

# Dudley Lodge

Inspection report for residential family centre

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<b>Inspector</b>	Christy Wannop
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full

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<b>Registered person</b>	Dudley Lodge
<b>Registered manager</b>	Angela Lane
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Jim Evans
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	20/09/2011

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## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

This residential family centre provides family assessments for up to 11 families. The accommodation consists of 11 flats; five two bed-roomed flats and six one bed roomed flats. One of the two-bedroom flats is adapted for use by a person with disabilities. It is operated by an established charitable company, which also provides a further residential family centre service in a city 23 miles away.

### **The inspection judgements**

**Outstanding**

**Good**

**requires improvement**

**Inadequate**

### **The overall experiences of children and parents**

**The overall experiences of children and parents are outstanding.**

The quality of the professional practice is excellent. The centre has grown and developed an outstanding service over many years. Leaders and staff continually improve their practice to better meet the needs of families and their children during critical assessment periods. The organisation has developed services to support parents' wellbeing through consultant psychological services during assessment, and also when they leave, from a new community based service. They are responsive to the needs of placing authorities for shorter, 'place of safety' assessments, as well as full 12-week assessments. They go above and beyond to help families as they move on, with their children, and sometimes without.

They develop their service based on current research and established good practice. Committed governance arrangements in the board of trustees and senior managers, mirror the 'not for profit' ethics of the organisation and provide a strong level of critical challenge that encourages reflection and improvement.

Well-maintained, attractive and private accommodation and grounds provide really safe and private facilities, perfect for parents to demonstrate their commitment and competence towards their children.

Children and parents recognise skilled care, support and guidance. They appreciate the honest relationships with staff, even when the outcome for them may mean they are separated from their children. An associated professional said: 'it is a fantastic place to be part of, working with vulnerable families to facilitate life changing behaviours to improve outcomes for future generations.'

There is an area for improvement: the records of staff recruitment do not always reflect good recruitment practice. The registered person had already taken action to strengthen this aspect, prior to the inspection.

## **Areas for improvement**

### **Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation:

Ensure the registered person can demonstrate, including from written and electronic records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in staff recruitment. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these good practices. (NMS 14.2)

## **Quality of assessment**

### **The quality of assessment is outstanding.**

Articulate, skilled, social workers deliver excellent assessments and child-focused reports for court, or placing authorities. They make robust and timely judgements about the level of skill and capability of parents to meet the needs of their children. A placing authority was pleased with the efficiency of assessment and reporting: 'Dudley Lodge were able to turn round a detailed comprehensive report for court in a short timescale and attend court as necessary.'

Formats for assessment reports are continually under review: they have developed and improved and are well evidenced and evaluative. Information is clearly related to the impact on children; local authority requirements or court directions are clearly addressed. For example: the agency made clear the difference that improved parenting had on the lives of four separate children within one family. Each child's needs was given highly detailed individual consideration and respect. Robust quality assurance processes mean the reports are of a high standard, well presented and factually accurate. One social worker said: 'The parenting assessment was well written and strongly addressed the risks and all the questions and queries raised in the referral. Another said assessments: 'Also explored other broader areas of the family's history that helped inform the whole assessment process.'

Information for parents and professionals about the assessment process is clear at the outset. Regular consultations and progress meetings with parents, guardians and placing social workers make sure that everyone is clear about the aims and the direction of the assessment. Progress reports are shared with all. One professional said: 'I feel very much part of the team and feel very informed by staff regarding the progress families make and feel part of the decision making in my own professional capacity.'

## **How well children and parents are protected and helped**

### **The service is outstanding at how well children and parents are protected and helped.**

Highly experienced, well-qualified, well-trained staff fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities with skill and often in difficult circumstances. Staff at all levels are confident, professionally, in their fundamental responsibility to protect children. The local safeguarding team have no concerns about how the service operates within the local safeguarding children board's procedures. Referrals to the safeguarding team are rare because the staff anticipate and end placements when risks are too great, before any harm. Staff are ready in the event of any parent or child going missing, to implement their agreed procedures. They work with parents about their vulnerability to any exploitative relationships and engage placing authorities in identifying risks to children's safety, during, and after, assessments. A social work professional said: 'I have been particularly impressed with the experience of staff and their ability to

assess risk and inform plans through this.'

Robust, constantly monitored and updated risk assessments ensure that children are not put at risk. Staff are tenacious in establishing the information from placing authorities they need in order to keep children, with their parents, in each flat safe, but also all families within the centre too. Staff are vigilant in their regular checks on families. They give clear messages to parents when additional surveillance, such as closed circuit television monitoring, is needed.

