

Serendipity

Inspection report for residential family centre

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Inspector	Jennifer Reed / Michelle Oxley
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

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Date of last inspection	05/08/2008

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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

Serendipity is a limited company which provides an independent residential assessment service to families where there may be serious risk of significant harm to their children. The service accommodates up to six families at any one time. Parents must be at least 16 years of age on admission and the service will accept children from birth up to 10 years of age.

The residential family centre undertakes viability assessments and residential assessments, based upon placing authority information and documents filed within court proceedings. The service works with parents to help them to identify and make any necessary changes in their parenting. The centre provides courts and local authorities with comprehensive, detailed assessment reports to contribute to decision-making about children's best interests and future care arrangements. The centre has a particular, but not exclusive interest, in working with people with learning difficulties.

The centre has applied to vary its registration with Ofsted to reflect the recent expansion of the service and changes in the organisation's structure. The acting manager has applied for registration with Ofsted.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Serendipity residential family centre is a good service, with many outstanding features. The centre provides families with a structured, nurturing environment while maintaining a clear focus on the assessment process and close monitoring of the safety and welfare of children and adults. The service is managed robustly, it is well resourced and the staff team are suitably qualified. Staff demonstrate a high level of competence in undertaking comprehensive assessment processes and in helping parents to improve their parenting skills. Assessment reports for the courts are completed to a very good standard, providing sufficient evidence to inform future decision-making.

The centre's high quality accommodation offers families a comfortable living environment and its location enables residents to easily access community facilities. The inclusive approach of the centre ensures families receive equal access to services. Families benefit from the individualised support they receive, their tailor-made packages of assessment and the strong working links established by the centre with other local services.

Parents and professionals report positively about the centre. For example, a parent said, 'the service is good at everything and really helps me to sort out my life. Staff

help with the kids and help me to be a good mum by telling me things lots of times to help me remember.' A professional worker reported, 'Serendipity manages to support and educate parents while providing a safe, robust assessment structure. If good outcomes can be achieved, then Serendipity can be relied upon to maximise the potential for this.'

The requirements and recommendations made at this inspection for improvement relate to: the expansion of the centre's staff training programme; notifications to Ofsted; and the provision of more detail in recruitment and monitoring records.

Improvements since the last inspection

No requirements or recommendations were made at the previous inspection in August 2008.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The centre has established very good links and arrangements with a range of local health services. This enables families to easily access the health services that they may need. Strong links exist between the centre, the local drug and alcohol team and the health visiting team. Health visitors report that the centre works well with them, listening to their advice and ensuring parents receive the guidance and support they need for their children to thrive. One health professional said, 'Serendipity take health and safety issues very seriously; there is an emphasis on teaching all the right procedures to keep babies and children safe.'

The identified health needs of families are noted within placement planning records. The centre provides an excellent range of written information and guidance to help parents meet their families' health needs. Parents are expected to take responsibility for looking after their own and their children's health during the assessment process. Staff support parents in making health decisions and encourage their liaison with appropriate health services. Staff are vigilant in monitoring both the physical and the emotional health of parents and children. On gaining the necessary permissions, the centre ensures families receive the health services that they may need to promote and safeguard their well-being.

Arrangements for the administration of medication and emergency treatment are robust. Staff complete training in first aid, including paediatric first aid and food hygiene. Staff monitor and record any medication given by parents to their children and gain prior written permission from parents for each child in case it is necessary for staff to administer medication.

The assessment process provides parents with opportunities to increase their understanding of how to maintain the good health of their families. The centre promotes a healthy lifestyle and provides targeted sessions of work to help parents develop their knowledge and skills. An example given by one parent was, 'they

encourage us to eat healthily by showing us recipes and doing cooking sessions.'

The centre encourages families to make use of local facilities, including nursery education and playgroups. Staff support families to attend external events and show them how to successfully use community facilities to benefit their families; for example, getting books from the library for their children. Staff take a common-sense approach in response to each family's needs and situation. Parents are helped to budget for their families within their income and they are encouraged to use outside leisure resources in good weather to provide 'free' entertainment and activities for their children. The centre has forged good links with local schools to make sure school-age children will be given a place on admission to the centre.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The centre provides families with clear information prior to admission about expectations of behaviour within the centre. Staff closely monitor family interactions within the centre and are robust in challenging and dealing with any unacceptable behaviour. This strength within the service has been noted by one professional, who said, 'Serendipity is able to challenge parents whose behaviour requires modifying and supporting them in learning behaviour management of their children. The service takes a very consistent approach to managing behaviour and the results for children and parents have been positive.' The centre has a system in place to notify appropriate persons of the occurrence of significant events and placing authorities and legal teams are kept well informed. However, the centre did not inform Ofsted that the police were called to the home on two separate occasions when male parents were asked to leave the centre.

