

Interact Care Limited

River Cottage

Inspection report

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Ratings

Overall rating for this service

Outstanding 

Is the service safe?

Good 

Is the service effective?

Good 

Is the service caring?

Good 

Is the service responsive?

Outstanding 

Is the service well-led?

Outstanding 

Summary of findings

Overall summary

The inspection was carried out on 11 April 2017 when we visited the service and we also spoke with relatives and professionals on 24 April 2017 via telephone. At the time of our inspection the service was providing support to three young people. The service had not been formally rated by the Care Quality Commission as it was previously registered as a service for children and was regulated by Ofsted. The registered provider chose to register River Cottage as a service for adults when the young people reached adulthood to ensure they had continuity of support.

The service provides accommodation and support for young adults who have behavioural needs and learning disabilities.

There was a very high level of confidence in the leadership and management of the service expressed by relatives, staff and other professionals. The registered manager demonstrated passion and commitment to people, strong values and a desire to learn about and implement best practice throughout the service. Staff were motivated and proud of the work they did and spoke passionately and positively about people and their achievements. The service had developed and sustained effective links with organisations that helped people living at River Cottage to gain a level of independence and confidence that people's families and social workers did not think possible.

The registered manager and staff team demonstrated passion and commitment to providing the best possible care and opportunities for people and we were told of the excellent progress people had made since living at River Cottage. One social worker told us, "It's great to see my client back in education and to see they are becoming more responsible and independent in the home and the community."

The service provided amazing care and support to people to enable them to live fulfilled and meaningful lives. Staff were skilled at ensuring people were safe whilst encouraging them to stretch their potential and achieve as much independence as possible. We saw that the service had developed its own education opportunities through the Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) award scheme so trained staff could enable people not only to learn new skills both individually and as a team but also to gain a nationally recognised award. The focus the service had developed through the DoE scheme and through the relationships it had developed with further education services showed that young people previously excluded from education were enabled to access and achieve their potential.

The service placed a strong emphasis on person centred care. Support plans ensured staff had all the guidance and information they needed to enable them to provide individualised care and support. People and their family members were consulted and involved in assessments and reviews. People's individual communication needs were understood and all information was provided in a format appropriate for them, which meant they could participate fully in the running of the service. One social worker told us, "The staff really understand people's needs and are very focused on providing a person centred approach."

The registered manager used effective systems to continually monitor the quality of the service and had ongoing plans for improving the service people received. The registered provider gathered information about the quality of their service from a variety of sources including people who used the service, their family and friends and external agencies. This was used to enable the registered provider to identify where improvement was needed and to implement and sustain continuous improvement in the service. Thorough investigations had been carried out in response to safeguarding incidents and these had also been appropriately reported to CQC by the provider. Comprehensive audits were carried out by the management team to ensure the appropriate improvements took place within the home.

People were kept safe and free from harm. They were encouraged to become more aware of safety issues and to learn strategies to protect themselves, for example the service worked to support people with peer pressure and internet safety. Comprehensive risk assessments identified individual risks to people's health and safety and there was information in each person's support plan showing how they should be supported to manage these risks. Risk assessments also supported people to take positive risks. There was enough staff to meet people's needs and to ensure they were able to access activities and be part of their local community. The registered provider operated safe and robust recruitment and selection procedures.

Staff protected people's privacy and dignity. All interactions between staff and people were caring and respectful, with staff being consistently patient, kind and compassionate. Staff demonstrated affection and warmth in their contact with people, which was clearly reciprocated.

Records and conversation with the registered manager and relatives showed that people were listened to and complaints or concerns were taken seriously and responded to appropriately. There was a clear complaints procedure which was available in pictorial form.

The registered manager ensured that staff had a full understanding of people's support needs and had the skills and knowledge to meet them. Training records were up to date and staff received regular supervisions and appraisals. Each member of staff had a personal development plan to enable them to think creatively about the support they provided to people. Staff were able to access additional training to ensure they understood and could support people effectively. Staff were clear about their roles and responsibilities and received excellent support from the registered provider and registered manager to provide care and support for people.

