

Fostering at Modus

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sue Winson
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Address	Modus Communicandi Ltd Highfield House 185 Chorley New Road BOLTON BL1 4QZ
Telephone number	01204 399514
Email	
Registered person	Modus Communicandi Limited
Registered manager	Gareth Bonar Walton
Responsible individual	Edwina Susan Hamilton
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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

Fostering at Modus is an independent fostering service based in Bolton and part of the 'Modus' organisation, which also provides residential care for young people at a children's home, a separately registered service.

The fostering service was registered in October 2002 and provides a range of placements with approved foster carers, including long term, short term, respite and mother and baby placements. They also offer a small number of specialised task focussed placements and work in partnership with an independent organisation to meet the specific needs of this group of young people.

Summary

This announced key inspection considered all key standards under the outcome areas. This is a good service with outstanding aspects.

The agency is child focussed and prioritises support and supervision of foster carers to ensure that children's and young people's holistic needs are met to a high standard. Staff and foster carers work in partnership with other agencies for the benefit of the young people. There is a strong improvement agenda and a clear direction of development, which is informed by reflective practice and open communication. Foster carers are well prepared, trained and supported in their work.

One action has been raised at this inspection in respect of obtaining full information prior to staff starting work. There are three recommendations concerning the accessibility of the young people's guide, seeking the opinions of children and young people's families about the service and the monitoring of health and safety checks.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Three recommendations made at the last inspection have been fully addressed. The chair of the fostering panel provides reports on the quality of practice provided by the service. Records maintained by foster carers allow for monitoring of children's progress. The agency can now demonstrate that young people are supported to develop skills and knowledge for independent living.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The agency promotes the health and development of children and young people. There is a strong focus on equipping and supporting foster carers to meet physical and emotional health needs leading to positive outcomes for children and young people.

Health plans are compiled which provide a running record of how an individual's assessed needs are being met. The agency is persistent in requesting full background information to inform these plans from placing social workers. Children and young people are registered with dentists, doctors and opticians and the agency is active in ensuring that they receive specialised health

services. Where young people are of an age to make informed choices about their own health care, they are provided with information and guidance, and are encouraged and supported to have healthy lifestyles.

Foster carers training and preparation equips them to meet children's health needs and the agency's policies and procedures provide effective guidance. These include safe storage and administration of medication and first aid. Examples were given where foster carers and agency support workers receive training to meet the specific medical needs of individual children.

The supervising social workers monitor how well foster carers are meeting health needs on supervisory visits, and provide a high level of support and assistance, which the foster carers value. Foster carers provide information and progress reports to the planning and review processes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The managers are suitably experienced, qualified and skilled to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The company has an established recruitment and selection process which includes interviews. Reference forms ask for information about why employment with children or vulnerable adults ended. Not all staff personnel files contain full histories to identify gaps in employment, references from most recent employers or documentary evidence of qualifications. Social work staff involved in assessments of foster carers have the relevant qualifications, while support workers have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The staff are skilled and experienced and work together to provide a service to foster carers and children.

The agency provides suitable foster carers and rigorous processes are carried out prior to their approval which serve to safeguard children in their care. Six references are taken up and at least three are interviewed, including employers and family members. The interviews with referees cover salient points and contribute to the thorough assessment of existing and potential parenting skills. Criminal Records Bureau checks (CRBs) are also obtained for any adults who are likely to have frequent or unsupervised access to children and young people, or who are part of the applicant's support network.

Health and safety checks of foster carers' homes are undertaken as part of the assessment and are monitored through supervision visits and unannounced visits. These records do not always contain information that hazards have been remedied, or that a re-assessment has been done once children are placed, in light of their age and stage of development. The safety of children is monitored through accident forms which foster carers complete.

