making great strides in reducing or stopping these habits as a result of the persistency of the staff team. The extent of care planning helps staff identify priorities and risk factors relating to young people's holistic needs, including emotional well-being and how these can be realistically addressed for the duration of their stay. A very robust reviewing system is also in place, involving young people's input and staffs' contributions. This two-way process is used effectively for determining the types of support young people require and how their assessed needs are best met. Well-established links are in place with external health professionals and this benefits both staff and young people. For example, young people receive guidance and support on health matters such as physical and emotional health. Although written consents for medical treatments are obtained, these are not kept at the home. As a result, there is no written proof that these are in place.

An established link worker system is in place and this provides a basis for young people to communicate openly with staff. The ethos of the home however, ensures that all staff are readily accessible to young people. The staff ratios, shift patterns and shift planning means that this works well in practice. Young people relate well to this approach and one said 'I like the staff here; they are cool because they listen to us.' Young people are engaged in activities such as life story work to help them work through very sensitive matters. Young people respond positively to these initiatives and one young person said 'life story work is about my life and people I have not seen for some time. I will always cherish these photos.'

The majority of young people only stay at this home for short periods before moving on. Despite this however, the support for encouraging young people to attend school or alternate educational provisions is extensive. Staff motivate young people by encouraging them to study effectively and learn through their own interests. A dedicated room is provided for private study. Staff are very understanding of young people's past experiences regarding education and learning. As a result, staff work intensively with schools, education provisions and where appropriate families, to help turn these into more positive experiences.

Currently, young people are not expressing a wish to follow a faith or requiring specific cultural or other preferences. However, staff ensure that young people are given options to integrate successfully into their local and wider community. In doing so, young people establish positive contacts with their peers in the local community and make good use of local amenities. Young people are proud to show off their photo collections, mainly relating to activities connected to their hobbies and interests.

This two bedded home is very homely and welcoming. Young people are not restricted and 'trust' is embedded in the ethos of the home. In turn, this means that young people are fully aware of times when the door is only locked to keep them safe. Young people are given opportunities to personalise their bedrooms and consulted on the décor of other parts of the home. Significant progress is being

made with plans to expand the premises. Young people are kept fully abreast of these plans and this project will include the replacement of some of the existing fixtures and fittings.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are confident that they are and feel safe. They know how to express their feelings if they do not feel safe and this includes direct contact with staff or use of the complaints procedure.

Robust safeguarding systems are in place, including staffs' understanding of written policies and the relevance of regular training on safeguarding. Staff are trained, skilled and prepared for supporting young people who have been involved in safeguarding concerns prior to admission. Extensive work is undertaken with external professionals who support staff in coping with and managing difficult situations as a result of young people's past experiences.

Behavioural management systems are wide ranging and planned interventions are recorded and monitored for effectiveness. Monthly briefings with staff and external professionals help establish positive reinforcements and consistency within the team when supporting young people through challenging and difficult situations. According to young people, sanctions are fair and help them take responsibility for their behaviour. Physical interventions are rare and when they do occur, young people are fully involved in discussions about the incident, taking into account their views and feelings.

Incidents involving young people missing from care are managed extremely well. The overwhelming majority of incidents reduce over time as young people settle. One young person said that they do not feel the need to go missing as often as they did in the past. This is because of the support they currently receive. Staff are proactive in engaging with young people about their safety. In turn, the personalised support systems mean that young people are responding in a very positive way. One professional praised the skill of the staff team whom they referred to as 'excellent' when supporting young people who are missing from care.

Robust systems are in place for ensuring that staff are suitable to work with young people. This includes a very stringent recruitment process, involving young people's input on the interviewing panel. The scrutiny of suitability checks also demonstrates the thoroughness in determining staffs' suitability to work with young people in very challenging and demanding situations.

High risk behaviours are very well monitored. Detailed risk assessments are in place and these are consistent with young people's care plans. Young people are fully abreast of their care plans and risk assessments. In addition to personalised risk assessments, risk management strategies are in place and carefully monitored for ensuring young people's safety. This includes off-site activities and environmental

matters around the home.

Young people do not associate bullying with this home. Policies and procedures are carried out effectively in practice within the staff team and demonstrated through their work with young people. For example, cyber bullying is discussed in detail with young people according to their age and understanding. Individual work undertaken with young people reinforces positive and accepting relationships with each other and the people around them. In turn, this helps young people build on safe relationships and teaches them about unacceptable behaviours including racism, homophobic bullying and prejudices.

Leadership and management

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

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose is in place and this contains relevant and up-to-date information about the running of the home. Staff are very familiar with the ethos of the home and this is clearly evidenced in their practice and interactions with young people.

A guide is available to young people and this includes a brief summary of the Statement of Purpose. Young people are given a copy of the guide on admission and other forms of information are provided to young people following admission.

The home is very well managed by a suitably experienced and qualified Registered Manager who is also registered to manage another service within close proximity to this home. In the absence of the Registered Manager, the day-to-day running of the home is overseen by a very experienced and suitably qualified senior member of staff.

Young people are supported by a strong and stable staff team. The staff team are very diverse and brings to the home a very good mix of experiences, skills and qualifications. The vast majority of staff are trained to NVQ Level 3 and above. A very small number of staff are pursuing the Children and Young People's workforce diploma. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about young people's needs and the impact of past experiences which triggers and influences a number of behaviours exhibited by young people. The management of the staff team and the effectiveness of team work motivate staff and empowers them to work successfully with the young people.

A vigorous induction process is in place and staff say that this is very beneficial in helping them gain a deeper understanding about working in a very challenging environment. Staff praise each other for the respect and support they receive. They are also fully supported by a small but supportive management team who are always accessible. A comprehensive training programme is in place, offering staff a variety of courses relevant to their work with young people, while supporting their professional development. Ongoing supervisions and annual appraisals are supportive of staffs' conduct and efficiency.

Good quality monitoring systems are in place. These are wide-ranging and include: external monthly visits, internal monthly audits, and an annual development plan which is now fully implemented. Outcomes of audits are used to influence practice and for monitoring outcomes for young people. Surveys completed by the young people, staff and external professionals all demonstrate very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of this service.

Effective systems are in place for the reporting and management of significant events. The promptness of this practice demonstrates how measures are swiftly put into place to keep young people safe. In addition, the management team evaluates all significant events and practices. When necessary, support systems are adjusted according to young people's changing needs.

Young people develop a real sense of identity and individuality following their admission to the home. Young people are encouraged and supported to build on their interests and to use these positively and constructively. For instance, one young person is pursuing further education prospects which are linked to a sporting and leisure pursuit.

At the last inspection, one requirement and three recommendations were made. Although the requirement to provide proper sleeping accommodation for staff is not fully met, plans for building work to commence are imminent. The Statement of Purpose has now been updated and contains more accurate information. Significant progress has been made in developing and implementing quality and monitoring systems. This includes an evaluation of monthly monitoring systems and the implementation of a development plan specific to the home.

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.