

# Hythe House Support Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Lucy Ansell
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<b>Registered manager</b>	Post Vacant
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Gary Edward Duffy
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	13 August 2007

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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**

Hythe House Support Limited is an independent fostering agency. The agency offers foster placements for assessment, support, respite and rehabilitation guided by individual children's and young peoples' ongoing care plans. As appropriate, placements can be made for the short, medium and long term and if required on an emergency basis. Services offered also include organising and supervision of family contact and meeting daily travel arrangements with driver and escort services. Additional services that can be provided include access to the company's educational unit and nursery, arrangements can be made for therapy and counselling. The office premises are close to Sittingbourne town centre and can provide a suitable venue for training, meetings and contact visits - supervised or otherwise. The agency has 12 foster carers based in Kent and Medway and has 16 children placed with them.

### **Summary**

This announced inspection focused on key standards, and was conducted over three days. Further material was gained through the receipt of questionnaires completed by young people and carers and the pre-inspection paperwork, completed by the agency. Five young people and three foster carers completed pre-inspection questionnaires. The outcome of these on the whole was very positive and expressed that a good service is being provided and the young people are satisfied with the care given. Some of the comments from the foster carers that were received are, "very impressed with the levels of support " and "the agency provides everything possible to make sure the children and their carers succeed in their placement". Overall the agency is ensuring outstanding outcomes for the young people in enjoying and achieving and positive outcomes and can evidence good practice is being used in all other areas.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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

The major improvement to the agency has been the extension and complete redecoration and refurbishment of the office. There has also been a change in the structure of the staff team and increase in foster carers. The new social work team have updated and reviewed all the policies and procedures as required. There have also been upgrades in the telecommunications and computer systems.

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

The provision is good.

Young people's health care needs are well met. The initial planning for any health matters occurs at the start of the placement, this takes into account health services available and is then subsequently monitored through both in-house and statutory looked after children medical reviews. The agency strives to ensure the 'right' provision is secured through accessing psychiatric and psychology services, both for the child and the family they are placed with, they do not profit from providing this service to the Local Authorities. Carers are aided through training and the foster carer handbook to supervise, monitor and enable the children's health needs to be met. Records detailing health were sampled in both the agency's records and the records kept by the individual foster carers. Medical records were noted at foster carers' homes, although some elements need to be sent on to the agency to maintain full and detailed health

records. Detailed guidance is in the Foster Carers' Handbook, alongside information and advice for foster carers. Foster carers spoken to said the recent health training they had attended was informative and relevant, all carers are up to date with their first aid training. Each child has a health file, and each carer has a signed consent card with delegated rights afforded to them. The health care plans that were looked at had not been reviewed since they were created. The agency does not provide health training for young people, in preventative measures, such as healthy eating and advice on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances.

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

The provision is good.

The new manager possesses a wealth of previous relevant experience and his qualifications are commensurate with the role. Checks and references for all staff and foster carers are carried out in a comprehensive manner by a senior member of staff, and renewed every three years, records of any checks obtained and their outcome are kept securely. For any references received, evidence was seen that telephone enquiries are made to follow up the written references. The young people can be assured that the agency will provide suitable foster carers. Three foster parents' homes were visited; each was comfortably furnished and decorated, and able to accommodate all who lived there with no obvious health and safety hazards noted. The agency completes yearly health and safety checks in conjunction with a questionnaire which checks all of their equipment and responsibilities for the welfare of the young person. The young people's rooms that were seen were all personalised and contained the latest gadgets and electronic toys; they allowed for privacy and space and were maintained to a good standard of cleanliness. There is clear written guidance pertaining to the agency's health and safety policy and procedure. The foster parents are encouraged to think about such aspects with regards to their own 'safe care' policy, and training helps make them individual to the young person and their family. The agency appropriately matches young people to their carers, and the length and purpose of placements are clearly communicated to all parties and this results in successful placements being made. The agency has remained stable with many long term placements, however, with the addition of new carers, the agency for example, will need to ensure its matching forms are completed to a high professional standard to ensure it maintains appropriate matching. Children and young people are protected from potential harm and abuse by robust and sound child protection systems. Child protection policies and procedures have been revised, updated and communicated to all staff and carers. All reports of abuse and neglect are scrutinised by the manager and social workers of the agency. The agency does not have a system in place which collates all the evidence and information in one place. Carers maintain and update when necessary their own safe care policies and these are monitored through the annual review process. Child Protection training which updated the carers on the new policies and procedures, has recently been completed with most of the carers. The content of the staff files is exemplary. They consistently hold all the relevant paperwork in a clear and concise manner. There are rigorous safeguarding checks for all people working in or for the agency, and all have had enhanced checks through the Criminal Records Bureau. Checks on identity and qualifications have been completed along with full employment histories. Written references are followed up by telephone verification and applicants cannot start work until all of the required paperwork and checks have been completed. The panel on this inspection was not observed in session. The decision maker was interviewed during the course of the inspection and the minutes of several panels were inspected. These were found to contain evidence that the Form F assessment material had been fully scrutinised and relevant questions had been put to the assessments'