Staff had received training in Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) to make sure they understood how to protect people's rights. CQC monitors the operation of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) which applies to care homes. The registered manager, registered provider and staff ensured that people were supported in ways that did not restrict their freedom and were looked after appropriately.

The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Is the service safe?

Good ●

The service remained safe.

Is the service effective?

Good ●

The service remained effective.

Is the service caring?

Good ●

The service remained caring.

Is the service responsive?

Outstanding ☆

The responsiveness of the service was outstanding.

The service was highly flexible and responded quickly to people's changing needs or wishes.

Young people received care that was based on their needs and preferences. They were involved in all aspects of their care and were supported to lead their lives in the way they wished to.

The service enabled people to lead a positive lifestyle with a community presence that focussed on providing people with life skills as well education and opportunities for fun.

Is the service well-led?

Outstanding ☆

The service was exceptionally well-led.

The registered manager promoted strong values and a person centred culture which was supported by a committed staff group. The registered manager ensured this was consistently maintained.

The service worked effectively in partnership with other organisations and forged positive links with the community to improve the lives of people living at River Cottage.

There was strong emphasis on continual improvement and best practice which benefited people and staff.

There were robust systems to ensure quality and identify any

potential improvements to the service. The registered manager promoted an open and inclusive culture that encouraged continual feedback.

River Cottage

Detailed findings

Background to this inspection

We carried out this inspection under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 as part of our regulatory functions. This inspection was planned to check whether the registered provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, to look at the overall quality of the service, and to provide a rating for the service under the Care Act 2014. The service was previously regulated by Ofsted as it had been registered as a children's home. The registered provider chose to continue to support the young people using the service as they reached adulthood by registering as an adult social care service.

This inspection visit took place on 11 April 2017 and was announced. We spoke with relatives and professionals on 24 April 2017. We gave the registered provider 24 hours' notice to ensure someone would be available at the service. One adult social care inspector carried out this inspection.

Before we visited the service we checked the information we held about this location and the service provider, for example, inspection history, safeguarding notifications and complaints. A notification is information about important events which the service is required to send to the Commission by law. We also contacted professionals involved in caring for people who used the service, including commissioners, further education lecturers and safeguarding staff. Information provided by these professionals was used to inform the inspection.

During our inspection we spoke with two people who used the service and a visiting social worker. We contacted three family members via telephone following the inspection visit on 24 April 2017. We also spoke with the registered manager and three support staff.

We looked at the records of two people who used the service and observed how people were supported. We also looked at the personnel files for two members of staff and records relating to the management of the service, such as quality audits, policies and procedures.

Is the service safe?

Our findings

Relatives we spoke with were confident their family members were safe living at River Cottage. They told us, "We are constantly blown away by their dedication and how they handle [name's] safety," and "I have absolutely no concerns what so ever." Staff members also told us they felt safe working at River Cottage. One staff member told us, "I feel comfortable and safe to deal with any situation."

Detailed policies were in place in relation to safeguarding and whistleblowing procedures. There was a copy of the local authority safeguarding procedures in the office which was accessible to all staff. Records showed and staff confirmed they had received training in safeguarding adults as part of their essential training and this was regularly updated. Staff were knowledgeable and able to describe the various kinds of abuse. They knew how to report any suspicion of abuse to the management team and agencies so that people in their care were always protected. Staff felt confident that any reports of abuse would be acted upon appropriately. One staff member told us, "I would raise it straight away with management, clients safety is our priority." The registered manager was very clear about when to report concerns and the processes to be followed to inform the local authority, police and CQC.

The provider followed safe and robust recruitment and selection processes to make sure staff were safe and suitable to work with people. We looked at the electronic recording system for the most recently employed staff. Appropriate checks were undertaken before staff started work. The staff files included evidence that pre-employment checks had been carried out, including written references, satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service clearance (DBS), and evidence of the applicants' identity. The Disclosure and Barring Service carry out a criminal record and barring check on individuals who intend to work with children and vulnerable adults. This helps employers make safer recruiting decisions and minimise the risk of unsuitable people from working with children and vulnerable adults. As part of the staff recruitment process, the way applicants related to people and how people responded was observed and considered before a decision to offer employment was made. This made sure people felt comfortable and safe with staff who would be supporting them. One recently recruited staff member told us, "I was impressed with how the interview was structured, with a group assessment and activities, it felt very professional."

