



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

Report of a Children's Residential Centre

Name of provider:	The Child and Family Agency
Tulsa Region:	Dublin North East
Type of inspection:	Announced
Date of inspection:	21 June – 23 June 2023
Centre ID:	OSV-004179
Fieldwork ID:	MON-0039982

About the centre

The following information has been submitted by the centre and describes the service they provide.

The service is a residential respite service located in a purpose built two-storey house, with a private garden, and in walking distance of a town centre. The service can offer short to long term respite placements and an outreach service to both males and females between the ages of 5 and 17 years. The centre has four bedrooms that can accommodate up to 4 children for respite each night. At the time of inspection 17 children were accessing the service for respite support.

The service implements an individualised programme of respite care for each child with planned overnight stays during the week, weekends and school holiday periods.

The aim of the service is to help children maintain the placements they live in, with family or in foster care through providing a comprehensive respite support structure for families. The service also aims to support children to enhance their lives and development on a physical, social, emotional, and recreational basis.

The centre is managed by a social care manager and supported by a deputy social care manager. The social care manager reports directly to the alternative care manager who reports to the regional manager. The service employs 5 social care leaders and 10 social care workers.

The centre uses the Tusla nationally approved model of care to achieve positive outcomes for children. The approach focuses on the use of a therapeutic connection between children and the staff team to promote positive outcomes. Placement support plans are created and structured using this model of care.

The service endeavours to work in partnership with children, their families, foster carers, social workers and other professionals. Where there is an identified need for support the service can also facilitate and supervise family contact and access with the centre.

Number of children on the date of inspection:

2

How we inspect

To prepare for this inspection the inspector or inspectors reviewed all information about this centre. This included any previous inspection findings and information received since the last inspection.

As part of our inspection, where possible, we:

- speak with children and the people who visit them to find out their experience of the service
- talk to staff and management to find out how they plan, deliver and monitor the care and support services that are provided to children who live in the centre
- observe practice and daily life to see if it reflects what people tell us
- Review documents to see if appropriate records are kept and that they reflect practice and what people tell us.

In order to summarise our inspection findings and to describe how well a service is doing, we group and report on the standards and related regulations under two dimensions:

1. Capacity and capability of the service:

This section describes the leadership and management of the center and how effective it is in ensuring that a good quality and safe service is being provided. It outlines how people who work in the center are recruited and trained and whether there are appropriate systems and processes in place to underpin the safe delivery and oversight of the service.

2. Quality and safety of the service:

This section describes the care and support children receive and if it was of a good quality and ensured people were safe. It includes information about the care and supports available for people and the environment in which they live.

A full list of all standards and the dimension they are reported under can be seen in Appendix 1.

This inspection was carried out during the following times:

Date	Times of inspection	Inspector	Role
21 June 2023	09:00 hrs – 19:00 hrs	Sharon Moore	Lead Inspector (onsite)
21 June 2023	09:00 hrs – 19:00 hrs	Sabine Buschmann	Support Inspector (onsite)
22 June 2023	09:00 hrs – 17:00 hrs	Sharon Moore	Lead Inspector (remote)
22 June 2023	09:00 hrs – 17:00 hrs	Mary Lillis	Support Inspector (remote)
23 June 2023	09:00 hrs – 17:00 hrs	Sharon Moore	Lead Inspector (remote)
23 June 2023	09:00 hrs – 17:00 hrs	Sabine Buschmann	Support Inspector (remote)

What children told us and what inspectors observed

Overall, inspectors found that the service was of a high quality, child-centred and actively promoted children's rights. Programmes of care offered to children were responsive to their age and understanding. They also reflected children's individual and diverse needs. Respite visits were carefully planned with opportunities for children to spend time with siblings and other children. The staff team sought to provide a safe and supportive environment where children could have fun while also helping them to positively manage their feelings and emotions. Children were listened to and given choices about their care.

The centre was observed to be bright, homely, comfortable and nicely decorated. The house had a number of rooms with open access to sensory toys, games, books and art materials where children could relax and play together. Comfortable, calm spaces were available for children who wanted quiet time alone. A hair and make-up area that had been planned with children's input was set up in the family room and its use was observed during the inspection. There were fresh flowers in the kitchen with comfortable areas to sit, eat and cook. The garden was large with play equipment for younger children, a cabin with a pool table and outdoor eating areas. Parts of the garden had also been used by children for their Gaisce¹ Award projects.

There were two children availing of respite in the centre when inspectors visited. Inspectors spoke with five children, one in person and four by telephone. Two other children completed a children's survey.

