

Jay Fostering Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sharon Treadwell
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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

Jay Fostering Limited is a private limited company with shares and operates as an Independent Fostering Agency. The shareholders have appointed three directors to run the company: Mr. Richard Berry is the Executive Director and designated Responsible Individual with responsibility for company matters including finance; Mrs. Joy Berry is the Social Work Director and Ms. Lara Harwood is the Non-Executive Director. The agency was first registered in December 2003. The agency's Statement of Purpose clearly defines the nature of placement types provided as short term, long term, bridging, respite, pre-adoption and parent and child. The current registered manager was appointed in November 2004. The agency additionally employs three full time Supervising Social Workers, a support worker and an office manager. At the time of this inspection the agency has 23 sets of carers and has 37 children in placement. The agency provides placements to a number of local authorities.

Summary

This was a proportionate key inspection. The agency was assessed as meeting or exceeding all but one of the key National Minimum Standards in May 2007. For the purposes of this inspection one foster carer and the two young people in placement were tracked through the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with placing social workers and agency staff. Records relating to a number of other carers and young people were accessed to support findings or to investigate issues arising within questionnaire responses. Questionnaires were returned by five foster carers, five young people and four placing social workers. During the inspection the inspector spoke with the registered providers, the registered manager and social work staff and the Fostering Panel Chair. A fostering panel was attended on 27 July 2007 and the minutes of three previous panel meetings were examined.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has expanded since the previous inspection and currently supports 23 fostering households providing placements to 37 young people. There has been an appropriate increase to the staffing compliment with the appointment of two qualified and experienced social workers. One of these social workers has been appointed as deputy manager. Training opportunities for staff and carers have improved. The agency has developed robust systems for monitoring operational practice and outcomes for young people and is now diligent, though not always successful, in pursuing outstanding information from placing local authorities. The notable strength of this agency is its child-focussed approach. The agency is committed to working in partnership with placing authorities and other agencies but is prepared to challenge the working practices of those agencies where positive outcomes for young people are not appropriately promoted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The Foster Carers' Handbook gives clear and comprehensive guidance on the storage and administration of medication and includes a clearly stated expectation of carers in relation to registering young people with health practitioners and organising appropriate appointments.

The agency has a robust smoking policy, in line with the recommendations of Fostering Network, which includes the provision of an air filtration system to carers who smoke. During the inspection carers were noted to be diligent in registering young people with a GP and in ensuring that they had regular dental and optical checks. Carers were also very aware of the need to record any medication administered to young people. Foster carers retain separate records relating to the health of young people placed and copies are forwarded to placing social workers to ensure that a full record of medical interventions is available should the young person move on. Placing social workers commented: 'The carers are very aware of specific medical needs, promote healthy eating and ensure appointments with health professionals are met' and 'The carers have supported the young person to develop skills in healthy options meals and hygiene'. Three young people, currently placed with Jay Fostering, have defined medical conditions which are being well-monitored and controlled by appropriate diet and the involvement of relevant health professionals. When minor accidents have occurred with young people in placement their carers have appropriately consulted a doctor or taken the young person to hospital. All carers are required to complete first aid training within a year of approval. The agency additionally provides a good range of carer training on health issues for example: 'Meeting the health needs of Looked After Children'; 'Enuresis, encopresis and soiling'; 'Understanding alcohol and substance misuse' and 'Sexual health and contraception for young people'. A very comprehensive audit of medical issues relating to young people in placement with the agency was carried out in November 2006. This resulted in the production of a detailed report and the development of a spreadsheet enabling the agency to monitor the health progress of each young person during their placement. The spreadsheet also makes it easy to identify excessive use of medication or a high incidence of accidents or illness. The agency maintains geographically based information about general and specific health resources to share with carers as needed and has a contractual agreement with a medical advisor for advice to the management and to the panel. The agency is currently seeking to recruit a panel member with expertise in child health. In relation to support in promoting young people's health foster carers spoke of: 'a high standard of training'; 'good access to advice' and 'regular checks on our records'.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The Jay Fostering Panel was observed by the inspector on 27 July 2007 and the Panel Chair was interviewed. The panel currently has eight members and all are white females. In seeking to recruit two additional panel members the agency wishes to achieve a better gender and cultural balance. During observation of the panel the inspector observed current panel members to have a good knowledge of equality and diversity issues. All foster carers' annual reviews are presented to the panel but panel minutes do not currently detail which are first reviews nor do they always indicate the carer's current approval status. Observation of the Fostering Panel, discussion with the Panel Chair and examination of panel minutes evidence that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. Good quality reports are provided by the agency's social work staff in relation to foster carer approval and annual review and these are closely scrutinised by panel members. The panel has access to medical and educational expertise. The Panel Chair confirms that she is able to meet with the Agency Decision Maker as necessary and that a range of panel training opportunities has been provided by the agency covering topics requested by panel members. The agency gives a commendably high priority to the process of matching young people to appropriate placements and to ensuring the safety of those placements. There is evidenced consideration of the identified needs of young people and the skills of proposed carers and a risk assessment is completed in relation to every