They make immediate changes to their assessment approach and level of supervision if fresh concerns arise. They rigorously track patterns of developing behaviour at weekly meetings. Detailed and prompt information sharing keeps children safe. Everyone is clear about the balance between privacy and protection. A parent, despite a difficult past relationship with the service said: 'they can help you.'

Support for different cultures, religion and heritage is strong. Staff use symbols, pictures and interpreters to make sure parents understand their targets and priority areas of work. This demonstrates the extent of their planning and respect for any learning disability, difficulty or communication need.

Staff deliver meaningful, 1:1 or group sessions with parents, depending on their needs. Those with specific language needs, have sessions with an interpreter. Information is translated so they too get the same clear message about the effort expected of them.

A positive staff approach helps parents to see how their priorities affect their children. This is especially clear in the excellent, transformative programme of work around domestic violence, which makes explicit the impact of dominating, bullying parental behaviour on the smallest of babies and also the possibilities for recovery. Parents develop better ways of thinking about their relationships with others and their children. A placing social worker said staff had: 'a good level of child focused flexibility.' Improvements in parenting for one child mean that she was able to: 'relax, have fun and be mischievous in the presence of her mother.'

Clear lines of accountability mean that parents know which staff coordinate decision making and lead on their assessment. Team case managers are available and responsive if parents want additional conversations about progress or set backs. Staff assess and report on the impact on children on a daily basis so that their emotional health and wellbeing does not suffer. Parents say they know where they stand and that the staff are fair. Some parents have suggestions for improvements and want staff to explain and listen more: 'to get to the bottom of things,' and to try and 'to understand where you're coming from.' Staff do ask on a daily basis for parents' feedback about their progress. A placing social worker said: 'what also helped is that the parents felt they were able to participate and express their views fully.'

All families benefit from the excellent physical surroundings. Health and safety checks ensure it is safe for parents, children and staff. They have private accommodation, all with their own kitchens and bathrooms, a playroom for children and outdoor playground. One parent said how much their children loved the facilities and their home at the centre, and did not want to leave. The building is on good

transport links and close to a shopping centre and a good local parks within walking distance. There is no need to socialise as a group outside the group work sessions, so group dynamics do not often impact on families. Parents say they need more washing machines and tumble dryers and a bigger storage area for all the pushchairs and buggies. There are sometimes resident disagreements or complaints about these shared facilities. The registered person recognises this need and has taken this on board.

The service uses a local psychology service if parents need more in-depth counselling, but experienced family assessment workers and social work staff are skilled in helping therapies too. They apply their training to ensure a clear focus on the quality of the relationships and attachments between parents and their children. They encourage parents to learn alongside their older children and help them to take up English as a second language courses when settled. They are proactive in helping children's schools understand their situation, so they do not fall behind or experience discrimination. A social worker said: 'The unit communicate clearly and honestly with family members, including managing their learning needs.'

Staff take a holistic view of health. Their approach encompasses diet, teaching parents basic healthy cookery; wellbeing and child health and development. Staff assess and closely track parents' ability to manage their own medication and any that their children require. A health professional reported that the centre staff are keen to know about developments in local community services: 'I am frequently asked about the health services available to the residents and how these are accessed to improve outcomes for children and families.'

Extensive, good quality information, including in different languages and formats, is available to parents once at the centre, and in advance, if there is time. Residents feel confident in using the complaints procedure and the outcomes are generally monitored well by the registered manager and trustees when they visit. One resident said that whenever she had raised an issue, staff sorted it out. Parents say of their experience: 'The staff are ever helpful.' They describe as good: 'the support and help you get when required. Everyone is very kind and understanding.'

A new, responsive community-based team works with families in the local area, or who settle in the area, to continue parenting support. They are also committed to work with parents whose children have been removed; providing counselling and emotional support. Staff work to ensure that parents who work, and live at some distance from the centre can keep in touch, or still be part of an assessment. One parent said: 'I feel positive and ready for the future.'

## **Working with partners to improve outcomes**

**The service is outstanding at working with partners to improve outcomes.**

Positive, effective relationships with placing authorities and professional partners in health, legal, housing and education ensure that any gaps in services or action to

meet children's need are promptly identified. Senior staff are tenacious in their contacts when there is delay to provide services agreed in plans. A independent professional commented: 'Dudley Lodge have also been open to reviewing arrangements when plans are not agreed by all and listening to other's perspectives. They are a provider I would be keen to use in the future.'

Prompt escalation to police and local safeguarding services protects children and vulnerable parents, in the event of any violent or harmful behaviour. The senior management team is seeking involvement on the local partnership board.