The agency places the needs of the child at the forefront when making matching decisions, in consultation with placing social workers and foster carers. They can demonstrate that they pursue placing social workers for full written information to inform the matching process. Information sharing between relevant professionals, children and young people and their families is evident. Robust matching procedures are in place which results in the stability of placements. Foster placement agreements contain all the required information and in addition the matching and planning meeting notes include an analysis of needs and specify how they will be met. Risk assessment and management is also carried out at this stage. Areas where foster carers need additional support are outlined. The agency considers the religious, ethnic,

cultural and linguistic needs of children and has been active in sourcing services in the community to meet specific needs.

Children and young people are protected and their welfare is safeguarded. Policies on bullying, behaviour management and safeguarding provide appropriate guidance and practice is thoroughly monitored through supervisory visits, foster carer reviews and management information systems. Foster carers compile safe caring guidelines which are carried out in practice and where possible young people are involved in discussions about strategies to keep everyone safe. They receive a range of training and support to inform their work with children and young people. The agency has informed social workers and Ofsted of significant events and can demonstrate that complaints and child protection issues have been dealt with appropriately to safeguard children. A high level of support is available to foster carers to assist them in helping young people to manage their own behaviour, in age appropriate ways. Risk assessments and detailed risk management planning benefit the young people. Those foster carers who provide specialised placements receive additional training, support and mentoring through the agency's partnership with an independent agency.

The fostering panel is child focussed and organised to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. The panel chair and members have a wide variety and range of relevant experience which contributes to the decision making process. The panel exercises robust scrutiny of information presented and have a quality assurance function which informs the agency's improvement agenda. Administrative support ensures that members have papers in time to read before the panel, and minutes clearly outline the reasons for decisions made. Applicants and foster carers attend the panel, and are informed of the appeal procedures and the independent review mechanism, should they wish to challenge the decisions of the agency. Panel training and development is ongoing.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Promoting equality and valuing diversity runs through the policies and practices of the agency. Foster carers work with young people to promote self-worth and encourage them in any interests or talents. Examples were given where the agency has worked to support individual communication needs and has accessed services for asylum seeking children and young people. The agency provides training and support to ensure that education is valued and carers support children and young people to maximise their opportunities.

The agency promotes educational achievement. Foster carers work in partnership with schools and educationalists to meet young people's needs and with the support of the agency ensure that children and young people access appropriate educational resources to meet their individual needs. Tutors have been provided to help some young people prepare for public examinations and alternative provisions have been found for others in line with their interests and talents. Young people have achieved positive outcomes, including those who have been out of education for long periods prior to placement with the agency's foster carers. They are encouraged and supported to be involved in community activities in line with their wishes and interests.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency promotes contact to meet the needs of children and young people and foster carers are committed to supporting them to maintain relationships with friends and family members. Details of contact arrangements and expectations of foster carers are contained in foster placement agreements and are also considered at matching and planning meetings. Examples were given where foster carers and agency social workers give practical support to contact arrangements. Foster carer training includes the importance of maintaining contact and the agency's expectation is that foster carers will work with parents for the benefit of the young people. Foster carers are involved with maintaining complex and frequent contact arrangements and are understanding of parents' perspectives when their child is being cared for in foster care. Young people were positive about the support they receive to remain in contact with family and friends.

The agency ensures that young people's views are sought over issues which are likely to affect their daily life and their future. Support workers and supervising social workers routinely ask for their views on visits and see them on their own. Children and young people contribute to foster carer annual reviews and are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews, or to give their views by other means. Foster carers listen to children and young people's views and advocate on their behalf. Young people clearly are encouraged to have a voice and use it. They are aware of their right to complain and know of a range of people they can talk to including children's rights workers and advocates. A complaints leaflet is provided to them. There is little evidence of consultation with families of children placed. They are given information about the agency, including the complaints procedures. Foster carers are asked for their views and a consultation event led to some changes in terms and conditions.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are prepared for adulthood and are encouraged and supported to develop life skills. Several of them have successfully moved on to independent living, after developing and building their confidence and learning to take responsibility for their daily lives in a gradual way. Foster carers receive training and support on leaving care and independent living and are able to balance young people's need for independence with safety issues. Supervising social worker visits monitor young people's progress. The agency ensures that young people are consulted about their futures and older young people are involved in decision making in all aspects of their lives.

