

Serendipity Family Assessment Centre

Inspection report for residential family centre

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Inspector	Jennifer Reed
Type of inspection	Full

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Registered manager	Julie Jackson
Responsible individual	Ian Wade Jackson
Date of last inspection	07/03/2012

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Serendipity is a limited company which provides an independent residential family 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 centre has a particular, but not exclusive interest, in working with parents with learning difficulties.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This residential family centre provides excellent support to families throughout their assessment processes. Children's safety, needs and the promotion of their welfare are central in all aspects of the centre's work, and are the explicit focus of the assessment and final report. Children and parents are kept safe, and they feel safe throughout their stay. Parents understand the clear boundaries and expectations about group living and the centre's responsibility to provide a well-balanced, nurturing and risk-managed environment throughout their assessment.

Families benefit from 'tailor-made' care planning, support and guidance to meet their individualised needs. Families and professionals report positively about the excellent level of care and support parents receive on a personal level, and the good quality of the guidance and training available to help them improve their parenting skills. Families, social workers and court representatives are kept informed and are fully involved throughout the assessment process. Parents are encouraged and supported to contribute to and challenge the process, emerging judgements and findings. However, written and agreed placement plans are not in place.

Assessments are accurate and detailed, based on comprehensive evidence gathered. Not all reports are written succinctly; they contain repetition of information and are

lengthy documents for families and decision-makers to read.

The centre is robustly led by the 'hands-on' management approach of the registered individual and the Registered Manager. Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement and the development of the service. However, the centre's operation has not been updated in response to changes in recent legislation and this has resulted in requirements for improvement being made. To date, these identified shortfalls have not adversely impacted on the welfare of families and the quality of assessment processes.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
4 (2002)	draw up in consultation with the placing authority a written plan (in these Regulations referred to as 'the placement plan'); and meet all the requirements of this Regulation (Regulation 13)	21/03/2014
4 (2002)	ensure the resident's guide includes a summary of the statement of purpose, the addresses and telephone numbers of the Chief Inspector and the Children's Rights Director; and supply a copy of the resident's guide to the Chief Inspector (Regulation 4(3)(a)(c)&(d) and (3A)(a))	21/03/2014
4 (2002)	notify the Chief Inspector within 28 days of any revision of the statement of purpose and resident's guide (Regulation 4(4)(b))	21/03/2014
23 (2002)	supply to the Chief Inspector a report in respect of any review conducted by him for the purposes of reviewing at appropriate intervals and improving the quality of care provided at the residential family centre; and make a copy of the report available to residents (Regulation 23(2))	21/03/2014
25 (2002)	supply a copy of the written report on the conduct of the residential family centre to the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 25(5)(a))	21/03/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure the assessment report maintains a clear focus; in particular, ensure reports are succinctly written and are not repetitive (NMS 1.12)

- include an assessment of the balance of privacy and supervision of families at the centre in written reports carried out under Regulation 25. (NMS 19.5)

Quality of assessment

The quality of assessment is **adequate**.

Assessment processes take account of court directions and responsible authority requirements, to ensure that sufficient information and evidence is gathered to inform robust decision-making about children's futures. A social worker said, 'I am confident the centre has a full understanding of the issues and these will be addressed in the assessment.'

During the assessment process, staff are mindful of past family history and risk while evaluating parental capacity to make positive changes to protect children's welfare and safety. Staff are aware of the identified risks to each child and know how these are to be safely managed during the assessment process to ensure children are protected. This information is shared with families, particularly with regard to the use of surveillance methods used in the centre and supervision within the community.

Although the centre does not write a placement plan for each family, a number of documents used within the centre include this information and guide staff in their approach to undertaking the assessment. These documents are not signed and agreed by parents and responsible authorities. Nevertheless, parents report that they know why they are being assessed, how staff are assessing their parenting ability, and know what to expect during their assessment. These matters are discussed with them on arrival, at regular review meetings and in daily conversation with staff. Parents feel able to share their views about their progress and challenge emerging judgments they disagree with.

The centre uses a good range of assessment tools. Staff are knowledgeable about approaches to assessment and understand child development. All assessments are carried out in line with the 'Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families'. Assessments are evidence-based and take account of the views of other relevant professionals.

Assessment reports provide detailed evidence and focus on the needs of the child. Feedback from professionals about the quality of the assessment and the quality of reports is mostly positive. A solicitor said, 'staff are open to parent's succeeding, but they are also good at saying that parent's do not have sufficient capacity to safely care for their child'. Three reports reviewed at inspection showed that the issues required by the court or local authority were fully addressed by the assessment. Reports outlined the parent's strengths, weaknesses and any on-going risks or safeguarding issues. However, reports were lengthy and in some areas, repetitive. This may impact on clarity for decision-makers.

Quality of care, support and guidance

The quality of the care, support and guidance is **outstanding**.

Staff demonstrate excellent engagement skills with families. Parents appreciate and respond well to the direct and open approach of the centre to their assessment and the sensitivity shown in meeting their personal needs. Parents say that staff are helpful, approachable and effective in helping them to make positive changes in their lives, both at a personal level and with regard to improving their parenting abilities. One parent shared how they had been helped by the centre to make major changes in their life-style. This had increased their confidence and trust of others and helped them to begin to work with staff to improve their parenting capacity. Professionals praise the centre for its nurturing approach and the positive impact this has on the well-being of families.

