

Phoenix Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Chris Fuller
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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

The main office of Phoenix Fostering is located in the market town of Leominster in Herefordshire. Phoenix Fostering aim to provide young people with high quality care in family settings with professional foster carers. By careful matching of placement to the young person's needs they aim to bring stability to the lives of the young people and provide them with opportunities that will enhance all aspects of their social, physical and emotional development. Fundamental to the philosophy of Phoenix Fostering is the intention to develop a model of therapeutic parenting for young people who have experienced trauma, abuse, loss and separation and who exhibit a range of behaviours such as offending behaviours, aggression, sexualised behaviours and inability to trust.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection. Phoenix Fostering was registered by Ofsted in August 2007. Since registering, a staff team has been recruited, a panel established and a number of foster carers have been approved. A proportionate inspection was completed in June 2008 due to no children being in placement.

This inspection monitors all of the key national minimum standards in respect of the outcome areas of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution, economic wellbeing and organisation. The recommendation from the previous inspection was also monitored and as yet has not been fully met. The service has made good progress with a clear focus for recruitment and assessment of foster carers and rigorous process for matching placements in order to ensure consistency and continuity of care is provided for children and young people with complex needs. Two actions and two recommendations have been made on this occasion in respect of staying safe and organisation. The fostering service must develop the quality assurance systems to ensure the good practice achieved is maintained as the service expands.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The management have established a quality assurance policy which outlines the systems in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of Phoenix fostering service. The service participates in and completes statutory reviews in respect of children and young people and foster carers. In addition, the fostering service has implemented procedures for obtaining feedback about the service from foster carers, children and young people, panel members and those attending panel. An annual report or letter is presented to the fostering panel and management regarding the performance of the service. While the service has information systems relating to the matters set out in Schedule 7 there is no evidence of how these are monitored and reviewed by the management to further develop the service. As a result a recommendation has been made in respect of monitoring these matters to ensure quality assurance of the service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people's health needs are promoted very well because the fostering service provides healthcare which supports their physical, emotional and social development. Foster carers have knowledge of a wide range of health services in the local community and these are accessed to meet the individual health needs of the young people. The staff liaise closely with local health services and specialist services to ensure young people's health care needs are identified and met.

The fostering service has a health consultant who is available for direct work with the children and young people regarding health matters. The consultant also provides up to date advice and assistance to foster carers to enable them to access resources they need for children in their care. The child and adolescent psychotherapist provides a consultation service to foster carers in understanding and managing the range of behaviours exhibited by the young people placed. This is done through direct work and group work for children and young people, foster carers and staff. All staff and foster carers have access to the psychotherapist to help them deal with any stress they may be experiencing due to the nature of their work. The fostering service also has a fostering panel member who is a health advisor, and is available to give advice to staff and foster carers.

The staff collate information regarding the health care needs of young people during the referral and matching process. This is shared with foster carers to ensure the relevant services are available and any specialist services can be maintained or accessed. Each young person has a health passport and health care plan which is current and provides a health care record available to the foster carer and staff. Foster carer records show the ongoing appointments and treatment received by young people in their care including reviews and updates. Young people make extremely good progress in their growth and development because the staff and foster carers are well informed and supported in addressing their health care needs.

Young people, foster carers and staff are all encouraged to develop healthy lifestyle choices, for example, diets, daily routines and activities. Foster carers state the fostering service provides foster carers and young people with 'free gym membership for the child and foster family.' As a result young people have access to a wide range of activities. The staff and carers took part in a charity walk in the Black Mountains raising over £400 for the charity. Staff and carers aim to lead by example and as a result promote exercise and activities for children and young people.

The fostering service provides a wide range of policies and procedures relating to all aspects of health care. This means foster carers have clear guidance and recording formats relating to health and safety, medication, accident and injuries and the health care of young people.

Staff and foster carers receive training in a wide range of health care topics including first aid and health and hygiene issues. Central to the ethos of the service is the promotion of the emotional health and well being of the children and young people. The staff and foster carers all receive training in attachment and trauma theory. This means they work effectively together to meet the health care needs of young people.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people are kept safe by foster carers and the fostering service through the provision of suitable foster carers. An extensive range of guidance and training ensures foster carers have the necessary skills and abilities to meet the complex needs of children and young people.

