

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Jackie Graves
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This service is a registered children's home for up to seven young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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**.

This home helps young people achieve outstanding outcomes in education, health and behaviour and in reducing incidents of going missing. The staff team create a nurturing atmosphere in which young people feel they are genuinely cared for. Firm and consistent boundaries enable young people to feel very safe, secure and supported. Care is well planned for each individual young person, taking into account their backgrounds and experiences.

Young people are clear that 'nothing needs to change' about the home and 'think it is great here'. Describing what they like about the home, one young person said, 'Mainly the atmosphere; you can joke around so easily.' Another felt their key worker had shown great commitment to helping improve their life, saying 'they deserve an award for what they've done'.

Young people are consistently positive about the quality of care in the home and their relationships with staff. They value the warm, friendly relationships with staff and each other. They benefit from a stable staff team. All young people have been supported to make some progress in their lives as a result of living in this home, with some making considerable progress. They enjoy a wide range of activities and new experiences.

The staff communicate effectively with all involved in young people's lives. Social workers are pleased with how the home positively affects the young people placed there. They say it 'provides a safe haven where young people can be stable' and find that staff do a 'fantastic job'. Parents appreciate how the staff are non-judgemental towards them, keep them informed and include them in the care of their child. Positive outcomes are achieved in building positive contact between young people

and their families.

Management is strong and effective. The manager strives to constantly develop the service, to provide the best support for young people to make progress and achieve their potential. The provider and the manager effectively monitor the quality of care to ensure the service is run with young people as its focus. No actions or recommendations are made as a result of this inspection.

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are making very good progress in their education, with some making excellent progress. Some achieve vocational qualifications, others are taking GCSE courses. All identify further courses to follow in the future in order to gain further qualifications, career options or a university education in order to maximise their potential. Young people are encouraged to seek part-time work or volunteer in order to develop their opportunities and work experience. Staff help them practically with this, for example, with interview techniques.

All young people living in this home experience considerably improved attendance at their educational placement, with some achieving 100% attendance. Some have also improved their time-keeping skills and now attend school on time, making the most of each school day to optimise their learning.

Young people make exceptional progress in developing emotional resilience and forming positive relationships with their families and staff. Young people feel less stressed, more relaxed and better emotionally as a result of living in this home. They show emotional resilience when facing new challenges in their lives, for example, when moving on to independent living or when returning to live with their families. Their very strong relationships with staff provide them with support and security when facing change in their lives; they are able to approach change positively and with confidence.

Health outcomes improve as a result of living in this home, some exceptionally. All young people's general health is good. They eat a healthy diet, take regular exercise and attend to their personal hygiene. Their access to general health services improves and is more regular as a result of living in this home. Some young people forget to attend appointments but staff continue to encourage their attendance and emphasise the importance of regular attendance to optimise their health outcomes. Due to the persistent, proactive approach of staff, some young people have made exceptional progress in living healthier lives. For example, some no longer smoke or use drugs, some are of a healthier weight and some no longer engage in risky sexual behaviour. Staff are doing everything possible to promote change and improve outcomes for those few young people who continue to engage in activities which may compromise their health, for example, by discussing consequences, seeking advice from specialists and running workshops on aspects of being healthy.

Young people have full and active lives when living in this home. Programmes of activities are drawn up based on their individual hobbies and interests. They also have opportunities to try new activities and experiences, for example, attending fashion week, going to museums or going on holiday to different areas of the country. Plenty of creative activities give young people the chance to express themselves, for example, through art and painting. They also learn to interact with others while learning new sports and games, including boxing, weight training, board games, football and chess, as well as developing confidence and self-esteem.

Young people are very well prepared for their transition to independence and adult life. They are confident about practical matters including budgeting and accessing benefits. They gain very useful practical skills in order to maintain their health, for example, how to plan, shop for and prepare healthy meals, including foods from their cultural heritage. They are secure in knowing they can maintain their connection to the home when they do move on and that staff will continue to be concerned for their well-being and want the best for them.

Quality of care

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

Young people live in a relaxed, nurturing environment. Young people feel secure in knowing the staff care about them and want them to do well. Staff have a thorough knowledge of the young people's needs and help them feel secure by setting firm boundaries and expectations. For example, all young people know that they are expected to attend school or college everyday, take part in activities and return to the home when they are expected. Staff manage behaviour in very positive ways. They take time to talk to young people about the consequences of their behaviour and have helped some make significant progress in moving away from criminal behaviour, including involvement in gangs. As a result, some young people are no longer offending or involved with the court system. Young people are supported to develop social skills and learn how to behave in society, for example, on the home's annual holiday when they have opportunities to meet new people and interact socially.

Young people value highly the relationships they have with staff. Some describe their key workers, staff and the manager as being instrumental in helping them successfully change the direction of their lives. Parents feel that staff show commitment and do not give up on their children, even when their behaviour may be very challenging. One parent said: 'They saved my child's life.' Social workers find the staff work consistently with them to achieve better outcomes for young people.

Young people feel they really have a say in how the home is run. There are formal opportunities to do this, for example, through key-work sessions, the provider's monitoring visits and community meetings. However, the open, friendly ethos of the home encourages young people to make suggestions, give their views or complain at anytime to any member of staff and they are confident in doing so.