placement made. One placing social worker highlighted: 'This agency regularly reviews risk assessments to promote safety'. Carers are provided with clear and comprehensive written guidance on safe caring practices and safe care policies are in place for each fostering household. A robust health and safety audit is completed of each foster home at the point of the carer's approval and this is reviewed annually as part of the foster carer annual review process. Assessment of safety appropriately includes transport used by the carer and any household pets. The panel rigorously examines safe care policies and health and safety audits as part of the approval and review process. Statistics evidence that the agency has good placement stability. A good range of training is provided for carers including: 'Personal safety and stress management', 'Safer caring' and 'Safe management and de-escalation skills'. Two social workers are due to complete the Webster Stratton behaviour management training and will then present this training to carers. The agency has a commendably robust staff recruitment process and all personnel files examined contained evidence of appropriate checks and of a very thorough interview process. The agency has a strict policy on bedroom sharing and only considers this option for siblings under the age of five where there are no identified potential risks. Where a carer is granted an exemption to the normal fostering limit, matching forms and risk assessments are completed and the appropriate signed consent is obtained from the local authority. The agency has an excellent Placement Agreement pro-forma which includes clear detailing of the roles and responsibilities of the agency, the carer, the placing authority and the young person. The agreement also provides good information about the young person's identified needs in relation to religion, culture, health, education and contact. Agency staff are very clear about their responsibilities in relation to child protection and notifications and referrals are made appropriately. The agency has challenged local authority responses to child protection referrals when it has considered their response to be inconsistent with stated child protection procedures. All young people consulted during the inspection said that they felt safe and were not being bullied. Evidence was noted on one carer's file of good liaison with the supervising social worker and the school when a young person reported bullying at school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people visited during the inspection were being supported to achieve well in school and to experience a wide range of leisure activities. The children showed the inspector some excellent pictures, which they had painted with their foster carer and they also talked about the many places they had visited and the cakes they made with their carer. One placing social worker told of a worker from Jay Fostering doing: 'good work with the young person to support educational and social development.' All placing social workers said that they were regularly updated on young people's educational progress. Young people list a variety of hobbies and interests which are supported by their carers: martial arts, music, golf, rugby, scuba diving and football and one young person said that the best thing learnt with the carer was how to look after animals. Foster carers complete a monthly summary report in relation to each young person placed and this details educational progress and any specific achievements and also lists any activities. A copy of the report is forwarded to the placing authority. During the summer holidays carers receive additional allowance specifically to fund an extra activity each week for young people in placement. Foster carers find the agency very supportive of young people's hobbies and say that: 'Equipment for home education and support of hobbies is provided as soon as the need is highlighted'. All young people currently placed with the agency have an educational placement and records examined during the inspection evidence that young people are achieving well and are developing both academically and socially. The agency presents

