

# Safehouses North

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sarah Oldham
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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

Safe Houses North is a small independent Foster Care Agency. The service recruits, approves and supports a range of carers providing short and medium to long-term care for children of all ages. This includes babies, sibling groups and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate mother and baby placements.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The fostering service promotes the health, welfare and safety of children and young people very well. Foster carers receive training on the promotion of health and safe administration of medication. Children and young people are encouraged to take part in activities that promote health and well-being as well as healthy eating. They are effectively supported with their education and this helps to increase overall attainment levels. They enjoy participating in new experiences and developing new skills. They develop confidence and self-esteem. They contribute to decisions made in their daily lives and to statutory reviews of their care plans. They learn the skills they need for future independent living. Children and young people are happy in their foster families and many said they feel like part of the family.

The fostering service has a recruitment and assessment process in place that enables the ongoing growth and development of the service. Assessments are comprehensive and provide a clear picture of the strengths of potential foster carers. The panel effectively scrutinises assessments and foster carer reviews and makes balanced recommendations to the agency decision maker. Foster carers receive an excellent level of support, training and supervision from competent staff.

Foster carers ensure that children and young people are involved in all aspects of their care planning. The agency ensures that carers are involved and consulted as a core member of the team providing ongoing support to children. This includes involvement in personal education plans, reviews and meetings.

Systems are in place for effective matching of children with carers. Children and young people are provided with this information about their carers prior to moving in. The agency has a children and young people's guide about the service. This is in a child-friendly format. However, it is not available in different formats to ensure that young people with communication difficulties have appropriate access.

The agency ensures that carers are provided with documentation received from placing authorities. Systems are in place to follow up any outstanding documentation. However, the agency has some difficulty in receiving some documentation from some placing authorities; these include signed placement

agreements.

The organisation and management of the service are outstanding. There is a detailed development plan in place to further enhance the services provided by the agency and to address the minor shortfalls identified within this report.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the previous inspection, there were five recommendations made. Four of the recommendations have been addressed in full. These related to obtaining health action plans for all children; ensuring safe care policies were updated; ensuring risk assessments were in place and to continue to develop plans for consultation with children and young people. The agency has ensured that health action plans from the placing authority are requested and are obtained for each child placed. Safe caring policies are completed by all foster carers at the time of approval. Once a child has been placed with them, the safe care policies are updated to be individual to that particular child or young person; these are kept under review. Risk assessments are in place for all children and young people and any known risks are identified. This ensures that carers are aware of potential risks and how to effectively manage these to promote the safety and well-being of young people. The service has developed consultation with young people. Way young people are consulted with include activity days. Young people are also consulted for foster carer reviews.

The outstanding recommendation is in relation to obtaining information from the placing authority. The service has developed a comprehensive tracing system to ensure that documentation is requested. However, the agency experiences some difficulty in obtaining signed placement agreements for all of the children and young people in placement. This has been identified as a requirement at this inspection.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering agency is proactive in ensuring that the health care needs of the young people are known to foster carers prior to placements being arranged. This entails ensuring health care assessments are in place at the time of placement, or within a week of placement. All carers have health care booklets for each child or young person. These are used by carers to record all children and young people's health care appointments, the outcomes and any medication prescribed and administered. This ensures that when a child moves on from placement, they have a comprehensive record of their health care needs. The supervising social worker reviews this documentation at every supervision to ensure that records are clear, comprehensive and appropriately signed. Children and young people say that they feel that their carers look after them really well. Comments received from young people included, 'if I don't feel very well then my carers will make sure that I get better and will take me to the doctors if they think it is best.'

The fostering agency has developed excellent links with health care professionals to

promote the health care needs for all children and young people. One health care professional stated 'the agency have good relationships with all health care professionals and provide an effective and supportive service.'

Foster carers working for the agency have appropriate health and safety checks completed during their initial assessment. These are updated on an annual basis or when there are any changes within the house. These risk assessments include all aspects of health and safety. This ensures that foster carers' homes provide a safe environment for the children and young people.

Foster carers receive training on supporting health care; including the management and administration of medication. This supports carers' knowledge and develops their skills in responding to health care needs of children. Carers say that they benefit from this training.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers receive training and support to promote the safety and well-being of the children. All carers complete a household safe care policy as part of the initial approval stage. This is then updated to be specific for each child or young person in placement. These are kept under review. The safe care procedure for the household ensures foster carers focus on the individual needs of young people. In addition, comprehensive risk assessments are completed. These include health and safety as well as individual risk assessments. They are also kept under review and amended when there are any changes. These are completed by the supervising social workers in conjunction with foster carers. This ensures children and young people's individual safety is identified and promoted at all times.