Admissions and discharges from the centre are dealt with sensitively and families' well-being is enhanced by the outstanding level of care and support they receive from staff. Parents respond well to the direct, open dialogue that is a strong feature within the centre's assessment process. One parent said, 'I can talk to X (member of staff). They listen to me and they say it like it is. I like that.' Professionals also praise the centre's approach to assessment. A social worker said, 'staff make it real' for families. It is not a clinical process and parents are relaxed and themselves.'

Staff have high aspirations for the parents and children in assessment and aspire to raise the quality of their lives. Staff are well trained and qualified and have a good understanding of child development. They are exceptionally innovative in delivering individualised and effective training and support to parents to help them to improve their parenting capacity. Staff are clear about the difference between assessment and the provision of advice and support and this issues is regularly discussed with families throughout the assessment process to help parents understand this difference. Parental views are sought and taken into account in planning their assessments. Parents are clear that they need to demonstrate positive changes during their assessment and should not become over-reliant on staff prompts and support. This approach contributes to parents believing that the assessment process is 'fair'. A professional said, 'some parents do exceedingly well here.'

Staff support parents to employ their preferred parenting styles in caring for their children, where this promotes their well-being. The service demonstrates a rigorous approach to ensuring that parents do not feel discriminated against by the centre's assessment processes. Due regard is given to managing diversity throughout the service and individual needs are identified and appropriately addressed. Discrimination is not tolerated and managers robustly challenge individual prejudices, and support families to value difference and to positively resolve their conflicts. The service works well with other agencies and has established a strong working relationship with local health professionals. Leaders are rigorous in ensuring families have access to the services that they need and show no hesitation in challenging agencies and partners to address any identified shortfalls in provision. The centre provides separate accommodation for each family, with shared communal areas. Outstanding effort has been made by leaders to provide families with contemporary

and comfortable accommodation. The premises are well maintained and are located close to the town's amenities. One family said, 'we like it here and we don't want to leave.'

Safeguarding children and parents

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and parents safe and feeling safe.

The child's safety and welfare is the paramount consideration throughout the assessment process. The centre requires individual risk assessments to be completed prior, or on admission to the centre for each family, to contribute to effective risk management for everyone within the centre. Risk management is given high priority and managers ensure that the centre operates to minimise any likely risk of harm to families and staff.

Managers work collaboratively and effectively with parents and with other local agencies to ensure that all identified risks are well managed. The centre works within agreed local safeguarding policies and procedures. Multi-agency partnerships are established and staff know how to share information appropriately to address safeguarding concerns. A social worker commented, 'safeguarding is good and arising issues are very well managed. I am confident the baby's welfare is protected.'

Staff continuously reflect on the quality and impact of the support and training they provide to parents to ensure that sufficient regard is given to supporting them in the safe care of their child. Excellent support and guidance is provided to parents to support their vulnerabilities and secure their protection. Leaders use consultancy to learn from research and best practice to inform the development of safeguarding within the centre.

Parents feel that staff genuinely care about the health and well-being of all members of their family. They feel safe at living at the centre and have sufficient confidence in staff to share their concerns. Many parents discuss their particular vulnerabilities, secure in their trust and belief in staff that they will be helped to address these issues. The centre evidences an excellent, user-friendly approach and shows staff resilience, in the protection of parents from the likely risks of violence, exploitation, bullying and self-harm. This support contributes to promoting their physical, emotional and mental health.

The accommodation, facilities and health and safety measures in place, provide families with a safe environment to live in. The centre has recently appointed an experienced resources manager; recruitment and selection procedures have been reviewed and improved to help prevent unsuitable persons from being employed.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the residential family centre are **adequate**.

The registered individual and the Registered Manager provide a strong leadership

presence within the residential family centre. Their 'hands-on' management approach and involvement in day-to-day core functions of the centre and monitoring processes, contributes to their good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the operation of the service. They are committed to delivering an exemplary service to families and they strive for continuous improvement. The two requirements and two recommendations made at the last inspection have been satisfactorily addressed to improve service provision.

However, leaders and managers have not kept up-to-date with recent changes in legislation. This has resulted in some shortfalls in meeting legal requirements in relation to the quality of some documents and monitoring processes.

The centre provides families and relevant persons with information about its operation within its Statement of Purpose. However, the current edition of the document is dated more than two years ago. Subsequent review dates cannot be verified to show that this information has been updated to ensure accuracy of information. A copy of the Statement of Purpose has been forwarded to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) since November 2011.

The centre produces a resident's guide which is made available to parents in accessible formats to aid their understanding. It has not been updated to reflect the requirements of current legislation, and a copy has not been sent to HMCI as is required.

Following an audit of management processes, the centre has achieved a recognised award in Quality Management Systems. Regular, internal monitoring processes are undertaken to review the quality of care provided to families living in the centre and to report on the conduct of the centre. Immediate action is rigorously taken by the registered individual and the Registered Manager to address any identified shortfalls in the centre's operation. However, the monthly monitoring outcomes are not systematically reviewed and reported upon to show how the centre is improving and developing its service. Thus, residents do not have access to a report to show them this information. The registered individual completes regular monthly reports on the conduct of the centre. The reports do not include an assessment of the balance of privacy and supervision of families at the centre. Copies of both of these required monitoring reports have not been sent to HMCI. Such omission reduces the external oversight and potentially weakens the safeguarding of families. However, notifications of significant events relating to the protection of parents and children are promptly reported to HMCI and the relevant authorities.

Leaders and managers expect high standard of care to be provided to families and they lead the staff team with enthusiasm and energy. Staff are well supported in their tasks and they receive good quality training and supervision to support them in delivering sound care and assessment. Records kept are clear and up-to-date, and underpin assessment processes.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of residential family centres.