

Equal Partnerships Ltd

Equal Partnerships

Inspection report

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Ratings

Overall rating for this service

Outstanding



Is the service safe?

Outstanding



Is the service effective?

Good



Is the service caring?

Good



Is the service responsive?

Outstanding



Is the service well-led?

Good



Overall summary

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 provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, and to pilot a new inspection process being introduced by CQC which looks at the overall quality of the service.

This was an announced inspection carried out on 15 July 2014 and 4 August 2014. We carried out this inspection at

short notice because we needed to check that the registered manager, or another senior person in the service, would be available to speak with us at the time of our visit.

We last inspected the service in June 2013 and found at that time the provider was meeting all regulations covered.

Summary of findings

Equal Partnerships provides personal support to people who have learning disabilities and live in their own home. At the time of our inspection 16 people were receiving personal support.

The service had a registered manager and a responsible person (two Directors). A registered manager is a person who has registered with the Care Quality Commission to manage the service. Like registered providers, they are 'registered persons'. Registered persons have legal responsibility for meeting the requirements in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and associated Regulations about how the service is run.

People told us they felt safe receiving support from Equal Partnerships. Family members told us they felt confident in the fact their relatives were well looked after.

We noted the service encouraged positive risk taking and did not restrict people's interests and encouraged them to try new things. We saw that risk assessments were completed on an individual basis.

People told us they were fully involved in recruiting and selecting their team of support staff. We saw that each recruitment campaign was individual to the person. People and their family members told us they had been involved in interviews and selections.

We saw that the staffing team were dynamic and each individual had a personal budget and chose on a weekly basis the support they wanted to receive and what they wanted to do with their time.

We saw staff training was regularly completed and was up to date. Staff told us they received essential training but also training specific to the people they were supporting. We saw that supervision and appraisals were regularly completed. The service had involved people in part of the supervision process and where comfortable, they helped to conduct a part of the supervision session.

We saw that external professionals were regularly involved where needed, for example we saw the speech

and language therapists were involved and had helped support a person to communicate with an emotion board. Staff and the managers told us, other professionals were used to support with people's permission.

People, relatives and staff were all positive about the care provided. One relative we spoke to said, "We have one of the best providers in the country and it's very well known in Tyneside. The care they provide for my [relative] has been the making of them." Another relative said, "My [relative] is the best testimony to the standard of the company, he tells everyone how he now loves his life. His happiness has always been our goal and we've reached it with Equal Partnerships."

We saw that the service worked with people to arrange and support them to try new things. We saw activities were varied and regular. We noted the organisation supported people to attend a number of group events as well as supporting them to fulfil individual passions.

The service had developed a complaints card which had a number of variations depending upon people's abilities. The card and the complaints policy were available but no complaints had been received. People and their relatives told us they could raise anything if it was needed but that they were exceptionally happy with the service they received.

Everyone we spoke with was very positive about the ethos of the organisation and the support of the two managers. One relative said, "These two people who run it really understand what my [relative] needs and they infect everyone with their enthusiasm. They're brilliant." Another relative said, "They are so special the people that run it, they really care and they not only value our [relative] but us as well. They know that we have experience that they can use and include us in everything."

Summary of findings

The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Is the service safe?

The service was safe.

People told us they felt safe being supported by Equal Partnerships. Relatives told us they felt happy knowing their relative was well cared for. Staff we spoke to were aware of the procedures they would follow should they have any safeguarding concerns.

Staff had a good understanding of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and best interests processes and were confident on how to seek support should it be needed.

People told us they were involved in the recruitment of their staff. We noted the staffing teams were dynamic and the rotas varied each week depending upon how the person wanted to spend their time

Outstanding



Is the service effective?

The service was effective.

All staff we spoke with told us they had received training in all key areas, as well as in individual topics related to the people they supported.

We noted staff received supervision regularly and annual appraisals. The registered manager and responsible person told us how people were involved in completing part of the staff supervisions, where they felt confident to do so.