Families are informed, prior to their arrival, that surveillance cameras are in place within the centre and they know this will impact on the level of privacy they are given during their assessment placement. Nevertheless, the centre sensitively manages family dynamics, demonstrating respect for parents and children's privacy while ensuring that the safety of children is the paramount consideration at all times. The centre is well maintained and families benefit from living in accommodation that provides physical safety and security. A social worker shared their view that the centre has 'a warm, friendly and nurturing atmosphere within the centre and the house feels safe.' Parents are also appreciative of their environment; one parent said, 'I love it here; I'm safe!'

Staff understand the need for confidentiality and know how to share information for safeguarding purposes. The centre's assessment work has a strong focus on the safety of vulnerable adults and children. The staff team receive regular training in child protection and safeguarding and daily practices within the centre contribute to protecting children and vulnerable adults from the risk of abuse and harm. A social worker said, 'I am always pleased to secure a placement with Serendipity, as I know it will offer my family the best opportunity they have to overcome their difficulties in a safe and caring environment where children's needs are safely and consistently

well- met.'

Recruitment and selection processes ensure that new staff do not commence work at the centre until satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau checks and references have been gained. This contributes to ensuring that employees are suitable to work with vulnerable adults and children which helps protect them from the risk of possible harm. The management show commitment to safer recruitment principles. However, interviewing staff have not completed training in safer recruitment practice and the centre has not sought verification of the reason why the applicant's past employment ended where a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults. All visitors to the centre are vetted and appropriately supervised to ensure families are protected.

Parents appreciate the good support and help they receive during their assessment and they feel sufficiently confident to discuss any worries and concerns they may have with the staff team. Families are given a copy of the centre's document, 'Tell Us' which provides families with easily read information about how to make a complaint. However, no formal complaints have been made since the last inspection. Staff report that any minor 'moans' have been quickly sorted out when they have been raised verbally with staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards for this outcome.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The centre has clear admission and discharge procedures. The service has thoughtfully considered moving in and leaving arrangements to make sure such transitions are sensitively dealt with to minimise any distress experienced by families. Where possible, a viability assessment is undertaken and families are encouraged to visit the centre prior to their admission. Expectations of behaviour within the centre and the process of assessment are made clear to prospective families.

The centre's strong emphasis on inclusion and collaborative working with families threads through the assessment process. Court letters of instructions and placement agreements clearly outline how the assessment will be undertaken. Staff make sure families understand how the assessment will be completed and there is ample opportunity for families to raise any questions or concerns throughout the process. A range of professionally recognised assessment tools are used to gather sufficient evidence to evaluate parenting skills and the safe care of children. Staff are aware of differing individual needs and find ways to ensure that each family member has opportunity to fully take part in all aspects of their assessment while benefitting from learning how to improve their parenting skills. Each assessment is specifically

designed to meet individual need. Staff check with families as often as necessary to make sure that parents clearly understand their placement objectives and the level of progress being achieved. One parent summarised this by saying, 'we have lots of meetings and we get feedback forms to let us know how we are doing.' Parental views are given due consideration; however, the safety of children remains the paramount consideration of the centre.

Professional workers speak highly of the centre's work. They say: 'I have seen excellent care plans and risk assessments, made accessible to those who might find reading difficult. There are regular feedback meetings to ensure that every opportunity is taken to monitor and review systems and procedures;' and, 'Serendipity is particularly skilled at working with parents and families strengths and encourages personal development and growth by supporting parents with recognising and achieving skills for themselves.'

Families are treated with respect and their dignity is maintained. Relationships between the staff team and families are generally good and families feel sufficiently at ease to talk about their issues and placement. Furthermore, regular residents meetings, use of the 'secret moan box' and the centre's complaint process provide families with alternative ways to express their views about the service. The centre listens to families views and has taken action to make changes to improve the service; for example, arranging a DVD night at week-ends. Families mostly prefer to speak directly with staff about issues as they arise. Parents said, 'if we are worried about anything we speak to a member of staff and they do their best to sort it out;' and, 'the service is good at being there whenever you need them to help with any problems, or you just want a good old chit-chat.'

Staff provide good role-modelling and work in partnership with parents to support them to develop their skills during the assessment process. Equality and gender considerations are duly considered when undertaking particular areas of work. For example, a male worker helping a father to develop his culinary skills, raising awareness within the centre to challenge the discriminatory view that meal preparation is purely a female role.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The residential family centre operates within two large terraced houses, named 'Serendipity' and 'Koru House', which are located within 75 metres of each other. Both houses look just like any other house on the street. They are centrally located in Exmouth, Devon, providing families with easy access to the town centre, parks, beach, and leisure and transport links. Each house provides accommodation for three families in self-contained family units, plus a staff office and bedroom, communal kitchen, laundry and multi-use rooms. Both houses have secure outside play areas for children. The houses are fitted with cameras for surveillance and monitoring purposes.

