

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
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Date of last inspection	13/09/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately owned children's home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to two young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is one of four children's homes owned by the provider organisation.

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**.

No new placements have been made at this home since the previous inspection, when the home was judged inadequate. One young person's placement was terminated, by the placing authority, as a direct result of that judgement. For young people, who have been accommodated at the home long term and are now preparing to move towards independence, outcomes are less positive than they should have been, had they received care of a consistently high standard. For this reason outcomes for young people are rated only as adequate. However there have been very significant improvements, in the consistency and quality of care provided, since that inspection. Committed and effective leadership, robust monitoring and the determined and dedicated implementation of development plans, which place young people at the centre of service delivery, have helped young people grow and develop in terms of skill levels and confidence. Outcomes for young people placed have, therefore, been considerably improved because of the positive input they have received during the last year. The improvements strongly indicate that outcomes for young people, who are placed in future, will be more consistently positive.

This is now a well run home. Staff receive training, support and supervision to equip them to meet the needs of young people. Care planning for young people is robust. Young people's positive relationships with the staff have helped them to engage in life story work, to begin to develop the skills and knowledge to prepare them for independence and to recognise and refine some of their challenging and unsafe behaviours. Young people's safety is prioritised within the home because staff have good awareness about young people's presenting, potentially unsafe behaviours and challenge and manage them effectively.

There are no breaches of regulations. Two recommendations for improvement have been made relating to information about staff retained within the home and the need to ensure that a member of the home's own staff is always on duty.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home's records relating to staff working at the home incorporate all required information, specifically in relation to Criminal Records Bureau checks (NMS 16.3)
- ensure that staff members who are placed in charge of the home and other staff have substantial relevant experience of working at this home. (NMS 17.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people are in settled placements where they feel generally happy and safe and comment that this placement: 'has surely helped me' because the staff 'have really looked after me now for nearly four years.'

Young people have not consistently engaged well with education, throughout their placements, nor have they always been robustly supported to take full advantage of professional help with emotional and mental health issues. Staff have not always been proactive enough in challenging associated professionals in terms of the inadequacy of the services they have made available to young people. These shortfalls were clearly identified during the previous inspection and have been addressed. However, for young people, this has impacted on their long-term personal and educational achievement and on the overall eventual outcomes of their placement at the home.

During the last year young people have benefited from a more structured approach to their care. Care plans are robust and the young people understand, and are involved in determining, the clear aims and objectives of those plans. Young people are achieving their aims now through positive relationships with staff and consistently good support and encouragement to do so. Young people are confident enough in these relationships to be able to say when they need additional help.

Young people spend quality individual time with staff. The young people enjoy a range of chosen activities with the staff such as cooking, football, snooker and horse riding. They have regular individual key work sessions, which help them to

understand and value their own individuality and to explore issues such as sexual and personal health, bullying and religion and so to appreciate and understand the world around them. Young people are encouraged to access health services properly and have been supported to seek specific medical help, for example to give up smoking. Young people are beyond school leaving age but have been encouraged and well supported, not always successfully, to access further education opportunities. Where young people have poor social skills they are receiving specific targeted input to develop these. This has included staff providing opportunities for young people, who find it difficult to make friends to socialise with other young people. Young people are able to keep in regular contact with their families, both through staff facilitating visits and by telephone.

Young people's views, wishes and feelings are listened to by the staff. Where young people make specific requests these are carefully discussed with them so that they understand when what they ask for cannot be agreed. Where a young person requested a dog at the home, for example, and this request could not reasonably be met, staff worked with the young person to reduce the impact of the refusal by arranging for him to walk dogs at the local dog's home and also to accompany a staff member walking their dogs.

Quality of care

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

The manager and staff team have implemented clear boundaries with young people and use rewards well to promote improvements in attitudes and behaviours. Records show significantly more rewards are issued than sanctions. Young people have regular key worker sessions and a weekly house meeting with staff and these are well used to encourage the young people to voice their opinions. At the weekly meeting young people are involved in deciding on menus and activities for the coming week. Young people are on independence plans and prepare their own menus and shop for their ingredients. The menus reflect the promotion of healthy eating. Though the record of what is actually eaten demonstrates that staff sometimes struggle to support young people to stick with the healthy option when the time comes to make it.

Where young people have specific health conditions, such as epilepsy, staff have access to good information about the condition to support them in helping the young person to manage it. Medication is safely stored and appropriately administered and recorded. In one instance the dedication and perseverance of the manager and staff have been instrumental in securing long overdue mental health support for a young person.

Young people know how to complain and complaints forms are simple to complete and readily available on the kitchen notice board. No complaints have been received since the last inspection. The young people's guide provides them with good information about the home and contact information for advocacy and support services. Young people have advocates, provided by their placing authority, who also

support them in knowing and exercising their rights. For some young people these are very positive relationships.

Care planning and placement recording is thorough and robust, ensuring that young people's support and development needs are clearly identified. The manager has prepared a life story work folder and this is being utilised to help young people to understand why they are in care and to gather information about their past. Young people are being supported to collect photographs and memorabilia to help them to remember time spent at the home. Young people sign all their records to show that they agree with what is written about them and the weekly records are also shared with placing social workers and parents who are encouraged to comment. A placing social worker says that: 'communication from the home is excellent' and that she receives regular written reports of good quality.