We noted that external professionals were engaged and contacted whenever necessary. We saw positive feedback from those that had been previously involved.

Good



Is the service caring?

The service was caring.

Everyone told us they felt well supported by their staffing team. Relatives told us how the support received from Equal Partnerships had, in a lot of cases, changed the lives of their family members.

We saw people were treated with respect and their individuality and personal choices were always respected. People told us staff supported them to do what they wanted.

Staff were aware of advocacy and how to support people. At the time of our inspection no advocacy support was required.

Good



Is the service responsive?

The service was responsive.

People and relatives were regularly involved in care planning. The registered manager and responsible person told us the dynamic ways they completed care reviews and how they got people involved; such as chatting over coffee and cake or letting the person chair the meeting.

Outstanding



Summary of findings

People told us they got to take part in lots of activities that interested them and they had learnt lots of new skills. One person we spoke to had a keen interest in outdoor activities and staff had supported them to learn how to surf.

We saw a complaints card was available for people depending upon their abilities, as well as a complaints procedure. People told us they had no concerns at all, but they would be confident to speak up if they did.

Is the service well-led?

The service was well-led.

Everyone was keen to tell us about the positive and engaging atmosphere of the organisation. Relatives told us how they could not fault the organisation, the two directors or the staff and how their enthusiasm was contagious.

We saw staff were happy in their role and felt well supported. Staff told us how they felt they were encouraged to share their views and they could not ask for anything more.

We noted regular audits were complete. The directors told us how they visited each house on a weekly basis and got to speak to people and the staffing team to gather regular feedback.

Good



Equal Partnerships

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 provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, and to pilot a new inspection process being introduced by CQC which looks at the overall quality of the service.

The inspection took place on 15 July and 4 August 2014 and was announced. The provider was given 48 hours' notice because the location provides a domiciliary care service and we needed to be sure that someone would be in the office to meet us.

The inspection consisted of an inspector and an expert by experience. An expert by experience is a person who has personal experience of using or caring for someone who uses this type of service.

Before the inspection, we reviewed the information we held about the service and contacted the local authority commissioning and safeguarding teams. The provider completed a Provider Information Return (PIR) and this was

returned before the inspection. This is a form that asks the provider to give some key information about the service, what the service does well and the improvements they plan to make.

We used a number of different methods to help us understand the experiences of people who were supported by Equal Partnerships. We spoke to three people who were supported by the service, 10 relatives, 11 care staff, the two directors (one of whom was registered as the registered manager.)

We looked at four people's care records, three recruitment files and the training matrix, as well as records relating to the management of the service.

This report was written during the testing phase of our new approach to regulating adult social care services. After this testing phase, inspection of consent to care and treatment, restraint, and practice under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) was moved from the key question 'Is the service safe?' to 'Is the service effective?'

The ratings for this location were awarded in October 2014. They can be directly compared with any other service we have rated since then, including in relation to consent, restraint, and the MCA under the 'Effective' section. Our written findings in relation to these topics can be read in the 'Is the service safe' sections of this report.



Is the service safe?

Our findings

People and their relatives told us being supported by the service made them feel safe. One relative said, “It works perfectly well for us all. She’s never been as happy and we have total peace of mind knowing she’s safe, well cared for and doing things she’s always wanted to do.” Another relative said, “Having our son now in their superb care means he’s safe. He’s safe and I’m safe knowing that we have done the very best for him by choosing them.”

We spoke to 11 staff members during the inspection, all of whom were knowledgeable about what they would do if they suspected abuse. We saw the safeguarding policy and procedure were available for staff to access. Staff told us if they had any concerns they would go to anyone in the office. One staff member told us they also had access to telephone numbers for the local authority, should they wish to seek any external support or guidance. We spoke to the directors who were confident they would support staff to raise any concerns. They said, “We talk about it in all of our meetings, we hope that if you always talk about it then it encourages an atmosphere where staff know they can bring up anything and they’ll be supported.”