Young people are placed with foster carers who are assessed as being able to meet the cultural, ethnic and religious identity needs of the child. Foster carers receive information about the initial referral and are consulted at each stage of the placement planning and introductory meetings. Foster carers attend meetings so that any shortfalls in the placement can be identified and addressed. This means the needs of the young people can be met in respect of their health, education, mental, physical and emotional development. The fostering service provides any equipment or adaptations needed to provide a safe and nurturing environment for young people.

The fostering service has developed specialist skills and services to meet the specific needs of children and young people. It has improved the referral and matching process to ensure only recruitment of potentially suitable applicants and appropriate referrals are considered. The fostering service provides high levels of support to foster carers in the form of supervision, support, direct work with young people, training and respite care provision. The latter has been limited at the present time but sufficient respite care is available while an active recruitment programme proceeds. Individual packages of support are set up for each placement to reflect their individual needs. Support services to young people are extremely good with family support workers allocated to each young person to provide direct support and assistance. Young people also have access to independent advocacy services.

Foster carers and staff receive training in child protection and safeguarding of vulnerable young people. The wrap-around team approach adopted by Phoenix fostering service aims to ensure the safety of young people placed in foster homes. Supervising social workers support foster carers while family support workers work with the child and family and where necessary provide a voice for the child. The fostering service is pro-active in addressing any concerns raised which helps to empower young people to voice their concerns using appropriate systems and services. Family support workers have developed useful user friendly programmes for working with young people on specific topics, for example, raising awareness of bullying and cyber-bullying to help them respond effectively. Foster carers are expected to exercise age and understanding appropriate parental controls when managing behaviour and to monitor the use of the internet. Where physical interventions take place these are monitored and reviewed to ensure practice is safe and the relevant people and agencies are informed. Safe caring guidelines are available in the foster carers handbook. A plan is drawn up with all in the household including the young person following their admission to the foster home. Young people are encouraged to develop strategies for keeping themselves safe. Young people are encouraged to express their views about their own safety and speak of any risks to themselves. This results in improvement as young people are listened to and changes are made to help them feel safe.

The fostering service has a robust recruitment process with well organised systems and recording processes. All of the required references are taken up including telephone enquiries. The original criminal record bureau references are held for all staff, foster panel members and foster carers, however, these are not stored in an appropriate confidential manner and are not disposed of in line with the guidance provided. The Registered Manager did address this issue immediately and revised the administration process. The fostering service follows the good practice of renewing police references every three years. All supervising social workers and independent assessors employed by the fostering service have the required qualifications and registration with the General Social Care Council. The family support workers are currently reviewing their qualifications and receiving support to complete relevant training courses. They are supervised

by qualified social workers. The therapists and other professional staff are professionally qualified and have a good understanding of foster care.

The fostering panel has developed and improved both in its organisation and subsequently the effective delivery of its functions. The panel is able to maintain independent scrutiny of the fostering service and the quality of the assessments brought to panel. Some management information regarding the fostering service and the findings of foster carer reviews is provided to the panel. The panel has a good mix of members with a broad range of relevant experience, skills and knowledge which informs their understanding of the needs of children and young people and the role of foster carers. However, the fostering service should appoint to panel an independent member who has at any time been placed with foster carers or who has had a child at any time been placed with foster carers. There is a robust system for the recruitment of panel members and they receive clear guidance of their duties and responsibilities. Panel members are expected to attend basic training. Staff and foster carers that attend panel meetings are welcomed and asked to provide feedback of their experience of assessment and panel. This contributes to the development of panel functions and quality assurance of the service. The element of child protection and safeguarding has been foremost in panel policy and procedures. The focus of panel business has been primarily been to ensure the safety of the children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people's individual needs are very well met by their foster carers, with foster carers providing good support to young people to enable them to meet their educational potential. The Phoenix fostering service promotes equality and diversity as part of the culture of the service. This is reflected in their policies and procedures. It is implemented in practice through an open inclusive and positive delivery of the service. Young people, foster carers and staff confirm that the service is sensitive to issues of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Foster carers recruitment and assessment process highlight equality and diversity issues and a wide range of training and development opportunities are provided to raise their awareness and understanding of the values of the service. The young people's individual needs are met through comprehensive assessments and thorough referral and matching processes to provide the best possible placement.

