

Horizon Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Setting address	Kingsbury House, 468 Church Lane, Kingsbury, London, NW9 8UA
Telephone number	020 8200 2355
Email	info@horizonfostering.co.uk
Registered person	Horizon Fostering Services Ltd
Registered manager	Barry David Ryan
Responsible individual	Shadab Ahmad
Date of last inspection	09/09/2008

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency. It aims to meet a range of placement needs for children and young people, including sibling groups and mothers and babies. It currently has 37 active fostering households and provides placements for 35 children and young people.

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**.

Promotion of diversity and equality is high on the agency's agenda. Together with safeguarding, it is integral to the high quality service it offers.

The agency's foster carers undergo a rigorous approval process and continue to receive robust supervision, support and training. Through having high quality foster carers, the agency contributes effectively to children and young people achieving generally good and in some instances, outstanding progress in many areas of their lives. Children and young people are carefully matched with foster carers who can confidently meet their needs.

Children and young people understand why they are fostered and what their options are at the present time and in the future. They are provided with a family environment that is safe, stable and nurturing. The agency enables them to have a happier childhood and to benefit from increased life-chances. Children and young people consistently have very high views about their relationships with foster carers and about the agency. They feel listened to, valued and supported.

This is a successful agency that focuses firmly on children and young people. Clear management oversight ensures that outcomes for children and young people are positive and that their development is maximised. Leaders and managers are closely involved in the service delivery and have an excellent knowledge of the agency's strengths and weaknesses. A detailed development plan is being implemented with

the positive impact. This inspection identifies areas for improvement in relation to panel minutes and foster carer's training in medication.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
24 (2011)	ensure the fostering panel makes a written record of the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24 (2))	31/03/2013

Recommendations

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

- make sure foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication. (NMS 6.10)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people benefit from being in a stable and nurturing family environment that fosters their development effectively. When it is in their best interest, they are placed together with their siblings. Children and young people report being very happy living with their foster families. They very much feel a part of their foster family. They report getting very well on with foster carers and their birth children. Foster carers do not treat foster children differently to their own children, although, one young person reports proudly that they 'get more spoiled'; this is because the foster parents and their birth children compete to make this young person feel welcome and happy.

One young person said that the placement has given them a new life following a period of real hardship: 'Look at me now. I go to school and have everything I need.' Another young person who has previously experienced frequent moves said: 'This time, I feel that somebody really cares for me.'

Living in a positive environment influences young people's constructive engagement with their local communities. They participate fully in educational opportunities. They make generally good progress in their learning and educational attainment. Older

teenagers are successfully working towards obtaining qualifications, such as in hair-dressing or electrical engineering. They receive good support to increasingly take more responsibility for themselves and prepare for independent living. They are confident about their futures and look towards it with great expectations.

Young people have adopted a positive outlook towards life and have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Foster carers encourage and support children and young people to have regular health checks and attend any appointments. Some children have made excellent progress in their health and general development. For example, following a successful placement through this agency, a child with a previously poor diagnosis is now reaching developmental milestones and doing very well. Some young people have taken exercise seriously and participate in a wide range of sports, such as boxing, football and running.

Those young people who are unaccompanied minors in this country talk very positively about their foster carers' understanding of their cultural backgrounds, customs and religion. They get comprehensive support to absorb English and learn about British culture, as well as knowing that their culture and language is fully respected and valued.

Children and young people's contact with their own families and friends is well managed and contributes to their ability to make, maintain and develop positive attachments and social skills.

Children and young people are given choices and know that their views count. They very rarely experience unplanned endings to their placements. Some placements have proceeded to become permanent, while others have led to adoption, when this is appropriate and identified in the child's care plan.

Quality of service

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

All those involved with the agency, including children, young people, foster carers, social workers and placing authorities, are highly satisfied with the quality of the service it provides. Placing authority commissioners state that the agency has worked extremely well with them and have provided stable and effective placements over a number of years. Successful matching that takes into account the child's needs carefully and fully, as well as the strengths and personal characteristics of particular carers, is a strong aspect of the service. On rare occasions when placements were disrupted, children's social workers commented that in their professional opinion there was nothing that the foster carer could have done differently or better to avoid the disruption.

The agency's stringent approval procedures emphasises the importance of the carers' availability and ability to actively engage with children and young people. The agency successfully promotes the importance of a healthy family life. It ensures that a comfortable balance between the needs of fostered children and those of their

fostering family is achieved. The agency has recruited a pool of diverse, committed and skilled foster carers. They are passionate about fostering and able to contribute fully to the planning and delivering of highly individualised support and care to children and young people. They are valued as key professionals and competently work together with other agencies to enhance children's lives. In their work, they embody nurturing care and fostering competence; they actively seek to promote a positive image of the profession.