The registered manager and responsible person told us all staff were currently undergoing updated Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) training following a recent supreme court judgement. They said they had prioritised all the senior staff initially and all other staff were now going through the training. We saw one person had a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) in place for finance and welfare decisions. LPA is a legal tool which allows people to appoint someone (known as an attorney) to make decisions on their behalf if they are no longer able to make specific decisions. There are two types of LPA; property and financial affairs and health and welfare. Staff we spoke to understood the LPA process and how and when this would impact on people.

We were told that no one had any best interests decisions in place but the staff were confident they would know how to start this process if needed. One senior staff member said, “We used to have someone who had a best interest decision in place, we were involved in the process. We don’t have anyone at the minute.”

We saw risk assessments were completed on an individual basis. We noted staff encouraged positive risk taking and did not restrict people’s interests and encouraged them to

try new things. One person we spoke to told us how they had recently taken up surfing. Another person told us how they had recently been supported to start paid employment. Staff told us how they completed risk assessments regularly, and they updated them as and when required.

One relative we spoke to said, “They just look at my [name of person’s] difficulties so differently, what has been a problem in the past is just a new challenge to them and the problems have disappeared one by one. We’d never expected to get to this stage.” Another relative said, “I like the fact that they are not afraid to try new things. We don’t recognise him now; we would never have dreamed he could have achieved so many things.”

We saw that each person had their own dedicated staffing team. The registered manager and responsible person told us there was not a set rota as the shifts varied depending upon what people wanted to do during the week. They said, “It’s important for us to be dynamic. We want people to have the flexibility that everyone else has. We have dedicated staff teams per person and we work on a weekly plan based upon what the individual wants to do that week.” We asked people whether they had sufficient staff to support them and everyone was positive in their responses. One person said, “I always have somebody with me when I need them.” Another person said, “We plan my week and I get to pick where we go.”

We saw the provider had a recruitment policy in place which specified that people who were to be supported would always be involved in the interview process. We looked at three recruitment files and saw evidence of an application being made, as well as references being taken up. We noted each staff member had an up to date Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS). DBS checks whether applicants had a criminal record or were barred from working with vulnerable people

We saw the staff recruitment process included initial interviews with either the person they were going to support or their family. These interviews were overseen by one of the management team. Once a short list was produced, the final candidates were introduced to the person they were going to support. One relative we spoke to told us about their family member’s involvement in the recruitment. They said, “They put people first, nothing is



Is the service safe?

too much trouble. For example, when my son needed a new key worker, they let him write his own advertisement and run the interview. They support but they don't take over."

One person we spoke to told us how they were involved in their staff recruitment. They said, "I got to be on the

interview panel and I got to ask them questions." One relative we spoke to said, "They put energy into employing the top people to represent their company and it pays off." Another relative said, "The standard of people they employ is really high and of course as our daughter was party to the interviewing, she chose the people she really gets on with."

Is the service effective?

Our findings

All staff members we spoke to were very positive about the training and support they received. One staff member said, “I cannot begin to express how much I enjoy working for both [names of managers]. They have provided me with support and any training which I have requested, and always make me feel like I am a valued member of staff.”

One staff member told us they had received training to be a ‘job coach.’ Job coach training is designed to help people look for a job. The staff member told us how the training was tailored so it was relevant to the people they supported. Another person told us how they had received training in areas that were specific to the people they supported. For example, training in autism, epilepsy and visual awareness. The registered manager and responsible person told us that senior staff members also received training in leadership and mentoring.

The registered manager and responsible person showed us staff training records; we noted they had identified seven training courses which were mandatory for all staff. These included safeguarding people from abuse, moving and handling and medicines. We saw they monitored when staff had attended this training and when they were scheduled to renew it. We saw additional mandatory training courses were recorded depending upon the people each staff member supported. The directors said, “We make sure everyone has completed all the mandatory training, then we look at the specialist training.” They also said, “All new starters have to complete the mandatory training before they start working in their teams.”

We saw four staff members had recently been recruited and all of their mandatory training was being scheduled prior to them starting work. The registered manager and responsible person told us they had a detailed induction program that each new starter went through. Induction is an important process for bringing staff into an organisation and ensures they receive sufficient training and support prior to working unsupervised.