Children told inspectors they really enjoyed and found their time in the centre helpful. They described their relationships with staff as supportive and positive. Comments about their experience included;

- "It's cool!"
- "change absolutely nothing, great place to come to"
- "I really enjoy coming to the service "
- "calm, feel safe, you can share and trust adults"
- "like it, I like the PS5, I like playing outside , the art and crafts , I like the seomra and pool"
- "Helping me to be more confident, came out of myself"
- "Staff are very compassionate and understanding "
- "keyworker is nice and does baking with me"
- "same staff on when I go"
- "there is nothing to change its good"

¹ Gaisce - The President's Award is a self-development programme for young people.

- “Did not want to come here, came to see house, thought it was a punishment, then came here, staff were really nice, and this is a treat”.
- “Centre closing last year, it did impact a little, but we did day activities”.

Inspectors had the opportunity to observe breakfast and lunchtime. Children and staff eating together was promoted and there was a good variety of homemade and wholesome food available. Children were given choices about the food they would like when visiting the centre and this was made available. Children were encouraged and supported to cook and bake and this happened regularly.

Children reported that they felt listened to, had choices and could make decisions about their care. Children knew what their rights were, this included their right to say no if they did not like something. They were aware they could speak to their foster carers, social worker and centre staff to get help if they were not happy, wanted to change something or to make a complaint. Children told inspectors that a children's rights service had come to visit the centre and information and booklets were available about this service. Children also said their diversity was respected and supported by staff. Comments included:

- “when I first visited they asked what food and things that I like and when I stayed they had all those things and that made me feel comfortable”.
- “I don't like staying the night and I told staff I didn't want to stay and staff told me I can decide to stay if I want to stay ”.
- “I feel listened to, we have a children's meetings, I asked for more books and a library and now we have a library”
- “be your own person do not let other people bring me down”
- “lots of conversations about support people, building a circle of friends”
- “can grow, learn and trust ”
- “I learned how to relate better to people and my peers”
- “Every time I go staff will say ‘Hello’ pick your room”
- “rules are fair, no complaints about house rules”
- “staff are very down to earth, understanding and caring and very non-judgmental”

Inspectors spoke with four foster carers by phone and they all shared the view that the service provided to children was excellent and staff were very supportive. All reported that children had a care and support plan based on their individual needs, which respected their diversity and promoted their rights. Foster carers spoke of the importance of the respite service for continuity for the children and how it supported them as foster carers to continue to care for children.

Introductory visits to centre were well managed and planned for children, foster carers, parents and professionals working with the children. One foster carer spoke of their worries about the children attending a residential setting for respite and asked for an introductory visit to the centre to support their decision making.

Given the positive experience on that visit, where they found the staff team open and supportive, the foster carer said it had helped them to make a decision. Another foster carer spoke of the stability the service provided to a child while they had moved between a number of foster care placements before coming into their current care placement. Foster carers praised the consistent and regular communication by service staff. This included planning before visits, contact as needed to support the child during the visit and handover after respite. Foster carers reported positively on the willingness and responsiveness of the service and staff to offer additional support when this was needed.

Other comments made included:

- "child always comes home happy and never has a bad word to say"
- "really good communication with staff"
- "child has much better self-regulation"
- "worked with child to improve their ability to relate to peers"
- "staff team are very caring"
- "Admission process really good, visited three to four times "
- " I visited, met the manager, walked around the house and I was well impressed, the staff were very open"
- "staff have been excellent"
- "child likes to go there"
- "child is included in decisions and the plan, staff talk to child about the plan"
- "experience has been very positive "

Foster carers viewed the service as providing important health and well-being support for children and the negative impact of the centre closing in 2022 was noted. One foster carer said that when the child had lost their respite place in 2022 "it was a disaster".

Inspectors spoke with five social workers and one guardian ad litem (GAL) by phone. All spoke highly of the quality of the service, the standard of care and safeguarding in place for children. They expressed satisfaction with the levels of joint working in place to improve outcomes for children. All reported a high standard of individual support in place to meet children's identified needs and promote children's engagement in decisions about their care. Service staff were viewed as well-trained and suitably experienced in supporting and caring for children with complex needs.