There were enough staff to meet people's needs and provide personalised care and support with activities. Staff were always present when people spent time in the communal areas and people who were spending time in their rooms were checked regularly. Staff responded quickly so that people did not have to wait for support or assistance. Staff told us there was enough staff on duty to meet people's needs and support them with their activities. In an emergency, relief staff, who are employed by the service to provide cover, could be called in to cover any staff absences such as holidays or illness. There was flexibility in rotas to allow for additional staff to provide support for activities, outings or holidays. The team leader told us, "We have really good team work here and staff cover for each other if someone is off."

A range of environmental risk assessments that had been conducted and recorded with detailed action plans which provided guidance for staff about how to minimise risks. These covered both the internal and external areas of the home as well as vehicles which were used to transport people when they went out. We

saw an example of a sheet developed for one person using their communication symbols that explained what would happen if the vehicle was to breakdown so that the person's anxieties could be reduced by knowing in their communication method what was happening.

The registered manager monitored and analysed all accidents and incidents and reported these to the registered provider for further analysis. This would ensure any learning was identified and adjustments made to minimise the risk of the accidents or incidents occurring again.

A fire safety policy and procedure was in place, which clearly outlined action that should be taken in the event of a fire. A fire safety risk assessment had been carried out so that the risk of fire was reduced as far as possible. Records showed that all necessary checks were carried out on equipment and installations such as gas and electricity. This ensured they were safe and in good working order. All the staff had taken part in a fire drill in the last year to make sure they understood what to do to keep people and themselves safe. Each person had an up to date personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) and one person had a fire evacuation plan using their own communication symbols. These were kept in an easily accessible place and included important information about the support each person needed in the event they needed to evacuate the premises, were taken to hospital or elsewhere in an emergency. This ensured continuity of care for people.

Only one person was prescribed any medicines. Staff who handled medicines were trained to do so safely. Records showed that an audit of medicines, including people's Medication Administration Records (MAR), were checked regularly. Records were signed to show that the medicines had been applied at the correct times. Information about the management of medicines was easily accessible by staff and guidance was available which described safe dosages and how to recognise any adverse side effects.

Is the service effective?

Our findings

Relatives told us they were confident in the staff team and felt they were well trained. One relative said, "The team network is faultless and the care is like something I would like for myself." We spoke with a college tutor who told us, "The staff who attend college with [Name] are always professional and treat [Name] with respect and appropriate boundaries." A social worker we spoke with told us, "They [the staff team] are adaptable and competent in their approach which gives the service users a sense of confidence in them."

All staff had completed an induction when they started in their role. Staff worked alongside experienced staff for as long as necessary to ensure they were competent to work alone with people. Staff told us they felt the training increased their confidence. One staff member told us, "I was amazed at the amount of training I did before I came into the service. I did seven or eight days and I felt prepared. I did three or four days shadowing and getting to know people. I am still learning and it's a really nice team and you can ask any questions."

All staff members completed essential training courses, such as first aid and fire safety. In addition staff completed best practice courses, such as communication skills, person centred support and autism awareness. All the courses equipped staff to think creatively about how to support each person to enhance their quality of life. We saw examples of how staff put their learning into practice. For example staff had developed resources with regards to young people and drugs and alcohol to ensure the service had the knowledge to support people when faced with possible peer pressure at college and in the community. One of the team leader's also told us, "Myself and the manager have just done a Makaton course, we have done that so we can support [Name] with their signs. Makaton is a signing system understood and used by some people with learning disabilities and is used by one young person who has recently transitioned to the service. This showed the provider had ensured that staff had knowledge and skills to meet people's individual needs, enhance their quality of life and ensure their safety."

Staff confirmed they received regular supervision including one to one staff development sessions to enable them to improve outcomes for people. One staff member told us, "I have supervision once a month, it's a chance to raise anything and nice to know what they are thinking about you and to get feedback about my performance." All staff had an annual appraisal to review their performance and identify any further training needs. We observed and staff confirmed that staff worked as a cohesive and flexible team, supporting people and one another willingly and cheerfully to ensure the best outcomes for the young people.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) provides a legal framework for making particular decisions on behalf of people who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves. The Act requires that as far as possible people make their own decisions and are helped to do so when needed. When they lack mental capacity to take particular decisions, any made on their behalf must be in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible. People can only be deprived of their liberty to receive care and treatment when this is in their best interests and legally authorised under the MCA. The application procedures for this in care homes and hospitals are called the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS).