Records demonstrate how the staff ensure that equality and diversity issues are really well integrated into young people's daily lives. Full advantage is taken of discussion opportunities raised by television programmes, newspaper articles or just everyday occurrences. These have resulted in discussions about safeguarding issues such as stranger danger and fireworks, about homeless people and even a discussion about effective team building focused on building a successful football team. Such discussions help to broaden young people's knowledge and awareness of issues they will face as they move into adulthood.

The manager has accessed a life skills folder, produced by Fostering Network and the National Leaving Care Advisory Service. This is a very comprehensive folder and young people have participated really well with staff in going through it and completing a number of worksheets to demonstrate their progressive acquisition of skills and knowledge to help them to manage the transition into independence and adult life.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel safe at the home. There have been no concerns regarding bullying, but it is a topic regularly discussed with young people, and individual risk assessments consider their potential to bully or be bullied. A placing social worker comments that she has full confidence in the home to 'contain and care for the young person and to keep him, the staff and the public safe from the behaviours he has the propensity to exhibit.'

Restraint is rarely used at the home and there have been no instances since the last Ofsted visit to the home in November 2012. All staff undertake regular refresher training to ensure that, should they need to use restraint to safeguard themselves or young people, they are able to do so safely and appropriately. Young people have clear behaviour management plans, which identify potential behaviours, what may trigger those behaviours, and distraction techniques found to be successful with the particular young person. This ensures that young people's behaviour is managed in a

consistent and effective way. A placing social worker feels that in the last year: 'boundaries are significantly clearer within the home and the young person has responded well to these showing significant improvement in confidence and behaviour because he knows exactly where he stands.' Young people do not go missing from the home generally but, should this happen, staff have access to the home's procedural guidance and the local police protocol for children missing from home. Individual risk assessments highlight any particular issues for consideration.

Staff working at the home are carefully vetted, and visitors are properly checked and supervised, so that young people are not exposed to adults who may pose a threat to their safety. Full recruitment records are stored at the provider organisation's head office. The staff records retained at the home do not always contain confirmation of the date and reference number of their Criminal Records Bureau check or confirmation that two satisfactory references have been received.

The home has positive relationships with the local Community Police Officers, who regularly call at the home to chat and have coffee. This encourages young people to see the police in a positive light. Where young people have had previous offending behaviours this has not continued to be a cause for concern.

The home provides a physically safe and secure environment. There are regular and robust health and safety checks, with reports sent to the directors, and regular comprehensive checking and servicing of fire safety equipment. All professional checks on gas and electrical equipment are up to date. Regular fire drills ensure that staff and young people are fully aware of how to evacuate the home safely in case of fire.

Leadership and management

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

There were a significant number of requirements and recommendations made at the previous full inspection of the home in June 2012; when the home was rated as inadequate. Many of these were reiterated when the interim inspection was completed in October 2012, and the home was judged to have made inadequate progress. A monitoring visit, in November 2012 concluded that the home had 'robustly addressed all compliance notices, requirements and recommendations.' The home has sustained the improvements noted during that visit and the manager has continued to pursue a rigorous and effective improvement and development plan. This has vastly improved the care experience of young people.

The manager exercises sound and effective leadership. She has undertaken work to build the skills and confidence of the team. She has instigated personal development plans for staff, which comprise a clear reflection of staff skills and competencies, and has identified specific training and development needs and ensured these are met. The manager has good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the staff team and utilises these well in compiling the rota and in delegating tasks. She has motivated the staff team to effect huge improvements to the home itself, which is

now clean, well decorated and maintained and provides a homely and welcoming environment for young people and visitors. There is a real focus on young people as central to all the developments that have taken place. The home features pictures and furnishings chosen by young people and staff and there are many photos of staff and young people around the house. A chill out room has been established for young people to use if they want time on their own, should they be angry or anxious.

There are regular team meetings and staff receive regular individual supervision and consistent support. Staff feel that the raised levels of confidence and competence within the staff team have been totally reflected in the young people's attitudes. The imposition of clear boundaries and expectations has resulted in a decline in damage caused by young people around the home and a reduction in the use of sanctions and restraints. The staff feel relationships between staff, and between staff and young people, are much improved and that: 'everyone takes ownership of the home now.'

The staffing compliment in the home has reduced in the last year because of consistently lower occupancy. The staff compliment is six, in addition to the manager, and currently four of these posts are vacant. The provider organisation employs bank staff and one of these staff has consistently filled one of the vacancies at the home. Up until very recently the manager confirms that there has been only minimal use of agency staff during the last year. Recent concerns, regarding a young person's safety, necessitated an increase in staffing levels and there have been a few occasions when neither of the two staff on duty have been regular staff from this home, though one has always been an employee of the organisation. This has not impacted adversely on current young people. Because the long-term nature of their placement means they are familiar with staff from the provider's other homes. The provider organisation has already undertaken recruitment and a number of appointments are imminent, once required checks are completed. The manager confirms that no additional young people will be admitted until additional staff are in post

The home's Statement of Purpose fully reflects the aims and objectives of the home and details the services provided. Recording is to good standard with placement records providing good information, which in the future will help young people to understand and appreciate their care history, and remember the positive relationships they had with staff at the home.

Robust and effective monitoring systems have been implemented to ensure that both care and recording practice focuses on meeting the individual needs of young people. The manager has researched to identify information and tools to support the development of staff skills and to promote effective work in developing young people's skills and confidence.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.