The service is well established and respected in the local community; a charitable service to parents has been on this site for decades. Excellent integration with local health services is of particular note, but learning, leisure and social resources are easily available to parents. The new follow up, community service for families originating from, or settling in this and the neighbouring local authority, enables families to build on the links and resources they have made during assessment. This give excellent opportunities for children to experience improved security and stability as their parents, 'go it alone.'

Placing authorities acknowledge the high levels of communication by centre staff with them. One social worker said the service was still very good at communicating and giving feedback to her and the parent. A health professional said: 'the staff team are 100% focussed on the best outcomes for the child and family.'

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers**

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers is good.**

Strong, collegiate management arrangements ensure the service continually develops and improves. Annual quality review systems encourages a culture of debate and challenge. Consultation with parents and staff about the service recognises the importance given to their experience. Accountability and feedback to parents is also excellent; a notice board clearly charts 'you said- we did.' Governance arrangements are highly accountable with summary reporting by the registered manager on a quarterly basis and an excellent qualitative annual review by the trustees of the monthly visits made by their members.

The registered manager has been in post since June 2012. She is qualified in work with children and leadership and management, but plans shortly to hand over to a newly appointed, also qualified, manager. Effective succession planning aims to ensure no gap in the registered management role. The manager communicates effectively with Ofsted when there are significant incidents at the centre and responds well to complaints raised with Ofsted, taking action to improve staff practice. The manager engages residents in thinking about resolutions and solutions to their issues. A social worker said: 'There is clear leadership in decision making and communication is prompt.'



A comprehensive range of information is easily available in the foyer and in each flat. An accessible residents' and children guide uses pictures and symbols to ensure everyone can understand what to expect. Extensive, empowering information about a wide range of local and national advocacy services ensures that parents have every opportunity to go outside the service if they have issues.

The cycle of monitoring, review and development planning has delivered improved staffing levels, better 'waking' night-time staffing arrangements, coordination and peer challenge between the provider's two family centres. Other improvements are: prompt access to a commissioned psychological service; community based support for local families leaving the centre; new training packages and programmes of work with families, such as the new domestic violence programme. The building now offers 11 flats, so they offer opportunities to more families. Crucially, a major development has been to make the child's perspective an explicit feature of daily reporting, rather than just parents' actions. Their wellbeing and interaction with their parents are now at the centre of the review of the day.

Well-informed admission decisions mean that work on assessment, advice and support begins as soon as families move in. Staff work flexibly to assess non-resident parents; they also offer a 'place of safety' assessment. This ten-day assessment means that parents avoid being separated from their children, pending court hearing or a decision about the viability of a full assessment. A placing social worker thought that the quality of the placement planning meetings: 'allowed the client to feel involved in the referral process and also helped them understand the assessment process and what to expect - Why, When , How etc.'

Despite close monitoring, inconsistent staff recruitment practice means that not all staff files show routinely rigorous reference checks and evidence of qualifications. The registered person had already identified and begun to improve this aspect prior to the inspection. They had arranged an external contract with a professional human resources advisor to deliver a stronger approach to recruitment policy, practice and staff support. Staff with responsibilities for safe recruitment completed relevant on line training during the inspection.

High staffing levels deliver safe daily care for children. Well-managed electronic monitoring systems are only used for a minority of families, when absolutely necessary, and do not replace staff input. Family support workers and qualified social workers are fully alert to children's needs; they focus intensively on their direct work with families and work efficiently to complete contemporaneous records of their observations and interactions. Excellent teamwork ensures that families received targeted input when they need it.

The organisation's excellent commitment to professional development results in a stable, ambitious and reflective workforce. Staff turnover is very low. There is a wealth of training that is coordinated and reviewed across the two centres by an enthusiastic training manager. The majority of staff in the centre are trained in assessment; all achieve the minimum level three qualification, and most exceed this. Qualified social work staff maintain their professional registrations through the extensive programme of internal and external workshops, programmes and training opportunities. Staff are very positive about their induction, shadowing opportunities

and support from more experienced staff. 'My induction period was really beneficial to me it enabled me to understand the working of the centre and to gain a thorough understanding of the policies that are in place to enable the centre to run safely and efficiently.'

Professional supervision is regular, reflective and challenging. Staff at all levels, managers and family assessment and social work staff, demonstrate strong insight and knowledge of children's social care, child development, parenting skills and assessment. Weekly discussions reference research and social work theory in relation to parent behaviour and children's wellbeing. A visiting professional commented: 'I have been very impressed with the service.'

## **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.