We checked whether the service was working within the principles of the MCA and whether any conditions on authorisations to deprive a person of their liberty were being met. There were two people who used the service with a DoLS in place and these were applied for and monitored by the registered manager. The registered manager understood the legal requirements and had applied to the relevant local authorities for the appropriate authorisations for people where their freedom was restricted.

Staff members demonstrated a person centred and flexible approach in the times meals were offered. Meals were offered at the times that suited each person in accordance with their planner and activity programme. The young people met weekly to talk with the staff team about planning menus and coming up with ideas for events such as themed nights. We saw that one of the young people had recently suggested a Malaysian evening where they had helped plan, shop and cook a Malaysian themed meal.

Meals times were relaxed and sociable. Staff supported people involving them as much as possible in the planning, shopping and cooking process to develop people's skills in independent living.

The service was committed to promoting people's health and wellbeing. Each person had a personalised health action plan. This set out their specific health needs and provided guidance for staff about how to monitor and support people's health. People were supported to attend health appointments and staff were quick to seek advice where there were any concerns about people's health. The registered manager told us, "The G.P practice along the road has been really good and we have signed people up with the Health Charter and so the practice lets us have the first or last appointments so people aren't waiting in the surgery." The Health Charter is designed to support social care providers to improve the health and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities, thus improving people's quality of life generally.

Is the service caring?

Our findings

Relatives were consistently positive about the caring attitude of the staff. They told us staff were, "Amazing individuals," and "The time and effort they have put in to getting [name] to where they are now just speaks volumes for what an excellent team they are. Every single one of them."

The small but consistent staff team had developed highly positive relationships with people. The variety of the staff skills had been used with good effect to match staff to people so that they could enjoy shared interests together such as football matches or going to the theatre. One social worker told us, "The service that is provided has a feeling of being at home and I have witnessed that staff treat each person with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect. Staff appear to enjoy their job and go the extra mile to deliver a service that has a feeling of home from home."

The registered manager and staff had worked together with young people and their families to develop detailed individual communication plans for each person. We saw how the service had developed a communication book with one person and they had also agreed a specific coping strategy of the person requesting staff support through going for a coffee to talk through difficult thoughts and feelings. One of the team leaders gave us an example of this person raising a sensitive issue about their personal health through the communication book that in turn the staff were able to seek appropriate professional support for the person.

A college tutor told us, "In my experience of the staff and management of River Cottage, they have never treated [name] with anything less than full respect, even when they are behaving unreasonably or aggressively. They have an excellent understanding of the issues this person faces and the areas where they have difficulty and are always looking to help and support them, whether in the classroom, on placement or at home." Without exception, we observed that staff treated people with dignity and respect. Relatives told us, "They always treat him as an adult and treat him with respect". Staff respected people's privacy. They made sure people had opportunity to have time in their own rooms during the day that was undisturbed. Staff were very discreet when discussing people's needs, moving to quiet areas as required for handover sessions which took place between each shift, or talking privately in the office. People's personal records and information was stored securely and kept confidential. This showed that people's right to privacy was respected.

The registered manager described to us how they set time aside for staff to engage with people in one to one conversation using appropriate communication methods. Staff described how they used, a Picture Exchange Communication system [PECS] for one person with a sensory impairment to help them to understand where they were or what was going to happen. For example, the service had developed picture communication cards to deal with incidents such as the vehicle breaking down or fire alarms going off to support this person to remain calm when untoward events happened.

People were involved as far as possible in all decisions about their care and support. Family members and independent advocates were also involved to provide support and advocacy where more complex decisions

needed to be made. The registered manager was committed to ensuring people were given as much control over their own lives as possible.