The admissions process and the openness of the service to meeting parents and foster carers to support a child referred was viewed as very positive. All reported very good communication with the service and were notified immediately of any concerns or incidents. The service provided reports which detailed the child's stay and progress on their individual plan after each visit. Comments included:

- "Happy with service, updates me on everything"
- "they ring, email or text before and after each stay"
- "informed of everything that happens and any incidents"
- "Staff have been really proactive about advocating for what's in the best interests of the child regarding respite"
- "Individualised approach for siblings"
- "the centre is well-managed"
- "received statement of purpose and leaflet at the beginning "
- "children's leaflet is quite nice, quite detailed, quite clear, pictures of the centre and explains what service does, one of the better ones I have seen"

The next two sections of the report provide the findings of this inspection on aspects of management and governance of the centre and the quality and safety of the service provided to the young people.

Capacity and capability

Overall, inspectors found that this was a well-led and managed service. There were clear systems and governance arrangements in place that provided for safe and effective care. Management roles and accountabilities were clear and there was good oversight of care delivery. Managers and staff were suitably skilled and experienced. Staff clearly understood their roles and responsibilities for keeping children safe, supporting their individual needs and promoting children's rights.

The centre was last inspected in March 2021 and was compliant with seven of the eight assessed standards and substantially compliant with the remaining standard. This inspection found the service to be compliant with all of the eight standards assessed as part of the inspection.

In June 2022 the centre closed as a residential respite centre, on a temporary basis, to accommodate an urgent special care arrangement. Following the ending of this special arrangement in July 2022 the centre required refurbishment works and re-opened as a residential respite centre at the beginning of March 2023. While the centre was closed, an outreach service was provided to children who had previously been accessing the service for respite. This included outings and limited overnight support in short-term rented accommodation.

The centre's statement of purpose (SOP) was reviewed in May 2023 and clearly set out and accurately described the service provided for children aged five to 17 years. There was a children's information booklet that was easy to read and reflected the service provided. The staff clearly understood the model of care and purpose and function of the centre.

There were clear systems in place to ensure the safety and quality of the service. The centre manager had oversight of all the centre's registers which included the register of children, complaints, child protection, restrictive practice, risk and, escalation reports forwarded to senior managers and significant event notifications. Inspectors reviewed these centre registers and found that they were up-to-date and contained all required information. The alternative care manager's oversight of the safety and quality of the service was evident from a number of records reviewed by inspectors. They received regular updates on the care of the children and any other centre activities. The effectiveness and impact of controls in reducing risk was carefully considered.

There was an effective auditing system in place. The centre manager had overall responsibility for auditing of the service and completed an auditing tool for all records. The deputy centre manager had responsibility for file audits to ensure that children's records were up-to-date and kept securely. Keyworkers audited children's care records and any identified gaps were communicated to the relevant staff members for correction. The improvements were recorded and once actioned, were signed by the relevant staff member.

The centre had a service improvement plan in place for 2023 to ensure the quality and safety of the care and support provided. This included planned actions around staffing, the building and staff training programmes around the model of care.

Restrictive practices were in line with Tusla policy and were accompanied by good quality risk assessments. Good practice was evident in terms of ensuring restrictive practices were reviewed and used for the shortest duration possible. At the time of inspection there were active restrictive practices in place which were part of children's individual safety plans.

There were good collaborative working relationships with social workers, other professionals and the children's carers in terms of information sharing and responding to risks. As part of the inspection the risk escalation processes of 'Need to Know'² (NTK) records for the service were reviewed. In June 2022 the centre closed as a residential respite centre, on a temporary basis, to accommodate an urgent special care arrangement. The centre manager advised inspectors that NTKs had been made by the service during that period, however these had been archived and were not available to be reviewed by inspectors. In the period since the 15 July 2022 there was no requirement for NTKs to be reported to senior management.

There were clear systems in place to ensure effective team communication. Staff team meetings were held weekly and inspector's reviewed a sample of these

² Tusla's system for informing senior managers about significant risks to the safety and welfare of children.

records which showed well-focused discussion and decision-making, with good engagement by all staff. Team discussions led to clear actions, with the person responsible identified and date of implementation noted. This promoted a consistent approach in managing risk, clear and shared team understanding of the service plan for individual children and the priorities for continual improvement in the quality of practice. Social care leaders had responsibility for the daily staff handover and allocation of tasks. Any updates regarding the care of children attending the service such as safety plans or risk assessments were included in handovers.

A culture of learning and reflective practice to improve outcomes for children was promoted by the centre managers. All staff had completed training in *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017). Staff understood their roles under Children First (2017) and were up-to-date on policy development. The majority of staff had completed child sexual exploitation training. Inspectors found that developments in policy were discussed at staff team meetings. A training analysis had been completed and a training plan was in place for all staff for 2023.