The fostering service gives high priority to the education of young people. They aim to secure and support the most suitable educational provision to enable the young person to fulfil their full potential. Where it is possible continuity of education will always be supported. The fostering service has employed an education advisor to support young people, foster carers and staff. The family support team have been working with the education coordinator to compile education profiles of the children looked after by the agency to ensure no opportunity for education is missed. The education advisor specifically monitors the educational plans and development of all young people placed. The advisor has assessed the learning styles of all young people and their carers to form a reference for their learning and development. Foster carers state, 'There is an education advisor to whom I can turn to for advice and guidance to ensure the children receive the appropriate and necessary education.' Foster carers complete specific educational training that heightens their awareness of the importance of education for looked after children. The fostering service is pro-active in providing educational information to schools and suggesting behavioural strategies within school which replicate the therapeutic approach of the service.

In addition the fostering service offers to provide training for teachers on attachment disorders, significant harm and trauma and the impact that has on a child's capacity to learn.

The fostering service secures education provision that provides the best learning and development opportunities. The supervising social worker, family support worker and education advisor work closely with the schools and other professionals sharing information, facilitating education opportunities and reinforcing learning. Other professionals recognise the valuable work done by the fostering service staff when monitoring progress and liaison with the schools. Young people are given resources and facilities to enable them to access education such as a laptop, computer, printer and education programmes. Communication and learning styles is given close consideration with bespoke packages being developed to promote young people's self confidence and self esteem. Young people are encouraged to engage in a wide range of leisure activities such as horse riding, Guides, Army Cadets, Drama Groups, Girls Brigade. All of the achievements of young people are celebrated by foster carers and the fostering service.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service and carers promote young people's contact with their family in line with their placement plans. Young people's views and wishes are sought in respect of contact with their family and friends and this informs the arrangements made. Due consideration is given to contact arrangements during the referral and matching process. Foster carers role and responsibilities are clearly recorded in the foster placement agreement. The supervising social worker regularly discusses and monitors these arrangements and the outcomes of contact visits during foster carers supervision. Foster carers are aware of the importance of positive contact experience for young people. This is emphasised in training for staff and foster carers.

Young people's views and opinions are highly valued and frequently sought by the fostering service. The fostering service aims to empower young people to be involved and make choices and decisions about their daily lives. Their families are also asked on a regular basis to make comment upon the service provided and positive criticism is sought for the development of the service. The fostering service's family support team worker meets foster children on a monthly basis as a minimum. This means young people have a worker they may identify their needs rather than supervising and supporting the foster carer. The fostering service is very creative in engaging and involving young people. For example, a pilot film project was devised where the child filmed aspects of their life and home to be shown at their review. This received a very positive response from young people and provided a positive profile and update to the members of the review meeting. Also information and paperwork filled out by children is in a format that is engaging and appealing as well as being set at a level suitable for their ability and understanding. This means they are more likely to be responsive and involved in otherwise formal processes. The fostering service has a clear complaints procedure in place that states that it is important that all concerns or complaints are taken seriously and dealt with as soon as possible. The young people's pack provides clear information of how to make a complaint and contact details for relevant agencies.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people were being well supported to move successfully into independent living and young people's needs were being adequately met through the allowances paid. Young people

are supported by foster carers to develop life skills through an independence programme. All staff and foster carers receive training in the independent living package. The foster carers, supervising social worker and family support worker work as a team to develop individual bespoke packages in consultation with young people. These incorporate clear aims and objectives to assist young people to achieve independence through development of personal and social skills.

The fostering service has clear written guidance in place for all foster carers about the allowances and expenses payable and how to access them. Foster carer's stated the administration of fees was good and payments were made promptly and regularly. Any requests were quickly responded to and generally agreed.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The individual needs of young people are addressed well, regarding personal, social and cultural issues. This is demonstrated, for example, through the personalised young people's handbooks, rigorous matching policy and training opportunities for staff and foster carers.

