

The Linksfield Residential Service

Care Home Service

Aberdeen

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About the service

The Linksfield Residential Service is registered to provide a care home service to a maximum of six children or young people, and is fully commissioned by Aberdeen City Council.

The service operates from a large detached bungalow with ample outdoor space for games and activities. The home and surrounds are currently being refurbished and redesigned, with input from the residents.

The bungalow is an established residential area of Aberdeen close to the city centre, with easy access to a wide range of local amenities.

The aims and objectives of the service include:

- Working with young people in the long-term, supporting them to remain living in the Linksfield Residential Service through to adulthood, empowered by the Scottish continuing care legislation.
- Providing opportunities for children to build their self-esteem, confidence, resilience and an understanding of the significant circumstances in their lives and offer support to recover from early years trauma.
- Engaging in appropriate partnerships working to give the child a sense of their past and engage them in plans for the future.
- Maintaining personal relationships with family members and/or the appropriate carers on the basis that is agreed within the Child's Plan.
- Supporting young people to prepare for adult life. This will include ensuring that they access advice on further education, employment/vocational training, and independent living options; and that they have been helped to develop independent living skills.

The service has been registered since 1 April 2002.

What people told us

We spoke to young people, staff, social workers and other stakeholders and took into account information from returned questionnaires.

We recognised one young person was experiencing significant difficulties and was in a distressed and agitated state. This young person told us they wanted help, that nobody was helping and they were out of control. They repeatedly asked us to get them out of the service and to shut it down.

One young person said they liked 'that everything was done for me' and made reference to positive staff relationships, saying 'she loves her job a lot and puts her foot down when she has to.....she'll tell you how it is.'

We observed humour between staff and residents with one young person saying 'she is easy to wind up. I tell her I'm not behaving myself, or not doing well (even though I am) and she gets worried. She cares a lot.....constantly trying to give me hugs, but I keep running away. She winds me up too as she knows I don't like hugs.' Another young person spoke about knowing the staff care because 'they give me consequences. If they didn't care they would let you do what the hell you want.'

One young person expressed the importance of being encouraged to talk about worries and maintaining respect and trust, as 'once trust is broken it's hard to rebuild.'

There had been recent staff departures with new staff recruited, and a young person referred to this as being 'a bit tough.'

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

4 - Good

Young people enjoyed attentiveness, trust, respect and fun relationships with staff. The value young people placed on support from staff and indications they knew each other well was evident. Appropriate sensitivity, warmth and physical contact was evident. We noted a focus on nurture and relational care. We were encouraged to hear the length of time young people had lived together, with comments that 'we grew up together.' Some staff also had significant lengths of employment and could recite the young people's experiences and stories. This allowed opportunities for reflection, praise and reminders of progress and achievements over time. Given the ages of some of the young people living in the service, we would also encourage a focus on the development of independence living skills to enhance future prospects of autonomy and self-reliance. We were reassured that management have identified staff development and greater participation and empowerment of young people as areas of priority. We look forward to hearing how these plans progress.

The culture and home environment, until recently, provided a sense of stability, predictability and harmony. A recent admission had disrupted this and staff recognised this impacted on all young people. The need to provide physical and emotional containment for the distressed young person was prioritised. Management were proactive in identifying a balance between reassurance, debriefing and space for all young people, whilst acting on opportunities for young people to reflect on their own past distress, behaviour and journey of personal growth.

Disarray and damage caused during displays of distress were quickly reorganised and repaired to prevent feelings of shame or guilt, reinforcing an ethos of repair and 'every day is a fresh start.' When a young person was distressed, we witnessed staff remaining respectful and supportive, talking calmly and providing reassurances they were valued and their safety and wellbeing was paramount.

Young people had access to advocacy and children's rights services and were encouraged to speak out if they had concerns. Staff supported young people to attend meetings, advocating for them and promoting their voice if they chose not to attend. Young people were 'forerunners' in a local 'participation agenda' forum. In addition to personalising their own space in the home, views and interests of the young people influenced indoor colour schemes and re-design of the outdoor area. There is an ongoing focus on healthy eating, and renewed enthusiasm to involve young people in menu planning, food shopping and meal preparation. Minutes of young people's meetings evidenced significant discussion between the young people, in a wide range of topics. We heard how the recruitment process involves encouraging young people to meet potential employees and provide feedback.

The service recently recruited a new manager and plans were in place to explore management roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability and decision making. This was an essential component to service improvement planning.

Young people were active participants in the community across a wide range of hobbies, interests, activities and local events. Staff supported young people to be actively involved in volunteering, further education and work experiences, and staff were described as going 'above and beyond' to support community connection and engagement.

Family contact and direct work with families was supported, and this assisted communication, problem solving and understanding between staff and all family members. Young people had positive relationships with peers and adults outside of the service and social work systems, with staff actively facilitating connection with friends outside of school hours. There was a sense of extensive networks for the young in their community.

Praise and encouragement surrounding achievements was evident, and young people were encouraged to attend events to support each other and celebrate successes.

Young people generally presented as feeling safe and protected from harm and abuse. The service does not engage in safe holding techniques and this was maintained throughout displays of agitation and distress shown by a young person.

Although we heard 'no-one is helping me,' we learned of referrals to specialist services and multi-agency working was promoted. We were informed that 'from day one staff were asking for professional meetings and promoting joined up working.' We recorded quotes of 'staff commitment is amazing' with provision of reassurances that 'we are here - we feel okay - we can keep you safe.'

We saw a number of important strengths with regard to supporting young people's wellbeing, particularly around the quality and stability of relationships. However, the service now needs to take forward actions and plans identified to ensure improvements in service delivery and outcomes for young people and we look forward to seeing the outcome at the next inspection. This has informed the grade of 'good' for this key question.

How good is our leadership?

This key question was not assessed.

How good is our staff team?

This key question was not assessed.

How good is our setting?

This key question was not assessed.

How well is our care and support planned?

4 - Good

The service involved and engaged in multi-agency working in order to positively support young people's plans. The needs of the young people were known and documented, and informal opportunities to address issues arising were a regular feature in the day-to-day lives of the young people. Young people's documentation was available and plans were up-to-date.

All young people had an 'All About Me' document, which was personalised by being written in the first person. This provided personal details of likes and dislikes, recognising behaviour and meaning, supportive engagement strategies and a risk assessment/management plan. These provided a good overview of the needs of the young people for new and existing staff, and were reassured of future plans for greater involvement and participation of young people in the development of all young people documentation.

Continuing relationships were visibly supported through the maintenance of contact, and provision of physical, emotional and financial assistance to a young person who had left the service. Weekly visits for meals were actively supported and facilitated by staff. We recognised how this will promote a sense of security for young people involved in pathways planning and facing transitions into adulthood and the prospect of moving on to independent living.

Service documentation and recording was being reviewed and amended by management, and the results were welcomed by staff and professionals. We noted amended documentation provided sections to record observations, assessment, analysis and placement progress. The use of the wellbeing wheel in assessment documentation was detailed and thorough, and included a grading matrix as a visual aid. SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic/relevant and timebound) goals were identified, to a maximum of four for each young person. We recognised these measures assisted in improved goal identification and case planning. One social worker said 'I have found workers involved in the care and planning for young people I have knowledge of has been child focused, thoughtful and realistic.'

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?	4 - Good
1.1 Children and young people experience compassion, dignity and respect	5 - Very Good
1.2 Children and young people get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children and young people's health benefits from their care and support they experience	4 - Good
How well is our care planned?	4 - Good

5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects children and young people's needs and wishes	4 - Good
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