

# Azalea House

Athena Family Services Limited

71 Spring Road, Kempston, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 8LT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential family centre

The centre is owned by a private organisation. It is registered to provide care, accommodation and residential parenting assessments for up to four families. The centre can provide Parent Assessment Manual (PAMS) assessments. Parenting assessments take 12 weeks.

The registered manager is a qualified social worker and has been in post since January 2020.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this home on 18 February 2021, to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on our website.

### Inspection dates: 9 to 10 June 2021

**Overall experiences and progress of children and parents, taking into account** good

How well children and parents are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential family centre provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** not applicable

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and parents: good**

The centre registered in January 2020. It provides parenting assessments and evidence-based court reports for families. The assessment takes place over a 12-week period. At the time of the visit, there were three families at the centre.

The progress made by families is recognised and acknowledged by the staff. Feedback on the assessment process is provided each week by the manager, who balances any emerging concerns with positive observations. This feedback ensures that families are made aware of any concerns throughout the assessment.

During the assessment, the levels of scrutiny and intensity can cause families anxiety. Some families do not like the assessment process. Despite this, they have positive interactions with the staff. This is testimony to the skills of the staff, who provide balanced and professional support.

The staff understand the assessment framework, and some staff are trained to carry out PAMS assessments when instructed by the court. Other assessments are compiled by the manager using feedback and observations from the staff. The manager oversees the staff's observations carefully, and challenges anything that is ambiguous or unclear. This oversight has helped staff to provide clear and accurate observations that contribute to the final report and ensure the process is fair.

There are regular forums in which families can raise feedback. These include house meetings and weekly meetings with the manager. These forums give families an opportunity to share their views on their individual experience and any issues regarding their communal living.

Families are encouraged to build structure and routine into their days. The centre has a range of indoor play resources. Families visit the local children's centre for play sessions and use local amenities to shop.

The centre is a detached property on a residential road and is close to shops and other amenities. The house provides ample space, a choice of comfortable living rooms and spacious family bedrooms. There have been some improvements made to the rear garden, which are ongoing. Despite the improvements, there are not enough outdoor resources for pre-school children and some areas of the garden require further work. There is rubble at the front of the property, left over from the garden work, and there are weeds growing around the house at the front and rear. These areas detract from an otherwise pleasant outdoor space.

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

Closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance is used in bedrooms and communal areas. The level of surveillance is agreed prior to the family's arrival. The use of

CCTV is reviewed regularly, in agreement with the social workers and families. There is a good balance between the family's privacy and safeguarding the children.

The staff are aware of each family's vulnerabilities and associated risks. The staff use risk assessments to categorise and understand risks associated with families and the locality. These risk assessments are monitored by the manager and the responsible individual. This monitoring has identified that the risk assessment for one family and the location risk assessment that did not include a serious incident that occurred while a family were at the centre. This incident was managed effectively to safeguard the family and others at the centre and the risk no longer exists. However, the failure to update these records was raised during internal and external monitoring but was not addressed.

Families understand the house rules. The manager has encouraged regular, open communication. Families express their views confidently. Regular, open communication encourages an atmosphere that gives families a sense of well-being and security.

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

The registered manager is highly experienced and well-qualified for the role. She provides strong leadership for the staff, who value her support and guidance.

The staff team, despite being relatively new, is positive, enthusiastic and professional. The manager recognises that as the team is new, having time to bond is beneficial. She has booked a team day to help staff develop their professional relationships.

The manager and responsible individual are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. A vacancy in the management team has increased the manager's workload. There has been a decision to reduce the number of families having assessments at any one time while a deputy manager is appointed. This measure has temporarily reduced the manager's workload.

The manager provides good-quality supervisions for the staff. These meetings encourage reflection, address practice concerns and help identify when staff require further training.

The final parenting assessment reports are fair and balanced. The reports make clear recommendations to inform court proceedings. The staff have a good understanding of the parents and their individual needs. They work in a way that supports parents who have the capacity to improve their skills. The staff recognise the difficulties for parents who are being assessed and reduce any additional barriers.

There are several staff who are in their probationary period. There are times when staff who lack experience and have not completed their probation are left in sole charge of the centre. An on-call manager is always available to assist by phone,

should the member of staff need support. However, this could lead to less supervision and observation, and therefore increase risk.

The responsible individual carries out the external monitoring visits each month. She works closely with the registered manager. The visits conclude with a comprehensive and detailed report, as well as a list of any actions that need to be taken. However, the manager does not always address these actions, and this reduces the capacity to improve the centre.

Feedback from stakeholders is very positive. Professionals identify good communication and well-written court reports. Health visitors said that the staff provide good, consistent advice for parents. Most professionals who use the centre recommend it, and several professionals commended the centre and the staff.

## **What does the residential family centre need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that the centre provides a comfortable and homely environment, and is well maintained and well decorated. Avoidable hazards should be removed, as is consistent with a domestic setting. Risk reduction should not lead to an 'institutional' feel. (Residential family centre NMS 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the centre provides facilities for the care of babies and children of all ages. (Residential family centre NMS 11.4)
- The registered person should ensure that staff members left in charge of the centre have the relevant experience of working with families and in residential care settings, and have successfully completed their induction and probationary periods. (Residential family centre NMS 15.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors, in line with the Residential Family Centre Regulations 2002, as amended, all records kept by the centre, to ensure compliance with the centre's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (Residential family centre NMS 19.2)

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and parents using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Residential Family Centre Regulations 2002 and the national minimum standards.

## **Residential family centre details**

**Unique reference number:** 2547305

**Registered provider:** Athena Family Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** 71 Spring Road, Kempston, Bedford, Bedfordshire  
MK42 8LT

**Responsible individual:** Hayley Murphy

**Registered manager:** Caroline Merritt

## **Inspectors**

Deirdra Keating, Social Care Inspector

Catherine Honey, Social Care Inspector

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