Children and young people say that they feel safe living with their carers. One young person said 'I know that my foster carers make sure that I am safe. We often talk about how to stay safe and they give me lots of information about it.' Another young person said 'my foster carers really look after me and make me feel safe, I can talk to them about anything.'

The agency has a clear and detailed policy in place in the event of a child or young person being missing from care. This is underpinned by the individual risk assessments. Carers are aware of the procedure to follow and feel supported by the out-of-hours service provided by the agency. Comments received include 'there is always someone there at the end of a telephone to discuss issues with you and to provide advice.' Another carer said 'they provide excellent support and the training is really good as that provides you with current information to develop skills.'

Foster carers are provided with information and know what to do in the event of an accident or a significant event happening. Recording mechanisms ensure that reports received provide appropriate details and information. Policies and procedures

underpin this. Staff have the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to ensure that the safety and welfare of the young people remain paramount.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers have a range of skills, experience and knowledge to support children and young people to develop appropriate life skills. Carers work in conjunction with the agency supervising social workers, placing social workers and other professionals to support and develop young people's resilience and development. This includes enabling young people to develop appropriate friendships with other children and young people and positive relationships with their carers. Children said that they felt really happy and settled within their placement. One young person said 'I was accepted as one of the family straight away. They are the best people in my life, they could not be better in any way.' Another young person said 'I love it where I am living now and I have made lots of new friends here.'

Foster carers enable young people to develop a range of social skills in a variety of settings. This includes accessing local community facilities such as: going swimming; joining community activity groups, including guides and scouts and use of local leisure facilities. A range of activities are also arranged by the fostering service. These include team building and life skills for children preparing to leave care as well as craft and art activities for younger children.

Foster carers are aware of their delegated authority to make timely day-to-day decisions, such as agreement to attend school trips and functions. Where this has not been agreed with placing social workers the agency has undertaken active steps to ensure that this is put in place.

The agency promotes and supports education effectively. All children who are referred to the agency have an assessment of their educational needs. This is undertaken by the National Teaching and Advisory Service. This enables appropriate support to be provided with education when it is identified to be appropriate for an individual young person. The services provided include support with homework, additional support in class and advice to foster carers. Supervising social workers are also proactive in supporting carers to attend parents' evenings and support with taking children to school. One carer said 'they provided support with taking the children to school to increase my confidence as it is many years since my own children went to school. This has enabled me to feel confident in attending school meetings and open evenings'.

All young people have personal education plans. Foster carers are involved in contributing their views to the personal educational plan. This enables them to be fully involved in the educational planning for the children and young people that they foster. When a young person has a statement of special educational needs, the carers are provided with this information. This ensures that the young person

continues to be effectively supported with their education through both their school and home.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency ensures that the wishes and views of the young people and feelings of the young people are taken into account in all aspects of their care planning. One young person said 'my carers are very supportive. They listen to me. They don't always agree with me but we discuss, negotiate and come to agreements.' Another young person said 'they always ask if I am ok and if I understand what the plans for my future are. We discuss on a regular basis these plans, what support I need and how they can help me achieve the things I want.'

The agency provides information to children and young people about the agency in the form of a children's guide. This is written in a child-friendly format. However, further formats for children and young people with communication difficulties, are not currently in place. Foster carers do ensure that information is provided to the young people. Information about how to make a complaint is discussed. All children who responded to questionnaires and who spoke with the inspector said that they knew if they had a complaint or were unhappy, they knew who to speak with. This included speaking with social workers, foster carers, the agency supervising social workers or manager or contacting children's rights officers.

The agency has comprehensive matching procedures in place to ensure that when a child is placed with a carer, all aspects of the carers abilities, experience and skills are known to placing social workers. This supports effective and positive placements to be made and ensures placement disruptions are at a minimum. Wherever possible a series of introductory visits are arranged to enable children to meet with prospective carers. All carers have developed an introductory information booklet for children to support them to make an informed choice about their placement.

Foster carers receive training and support with regards helping children and young people understand their background and heritage. Carers encourage and support young people to keep mementos, photographs and information about their background and the details of their achievements. This ensures that they will have a history of their lives for when they move on from their foster family.

Contact arrangements are clear and carers are aware of these. Where it is appropriate, carers support and facilitate contact. This supports children and young people to benefit from positive contacts. Foster carers are also aware that contact can be difficult for children and receive training to develop skills and knowledge to provide support to children and young people following contact sessions.