Written information is provided to foster carers in respect of financial issues. Effective systems are in place to ensure that foster carers receive payments regularly and in a timely manner after a placement is made. They expressed satisfaction with the financial arrangements.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Young people's religious, ethnic and linguistic needs are being met and foster carers are active in equipping themselves with relevant information through a variety of sources. They are supported to collect mementos, photographs and life story work to take with them when they move on. Agencies policies and procedures are underpinned by valuing diversity and equality of opportunity.

The agency has a statement of purpose which outlines its aims and objectives and services provided. The young people's summary is only accessible to those young people with reasonable literacy skills. It includes details on how to contact Ofsted.

The agency is well managed and organised. The manager exercises effective leadership and supervision of staff and they are positive about his knowledge, skills and management style. They are involved in developing practice and their views and ideas are welcomed. A post of director of policy and quality has recently been established as part of the improvement agenda. Regular management meetings take place to focus on evaluating practice to inform developments. Regular file audits and monitoring systems are in place which ensure that practice is scrutinised and is in line with the agency's policies, procedures and core values.

Staff have clearly defined roles and job descriptions and lines of accountability are clear. They are organised efficiently and it is evident that they work co-operatively towards the agency's priority of achieving positive outcomes for children and young people in foster care. There is evidence of problem solving and innovative and inventive ways of working to achieve this aim. The staff have a range of skills and experience prior to working for the agency and this enhances the team's knowledge base. They are well supervised and trained and there is a focus on continuing professional development. Caseloads are manageable and they work flexibly to provide high levels and quality of support to foster carers, including an out-of-hours service. Foster carers were positive about their approachability and availability and they expressed high levels of satisfaction with the service they receive from the agency.

The agency has systems in place to respond to enquiries from people thinking about fostering. Targeted recruitment takes place and its effectiveness is monitored. Foster carers were positive about their first contact with the agency and the pace of the assessment process. Thorough assessments of carers' abilities to parent looked after children are undertaken. The agency has access to a medical adviser who signs off the health reports, and who is available for consultation. Foster care agreements are in place which contain the information needed to ensure that foster carers carry out their role effectively, to the benefit of children and young people in their care. Appropriate policies and procedures inform the work of the agency. A foster carer handbook provides comprehensive guidance and is a useful resource. Detailed and thorough reviews of foster carer's competencies and abilities to meet the needs of children placed with them are carried out annually and are chaired by an independent reviewing officer. Foster carers provide written reports and attend their reviews.

Foster carers and staff have access to a range of training. The agency has provided incentives to encourage foster carers to attend ongoing training and updates. They value the learning opportunities and are positive about the quality and usefulness of the training. The effectiveness of their training is evident in their practice and their ability to understand and meet the needs of looked after children. Staff have annual appraisals and are encouraged to identify areas for professional development. The agency supports them to attend external courses and provides specific training to meet the needs of children in placement where necessary.

The work of the agency is enhanced by appropriate levels of business and administrative support. There are efficient and robust administrative systems. The staff work flexibly and co-operatively to ensure that the work is carried out in an efficient and timely manner. The building is fit for purpose and regular health and safety and fire checks are carried out. Confidential records, including archived files, are securely stored.

The agency has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations and robust financial management systems are in place to monitor viability. Accounts are maintained and properly audited. Information is provided to the management team on a regular basis.

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
15	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to all staff as specified in schedule 1. (Regulation 20(3)(d))	18 June 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carers' homes are free of avoidable hazards and contain safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability (NMS 6.6)
- consider ways in which the opinions of families, and others significant to the child, can be sought over issues which are likely to affect their daily life and their future (NMS 11)
- ensure that the children's guide to the fostering service is suitable for all children fostered through the agency. (NMS 1)