

Nugent Care

Inspection report for independent adoption agency

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Nugent care, formerly known as the Nugent Care Society, is the social care agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool and provides a variety of children's services, including an adoption service. The adoption service is based in St. Helens and covers the whole geographical area of the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. It is a small, well-established voluntary adoption agency and specialises in finding adoptive families for those children, whom the local authority finds difficulty placing. It also specialises in providing a service for inter-country adopters. The agency provides a comprehensive range of adoption services both pre and post adoption to children and families. These include the recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and support of domestic and inter-country adopters. The agency offers assistance and support to birth parents who may be considering placing their child for adoption and to adults, who have been adopted through the agency.

Summary

The agency's preparation, assessment and approval processes are of good quality. The support services to adoptive families, adult adopters and birth parents are promptly provided, tailored to individual needs and are of good quality. The agency is well managed and organised effectively and efficiently. Staff have confidence in their managers and believe they have the necessary vision to develop their service. Managers value their staff, who are well supported in providing a good adoption service to all those affected by adoption. Nugent Care adoption agency achieves safe, secure and stable placements for children.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

One action was made in the inspection regarding information contained in the personnel and panel members' files, as they did not comply with the adoption regulations. Whilst there has been an improvement in the files, some files still do not contain all the information required by regulation and an action has been made regarding this. Seven of the ten good practice recommendations have been met, which has resulted in the agency delivering improved outcomes for children and adopters. The agency has made a number of improvements in relation to their management information system. This enables qualitative information to be obtained and enables the agency to measure its performance in terms of the outcomes. Quality assurance systems have also been developed and the information obtained used to inform adoption practice. Nugent Care has established a safeguarding steering group to look at safeguarding issues across the children services. An adoption agency representative attends this group. Information obtained is used to inform their safeguarding practices and procedures and benefits those using their services. The agency has moved to new premises which are fit for purpose and effectively meet the agency's needs. The agency has enabled inter-country adopters to make links with regional and national support groups to assist them in the promotion of their children's heritage.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency has a written recruitment plan, which identifies the number of domestic and inter-country adopters to be assessed each year. It also identifies the number of children to be placed in adoptive placements. Recruitment strategies are effective and their recruitment performance is good. This has enabled the agency to meet the needs of a number of children requiring an adoptive family. The agency's response to adopters initial enquiries was said to be 'excellent' and resulted in a number of adopters pursuing an adoption application with this agency. The agency has a thorough preparation, assessment and approval process of adopters. Placing authorities and adopters were positive about these processes, as illustrated by some of the comments made. For example, 'the assessment was very thorough', 'adopters are of real quality' and 'understand about the importance of maintaining a child's heritage'. Assessments seen were generally thorough, analytical, of good standard and met adoption legislation and regulations. However, there were some shortfalls. For example, in two of the assessments the issues of loss and diversity were not fully explored and direct work undertaken with adopter's children was not effectively evidenced in one agency's record. Similarly, in another record, all the information regarding the adopter's temporary accommodation was not included in the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. In addition, the internal form used by the agency to record a CRB check has been completed did not contain the disclosure number or status of the CRB check. The agency ensures applicants are able to look after children in a safe and responsible manner through the use of a health and safety checklist. However, this is not comprehensive. Adopters have a good understanding of safeguarding issues and this ensures the welfare and protection of children is safeguarded. The agency's adoption panel's policies and procedures fully meet the adoption National Minimum Standards and regulations. The constitution and membership of the adoption panel meets the adoption National Minimum Standards and adoption agencies regulations. The adoption panel is arranged at an appropriate frequency, which is dictated by the need to consider the approval and review of adopters. It is well chaired and operates in an efficient and effective manner. Panel members have good knowledge and understanding of the complexity of adoption work and receive regular training to equip them to carry out their roles effectively. The adoption panel minutes are well structured, informative, accurate and meet the adoption National Minimum Standards. The adoption agency's decision maker ensures decisions are considered thoroughly and communicated to adopters within the timescales laid down in the adoption guidance provided in relation to the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The agency has a clearly written complaints policy and procedure. They also have an accessible complaints leaflet, which has been produced in a user friendly format. Adopters confirmed that they were aware of the complaints policy and procedure. There is a safeguarding policy and procedure in place. However, this policy does not deal with allegations of historical abuse. There is a good recording system in place to enable staff to record safeguarding issues effectively. The agency ensures that all those working for the agency are competent and well supported in handling and managing safeguarding issues.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency demonstrates a commitment to ensuring a variety of qualitative adoption support services are provided to adopters. For example, social events, the recently developed newsletter and a support group. The agency has also made arrangements with other local adoption services for adopters to attend various training events, so their parenting skills are developed and