Foster carers support young people when they are moving on to adulthood. Young people are kept fully involved in their plans for the future and any further placement. Foster carers and the agency are aware that moving on can be challenging for the

young people and therefore transition plans are in place to enable effective support to be provided. In addition, the agency has recently developed team-building days for young people leaving care. This was following consultation with young people about what would help them to prepare for their future.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers provide support and guidance to young people to prepare them for leaving care and adulthood. This includes support with budgeting, opening bank accounts, applying for college or employment and daily life skills. Young people are supported to develop skills with cooking and having a healthy diet. One young person said 'my carers helped me to learn to cook from when I first came here. We are all involved in planning and preparing meals and this will make it easier for me when I move into my own accommodation.' Other young people said that they enjoyed learning how to cook and bake and that the carers made it enjoyable. Carers also play a proactive role in supporting young people to find appropriate accommodation and assisting them with moving onto independence.

The agency ensures that the views of the young people are gained and that appropriate pathway planning is in place. Where there is a delay in a young person being allocated a leaving care worker, the agency makes appropriate referrals to the placing authority and through the independent reviewing officer. One independent reviewing officer said 'the agency is diligent in ensuring that the voice of the young person is heard and support is provided to address young people's future needs.'

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The manager of the agency is experienced, qualified and knowledgeable. This ensures that the operation of the service is managed competently. Supervising social workers are appropriately qualified and experienced and demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring the children and young people are provided with outstanding levels of care and support. They provide excellent levels of support and supervision to foster carers and all carers spoken to, and those who responded to questionnaires, said the level of support, understanding and knowledge of the workers is outstanding. Comments made by carers included 'the agency provides excellent support and I enjoy being treated and working as part of a team to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to flourish.' Another carer said 'they have provided superb support during my time working with them.'

The Statement of Purpose provides a clear overview of the aims and objectives of the service. It is reviewed and updated on an annual basis, or sooner if there are any changes. This document is available on the website, through the office and provided to all foster carers and placing authorities. Information guides for children and young people are also provided.

Recruitment of foster carers is ongoing. The agency has an overall development plan and is growing at a pace that they can ensure that robust recruitment and selection of carers is undertaken. Carers are recruited from a wide and diverse background to enable effective matching of children and young people. Assessments of potential foster carers are comprehensive and provide an analytical overview of their skills and abilities.

The agency undertakes robust recruitment and selection of staff including appropriate application, references and interviews. This ensures that the staff have the necessary qualifications, experience and knowledge to effectively support the young people.

An effective and competent panel has the expertise to robustly scrutinise assessments and reviews. This means the panel makes well-balanced recommendations to the agency decision maker. The agency has a central list of panel members, with further recruitment of panel members to ensure a diverse membership with a broad range of expertise and experience of social care services. The agency is developing the appraisal system for panel members to ensure that the panel remains effective and robust at all times.

The agency ensures that, in most cases, all foster carers receive appropriate documentation prior to the placement of a child. Where there is a shortfall in documentation received from the placing authority, systems are in place to follow this up with additional requests. However, the agency has experienced some difficulty in obtaining signed placement agreements from a small proportion of placing authorities. These issues are raised with the independent reviewing officer at the young person's review.

There is a training and development plan in place for all foster carers, with an expectation that carers will attend a total of ten training sessions over a two year period. The agency has promoted the Children's Workforce Development Council standards for foster carers. The majority of carers having achieved these, with the remaining carers working towards them. Carers report that the training programme is excellent and has enabled them to develop their skills and understanding of the children's needs. One carer said 'the training is outstanding, it fills us with enthusiasm and encourages us in all aspects of caring for the children that we support.' The impact of this is that they feel equipped to provide a holistic level of care and support to children and young people. Supervision is held on a fortnightly basis with new carers receiving weekly supervision. Records are maintained of all supervision and carers say that they find supervision to be effective.

## **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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England)

Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

<b>Reg</b>	<b>Statutory Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
17 (2011)	ensure that, in relation to any child placed with a foster parent, the foster carer is given a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under Regulation 6 (3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations (Regulation 17 (3))	30/10/2011

## **Recommendations**

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

- ensure that the children's guide is produced in a format which is appropriate to the age, understanding and communication needs of children who may be fostered by the service, including children with learning or communication difficulties. Ensure also that the document is reviewed annually. (Volume 4, statutory Guidance, 4.3, 4.4)