

OUTSTANDING CHILDREN'S HOME

Calcot Services

"I thought it was going to be like something out of *Oliver Twist*, but I was pleased it was just like an ordinary home," says Melissa Duncan, who was 14 when she was taken into care and was placed in one of Calcot Services' homes in Berkshire.

The home where Melissa stayed was one of 12 featured in Ofsted's *Outstanding Children's Homes* report, published in March 2011. Inspectors were impressed with the home's provision of intensive therapeutic support within the normality of a typical suburban home.

When she arrived at the three-bed home, Melissa, now 18, admits her behaviour was "rebellious". Still emotionally scarred by incidents of domestic abuse at her family home, she truanted and misused drugs and alcohol. Staff at the home focused on improving Melissa's feelings of attachment and trust in people and after only weeks they started to notice improvements.

"I did start to get closer to members of the staff and saw them as my family. One I called auntie and another was my nan," says Melissa.

Group discussion sessions with staff take place after dinner each day and young people



Calcot aims to provide a stable and safe home life

are encouraged to compile a life-story book. "The book was really good. When I left, they gave it to me as a present. It was the best present I've ever had," says Melissa.

Rachel Redgwell, care manager at Calcot Services, says most children at its homes have behavioural problems. "They have not had much stability in their life. Our aim is to give them routine, setting boundaries, rewards and a stable, safe home life that they may not have had before. Many suffer from severed attachments. Trust is a huge issue and our work has to focus on rebuilding that," she says.

Calcot's psychotherapist takes sessions with

young people and art and play therapy also take place. Young people are also encouraged to take part in activities outside the home, such as cinema trips or horse-riding lessons.

Most children stay at the homes for about two years with the aim of being placed permanently with foster parents or adopted. It is rare that they return to their family home and most come from outside the Berkshire area.

Where possible, links between young people and family members are encouraged and supported, says Redgwell. For those who cannot return home, the residential unit and its staff become their family members. "We encourage them to come back and visit and to keep in touch. They form a close bond with staff and when they want to tell someone something, they know they can just call. We provide that for them," says Redgwell.

She estimates that eight out of 10 children stay in contact with the home once they have moved on. Melissa is among those who keeps in touch and is grateful for the support in turning her life around. During her two years at the home, her school attendance and classwork improved so much that she was made head girl. She is now studying at university to become a social worker.