Managers and staff told inspectors about the negative impact on the children's emotional wellbeing of losing their respite places when the centre closed without notice in June 2022. They said that children were only told on the day of their planned respite that it was cancelled. Concerns were shared about the impact the extended period of closure had on children maintaining their care placements. The concerns were for both children already with a respite place and those who had been on the waiting list for the service. These concerns were escalated to the regional manager who met with the staff team in August 2022. The significant impact of the closure of the service on the staff team was recognised by senior managers and a staff support plan was implemented. This included additional management support on an individual and team basis, team support from Tusla's Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) service and access to the employee assistance programme (EAP). The centre manager advised that a review was planned with the CISM services and staff team in September 2023.

Standard 5.2

The registered provider ensures that the residential centre has effective leadership, governance and management arrangements in place with clear lines of accountability to deliver child-centred, safe and effective care and support.

The centre was well-led and managed .There were effective governance and management arrangements in place with clear lines of accountability to deliver child-centred, safe and effective care and support. A culture of learning and reflective practice to improve outcomes for children was promoted in the service.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 5.3

The residential centre has a publicly available statement of purpose that accurately and clearly describes the services provided.

The service had a clear and up-to-date statement of purpose that outlined the service offered and care approach. This was widely understood by children, their foster carers and social workers.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 5.4

The registered provider ensures that the residential centre strives to continually improve the safety and quality of the care and support provided to achieve better outcomes for children.

The service continued to strive to improve the safety and quality of the care and support provided. The system of governance in place promoted a strong child-centred and rights-based approach to children's care. Management oversight of care practice was good and a culture of reflective practice was promoted. Audits were effectively used to support continual service improvement. Feedback from children was regularly sought to inform learning about what works for them.

Judgment: Compliant

Quality and safety

Overall, this inspection found the service delivered to children was of a high standard and staff, at all levels, had a strong focus on the promotion of child-centred and individualised care that clearly recognised children's rights and diversity. The safety and protection of children was prioritised alongside providing tailored support to meet each child's individual needs. Care practices promoted open communication and building trusting relationships with children, parents and foster carers. Children reported high satisfaction levels with the service and that staff had made significant efforts to promote their engagement and give them a voice in shaping the service they received.

A review of children's files showed that admissions to the centre were informed by a referral from the child's social worker, a social history, their care plan and any other available assessments. A collective risk assessment was undertaken which considered the child's individual support needs and the provision of safe and supportive respite for all children attending the service. Once the referral was accepted, an induction plan was agreed and visits were arranged for the child, parents and foster carers. These initial visits helped the child to get to know about the service and also helped staff develop a placement support plan to meet the child's needs. Children were asked about their routines, the food they liked to eat and activities they liked to do. This was noted in the child's record and provision of same was made when the child came to stay. Records reviewed showed that efforts were made to ensure home routines were maintained and that supportive strategies effectively used by foster carers to promote positive behaviour were recorded and used by staff.

Children who found it difficult to leave their carers overnight were supported with day programmes within the centre. Staff continued to work with them and their foster carers to move towards overnight respite care. Creative play based activities were used that helped children to experience overnight respite in a safe way. Children spoken with were clear that they had a choice to stay on each visit or they could decide if they wanted to return home.

Children were informed of their rights and supported to understand and exercise their rights. The voice of children was captured through their daily logs and twice monthly children's meetings. These meetings were scheduled so that all children could participate in line with their respite plan. Children were encouraged to lead these meetings and put items on the agenda for discussion. Records of meetings evidenced ongoing follow-up discussions with children on how to make a complaint, how to get advocacy supports and planning centre activities. Inspectors found that children's suggestions were followed through and were actively sought through the use of a suggestion box.

The children's information booklet included information on Tusla's complaints process and external advocacy agencies that children could contact. Children were clear that they could speak to their social workers or external professionals if they were not happy with the service and they were provided with information on advocacy services for children in care. They said that this advocacy service had previously attended one of the children's meetings and it was planned for them to return to the centre during the summer.

The service actively promoted the dignity and privacy of each child. Children had their own bedroom that had a safe to store personal items. Children were invited to bring items from home, if they wished, to personalise their room and were provided with a storage box if they wanted leave items in the centre for their next visit that would be stored safely. Personal care was sensitively given to children who needed assistance, recognising their age and development needs.

Inspectors found that individual support and key working was of a high quality, helping children to self-regulate and safely express their feelings and emotions. The accommodation was organised so that all communal spaces including the sensory room were always open and available to children. The service had sensory boxes available in these rooms and adapted the lighting in the centre to be more calming.