Staff clearly identify and meet needs relating to young people's cultural background and personal identity. For example, they support young people to attend places of worship, make sure they can participate in religious festivals and eat the foods required due to cultural or religious needs. Staff are effective in confronting barriers, for example, in helping young people when they feel they would be judged unfairly due to their looked after status. The staff team provides very strong role models, represents both genders and is of varied ethnic and religious backgrounds. Staff challenge young people's comments or behaviour which may show prejudice or gender stereotyping to help them learn to respect people's differences. They are sensitive towards young people's sexual identity and how they present this to others.

Staff recognise and reward young people's achievements to encourage their further progress. An 'achievement day' is planned where families and social workers are invited to celebrate young people's hard work and progress in all areas of their lives, for example, in achieving 100% school attendance, obtaining qualifications or living healthier lifestyles. Staff are really proud of young people's achievements and reward them with certificates and prizes in recognition of their efforts.

Young people live in a home that is in a suitable residential location with shops, a park and transport easily accessible. The house is reasonably maintained and decorated. Posters and pictures reflect positive images to promote young people's sense of cultural and ethnic identity. It is made homely with photos of the young people taking part in holidays or activities, which helps give them a sense of belonging. Young people are happy with their rooms, have sufficient privacy and are able to personalise their rooms with furnishings and posters. Some attention is needed to small areas of the external premises. The bathrooms and corridors on the first and second floors are stark compared to the homely feel of the rest of the building. However, as the Registered Manager has already identified these areas for improvement, a recommendation is not made in this report. There are facilities in the home to encourage leisure activities, including plenty of books, games and art equipment so that young people are usefully occupied and there is not an over reliance on electronic media.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel very safe in this home. One said they would 'trust staff with their life'. An independent reviewing officer and a social worker described the home as 'providing a safe haven where young people can be stable'.

Incidents of young people going missing significantly improve and in most cases completely cease, as a result of living in this home. This is because staff are consistent in their message to young people that they wish to protect them and keep them safe. It is also because young people want to be in the home with the staff and taking part in activities with them. Staff are very aware of young people's vulnerabilities and any risks to their safety when they are missing; this is successfully

addressed in key work sessions so young people feel nurtured and know staff are concerned about them. Staff are doing everything possible to protect the very few who do continue to have periods of going missing. This includes trying to get in touch with the young person through all their known contacts and reporting their absence to their families and the appropriate authorities.

The majority of young people's behaviour is very good and in some cases has improved significantly. Some have made outstanding progress in moving away from anti-social or criminal behaviour and have successfully changed the direction of their lives. A parent says the staff help their child 'learn how to deal with their emotions/behaviour a bit better'. Another said 'they saved my child's life'. Physical restraint is used only in exceptional circumstances, with only one incident in the last year. Instead, staff use positive behaviour management strategies to help young people learn to manage any challenging behaviour.

Bullying is not an issue in the home. There have been incidents where young people have been provoked by the behaviour or language of others. However, they, and the staff have consistently challenged and confronted young people so that they are aware of the impact of their behaviour and when this may cause offence, for example, by using derogatory or racist language. The manager is careful about who is admitted to the home, considering any impact a new admission may have on the existing residents, including the potential for bullying.

There are very sound arrangements for responding to any allegations or suspicions of harm or abuse. Staff maintain their knowledge of safeguarding through regular training and are vigilant in watching for any signs that a young person may be at risk, working in partnership with police and other professionals where necessary.

Young people live in a physically safe environment. They are protected from hazards by the home's systems of risk assessment and health and safety procedures. Regular checks of the premises ensure they are safe for young people, including gas and electrical safety. A high priority is given to fire safety. Systems and equipment are checked regularly and young people take part in fire drills so they know what to do in an emergency. There are effective systems to ensure prospective staff and visitors to the home are suitably checked to keep young people safe.

Leadership and management

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

This is a very effectively managed home, conducted with the best interests of young people at its core. A very experienced Registered Manager shows strong commitment to delivering good quality care focused on young people's individual needs. Her strength of leadership permeates across the staff team, who set high standards for young people and show strong commitment to helping them make progress and improve their lives. The staff team are innovative in finding new ways to approach problems and help young people in the best way they can. A young person said: 'Staff usually go above and beyond what they need to do.' A social worker said staff

'go the extra mile'.

Young people benefit from being looked after by a very competent, stable staff team. There have been no changes to the staff team for some time, so young people have the opportunity to form lasting relationships with them. Staff backgrounds and experience match young people's needs very well. Staff are well supported to do their jobs, for example, with regular supervision and team meetings. Some of the staff team hold appropriate vocational qualifications while others are enrolled on courses to achieve the recommended qualifications. Staff undertake regular training to help them support young people in the best possible way; for example, staff find therapeutic training to be particularly useful in helping them manage young people's emotional and behavioural difficulties successfully.

The service shows a capacity for continued improvement. The Registered Manager and the provider regularly monitor the quality of care in the home. The manager consistently meets any recommendations made as a result of the provider's monitoring; she identifies strengths and weaknesses through her own careful checks. The provider has a development plan for the service and it is sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people and provide them with positive experiences, for example, through varied activities and holidays

The home meets the aims and objectives of its Statement of Purpose. Social workers, staff and parents are clear about what the home sets out to do. Staff make sure young people moving into the home are provided with full information on what to expect from their stay to help them adapt. Young people say they feel 'welcome' and 'at home'.

Young people's records are mostly very detailed and capture well their experience during their stay in the home. For example, they show how young people are gaining skills which may help them when they are living independently or how they are making progress and achieving at school. Young people are encouraged to contribute to their records; this has been particularly successful with individual 'All About Me' books which young people compile with their key workers, focusing, for example, on their families, identity and future plans.

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.