The fostering service has a clear Statement of Purpose that is reviewed annually. It is made available to those people who have an interest in the service. Staff and foster carers have access to a range of clear policies and procedures and these are available disc for use on computers. However, the policies and procedures for complaints do not provide the contact details for Ofsted. This means complainants may not have the required information available to contact external agencies with any concerns.

The young people's guides are adaptable to be age and stage appropriate and personalised with relevant information to each young person. The format is colourful, attractive and presented in a magazine format. They accurately describe the fostering service function and services with useful contact details of other agencies.

The Registered Manager is appropriately skilled, experienced and qualified. The registered person is able to monitor the day to day service delivery, however, there is no regular programme of audit, review and action for quality assurance and development of the service. This matter was raised in the previous inspection and has not been fully addressed. Foster carers feel confident in the service development and development stating, 'they are constantly looking at ways to better the company.' The fostering service is creative and staff are flexible in application of their skills to promote placement plans and welfare of young people. For example, staff workloads may be adjusted to facilitate specific pieces of work such as a comprehensive parenting assessment and report.

The fostering service employs a high proportion of staff to support and supervise foster carers and to provide support to young people in placement. The organisation and structure of the company promotes team working and a wrap-around service for young people in placement. The staff group have limited workloads with clear roles and responsibilities. This means they can provide an intensive level of support and supervision to foster carers. There is a twenty-four hour on call service and includes independent assessing social workers, supervising social workers who support the foster carers, family support workers who support the young people and foster carers, specialist advisors in health and education and therapeutic professionals.

Young people's needs are promoted because they are supported by a staff team of professionals with a range of skills and experience suitable to work with young people in foster care.

Management effectively manage and support the staff through regular supervision, management meetings and team meetings. This enables information to be passed efficiently throughout the organisation. The ethos of the service promotes openness, communication and sharing of information. The fostering service promotes staff development to achieve and maintain a competent workforce and all staff have an annual performance review.

The supervising social worker provides support, guidance and supervision to foster carers in all aspects of their role. They maintain regular telephone contact and monthly supervision visits. Unannounced visits are also made to the fostering household. Foster carers have an annual review which is monitored through the panel process. The fostering service provides a range of opportunities for foster carers to discuss any issues or concerns they may have and provide feedback about service delivery. Foster carers highly value the visits and support provided by both the supervising social worker and family support worker and state they feel very much part of a team.

The fostering service demonstrates a commitment to developing and maintaining a trained and skilled staff group. Staff and foster carers provide an extensive range of training opportunities that include both general and specialised skills at basic and advanced levels. A recent review of family support workers qualifications and training has prompted additional support for appropriate qualifications. Similarly, panel members, independent assessing social workers, foster carers and staff are all expected to attend basic and core training. The training programme is reviewed annually and includes mandatory training in therapeutic parenting, attachment and therapeutic crisis intervention. The latter underpins a shared knowledge and understanding of the ethos of the company and the service delivery.

The case records for children and young people are kept in good order with accurate, up-to-date information as required by regulations. Where possible young people are encouraged to contribute to their records and are aware of the information being held. Foster carers handbooks and staff guidance provide written guidance with regard to safekeeping and retention of records.

The administration of the fostering service is generally well organized with efficient information systems supporting the functions of the service. However, within the staff procedures and records there was no specific record of an incident and subsequent disciplinary process and outcome, although this had been recorded appropriately in respect of the young person's records and procedures. This means that, while this did not have a direct impact on the welfare of a young person, potentially the staff file would not hold the relevant information relating to a disciplinary matter in a confidential manner.

The management promote clear vision and values that reflect the therapeutic ethos of the fostering service. Staff and foster carers are trained, skilled and sufficient in numbers to provide a high quality of service that achieves good outcomes for children and young people.

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
1	ensure the procedure for considering complaints includes the name, address and telephone number of Ofsted (Regulation 18(4)(a))	31 December 2009
4	establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 42 (1)(a))	31 December 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. For example, police checks (NMS 15.4)
- ensure that one of the independent members is normally a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers. (NMS 30.9)