author and prospective foster parents. The panel undertakes a robust quality assurance role but more evidence relating to this function would be useful. The panel is quorate.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Sound and robust policies and procedures remain in place with regards to equal opportunities and valuing diversity. This is demonstrated in practice through the agency's recruitment procedures of foster carers and staff, and within the agency's strong commitment to provide a wide and diverse group of foster carers. The carers work hard at ensuring the young people can access local groups and pursue their interests, by ensuring they have equal access to opportunities and are not disadvantaged by being a foster child. An example of this is the one off payment every year the agency gives to foster carers, so over the summer holidays they can go out on extra trips without worrying about the financial side. Foster carers confirmed they received excellent support with regards to any specialist needs, including funding, adaptations to their homes, equipment, additional support for their child at school and specific training for them as carers. The agency provides for all young people including birth children, a gift token for birthdays, Christmas and any significant achievements, the young people all commented on this and felt included into the agency's extended family.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Records on file indicate that children's opinions have been sought prior to their own reviews and that of their foster carers' review. Children and young people spoken to described means by which they had been consulted, for example, review paperwork, and the opportunity to attend groups and events set up by the service. If the chance to have introductory meetings with potential foster carers prior to a placement being made is not available then a comprehensive pack about the prospective carers and the area can be given to them. The service is taking steps to establish a forum for children and young people to attend whereby they could be encouraged to air their views on aspects related to their being in foster care. The children and young people's guide to the fostering service includes information about how to complain or to raise concerns in relation to their being in foster care. The young people were spoken to by the agency about the handbook and offered the view that they had found it helpful and reassuring especially in the early stages of their placement, but didn't really like reading, so the agency made this into a disc format for them.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The statement of purpose provides an accurate account of the services provided, however, information was not seen on the number of complaints received together with the outcome of any child protection investigations. This is updated on a yearly basis. The new governing body Ofsted is not recorded on several key policies and procedures. A children's guide to the service is available and has been distributed to children and young people placed, this is available on a disc or paper format. The manager of the fostering service is suitably qualified and experienced. The overall findings of this inspection indicate that the manager has been effective in the

exercise of their duties. During the visit the inspector was informed of the resignation of the manager who is going to work with another discipline in Kent. The post has been already been filled. The agency has just taken on six new foster carers and so is expanding the staff structure both within the administration and social work side. The agency is very aware that the maximum limit for them would be 20 carers, as they feel any more than this would jeopardise the agency's whole ethos and limitations on being a small family run agency with all the good points this encompasses. Senior managers within the organisation were interviewed. Each possessed the qualifications and experience needed to effectively run the agency. Lines of communication, accountability and responsibility were clear and monitoring and quality assurance systems were robust and effective. The manager receives external supervision from a qualified social worker. They have recently joined the Fostering Network which will enable them to broaden their networks in local run forums. Individual staff members are provided with good access to ongoing training and opportunities to broaden their own knowledge base. All social workers are appropriately qualified and experienced, and receive regular supervision from the manager on a monthly basis. Team meetings are held weekly, such records demonstrated these were happening regularly. There is a clear written strategy in place for working with carers. Foster carers, through their returned questionnaires reported good communication with the agency and themselves and written evidence supported that all carers receive regular, recorded supervision from their agency. 'Out of Hours' support was described as "excellent" and very accessible. The carers also all receive respite breaks with the foster children going to the same respite carer or a family member if possible, this helps to relieve the risk of placement breakdown. All carers had up to date written Foster Carer Agreements in place and were conversant with the agency's complaints procedure. Case records for children were inspected, and contained most of the information required, case files were very detailed and comprehensive. All records pertaining to the young person, are not always copied over to be kept on their files in accordance with data protection legislation. The agency has a policy on case records which ensures the purpose and content of files and clarifies what information is kept. Monthly placement updates are sent in by the foster carer, evidence was not seen that the foster children have access to these records to make comments or record their own statements. The agency does not at this time send monthly reports on to the Local Authorities. Reviews are occurring in a timely manner. The agency keeps its own notes following the review of a young person until they are sent copies from the Local Authority. The agency works hard to ensure all parties are clear on their understanding of the basis for the placement, its duration and purpose and to keep the young person's needs at the centre of this. What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s): ensure there is evidence to show young people are given appropriate access to their written records.(NMS 25.12) review all paper work and update change of governing body to now read Ofsted.(NMS 25.3) ensure all records pertaining to the young person are copied and kept on their files in accordance with data protection legislation.(NMS 24.2) ensure that the monthly reports are also sent to Local Authorities. (NMS 24.1) provide health training for young people, in preventative measures, such as healthy eating and advice on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances. (NMS 12.1) ensure the health care plans are reviewed yearly. (NMS 12.4)

## 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.**