We saw the directors had put in place a standard agenda for staff supervision. This included their relationship with the people they supported, any feedback for the staff

member from the directors, as well as key areas of practice, such as health and safety and safeguarding. Supervision sessions were used, amongst other methods, to check staff progress and provide guidance.

The registered manager and responsible person told us how some people who used the service completed a part of their staff members’ supervision. They said, “We did some research on it and we wanted people to be involved. They go through some supervision with the staff, talk to them about what is important to them and give the staff feedback.” We saw the form that people were using for staff supervision had been altered so it suited each person. We noted that only people who wanted to be got involved, and all staff also received a supervision session with their line manager. The registered manager and responsible person told us that as most staff worked on a one to one basis with people, they recognised the need for more continuous support. They said, “I phone every house each morning. I ask for feedback on how they are doing and check if they are okay and if they need anything.” We saw that appraisals were also completed on a yearly basis.

Staff told us they had team meetings every six to eight weeks. The registered manager and responsible person told us they could increase the frequency if they felt it was required. They said, “If a team is having difficulties then we meet more frequently. We use the time for coaching and training too; anything that will support the staff.” We saw that each house supported by the service had senior staff in care managers’ posts. We saw the provider had recently introduced a manager’s meeting whereby all managers got together to discuss best practice.

People told us they were involved in planning their menus. They told us how they designed the menu for the week and then wrote a shopping list of what was needed. Staff told us that every house did things slightly differently, for example, some people had individual menus, whilst others did a weekly menu communally where everyone agreed on the meals.

The directors told us how each person had a food and nutrition plan which covered any individual requirements identified. We saw one person had their food chopped into small pieces, which enabled them to then eat independently. We saw another person had been going to a slimming group and staff had supported them as they had wanted to lose weight.

Is the service effective?

Staff told us they encouraged people to get weighed regularly, but it was their personal choice. They also said they tried wherever possible to sit and have their meals with people. They said they felt this helped the meal time experience.

The directors told us they received support from the Speech and Language Therapy team (SALT) for two people. They explained how they received support in helping with communication and that one person had an emotion board. These types of boards are important as they enable the person to communicate their wants and needs.

Staff told us they used other external professionals to support people with their permission. One staff member told us they had used the Behaviour Assessment and Intervention Team (BAIT) to support one individual. BAIT are a team specifically trained to work with adults who display behaviour which challenges.

Relatives we spoke to told us people were supported to attend routine healthcare appointments where necessary.

Is the service caring?

Our findings

People told us they felt well cared for by the service. One person said, “They are lovely, they take me out.” We spoke to 10 relatives all of whom said their loved ones were well cared for. One relative said, “They’ve transformed his life.”

We spent time in the morning with one person and their staff member. We noted they had a good relationship and the staff member supported the individual whilst encouraging them to be independent and make decisions throughout the morning. The person was keen to talk to us about the different staff members who supported them. It was clear how much they knew about each staff member. They also told us about what their likes and dislikes were and which staff members had similar interests. Another person we spoke to said, “It’s up to me what we do. If I want to go somewhere I just ask.” A third person said, “They take me to the shops and I do my shopping, they let me say what I want to buy.”

We noted each person we spoke to was able to tell us about their relationship with the staff and how well they worked together. One person said, “I like them all, they are my friends.” Whilst another person said, “(name of staff member) is my best friend.” Relatives were positive about how the staff were motivated and supportive to their family member. One relative said, “We never dreamed our daughter would be able to achieve so much but it is the support of the staff that makes it possible. They are fantastic with her.”

Relatives we spoke to confirmed the staff encouraged people to make their own choices. One relative said, “She is having a more normal life now than she has ever had, going out to disco’s, having lots of friends, choosing what she buys and what she eats and living away from us. Just like she should be doing at 29. They have given her a life worth living.”

