

Partners in Parenting Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Clive Lucas
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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

Partners in Parenting is an independent fostering agency, part of the Pathway Group, situated in the village of Over near to Cambridge. The agency was re-registered on 30 June 2010. This is the first inspection since the re-registration.

Partners in Parenting provides foster families for children of all ages, and the types of placements offered include emergency and respite placements, placements for sibling groups, rehabilitation to the child's birth family or previous placement, placements for children with physical and/or learning disabilities and placements for children requiring a family on a long-term basis.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was a full inspection, it was announced in advance and looked at all of the national minimum standards. The fostering agency provides an overall good standard of care with some areas being outstanding. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Looking at young people as individuals and ensuring that their individual needs are identified and met is a strength of the agency. Other areas that stand out are the way the agency promotes young people's health and leisure interests. This enables them to enjoy and benefit from a wide range of normal childhood experiences. Foster carers are highly appreciative of the training and support provided by the agency, which helps them to fulfil their role in looking after the young people.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection since the service was re-registered.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people who use the service, and carers, are very positive about the way that the agency promotes good health and well-being. At the end of one placement the placing social worker commented that the agency had made 'every effort' to meet the health needs of the young person. Carers get general training to help them promote young people's health; they describe the training as being of very good quality. They also get any training that is identified to help them provide high levels of care for young people with specific health needs. If plans identify a need for external health services, these are sought and promoted. Young people are actively

encouraged to take part in activities and hobbies that will help them to be physically healthy and also to develop their self-esteem and emotional health.

Young people live in homes that provide a level of accommodation that they appreciate. Homes are clean, suitably decorated and furnished, and above all homely. Some young people spoke about being very pleased that their bedrooms had recently been decorated and they had been able to be involved in the process. Supervising social workers make unannounced visits to all carers' homes at least once a year. During these visits they look at the standard of accommodation to ensure it is suitable. Initial carer assessments look at the facilities available in the home and the surrounding area. This helps to ensure the high standards are maintained.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people feel safe and are kept safe in their foster placements. All young people who completed pre-inspection surveys said they knew who to speak to if they were unhappy or had a problem. They made comments such as, 'I am safe and happy', and, 'they listen when I am feeling especially worried or upset'. Carers attend safer caring training. They also have individual safer caring policies. This ensures that they are well aware of how to provide safe and appropriate care for young people. When young people have specific needs that require high levels of supervision or support to keep them safe, the agency helps carers to provide this. Carers help young people to learn how to keep themselves safe.

The agency has an appropriate policy on how carers should respond to young people who run away, or are missing from their care. They have worked with the local authority and the police to ensure that the policy is effective and in line with local protocols. There have not been any such incidents to date.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people have very good relationships with their carers. Supervising social workers have regular discussions with carers about the progress of young people in placement and any behavioural issues. This helps carers to effectively encourage young people to develop and take responsibility for their own positive behaviour. Carers attend training on managing behaviour and they say this is very good. There is minimal police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and this avoids criminalising young people unnecessarily.

The agency has very clear expectations of how carers will manage confidential information. All carers sign an agreement about confidentiality. Carers support young people if they are subject to discrimination or bullying and work to find effective strategies to deal with it.

The agency is extremely effective at encouraging young people to develop leisure interests. In turn, this helps the young people to develop confidence and self-esteem. Young people are able to take part in a wide range of school-related activities such as after-school clubs, trips and holidays. They can also take part in community-based activities. Carers will work with young people to find activities and interests that they really want to do. The agency employs a family outreach worker, whose role includes organising activities for young people, carers and birth children. They also undertake individual work with young people to help them gain skills or take part in community activities. This all helps young people to have valued and varied experiences in the same way that young people living with their own families can.

Foster carers have high expectations of young people's educational attainment and provide support for them to do well in school and further education. There is training for carers to help them do this effectively. Young people say that they get help with education. The agency employs an education advisor who provides support for carers and helps to get young people back into school. She also does some individual work with young people who are not in school and helps sort out any problems with personal education plans. Placing social workers make very positive comments about how carers help young people to do well in education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency actively engages young people and seeks their views. There is a consultation group that meets regularly and is currently involved in making suggestions on how to improve the children's guide. Supervising social workers regularly speak to young people when they visit the home, so that they are well aware of young people's views. Young people say that their carers listen to them. One commented that, 'they listen and act on it'. Young people are involved in decisions such as their choice of clothes and how their bedrooms will be decorated, as well as in their care plans. They are supported to attend reviews, so they can give their views and hear what is said about their future plans.