Staff were highly motivated to offer care that was kind and compassionate. Relatives described how staff members had gone the extra mile to accommodate their family member's wishes and aspirations. One relative told us, "They are an amazing bunch of people and I can't believe how amazing they have been." Another relative told us, "They have turned his life around. Even if I was a multi-millionaire, I wouldn't place him anywhere else." The registered manager praised the staff team and gave examples of how they had helped people maintain their important relationships. One was supporting a young person to a family celebration event which had been really successful and which meant a huge amount to the family and young person concerned. The registered manager described how staff regularly gave their time to be with people for particular activities and holidays. Relatives also told us how the service had supported people to attend events which they thought would be impossible due to their behaviour before they moved to River Cottage.

Staff took time to make sure they understood people's wishes and respected them. A college tutor told us, "They listen to his opinions and try to accommodate his needs and wishes where possible." Staff recognised the importance of self-esteem and diversity for people and supported them to dress and decorate their rooms in ways that reflected their personality. A college tutor told us about the staff team, "They support him hugely in developing his behaviour and interpersonal strategies as a young adult.

A relative commented, "They are amazing. [Name] was heading down a dreadful path and as far as I am concerned they have saved his life. Things could have gone so wrong. We now have a young man who is experiencing college and life in a way we never believed would happen." Staff were good in enabling people to achieve as much independence as possible. Staff supported people to overcome behavioural difficulties which could have prevented them from enjoying life experiences and actively engaging with their environment and community. This was done through a joint approach of the service and young people defining appropriate behaviour with lots of positive reinforcement. One of the college tutors told us, "The staff team make clear to him the expectations of what will be involved and what he will need to do in order to achieve in the future, even when this means being direct with him. As far as I can see, everything they do is focussed on helping and supporting [Name] in a realistic, safe and empathetic way."

Is the service responsive?

Our findings

Relatives told us they felt the service was responsive, flexible and staff regularly provided additional support, "Above and beyond". A college tutor told us, "There was recently an issue with [Name's] behaviour in a class and the member of staff who was with them showed a great deal of patience and professionalism. [Name] eventually had to be sent home, but again the support from River Cottage was outstanding. Initially this person did not want to return to college, but the staff worked with them to help them see that the issue had been resolved and it would be in their best interests to complete the course. They returned to college and I believe that that is only due to the skilful intervention of the staff team from River Cottage."

People received consistent, personalised care and support. Their care and support was planned proactively with them and the people who mattered to them. Relatives and advocates were fully involved in identifying people's individual needs, wishes and choices and how these should be met. They were also involved in regular reviews of each person's care plan to make sure they were up to date. People's plans were reviewed every month or sooner if their needs changed and they were provided with support that met their needs and preferences. We spoke with a visiting social worker who had nothing but praise of the service provided at River Cottage. They told us how before their client accessed the service there were huge difficulties in supporting the person to manage their own behaviour and this person's relationships with family and education services were at breaking point. They told us, "Contact with his parents has improved significantly and positive outcomes are always achieved." This person's family member went on to tell us, "I can't believe how amazing they have been. He was totally out of control before coming here. Now his anxieties are controllable, he has put them through the wringer and tested their abilities and the results are just out of this world."

One person's social worker told us, "Support is provided in a service user focussed and person centred manner ensuring each individuals needs are met to a high standard and each young person is given the opportunity to develop their independent living skills and reach their potential. Staff are constantly striving to develop weekly timetables to ensure each service user has activities tailored to their needs and which provides them with the best opportunities to develop as a person."

People were supported to take part in a wide range of activities regardless of their abilities. Staff worked enthusiastically to support people to lead fulfilled lives; as a result their quality of life was enriched and optimised to the full. The attitude of staff was that "We all want the people here to achieve the best quality of life possible." People were provided with excellent support that enabled them to experience both familiar and new experiences to the fullest possible extent. We saw the service had liaised with the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. The registered manager told us, "We wondered if we could provide it as an alternative form of education and a way of getting our young people back into a scheme before we got people into college placements." We saw the registered manager and key staff took Duke of Edinburgh training with the scheme to become verifiers and they supported one young person and a small group of other people from the registered provider's services to undertake their Bronze award. We watched a DVD showing the skills people achieved such as map reading, cookery and team building. One staff member told us, "It was an unbelievable experience, I loved it." One relative told us they were delighted that their family

member had achieved this award and that they celebrated with an awards night presentation with family and friends. One young person said the worst part of the award had been "Walking with wet feet" on their expedition event where the weather was appalling.