adoptive placements maintained. Adopters presented an extremely positive picture about the quality and amount of agency support. They said, 'the agency really understands the importance of support to adopters and that provided is excellent'. A new social work post is to be created in order to expand and develop their post adoption services. Adopters have a good understanding of the possible discrimination that an adopted child might experience and they are supported to develop a variety of strategies to deal with this. They have a clear understanding of the need to enable a child to develop a positive self identity and understand the importance of maintaining a child's heritage. The agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to their needs. There are written protocols in place regarding the roles of specialist advisers. Staff, panel members and adopters are able to access to the agency's specialist advisers whenever the need arises. The agency's practice is service user focused. Those using the service are carefully listened to and their wishes and feelings considered. The agency considers the welfare and safety of the service user and others affected by the adoption when trying to determine whether a service should be provided. However, agency records did not effectively evidence this.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency can be involved with birth parents at the point of placement, if requested by the placing authorities. The majority of domestic adoptions, which the agency is involved in, relate to children whom local authorities have found difficulties placing with adopters. In these cases, it is the local authority's responsibility to work with and involve birth parents in the care planning process for the child. The commissioning of independent support to a birth parent, where an adoption plan is being made for their child, is also the local authority's responsibility. At the time of this inspection, the agency had not been commissioned to undertake any independent support to birth parents on behalf of a local authority. The agency's past and current adoption work has resulted in a clear understanding of the lifelong implications of adoption and this is clearly demonstrated in their work. There is evidence that a number of people who have been affected by adoption are approaching the agency for information. This sometimes involves direct work with birth parents and families. The agency's practice, in relation to their work with those birth parents and families who had historical links with the agency, is extremely good. The records seen demonstrate that birth parents and families are treated with a great deal of respect, sensitivity and empathy in what can only be described as an extremely personal and emotional experience. There is evidence that information about local and national support groups is provided to birth parents and their families. At all stages in the process both birth parents and their families are enabled to make choices about what should happen in their lives and they are appropriately supported in these choices. There is evidence that the agency uses the experiences acquired from working with both adopted adults and families to inform and enhance their practice. The agency recognises the vital importance of a child's heritage. This is clearly demonstrated in a service user's comment, 'the agency fully understands the significance of one's past and the need to search for one's identity'. There is evidence of the agency being proactive and making strenuous efforts to ensure adopters receive as much information as possible from the local authority regarding the child or children placed with them. Adopters interviewed confirmed that the agency provides information about the birth parents of the children placed with them. Inter-country adopters also have a good awareness of the importance of the child's heritage, even if they are unable to have direct information from the child's family. Adopters spoken with clearly understand the importance of keeping and sharing information about the birth family and they demonstrate openness in talking about

adoption. Several adopters indicated that their work with the agency has significantly altered their attitude towards contact. The agency has a letter box scheme in operation which is robust, well organised, effectively managed and provides birth parents and their families with a real opportunity to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no adoption National Minimum Standards that map to this outcome.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose, which is circulated to all staff and contains all the information required under the adoption agencies regulations. Its written policies and procedures, which have been revised in line with adoption agency regulations, are of a good standard and accurately reflect the agency's Statement of Purpose. The agency has a children's guide, which is in a child friendly format. This Guide is not required for a voluntary adoption agency and exceeds the adoption national standards. The agency produces two information packs, one for domestic adopters and one for those wishing to adopt a child from overseas. Both information packs are well written, clear and provide comprehensive information regarding the adoption process. The agency has a prioritisation system and prospective adopters wishing to adopt a child from this country are assessed to meet the needs of the children waiting to be adopted. The agency has a clear management structure which encompasses the board of Trustees, the chief executive, the senior management team and agency manager. A supervisory system is in place to monitor staff's performance and ensure a quality service. Staff are supervised in line with the agency's supervision policy. The agency operates in accordance with its Statement of Purpose and is managed effectively and efficiently. This ensures good outcomes are achieved for children and adopters. Nugent Care has clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and a number of quality assurance systems are in place. The systems examined are effective in monitoring the agency's performance. The administrative support provided to the agency is of a good standard and assists staff to carry out their work in an effective and efficient manner. The agency has sufficient staff with appropriate experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of the agency. Nugent Care's policies and procedures encourage staff retention. This assists the agency to provide a consistent and continuous service to children and adopters. There is a clear commitment to developing staff's knowledge, skills and ongoing professional development. Staff's training needs are identified through the organisation's appraisal scheme. Training records confirm staff are kept up-to-date with professional and legal developments relating to their work. The agency has a complaints policy and procedure, which is available to all staff and service users. This documentation is in an appropriate form to meet service users' needs and fully meets the adoption National Minimum Standards. There is a separate system to record complaints, with detailed records kept of complaints, which comply with the adoption National Minimum Standards and regulations. The agency has appropriate policies and procedures in place for case recording and access to records. Case records are well organised and generally in good order. Although, there were some shortfalls. For example, there was no evidence of case decisions arising from staff's supervision on file. The agency's current and archived adoption records are stored securely. However, the archived files are not stored in a manner to minimise the risk of fire and flood. There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures, though some

personnel and panel members' files did not contain all the information required under the adoption agencies regulations. For example, proof of identity in the form of a recent photograph of the staff member. The service's current adoption records are effectively safeguarded through an appropriate back up system. However, the archived records are not safeguarded. The agency has a disaster recovery plan which meets the requirements of the adoption National Minimum Standards. There are a clearly written set of financial policies and procedures governing the agency's financial management, which are properly operated.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
28	ensure all agency personnel and panel members' information is obtained (Regulation 5 and 17)	1 November 2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure all work undertaken is clearly demonstrated in the agency's case records (NMS 4)
- ensure all the accommodation where an adopter resides is included in their CRB check (NMS 4)
- ensure the internal form used to record a CRB check indicates the status and disclosure number of the CRB check obtained (NMS 4)
- improve the health and safety checklist and pet risk assessments (NMS 4)
- ensure all staff's CRB checks are renewed every three years (NMS 15)
- consider revising the agency's safeguarding policy (NMS 32)
- formalise and evidence the assessment and decision making system used to determine service provision (NMS 33)
- ensure supervisor's decisions are recorded on case records (NMS 25)
- ensure archived records are stored in a manner which minimises the risk of damage from fire or water (NMS 25).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent adoption agency