

# Thistle Foundation Housing Support Service

Thistle Centre of Wellbeing, 13 Queens Walk  
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Type of inspection: Announced (short notice)  
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**Service provided by:**  
Thistle Foundation

**Service provider number:**  
SP2004005062

**Care service number:**  
CS2004080907

## About the service

Thistle Foundation is a voluntary organisation. Guided by a board of directors, the organisation is managed on a day-to-day basis from a Head Office in Craigmillar, Edinburgh.

This service provides housing support and care at home for adults with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health problems and head injuries.

The service is delivered by small teams of personal assistants (PAs) who provide the direct support and care. The service is led by the registered manager, a health and wellbeing manager and 13 lead practitioners (LPs).

The Thistle vision, mission statement and manifesto states:

"We believe life is for living. We always go the extra mile to help people with disabilities or longstanding health conditions to lead great, authentic lives, where they are in control. Thistle Foundation is a boundary-pushing, pioneering organisation helping bring about a society where everyone has the right to feel involved and empowered to live the life they choose, regardless of their disabilities or health condition. We go the extra mile to find the right solution for people, without presuming we know the answers."

At the time of the inspection there were eighty people receiving the service. Support ranged from a few hours per day to twenty-four hour care.

## What people told us

We sent 35 care standards questionnaires to the manager to distribute to service users. We received 15 responses, 11 were completed by relatives on the service user's behalf. The majority (13) were happy overall with the quality of the care and support.

During the inspection, we met eight people using the service. Most people were happy with how things were going, were comfortable with their staff and leading busy lives. Due to the extent of their cognitive ability, some people were unable to offer their views on the service.

We also met two relatives. We spoke with another relative by telephone.

Comments we received included:

- "All my needs are met well. The staff always go by the care plan. They go on training all the time."
- "The staff try to get me to go out more."
- "Staff are doing a great job."
- "I did my support plan with the service leader and my mum. We had a meeting. It says what I like. It says I love to hear music and want to play music. Staff help me be as independent as possible, I like to help with the potatoes, staff put them in the right place so I can. We compromise on the jobs in the house. Staff take me out and I'm going on holiday. We had a fantastic meeting. I was one of the people who made the points."
- "My son has plenty of space in his home which is important and works well. He is fit and active - he learned to cycle. He has more words now. The lead practitioner is planning communication training. He has a stable,

consistent team. I had to reject one PA, just not a good match. There's always room for improvement but I can relax and trust in the care provided."

- "My support plan has vital information and is easy to follow. There are regular team meetings and my mother is invited. I eat homemade food. I need a long time to eat meals and require assistance. My carers are patient and never rush me. I feel safe as my carers are all trained in moving and handling, epilepsy, etc. I am respected and treated very well. My team are always looking for places to take me for new experiences. I have had some of the same staff for 3-6 years! If a carer is off ill it is always someone who knows me that covers, never a stranger. What I would change - I want staff to read the communications book at the start of shift and on return from their holidays."

- "My support plan details all my interests and activities I like. We have a review of my support plan at my home. We discuss if I am happy with my support and if there are any changes I would like to make. I am much more confident now. I will speak to people outside my family, buy things myself with my own money and now that I can go to the gym I have lost a lot of weight and am much fitter. I'd like slightly better coverage of staff when off due to illness. Several times I have been left with no one to support me."

- "Support plan is excellent. All of the team do an incredible job. The personal service is incredible. They do all they can with approved hours. The Council hold some fault here, but Thistle are amazing."

- "The carers are trained in using equipment. Staff have the right skills and training, although it sometimes takes many months before staff have undergone all relevant training (e.g. epilepsy support and use of Midazolam). It appears difficult to attract suitable staff. Overall I am happy, except I would like a sufficiently large/robust/flexible team."

- "My support plan is very detailed and is a true reflection of my life so far. It's there to help people in my team understand me and what I like, don't like and how to help me live a fulfilled life in a safe way. My staff ask me and include me which is great. We talk about what I would like to do and we plan in advance so that I can do things whilst knowing I am safe. I can't travel on my own but I still feel independent. My staff make me laugh, we have fun. PAs have full training which reassures me that they know what to do. My team are very settled but I do have rota changes. I feel very confident and happy with my level of support."