We saw the service supported people to transition into the service in a way that met their own needs rather than that of the service. One person currently spent their time divided between home and the service. One relative told us, "They prepare [Name] for any situational change for example one of the staff team was leaving to take up a post in education. The transition of this happening was made so painless by the service and I have noticed they deal with other changes in a similar way so much so that you don't notice it has happened! This is so helpful for my relative who doesn't cope with change at all well."

Each person's individual support and activity plans were based on a detailed profile of the person and assessment of their needs that was developed with them. This provided in depth information about the person's background and social history, relationships that were important to them, their abilities and methods of communication. People's support needs and how to meet them were set out in a written plan that described what staff needed to do to make sure personalised care was provided. This included detailed guidance about how to communicate with the person, how to support people with their behaviour in a positive way and also what people's goals were and how they wanted to achieve them. There were detailed activity plans and guidance about the person's choices and preferences in relation to routines and activities of daily life. One support worker told us, "We did lots of talking with one person about strategies in terms of their behaviour and how they reacted or responded when faced with a difficult situation. The strategies we put in place have helped [name] learn to manage their anger and frustrations and we now very rarely have any serious episodes of behaviour."

The support plan called "Investing in Me" was used to review people's care in which they looked at what was important to the person, analysed what was working and what was not working, identified where change was needed and looked at any additional support that was required for the person. This was recorded in detail through a series of easy read language and graphics. Records showed that progress was made over an achievable period of time so people could see steps on their goals being achieved quickly to help motivate them. For example, for one person a need was time management, and the service showed how through resources such as a "sleep in" card where the young person could use this to let staff know they were having a lie in. This showed the young person could express their choice for a lie in on a set number of days in the week and at other times could be prompted by staff to get up for daily activities. The registered provider was committed to ongoing improvement in the responsiveness of the service people received.

Shifts were planned to incorporate people's daily activities so that there were always enough staff to support them. People were given opportunities to go to taster sessions to try new activities. We saw the staff team had developed a visual feedback form called "My Say" using emojis and photographs so they could evaluate with people on a weekly basis what had gone well and if people wanted to add this to their regular list of activities on their planner. This also looked at what hadn't worked so well so the service could make improvements or try something else.

The service had worked with people and their families to develop "lifebooks" a record of achievements and events for people from moving into River Cottage using photographs. One staff member told us, "The lads have their own books about their achievements that we support them to complete; you can see how they really engage with those memories and how much they have achieved."

The registered provider had made information available about how to make a complaint. There was a pictorial procedure and staff discussed people's satisfaction with the service with them at the weekly service

meeting. The complaints procedure was also displayed in the entrance hall at the service. The registered manager was responsive to people's concerns. There had been no formal complaints about the service. When we spoke with family members they told us that any issues they may have were dealt with by the registered manager or one of the team and the responsiveness of all the staff at River Cottage was excellent. Relatives told us they were confident they would be listened to if they made a complaint.

Is the service well-led?

Our findings

The service had a registered manager in place who was qualified for the role and who had been registered with the Care Quality Commission since November 2015.

People, staff and relatives responded warmly to the registered manager who had worked at the service since it began and knew each young person well. Relatives were consistently positive about the service their family members received. They said, "This service is so brilliant, everything is dealt with so calmly and professionally," and "I can't believe how amazing they have been. To see [Name] now going to college on their own and doing all the things they do is just unbelievable. The turnaround in their behaviour is just so impressive."

The registered manager had a clear vision and values that were person centred and focused on people having the opportunity to be part of their local community and promoting citizenship. The registered manager demonstrated passion and commitment to providing an excellent service for people and their relatives. These values were owned by staff who were equally committed and enthusiastic about fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in a way that delivered the best possible outcomes for the young people using the service.