The centre is maintained to an excellent standard. It offers each family good quality, private living accommodation containing; an en-suite shower room with toilet; a kitchenette with dining area; sufficient beds and cots for all family members; a television, DVD player and a music system. The centre encourages families to bring some personal belongings and children's toys to help them feel more comfortable during their assessment. The units are thoroughly cleaned and redecorated prior to each new admission. The centre purchases new bedding for parents and they are able to take this with them when they leave.

The communal areas of the two houses are also furnished and decorated to an excellent standard. Cleaning and hygiene standards in communal areas are high. The kitchens are well equipped, providing sufficient crockery, cutlery and cooking utensils. The centre provides cots, high chairs and a wide range of toys and games. Families say they are very satisfied with the standard of their accommodation.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The centre is committed to equal opportunities for all and any form of identified discrimination is robustly challenged. Staff are non-judgemental in their approach when working with families and equality issues are well considered in all aspects of the centre's operation. Staff help families to live comfortably together by promoting difference and encouraging individuals to accept each other's differences.

The centre's assessment processes identify the individual needs of parents and children. This leads to tailor-made assessment packages for each family to ensure that each family member receives optimum opportunities for development and support. Staff understand social learning theory and are skilled at working with people with learning disorders and difficulties. One professional worker said, 'I have been impressed by the level of support for those parents who have learning disabilities.'

Staff are confident in discussing sensitive issues with families and are outstanding at promoting equality of opportunity between males and females. The centre works well with parents of both genders, and with individuals wishing to live as a different gender to their birth gender. A professional worker said, 'the service has an understanding of individual need and is able to work at all levels to ensure each individual's understanding of the assessment process.'

The centre provides an up-to-date Statement of Purpose that provides parents and children with detailed information about how the centre operates and how they will be treated. This document highlights the centre's commitment to undertake assessments in a manner which is fair, anti-oppressive and respectful of each individual and the unique identity and circumstances of every family. Excellent written information is available for adults and children in differing formats to meet their diverse needs.

Throughout the assessment process, parents and children are kept informed about the progress they are making by ongoing dialogue with staff, review meetings and regular written feedback reports. The centre is diligent in ensuring that written observations of families' interactions and progress are accurately recorded to reflect parents' ability to care for their children in a safe manner. Records kept by the centre provide sufficient detailed information of families' progress. Written information about the operation of the centre is available for adults and children in differing formats to meet their diverse needs. Vigilant management oversight contributes to the maintenance of good quality recording. Court reports are completed to a high standard, providing evidence-based information to contribute to future decision-making. One social worker said, 'reports are of a high standard. They are fair, unbiased and clearly identify risks and further support if required, while also being able to say if a parent and child should not continue to be placed together.'

Leadership and management within the centre is strong and families benefit from the stability of an efficiently run service. Managers are experienced and knowledgeable about the work that they do. Their 'hands-on' approach within the centre provides clear direction and guidance to the staff team and benefits outcomes for families. The staff are competent, well qualified and experienced and they work cohesively together to provide families with a consistent assessment framework. A sufficient number of staff are employed who receive regular supervision to ensure that both children's and adults welfare is promoted and safeguarded. A health professional summarised the staffing of the centre by saying, 'the staff team are very knowledgeable with a wide range of skills, experience and qualifications which ensures there is support across all the domains for the families.'

The centre provides staff with a good range of training opportunities to help them work effectively with families. However, staff have not received training about the implications for families living with HIV and AIDS, dealing with sexuality and safer recruitment practice.

The centre has regular monitoring systems in place, which are outcome focused and provide sound information about the quality of the service. The service strives for continual improvement and listens to feedback from families to inform future development. However, not all issues raised within the national minimum standard for the internal monitoring of the operation of the service are clearly documented within the monitoring reports produced.

The centre works in partnership with other agencies, the court and placing authorities to provide families with an effective service. Professional workers highlight this as a particular strength of the service. One worker said, 'the service is very good at communication, keeping me informed and working collaboratively to promote good outcomes.'

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, Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
16 (2002)	ensure full and satisfactory information is available for each applicant in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2; in particular, in relation to point 4 of Schedule 2 (Regulation 16(3)(d))	30/04/2012
26 (2002)	notify Ofsted, without delay, when any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 take place at the residential family centre. (Regulation 26(1))	31/03/2012

Recommendations

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

- provide the relevant staff with training about the implications for families living with HIV and AIDS; dealing with sexuality and safer recruitment practice (national minimum standard 18.5)
- include all issues raised in this standard when compiling the service's monitoring reports on the quality and conduct of the service. (national minimum standard 24)