- "We would not have got to where we are now without the help of (the family forum coordinator) who was a godsend. This is the help people need as you don't know where to start. Providing this 1:1 service is vital, family support is paramount. Thistle provide this and we are very grateful."

- "My support plan is quite detailed and covers all aspects of my care. Shadow shifts are done with new staff until they are confident in caring for me. There are regular team meetings to exchange ideas and keep up to date with my care. There are also plenty of training opportunities for staff. Staff are qualified to drive my car and also take me on the bus and train to enable me to get out and about. I help with shopping and I am encouraged to help as much as I can with washing and dressing. Staff treat me with respect and affection. If there is a choice I am usually asked. I am sad when people leave my team but often they keep in touch."

- "My son is supported by a PA when out for a café visit, concert or disco. Staff know how to support him because there are many home visits, meetings and reviews. Staff build up a beautiful relationship over a long period of time so they get to know his emotions and behaviour and in turn he gets to know them. New members of staff are introduced slowly. It has been worked out for him to handle his own money, bus pass and memberships card and with staff help he can understand these tasks, at all times with great kindness and respect. I can tell by his eagerness to go and his happy mood when he returns that he has had a lovely time. Staff come up with new ideas if we feel he would benefit from a change and they agree to keep things as they

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are when we feel continuity is relevant. Staff have been kept consistent in my son's case. I am delighted by the wonderful level of support by a team of amazing people doing a much appreciated job.

- "Great care has been taken by the support team in ensuring that the support plan is up to date and appropriate. There are regular meetings to ensure care is consistent and takes (my relative's) needs into account. He has made great progress in becoming more independent with the chance to live in his own home, with the support of a first-rate team of carers. The team treat him with dignity and respect even though his behaviour can be erratic and challenging. They are always appropriate and kind. He is lucky in that there is not great staff turnover. Regular discussions are held with the management team. We are greatly impressed by the level of support that Thistle provide."

- "After a number of changes and with a new manager who has been very supportive, we have worked together to improve the service. More full-time staff has improved the consistency of care and communication. There are clearer support plans, clearer roles and responsibilities and we have built up trust. Although there have been some very challenging and difficult concerns and issues overall I am impressed by the organisation and their ability to listen and truly focus on a person centred approach. Having staff that have the skills to ensure that the service runs smoothly and is well organised with clear communication is imperative. Leadership is the clear key to success. Team meetings that are regular and well attended and driven by motivators who praise achievements. The support plan is continually updated. Many of the staff are excellent and get well supported by the organisation and management. Many have demonstrated their commitment and care."

- "The company is a good decent company, but my family felt Thistle had lost its sense of vision and we felt a bit sad. We met with the depute director and they took this on board. We hope things are going to settle and improve now. It has been chaotic. The support plan needs updated and this is being addressed. Getting staff is difficult. Lack of staff support probably contributed to high turnover. There are no team leaders now which I feel doesn't help. Staff work on their own and as my relative cannot communicate a lot of trust is needed. I would like a team member who provides supervision and guidance for other staff, who is committed to supporting my relative's needs and ambitions and can impart positivity to team members and who can run a household. Covering a shift would help them get to know my relative. More staff meetings and spot checks would help."

- "Staff treat me well but don't know how to support me. I'm not confident they have the right skills and training. There are a lot of staff changes and staff don't have enough time. I am not happy with the quality of care and support. When I tell the service I am unhappy they do not do anything about it. I would like a change of team leader."

- "There had been a lot out of issues. The service responded well to my complaint and there was a plan with actions but these were not seen through. Now the manager is dealing with this. I would like someone with good management skills to lead the team, I'm waiting to hear."

We met and corresponded with a number of external professionals and their comments about Thistle included:

- "Thistle is one of the best care providers I work with."

- "My experience has been of a person-centred care environment working closely and collaboratively with the service user's family and health professionals to support the service user. The staff were involved and well supported and appear to be reasonably skilled and knowledgeable. They all knew the service user well. The team appear to be well supported by a team leader and management that are hands on and responsive. The manager and team leader have always been quick to respond and their communications have always been appropriate - inspiring confidence in their ability to respond appropriately to service needs and to staff's needs. The support

plans were comprehensive and very person-centred. I know that they are aware of issues related to the use of restrictive practices and the need to avoid this where possible."