Another relative was keen to tell us how the staffing group that was allocated really complemented the person’s different needs. They said, “He has a ‘mother’ figure who looks after his emotional needs, and a young male carer who is his great mate and they do so many things together. It’s wonderful to see them together. It’s perfect, we couldn’t give him more at home.”

Staff told us people were encouraged to express their views. One staff member said, “We work together with

families and have been able to support people to achieve and enjoy activities which at one time may have been thought impossible.” Another staff member said, “Equal Partnerships is a very apt name as everyone is involved...clients, family, friends, staff...are all treated equally and as part of the whole package in making our clients lives the best they can be.”

We saw records to confirm people were regularly consulted about their care. Staff confirmed as many people as possible were involved in the care reviews. One staff member said, “We recently had [name of person’s] annual review which involved the whole team and [name of person] and her parents. We always make sure [name of person] understands what has been decided and what has been said.”

Relatives we spoke to confirmed they were also involved where needed. One relative said, “We’ve been included in everything from day one and we’re kept in the picture. If there’s something our son is not sure of what we all get together and thrash it out.” Another relative said, “They include us and our son every step of the way.”

Staff we spoke to told us how important people’s privacy and dignity was. They explained how they always knocked on people’s bedroom doors and their bedrooms were their private space. One staff member said, “We have to think of how we would like it, I wouldn’t want someone just walking in my room, it’s about respect.” Another staff member said, “It’s like people’s mail, it’s their own. If they want support then we’ll happily help but otherwise it’s up to them to store or keep things wherever they want.”

The directors told us how some people had agreed for information to be shared with their family on a regular basis. People were supported to use social media safely as a means of keeping in touch with family and friends.

Some relatives told us how they received weekly calls from staff to update them. One relative said, “Every Monday they call me just to keep me up to speed with what he’s doing, it’s so reassuring to be included.”

We spoke to the directors about the use of advocates. An advocate is there to represent the person’s interests, by either supporting the individual to speak, or speaking on their behalf. At the time of the inspection no one required the support of an advocate, however the registered manager and responsible person was clear as to the process they would follow, should one be required.



Is the service responsive?

Our findings

People and their relatives told us they were regularly asked for their views and opinions and were involved in care planning. One relative said, “They really involve her in every decision. And they are with her every step of the way. Any concerns or any decisions they feel we should know about, they contact us immediately and we discuss it all together. They keep us fully in the picture.” Another relative said, “The agency are excellent, they really involve us and keep us well informed. We get together regularly to discuss all the things that our daughter wants to do and discuss how she can do it.”

We saw from care records that formal reviews were recorded on a regular basis and each person and their relative was involved and engaged on a day to day basis. One person we spoke to told us they had a diary at their house that everyone wrote in. They explained the staff and their family could write messages. One staff member told us that family members regularly wrote compliments and information about future events in the diary. We saw examples of this during our inspection. We saw one relative had written in the diary following a review, ‘A huge thank you to everyone for their continued hard work and support – it’s greatly appreciated’.

All relatives we spoke to told us the care and support their relative received was always personalised to the individual, and dynamic enough to change whenever needed, especially if it was to support something the person wanted to do. One relative said, “He gets a personal budget and his team help him to choose the best way to spend that budget. It enables him to live totally independently, make his own decisions about who works with him and what activities he does to keep him busy.” Another relative said, “She is having an absolute ball. Going to the theatre, to discos, to pubs, bowling. Every Thursday they meet up with another ‘house’ and the four of them have fish and chips with their personal assistants. They really have a lovely life thanks to Equal Partnerships.”

People told us they regularly got to take part in all the activities they enjoyed. One person we visited told us about all the outdoor activities he enjoyed. This included

mountain biking, walking, horse riding and surfing. He was very passionate about these activities and all the opportunities he was getting. Other people told us how they could do what they wanted, when they wanted, with their staff members for support. One person said, “It’s up to me what we do, if I want to go somewhere I just say.” Another person said, “I like going to the cinema and to see my friend who has a horse so we do that.”