The agency's panel functions effectively and drives the improvement of quality fostering. Minutes of the panel meetings contain a clear record of the recommendations that the panel has made. However, the reasons for the recommendations and for the decisions subsequently made are not always clearly recorded. The agency is aware of this weakness and is working towards improving the quality of the minutes. Because of the size of the agency, panels are held infrequently. This has had a negative impact on the agency's ability to demonstrate that the improvement to panel minutes has been achieved.

Once approved, foster carers receive high quality supervision, support and training. The agency regularly reviews the quality of foster carers' work with children, in light of the children's and their social worker's views. Foster carers receive training on a wide range of relevant topics and have good opportunities for professional development.

A recent incident has highlighted challenges surrounding management of medication in a fostering environment. Although dealing with medication is included under various subjects covered by their training, foster carers have not had a specific, comprehensive training on medication. Foster carers meet regularly to network, share their experiences and learn together. They are highly committed to learning and doing anything in their power to enable children and young people to have better lives.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare is at the forefront of the service. Robust recruitment of the agency's staff, foster carers and all volunteers, including student social workers, ensure that they are suitable to work with children and young people. Once recruited, they have access to clear written policies and procedures, as well as to rigorous supervision, review and training to ensure that good safeguarding practice is fully and consistently implemented.

Foster carers' comprehensive safeguarding training includes sessions on child protection and behaviour management, as well as on other aspects of care. The training contributes effectively to the protection of children and young people and promotion of their welfare. Foster carers have a clear understanding of impact of neglect and abuse on children and are able to build positive and trusting

relationships with them.

When supervising social workers visit fostering households, their observations and discussions focus on the progress that children and young people have made. They also explore any barriers to the development and how these can be addressed. In addition to talking with foster carers, the agency's social workers also talk with other members of the household, including all the children. The agency's supervising social workers ensure that foster carers consistently follow effective safeguarding practice. One foster child said that they had a better relationship with the agency's social worker than with their own social worker.

Children and young people report feeling very safe. They have developed a strong sense of personal well-being. They say that they do not experience any form of bullying or intimidation. Their understanding of risk and their willingness to engage in safer behaviour is growing. For example, one young person said that they used to be missing a lot from their previous placement, but do not go missing from their current foster home; they realised the risks and started valuing more the security and safety that their foster family provides them with. Another young person said that they stopped 'hanging out and doing bad things with other young people' because they 'want to focus on their education and good things in life'. Another young person said that if coming back home later than planned, they would have to ring the carers and explain the reasons. They said: 'They are so nice to me. How could I not ring them and let them worry about me.'

Leaders and managers have created an open and supportive atmosphere in which people find it easy to raise any difficulties and concerns that arise. The agency has handled a number of concerns about standards of care, allegations and disclosures. This was done promptly and robustly while working together in effective partnership with other partner-agencies. The agency ensures foster carers have confidential access to wide ranging independent support services including legal advice and representations to support and protect them.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **good**.

Leaders and managers are social workers with many years of post-qualifying experience at a senior level. They run the service with extensive knowledge in social care and with management efficiency. The agency's clear vision that focuses on the best interests of children, their needs, wishes and feelings, unites people who work for the company. Management appropriately employ, supervise, appraise, support and train social workers and foster carers of a high calibre; they also facilitate retention of foster carers and staff. They have created a lovely working environment in which people feel valued and enabled to contribute positively and significantly to children and young people's lives.

Within a framework of working closely together with other professionals, the agency is effective at enabling children and young people to achieve positive outcomes for

themselves. Their progress and the agency's contribution to it, through providing high quality fostering support, are clearly evidenced in the records kept. All files are regularly audited and demonstrate that high quality outcomes are consistently achieved.

The agency has a good capacity for continuous improvement. The only requirement given at the last inspection related to the agency's documentation and has been fully met. All policies and procedures, the Statement of Purpose and guides for children and young people are regularly reviewed and updated in line with legislative changes and good practice guidance. Leaders and managers are committed to learning and monitor the quality of the service closely. Implementation of a detailed written action plan secures continuous development of the service. One of the biggest developments is in the area of data management to provide a better platform for statistical information gathering and easier monitoring of trends, as the agency grows in size.

About this inspection

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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 inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.