- "Overall I believe that the Thistle Foundation provides a good service and that there is an ethos of good intentions in trying to optimise the outcomes for each individual in the least restrictive manner. I am involved with eight service users. Six had previous care placements and all have had improved outcomes over the time that they have been at the Thistle Foundation and are more settled. Most of the improvements were initially slow, but over time Thistle has acquired more skills and consistency in staffing which is critical. Staff know the people that they work with well and almost everyone has a dedicated team. One new client has shown considerable improvement in behaviour over the past two years. There is concerted effort put into person-centred planning and in trying to achieve the best outcomes for clients, while considering their individual wishes. I have been invited to meetings. I am usually able to contact (senior managers) and if not immediately available, they do respond to messages. I have the phone numbers of individual care teams and can reliably get hold of team members. Co-operation in terms of adult protection concerns has improved and generally this is very good. A colleague feels support workers could intervene more pro-actively, but this would be difficult to implement in any situation and I believe the staff are doing their best to act in the interest of the client."

- "Our experience of working together with the Thistle Foundation is very positive. One person started at day care through a year-long and well supported transition from school. It was very important for this person to start attending our service whilst still attending school. This transition overlapped with another change: the move to his own home where he was supported by Thistle. In order to support the individual effectively through these major changes, all agencies and family had to work closely together. The Thistle manager, team leader and support staff communicated well and effectively with our staff. Meetings were held and a variety of views were taken on board, information was shared and approaches were fine-tuned and developed to reflect the stages of the transition from school to day service for this young person. In this way the organisation contributed to improved outcomes for this person. Another person is supported by Thistle staff whilst attending our workshops. When we set up the placement, good communication and positive information sharing between our organisation and Thistle contributed to positive outcomes for this person. We were very impressed with detailed Thistle care plans which were shared with us with guidance on appropriate use. This was based on the perspectives of the service user and family and allowed us to get to know the person's concerns, aspirations, wishes and hopes. This contributed to our ability to set up a person-centred placement. The family wanted the service user to be supported by Thistle staff at day care and the trust that the family had in them enabled the person to take up the opportunities in our workshops. Thistle have provided training, such as on Talking Points - outcomes and asset based approach, which was very well organised and delivered. This enabled the assistant day service manager to contribute to and further develop and embed this approach that we are already using. There is effective communication with Thistle and I have always been able to reach someone when required. Thistle staff attend meetings and reviews. They share information when appropriate, relevant and helpful for improving outcomes for service users. Thistle staff are competent, confident, friendly, cooperative and approachable. We see that they have a good relationship with the people they support and they engage with the opportunities we offer. Through this approach they are effective in supporting the service user within our workshops. Service users are supported by a consistent team. This means that we work with a limited group of support workers coming to our building and this makes communication and cooperation easier. One member is supported 2:1 and staff work well with each and their approaches are consistent and effective. Both service users respond well to the support they receive in the context of our workshops. Staff appear to be well led. If we had any concerns I would contact the manager at the Thistle and feel confident that the concern would be responded to. Because the cooperation between staff in both organisations is running so smoothly, there have been very few occasions that required me to contact managers at Thistle. This week however I have followed up an incident that happened in one of our workshops. The manager was on annual leave but her telephone message was very helpful in providing alternative numbers. I have also found Admin staff very helpful. The manager I then spoke to was very approachable and happy to answer my questions which enabled me to complete my follow-up. I also felt that

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she was very informed and obviously in frequent contact and communicating well with her staff. She held knowledge of the incident that had happened the day before but also knew already that the morning on the day that we spoke had gone well and without further incidents."

- "I completed a follow-up check for my client. I found the manager and his key worker very helpful and knowledgeable about my client's needs. They appeared to provide a service that supports him to engage in activities and relationships that are meaningful to him. His key worker had good manual handling skills and listened to advice given. All the information about what support he received was laid out in a timetable accessible to him so he knew who to expect and when. My client had very good rapport with the workers and they worked well as a team."