The registered manager and the wider management team provided clear leadership and used systems effectively to monitor the culture of the service. This included the consistent presence of the registered manager in the service, working alongside staff as an extremely effective and exceptionally supportive role model. The success of this approach was evident in the consistent person centred care and support staff provided. They were willing to go 'the extra mile' for people; this was confirmed by relatives we spoke with who gave examples of this caring culture of supporting young people to attend key family events successfully which prior to River Cottage would have been very difficult.

The service had actively sought and acted upon the views of others through creative methods. This included surveys, welcomes packs and the young person's guide to the service being written using emojis and in a comic book style to reflect and engage the young people using the service in a format they understood. There were visits by the regional manager at least fortnightly to observe and seek feedback from people. Relatives told us they were frequently asked for their views and could speak with the registered manager at any time.

The registered manager told us they had set up a forum for registered managers working with people with a learning disability across the North East which met twice a year. They told us this forum had worked to implement the Health Charter, working in partnership with health colleagues, to tackle some of the health inequalities that people with learning disabilities experience. For River Cottage, they told us this had led to the service with their local GP practice giving free health checks for people using the service. This had been after some problem solving with the GP practice as they were not signed up to the Health Charter. After working with the registered manager at River Cottage they had adopted this initiative thereby improving outcomes for people with a learning disability in the local community.

Comments from external agencies who were involved with the service were consistently positive. A social worker told us, "[Name] the manager of the service has a very hands-on approach and knows the needs of all the residents well. She is approachable and open to new ideas if it will benefit the service users and the placement. [Name] is keen to see all of her service users reach their potential."

The registered manager and staff were exceptional in their commitment to understanding and helping people communicate their views. Staff used a pictorial survey with people and observed and recorded their responses. People were involved as far as possible in every aspect of the ongoing development of the service. Where any changes were made these were trialled carefully and people's responses observed and monitored to make sure the changes worked for them.

The registered manager understood their legal obligations including the conditions of their registration. They had correctly notified us of any significant incidents and proactively shared identified risks and plans for improvement.

There was a strong emphasis on continually striving to improve the service for people. Quality assurance audits were carried out monthly by a manager from another service using a peer review. The registered manager and senior staff carried out regular audits of all aspects of the service and to review the effectiveness of the support people received. The registered manager received consistent support from the registered provider and told us that the resources required to drive improvement were readily available.

The registered provider also ensured that communication throughout the organisation was effective through a variety of management meetings and briefings. The registered manager ensured staff had all the information they needed and were kept up to date with any changes through daily handover meetings and extended monthly staff team meetings.

The service had a number of multi- agency working agreements. The registered manager was proactive in arranging multi-disciplinary meetings with other professionals to ensure people received consistent support. A college tutor told us "The manager at River Cottage maintains contact with me via phone and email to keep us informed of whether there have been any issues during the day." Relatives confirmed that this worked well. One relative told us how the service was helping one young person remain in contact with their sibling who had moved abroad, not just via the use of technology but also supporting them more importantly with their emotions. The staff supported people to form and sustain links with their local community through connections with organisations such as colleges and local shops where people had voluntary employment opportunities. One person had worked in the local Children's Society charity shop supported by the service.

Staff told us the registered manager and the registered provider were very supportive and showed they were committed to supporting their employees through learning and development. One staff member told us, "I can raise any issue with the registered manager or regional manager. They are happy for us to be proactive and to develop our own skills." Additional training had been obtained in order to contribute to the development of best practice. The registered manager told us, "I believe all the staff here are professionals and need to shine. I have very dedicated staff who work hard to give people a great quality of life. I constantly seek opportunities for staff to act up in new roles or develop their knowledge." One of the team leaders told us they were shortly commencing a leadership course they were looking forward to. The registered manager worked in partnership with other organisations to make sure staff were provided with all the training they needed to follow best practice for example we saw a training resource developed by two staff members using information from the NSPCC in relation to staying safe online.

Staff told us they enjoyed working at the service. This was evident in the excellent teamwork we observed and the consistently positive way staff related to people, to one another and to the registered manager. We saw that a programme was in place to recognise staff achievements each month using a "Star of the Month" award. This was a joint programme of recognition that was used for staff and people using the service so we saw the joint winners would chose an activity to do together. We saw the winners recently had gone bowling or out for a meal. This demonstrated the approach of achieving goals together – the staff team and people using the service.