

# Children's residential care

*Our philosophy of care: a synopsis*



## About St Christopher's

St Christopher's Fellowship has provided care to vulnerable people for over 140 years. We have constantly evolved to meet a changing population of young people at risk; the changing needs of those young people; and research evidence about the most effective ways of meeting those needs.

## St Christopher's is able to offer

- consistently successful outcomes
- a person-centred approach
- passionate, innovative, experienced staff
- an environment in which young people can thrive
- proven approaches / evidence-informed practice
- effective multi-agency partnership working
- flexible and cost effective services

Our view of residential care is not as a 'last resort' but as a valuable option in its own right for some young people who have had painful experiences of family life.

We are able to provide stable, effective placements for all - including those with very challenging backgrounds and behaviours – providing them with a safe and caring community in which they can learn how to build positive relationships.

## Consistently successful outcomes

St Christopher's is proud of its record in achieving:

- improved life chances for young people in its care
- low placement breakdown figures
- high school attendance figures
- positive feedback from young people
- positive Ofsted reports

## A person-centred approach

In all that we do we:

- treat young people as unique and valuable individuals and recognise that they are their own experts in knowing themselves
- work in partnership with young people, to aid the accurate diagnosis of their needs and interests; and the informed development, delivery and review of comprehensive, personalised care and education plans. We aim to make the process a joint venture, rather than something that is 'done to' young people.

... 'Young people benefit significantly from very individualised care and support... This is a keen focus of the service.'

*Ofsted Inspection Report*

We promote the active involvement of young people in shaping our services by:

- encouraging them to have a say and play a part in all aspects of their life in the home, both individually (for example in planning menus; decorating their rooms; organising activities), and in groups, such as regular house meetings
- employing a Participation Officer, whose assistants are drawn from the community of young people in our care
- offering the opportunity to get involved in the staff recruitment process. Candidates meet informally with young people before the interviews begin, and one young person will be on the interview panel.

... 'Not only does it [involvement in staff recruitment] mean that we get staff who can relate to young people, I found that it made me feel a lot safer, living in a centre that allows us to have a say in who works here. It made me feel that my views were respected...'

*Amber – young person involved in recruitment*

This enables us to find out what young people think about our services - and how we can improve them - while also providing young people with opportunities to learn valuable life skills in thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and taking responsibility.

## Passionate, qualified and experienced staff

The primary qualities that we recruit for are a passion for, and commitment to, our work and to young people.

... 'The staff have a clear understanding of the individual needs of children. They are passionate about what they do...'

*Ofsted report*





## Proven approaches / evidence informed practice

Our staff work with proven approaches but also generate their own evidence about what seems to work with which young people. Comparing our own evidence with that from theory and research findings is part of a process of critical reflection, which enables us to find the most effective ways forward.

With our cutting-edge, internet-based file management and care planning software – Journal Digital – we are able to provide staff with:

- a range of assessment tools, allowing them to develop a holistic picture of each young person in our care
- a user friendly database system which allows us to track young people's progress and to compare results with national standards.

Our approach has been developed and tested over time and has three main elements:

- attachment theory – providing a route to understanding an individual's needs
- social pedagogy – providing a route to getting alongside young people
- behaviour management – providing a route to positive behaviour through agreed contracts with each young person.

A purely behavioural approach can feel formulaic. By incorporating attachment theory and social pedagogy approaches we are able to work more flexibly and effectively with each young person.

## Effective multi-agency partnership working

We are proud of our partnership work with commissioning bodies; offering professional relationships and consistent service delivery. We believe that we go the extra mile in providing an element of consultancy alongside service delivery. As one example, our SHARP (Specialist Homes Action Research Project), undertaken in partnership with the Lifespan Research Group, grew out of a request from four London Boroughs to develop a specialist residential model for young people with very challenging behaviour. The findings from that pilot research project now underpin all our work.

We also encourage staff to work closely with other people involved with the young people in their care – including for example: families, friends and other professionals, such as teachers, social workers, mental health services and other health professionals – to ensure that young people receive consistent messages. Both young people and staff have access to sessions with a consultant psychiatrist.

Once they join us, staff have access to regular support, supervision and training, so that they can build and grow the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise - both through our comprehensive training programme and through critical reflection on *'What works (or does not work) with this young person and why (or why not?)'*

At St Christopher's, we encourage and trust staff to develop their ideas and to be innovative - to act on their own initiative; to respond to opportunities that arise; to take responsible and calculated risks; so long as they can justify their actions with a clear rationale.

**...'I feel more valued as a manager than I did at my previous job. I have more autonomy- and this has a knock on effect on my staff and on the young people. They learn to take responsibility for their actions too...'** *Manager*

## An environment in which young people can thrive

We aim to strike an appropriate balance, to cultivate an environment in which young people feel safe and comfortable ...

**...'Young people feel safe. They benefit from experiencing communal living in a positive light. They report having warm relationships amongst themselves and with staff members...'** *Ofsted report*

... but also one in which they are encouraged to identify and work towards achievable goals; on the road towards recognising and achieving their full potential.

*...continued >*

## Flexible and cost effective services

As a charity high quality comes with a cheaper price tag than you might expect. Quality and effectiveness arise from our commitment to evidence-informed practice, while flexibility arises from our:

- wrap around provision which allows young people to move between residential care, fostering, supported housing and after-care services as appropriate
- enthusiasm for tailored provision – for commissioners as well as young people.

'...definitely value for money. You really can't put a price on the commitment staff have given.' *Local authority social worker*



## How to make a referral

Telephone **0207 1600 101** or email [referrals@stchris.org.uk](mailto:referrals@stchris.org.uk)

Visit [www.stchris.org.uk](http://www.stchris.org.uk) to learn more about how we can help, and the wide range of services that we provide.

St Christopher's Fellowship  
1 Putney High Street, London, SW15 1SZ  
Registered Charity No 207782

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