Most young people said they knew how to make a complaint, although some were unsure. As this information is clearly set out in the children's guide, which all young people get, they have easy access to it if they need it.

Carers say the agency is very good at promoting equality and diversity. Young people are provided with highly individualised care to meet their needs and promote their individual identity. All young people are given a memory box. This contains a disposable camera, photo album and frame, money box and written suggestions for how to use them. Young people say that they use the memory boxes to remind them of things like holidays and happy times with their carers. Foster carers help young people to develop skills and interests that increase their self-esteem and help them develop emotional resilience. Some young people do regular or one-off pieces of

work for charity and to help others, such as sponsored events. This is supported by carers and the agency.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency and its carers are good at helping young people to prepare for adulthood and independent life. Carers make use of specific training to help young people move to independence. Young people are encouraged to think about their futures, for example, their further education. They are helped with budgeting and encouraged to open bank accounts and to save. They also get individual help with skills such as cooking and using computers. Young people say that they are helped to think about their future; one said, 'I have been given a lot of help and advice from my carers.' Those young people who are preparing for adulthood have individual pathway plans that clearly set out the roles that carers, the agency and the placing authority have in the process. Young people are able to stay in their placements beyond 18 years of age if this is appropriate. The expectation for this is set out in the foster carer handbook. However, the agency does not have a policy on young people staying in their placements into their legal adulthood and so detail of how this would work is lacking.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The fostering agency has an effective and robust system for recruiting carers. People interested in fostering are given comprehensive and realistic information on the role, and take part in a preparing to foster course. Throughout the assessment of their suitability to foster, they are treated sensitively, but this does not limit the effectiveness of the process. The required checks are undertaken and clearly recorded. Assessments of new carers go to the fostering panel, who make a recommendation to the agency decision maker. This process helps to ensure that carers are suitable and well prepared to provide a good standard of care for young people. The fostering panel covers this agency and another one that is part of the same organisation. They meet regularly and give thorough consideration to the assessments, including identifying and questioning issues related to equality and diversity. They also undertake a quality assurance role and feedback to the agency on the standard of the assessments, which helps to ensure their effectiveness. The panel has access to specific expertise, such as medical and educational. There is also a suitable system for recruiting and checking staff.

In practice there is a good level of matching young people to prospective carers to ensure that placements are able to meet young people's individual needs. Ongoing discussions between carers and supervising social workers monitor the degree to which these needs are met and cover how any gaps identified in matching can be addressed. Gaps in matching are recorded on matching records, but they do not all record how they will be addressed and what additional resources or training may be

required.

Foster carers and staff are highly appreciative of the training that the agency provides for them. These cover a wide range of areas and consist of core training that all carers are expected to undertake as well as additional training to meet specific needs of young people. Training courses for carers include child protection, self-esteem and identity, valuing diversity, moving into independence, safe care, education and mental health. If a carer or member of staff needs any training that is not provided by the agency, it is sourced externally. All carers receive handbooks with the agency's policies and procedures set out in them. This all helps to ensure that staff and carers are provided with the knowledge and skills to provide a good standard of care for young people.

There is a high level of support for carers, including out-of-hours support. One carer said that the supporting social worker was, 'excellent in supporting us in our role'. Carers receive regular visits and supervision from the supervising social workers to ensure that they can care properly for the young people placed with them. These visits are clearly recorded. The frequency of supervision is increased when this is necessary. There are regular support groups for carers, including a support group for male carers. Independent support is available for any carers who are subject of allegations. The agency has an identified person who takes responsibility for ensuring that the child protection policy and procedures are working to protect young people and are compliant with local authority protocols.

There is an effective system of monitoring and improving the quality of care provided for young people placed with the agency. This includes regular meetings between the regional quality assurance manager and the Registered Manager. However, reports made as a result of this are not sent to Ofsted as required by The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. Young people and foster carers are involved in discussions and decisions about care plans. Young people can attend their looked after children reviews with support from carers. This means that everyone is aware of the plans and this helps to ensure that they are suitable and young people's needs are effectively met.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency pays close attention to young people's individual needs and supports carers to meet those needs.

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.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
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35 (2011)	provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purpose of monitoring and improving the quality of foster care provided by the agency. (Regulation 35(2))	29/07/2011
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Recommendations

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

- ensure there is a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carer(s) into legal adulthood (NMS 12.4)
- ensure that when gaps in matching are identified the placement plan sets out any additional training, resources or support that are required. (NMS 15.1)