- "The service absolutely contributes to improved outcomes for service users. They have very thorough support plans and identify outcomes with service users above and beyond the outcomes that may have been identified by social care. The staff are well skilled and knowledgeable in meeting the complex care needs of my client. I have never had any difficulty reaching my client's line manager. She has always been responsive and supportive in ensuring I was able to undertake my assessment/review."

- The (lead practitioner) is extremely knowledgeable and helpful. They are the lynchpin in holding things together and keeping on top of things. The staff are brilliant with my client, they know how to get in touch with people and how to get things done, for the best of reasons. They aren't afraid to chase things up."

## Self assessment

We are not asking services to submit a self-assessment for this inspection year. Instead, we will ask services for their improvement or development plan and discuss any improvements they may have made or intend to make since the last inspection.

## From this inspection we graded this service as:

<b>Quality of care and support</b>	5 - Very Good
<b>Quality of staffing</b>	not assessed
<b>Quality of management and leadership</b>	5 - Very Good

## What the service does well

Thistle's care and support was highly personalised. People were supported to live well and safely and to be active citizens in the community. The service took into account how people communicated their needs and wishes and worked at developing person specific knowledge and skills.

The Thistle approach was especially valued by people experiencing support. Thistle's values were practiced and reinforced across the organisation so that the person receiving support was always at the centre of actions and decisions. Staff training, supervision and practice development was underpinned by human rights, citizenship, good practice. The service persevered, searching for person-centred and creative solutions for people with complex and sometimes challenging needs. The service worked at building relationships. There was a willingness to be as flexible as possible to accommodate everyone's wishes. The service was inclusive, responsive and compassionate, in keeping with the new principles of the national care standards, available at:  
<http://www.newcarestandards.scot/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NCS-Principles-Feb-2016.pdf>

People experiencing support could be involved in choosing their own PAs; the lead practitioner overseeing their service and had been involved in the recruitment of senior managers. There were very good opportunities to influence the leadership and direction of the whole service through the 'Big Conversation'.

Support planning had improved. These were more detailed, current and outcomes focussed. Where relevant, files contained Section 47 certificates from the GP and copies of Guardianship orders.

The service measured its effectiveness in helping people progress towards their goals. People had learned new skills and made new social connections, often surprising and delighting everyone. Examples included: getting their first car, getting a place at college, a hot tub, travelling on the bus without support, making soup, having a barbecue and attending new social events. Other people had begun to show more self-determination, such as choosing how their home should look and indicating when they wanted to do their own thing without staff.

There was close dialogue with a wide range of professional colleagues to the benefit of service users. Staff were clear about their responsibilities with adult and child protection and there were clear reporting systems.

Lead practitioners were well motivated and well supported by a senior management team who valued and developed staff. An example being the Leading Others course which most lead practitioners and some PAs had completed. A competency framework informed each staff member's performance review. Thistle was planning for the next stage of leadership development and SVQ planning for PAs, in preparation for PA registration with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) from Autumn 2017. Staff turnover rates had reduced and were now comparable to similar services across Scotland.

Managers had acted on most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. We saw improved incident and complaint reporting. The QI audit systems continued to deliver benefits and highlight areas for action. We welcomed the plan to develop incident reporting and analysis.

The service had a clear and ambitious operational plan for 2017-19 which included developments and planned improvements - including establishing outcome indicators in order to better demonstrate the difference it makes to people's lives.

## What the service could do better

We made a number of suggestions to further improve this very good service, including:

- continue with improvements to recruitment and retention of staff across all teams,
- continue to personalise and to up-date assessments of risk (for example where bed rails are in place, where someone is at risk of choking, where there are adult protection concerns, use of equipment such as hoists) and to document that all parties have been consulted on risk reduction measures,
- keep records of management responses to any concerns about the service, and
- show how the findings of complaint investigations lead to action and improvement.

## Requirements

**Number of requirements:** 0

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## Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

## Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings	
7 Jun 2016	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed Not assessed 5 - Very good
30 Jun 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
10 Jun 2014	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
6 Jun 2013	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
26 Jun 2012	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
17 Feb 2011	Announced	Care and support	5 - Very good

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Environment Staffing Management and leadership	Not assessed Not assessed Not assessed
19 Mar 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 4 - Good Not assessed
22 Dec 2008	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good

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