

Safehouses Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC036888
Inspection date	24 September 2007
Inspector	Alex Turner
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	25 September 2006

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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

Established in 1997, Safehouses is an independent fostering provider. The type of placements offered include task centred, long term, parent / child, respite, sibling groups, asylum seekers and children with special needs. Safehouses is based in Knockholt, Kent and operates a sub office in Essex. Foster carers approved by Safehouses reside in the Kent, Essex and Greater London areas.

Summary

The inspection was announced. All of the key National Minimum Standards were assessed. Safehouses engage in a process of continuous monitoring and learning and seek to attain ongoing improvement in the standards of care provided. Safehouses continues to provide a child centred service with good quality placements.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Safehouses has developed its monitoring systems in relation to children's educational attainment, achievement and needs of those in its care. New measures to promote equality and diversity have been introduced. Health issues are now more clearly followed up at foster carer supervision meetings and the health care handbook has been updated. Quality assurance feedback from the fostering panel regarding assessments and reviews has been incorporated into the panels routine functions. Advice to foster Carers has been provided regarding changes in laws and regulations. Safehouses have consulted with children who are leaving care and who have left care to help develop the leaving care programme. The consultation process with children at the point of foster carers annual review has been enhanced. Safehouses website has been updated. Improvements have been made to the arrangements for when payments are made to Foster Carers. The staff appraisal process has been revised to better address the developmental needs of the staff in line with the needs of the Company and service delivery. More use is being made of statistical information in relation to attracting and recruiting a diverse range of foster carers.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Safehouses promotes the health and development of children. The matching process and preparation of placements takes into account children's health needs; foster carers undertake training to help ensure they are competent in meeting these. A clear example was found of a foster carer who had invested and continued to invest a great deal of personal resources, with the support and coordination of Safehouses, towards meeting a child's complex health care needs. Safehouses works in collaboration with health care providers and foster carers and in doing so contribute to achieving good outcomes in this area.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The registered persons meet and exceed the criteria used to determine suitability. Safehouses conduct checks on foster carers' homes as part of foster carers assessment and approval process. The ongoing suitability of foster carers' homes is also monitored by regular supervision visits and occasional unannounced visits. Health and safety standards are formally reviewed by Safehouses at the time of foster carers annual reviews or sooner if required, for example following a change of address. Safehouses takes into account all relevant information known and made available about children and foster carers when considering suitable matches to referrals made. Management information on the stability of placements indicates matches made are successful. Information about placement disruptions is collated. Safehouses demonstrate that where there are lessons to be learned practice is reflected upon and improved. Safehouses takes steps to help ensure that children are protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation. Instances where allegations have been made are acted upon in a timely and an appropriate manner. There have been no substantiated allegations in the twelve months preceding this inspection. Contributing to keeping children and foster carers safe, family safe care statements have been formulated by foster carers, based on guidelines provided by Safehouses. The safe care statements covered a range of relevant areas. The statements though had not been written in a manner that could easily be shared with children and frequently there was no indication they had been discussed with and signed off by the supervising social worker, placing social worker or the children that had been placed. People employed by Safehouses to work with children are suitable to do so. The process of recruitment and selection of staff is rigorous and exceeds the requirements set out in the National Minimum Standards. Checks are carried out on persons used by foster carers to baby sit though this practice is without the benefit of any clear written procedures and guidance to do so. The fostering panel is constituted and carried on in line with the standards and regulations. Independent membership of the panel includes people with a broad range of experience including those with experience in child health, education, fostering and in being fostered. The panels role in providing quality assurance of the work carried out by Safehouses is firmly established and implemented in practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Safehouses values and promotes diversity. Practice is informed by written policy and guidance. The approval, assessment, supervision and training of carers all cover equality and diversity. Gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture and disability are all included in the factors taken into account in the matching process. Foster families demonstrated some excellent examples of how these principles and values have been implemented and are contributing to attaining positive outcomes for children. Children whose first language is not English are disadvantaged to some extent by the omission to provide written information including the children's guide and consultation forms in a format they can easily understand. Children's educational achievement is promoted. Children have been supported by their carers to attend schools and colleges. Children's educational achievements have been encouraged and acknowledged. Information systems to demonstrate attendance and the educational attainment of children in foster care have been improved since the last inspection and continue to be developed. Safehouses is contributing to professional research to help improve outcomes for children in this area.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. Contact is included in the factors considered in the matching process. The views of children or young person are sought and given weight in determining contact arrangements. The provision of a contact suite, social work supervision during visits, and contact reports can all be provided by Safehouses and serve well to contribute to positive outcomes for children in this area. Children, families and other users of the service are consulted with routinely and on a regular basis. The review of foster carers approval, post placement feedback and children's care are some of the more formal mechanisms to do so. Safehouses take notice of opinions and views expressed and use this information to develop and improve service provision. Informal consultation with children, including birth children takes place for example during supervision visits however the manner in which this is recorded could improve.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Safehouses support children to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living. Foster carers demonstrate they are aware of the expectations placed upon them. Children spoken to described ways in which they have been able to develop skills for adult living. Safehouses have continued to provide support to a number of young adults since leaving care and continue to maintain links with those that wish to do so. This level of commitment provides an example of the high level of investment Safehouses make in helping children

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The statement accurately reflects the services provided. Children are provided with a guide to the fostering service. The guide is published in two formats that take into account the different age groups of children fostered. Safehouses have omitted to publish the guide in languages other than English. This has resulted in children who have been placed but have yet to learn how to read English not having easy access to the information contained within. Safehouses organise it's staff well and delegate tasks in line with providing high quality services to children, foster carers and other stakeholders. Foster carers, supervising social workers and local authority social workers have praised the professionalism, overall management and child centred approach of the fostering service. Workloads are maintained at levels which contribute to social work and administrative functions being completed to a good and often excellent standard. Supervision notes, preparation and presentation of reviews, panel minutes, management statistics, reports and the general high standard of administrative records all provide examples of ways in which the functions of the fostering service have been carried on. Safehouses have clear strategies for working with foster carers. This includes arrangements for training and development, supervision, information and advice, out-of-hours support and respite care. There is a good communication between the fostering service and children's social workers. Children's and foster carers case files are well maintained and provide a good account of their progress and development. Administrative records are of a similar high standard. Internal quality audits are carried out and contribute to the good standard of practice in this area.

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
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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 foster carers safe care statements are signed of by the supervising social worker, cleared with the child's social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to children that are placed.
- formulate written procedures and guidelines relating to checks to be conducted on persons used by foster carers to baby sit children placed with them.
- ensure that written information which would normally be shared with children, for example consultation forms and safe care statements, is presented in a language which can be understood by all children with whom it is shared.
- maintain records that demonstrate how it is ensured that children are aware of their rights as set out in the children's guide.

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.