One person we visited loved animals, however they could not have a pet due to the preferences of the other people they lived with. The person and the staff member had told us how they had advertised in the local community and they now walked a local person’s dog once a week. We joined the person on their weekly dog walk and saw how much enjoyment they got out of this. We noted the dynamic nature of the service and how they had thought of an alternative so the individual’s likes were still regularly met.

Everyone we spoke to told us they had no concerns or complaints regarding the service and the care they or their family member received. However, they said should they feel the need, they would feel confident in raising anything with either the staff who supported them or the managers. One person we spoke to said, “If I wasn’t happy I would tell [name of staff member] and they would sort it.”

We saw complaints policies and procedures were available in each person’s home, should they be required. The provider had different variances of a complaints card where they had tailored the design to meet different people’s needs. For example, one had a sad face on and they communicated with people to fill it in when they were sad with the reason why. One staff member we spoke to said, “We support 16 people and we are all so involved that we don’t get complaints, we work together and discuss care all the time.” The registered manager and responsible person told us they spoke to each house each day to check everything was okay, and the staff members or themselves spoke to family members regularly for updates and feedback as well as formal review meetings. They felt that based upon this regular contact they could constantly evolve the care and support they offered, therefore they had not previously received any complaints.

Is the service well-led?

Our findings

Everyone we spoke to was keen to tell us about the positive culture and supporting nature that came with Equal Partnerships. One family member we spoke to said, “It is the way it is run that makes it so outstanding. They are special people and they have a unique understanding of our children. They employ only the best people for us to choose from and it keeps the standard really high.” Another family member said, “We are absolutely delighted with them. They have the same aspirations that we have for our own children. I wanted to know that my [name of person] would be able to have a life without me, and thanks to Equal Partnerships, that is exactly what he has got.”

Staff we spoke to were very positive about the organisation as a whole as well as the two managers who owned and ran the service. One staff member said, “Both directors are not only approachable but breed absolutely positivity and empowerment into both us as support workers but also the people they support.” Another staff member said, “Both [name of managers] are very hands on and have a great interest and knowledge of their clients and their lives, and are always thinking of ways to involve clients in making improvements to their lives. They genuinely feel privileged to be working with their clients and encourage staff to feel the same.”

One of the two directors was the registered manager but both worked together on a day to day basis on all aspects of the service. Staff told us they felt they could talk to the managers about anything. One staff member we spoke to said, “My own personal opinion is that they are simply the best in their field and their approach should be set as a standard for others to follow.” Another staff member said, “I regularly see many of the clients which are supported by Equal Partnerships at different social events. To see so many happy faces, I think is a testament to the continuous work of every member of staff. I can honestly say it’s a pleasure to work with such great supportive teams of staff.”

We saw that people, family members and staff were regularly asked for feedback. We looked at the results of the recent staff survey and noted all comments were positive and included things like, “I think the work ethos is excellent”, “Excellent organisations for both those needing support and staff”, “I have met carers from other companies and I would say from the information I receive from them that Equal Partnerships are the leaders in their field.”

We noted that external health care professionals had also sent in feedback to the service following their involvement. One member of the Behavioural Assessment and Intervention Team (BAIT) team had wrote, “Fabulous - is there an award for carers I could nominate your company and staff for as I’m constantly impressed with the standard and heart of your work.” We saw the thought of wanting to nominate the service was not unique to the BAIT staff member. A relative had also nominated the service to the National Learning Disability Awards in January 2014 following the care and support their relative had received.

During our inspection we also looked at the auditing procedures in place. We saw the managers completed spot checks on records when they visited the houses. We saw they signed the diary and the communication book on each weekly visit following talking to the staff and reviewing some of the records.

The managers told us they completed an audit around the staff and care delivered. They covered all staff over the year and called different staff each month to discuss the service and areas for improvement. In addition we saw monthly quality monitoring records were completed for risk assessments, support plans, staff training and timesheets and rotas. We saw auditing procedures were in place for safeguarding, accident and incidents and complaints, however due to the low level of incidences they were not always required on a monthly basis.