The centre improvement plan included embedding the Tusla national model of care into practice, which was demonstrated by the positive support work undertaken with children. The centre manager had good oversight of the model implementation, and consultation meetings were held with the external lead person to further develop and enhance the care outcomes for individual children attending the service.

The protection and safeguarding of children was well-managed, staff understood their responsibilities to safeguard children in line with Children First (2017). Staff worked in partnership with children, parents, foster carers and social workers to promote children's safety and wellbeing. There were clear policies and procedures in place to protect children from harm including internet safety risks and child sexual exploitation. The majority of staff had completed child sexual exploitation training. The notification of significant events and mandatory reporting of child protection issues was timely, and any issues of concern were closely monitored. Each child was involved in the development of their safety plan. When required, staffing in the centre was increased to ensure the safety and well-being of all children. There was a policy on protected disclosures and staff were aware of how and who to report a disclosure to.

Restrictive practices were in line with Tusla policy and were accompanied by good quality risk assessments. Inspectors found good practice in terms of ensuring restrictive practices were reviewed and kept in place for the shortest duration possible. At the time of inspection there were active restrictive practices in place which were part of children's individual safety plans. These included bag searches, room searches and a high level of supervision of children. Restrictions had been discussed with children in advance and a clear explanation was given to children about why they needed to be in place. A log of these restrictive practices was maintained and were recorded in children's care records. Children's parents, foster carers and social workers were immediately informed of any safeguarding concerns for children or restrictive practices in place.

There were systems in place to review all incidents internally and by an external review group. Inspectors found that reflective practice and learning from incidents informed children's placement support and risk management plans. Feedback was given to the staff team following the review of incidents and outlined recommendations to be followed up on.

Standard 1.1

Each child experiences care and support which respects their diversity and protects their rights in line with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Regulation 10: Religion

Regulation 4: Welfare of child

The service recognised and promoted the individual rights and diversity of children as set out within international and national legislation, policies and best practice. Children understood their rights, were supported to exercise their rights and shape the care and support they received.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 1.2

Each child's dignity and privacy is respected and promoted.

Staff were aware and took appropriate action to ensure that children's right to privacy and dignity was respected and promoted. Children were supported to understand any limits to their privacy. Individual programmes of care reflected a high standard of practice in this area.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 2.1

Each child's identified needs informs their placement in the residential centre.

The centre's admissions policy considered children's rights, standards, regulations and legislation. There was a clear and structured approach to children's admission for respite that considers the appropriateness of the placement in responding to individual children's needs and the rights and the needs of the children already attending the service.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 3.1

Each child is safeguarded from abuse and neglect and their care and welfare is protected and promoted.

Staff understood their responsibilities to safeguard children in line with Children First (2017). They worked in partnership with children, families and social workers to ensure each child's care and welfare was protected and promoted. Children's vulnerabilities were sensitively recognised and supported by direct work to help keep them safe from harm.

Judgment: Compliant

Standard 3.2

Each child experiences care and support that promotes positive behaviour.

The service was proactive and creative in its approach to promoting positive behaviour. Staff were skilled in building open and trusting relationships with children. The use of restrictive practices was limited, with a clear rationale for its use. The reason for this was clearly communicated to the child and was regularly reviewed.

Judgment: Compliant

Appendix 1 - Full list of standards considered under each dimension

Standard Title	Judgment
Capacity and capability	
<p>Standard 5.2 The registered provider ensures that the residential centre has effective leadership, governance and management arrangements in place with clear lines of accountability to deliver child-centred, safe and effective care and support.</p>	Compliant
<p>Standard 5.3 The residential centre has a publicly available statement of purpose that accurately and clearly describes the services provided.</p>	Compliant
<p>Standard 5.4 The registered provider ensures that the residential centre strives to continually improve the safety and quality of the care and support provided to achieve better outcomes for children.</p>	Compliant
Quality and safety	
<p>Standard 1.1 Each child experiences care and support which respects their diversity and protects their rights in line with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child.</p>	Compliant
<p>Standard 1.2 Each child's dignity and privacy is respected and promoted.</p>	Compliant
<p>Standard 2.1 Each child's identified needs informs their placement in the residential centre.</p>	Compliant
<p>Standard 3.1 Each child is safeguarded from abuse and neglect and their care and welfare is protected and promoted.</p>	Compliant
<p>Standard 3.2 Each child experiences care and support that promotes positive behaviour.</p>	Compliant