young people with certificates in recognition of all achievements. The agency has a clearly stated expectation that foster carers will support and encourage young people to progress educationally and will liaise with schools and attend all meetings and parent's evenings. Supervising social workers also attend all relevant education meetings to support carers. Recent carer training on 'Meeting the health and educational needs of Looked After Children' covered the benefits of extra curricular activities in developing young people's confidence & experiential learning. The agency has recruited a number of carers with a range of racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds, some still undergoing assessment and has worked hard during the last year to target particular minority groups to create greater diversity in its carer population. The agency is currently attempting to recruit new panel members to give a wider cultural representation. Equality and diversity issues are given appropriate consideration within the matching process and the agency has provided a range of appropriate resources to carers to facilitate the meeting of young people's individual needs such as books, videos and prayer mats. The agency plans to include diversity training for staff and carer in its training programme.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The Foster Placement Agreements and the information stored on the agency's Child Database clearly detail each young person's contact arrangements and identify the responsibility for transport arrangements. The agency has recently provided placements for a number of very young children with high levels of family contact and carers have been well supported with the issues arising from this. The agency has appropriately challenged local authorities where unrealistic expectations have been placed on foster carers and the agency's support worker has provided practical support with some transport arrangements. The agency has provided training specifically aimed at carers providing these placements: 'Legal proceedings and working in partnership'. Carers have a clear understanding of the need to promote and facilitate contact and they support young people well where issues arise with contact arrangements and retain good records of the impact on the young people. Contact is a standard topic for discussion on the supervision agenda when carers receive monthly supervision from their allocated social worker. All young people say that they are happy with their arrangements for family contact and that they can have friends to stay. The agency produces three age specific children's guides which, commendably, include contact details for the young person's placing authority Children's Rights Officer. In May 2007 young people fostered with Jay were invited to a consultation with the Ofsted Children's Rights Director. Young people in placement are regularly consulted by the Supervising Social Worker during support visits as well as by their own placing social workers. The views of young people in placement and of foster carers' birth children are sought as part of the foster carer review process and are carefully considered by the Fostering Panel. Carers commented: 'Jay's approach encourages mutual respect and communication about all issues'; 'Young people are encouraged to add their bit about how they feel on our monthly records'. A colourful and informative newsletter is circulated to all young people in placement bi-monthly and their contributions are included. The May edition included an excellent article describing the role of the Ofsted Children's Rights Director and contact details for his website. The agency has worked hard during the last year to raise the profile of advocacy and children's rights with young people, including involving a student, on placement with the agency, in a project with this express purpose. The agency has not worked as pro-actively with its carers in this area and does not always encourage carers to provide support to younger children to access children's rights services when it is appropriate.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The Carers' Handbook includes guidance on preparing young people for independence and details twelve particular skill areas which should be developed. Carers commented: 'The agency checks with carers and young people re pocket money given and checks social skills training provided for young people in placement at supervision'; 'The agency has been very supportive of my efforts to encourage budgeting, saving and book-keeping skills'. The agency has carers with identified strengths in equipping young people to move towards independence and a planned placement move had recently been undertaken by one young person tracked to specifically focus on preparation for leaving care. Since the previous inspection the agency has reviewed the fees charged to local authorities and payments to carers and these are both now age related. Foster carers are also paid on a rising scale which reflects their competence and experience. Supervising social workers make any recommendations for progression and these are considered, within the annual review process, by the panel and the Agency Decision Maker. Foster Carers have a stated respite entitlement which can, at their request, be claimed as payment instead. All foster carers have recently been provided with the Fostering Network guidelines on appropriate pocket money rates for young people in foster care and on appropriate spending on clothing according to age. The agency retains an inventory of the clothing a young person has on admission to a foster placement and the inventory is reviewed when the young person leaves the placement.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency is currently in the process of expanding and is commended on securing the appointment of three additional social workers (one appointment in process) prior to recruiting additional carers. The agency has established sound working relationships with a number of placing authorities and referrals for placements have increased significantly since the previous inspection. The agency's Statement of Purpose is commendable and provides clear detail of its aims and objectives and of the services provided. The agency's policies and procedures are robust and are very well referenced to the Fostering Services Regulations and to the National Minimum Standards. The agency has a strong and stable management team with clearly defined roles and clear lines of accountability. Since the previous inspection a Deputy Manager/Senior Practitioner has been appointed. This worker is still within her probationary period and has been given a good induction, having assumed only some of her managerial responsibilities whilst familiarising herself with the agency's policies, procedures and operational systems and getting to know the carers. The agency has a range of excellent systems for monitoring organisational practice and performance and outcomes for young people. The manager completes a very comprehensive Schedule 7 monitoring report every six months and carers are regularly consulted about their satisfaction with the support that they receive. Both staff and carers say that formal and informal support is excellent and supervision is regular and valuable. Records of foster carer supervision evidence that carers are provided with appropriate advice and assistance by their social workers and carers feel a valued part of the team. Foster carers said: 'I have a lot of respect for Jay because I have been made to feel, by the manager, directors and social workers, like part of a team promoting and supporting the care of children'; 'My views, worries and concerns have always been recognised and understood'; 'My link worker has a wealth of experience and reality and I have absorbed this and worked closely with her'. Placing social workers also spoke positively about the agency: 'The service from Jay's key workers &

associate staff has been exceptional. They supported the placement really well with regular visits and offering 1/1 work with the young person'; 'I always get a positive and professional response'. Staff confirm that they have good access to training opportunities. The agency currently has one support worker, who provides invaluable support to foster carers, and proposes to appoint a second. The agency has obtained funding through a local authority for the support worker to complete a Diploma in Social Work and has recently supported the worker to complete an Open University Foundation Course in preparation. A good range of training is provided for foster carers and the agency now holds some training sessions in the evening to better facilitate attendance. The agency is aware that the current recruitment of carers from other geographical areas will require a review of training and carer support group venues. The manager is aware that some carers are not accessing enough training and is working towards the development of individual training plans to address this. Some of the young people's records do not contain appropriate Looked After Children paperwork. Care Plans, Personal Education Plans and health histories are just some of the crucial items missing. The agency has developed a robust system for monitoring the receipt of paperwork from placing authorities and completes a monthly audit of files. In some cases several telephone calls and letters seeking missing paperwork have been made, over a prolonged period, to placing social workers and their managers and the requested paperwork has still not been provided. The agency system for monitoring the frequency of visits to young people by their placing social workers is not robust enough. All records examined in the Jay office and in carers' homes were appropriately retained. Carers retain photographs and memorabilia to support young people's life story work. The agency's records are electronic with varying levels of password access and a secure back-up system and carer recordings are scanned on to the system as they are received. Young people had strong feelings about what Jay Fostering is good at: 'remember my birthday'; 'support for me & my carers'; 'supervising contacts'; 'giving me certificates of achievement' and 'presents for birthdays & Christmas'. Some young people made specific reference to work done for them by the carers and supervising social workers. Asked what the agency could do better all questionnaires received from young people contained only one comment: 'less forms to fill in'.

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):

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.