

Catholic Children's Society (Clifton)

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Sean White
Type of Inspection	Key

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Registered person	Catholic Children's Society (Clifton)
Registered manager	Amanda Alston
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Date of last inspection	24 August 2004

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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

This is a voluntary adoption agency constituted under current legislation and registered appropriately. It operates under the principles of the Roman Catholic faith. It undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of people wishing to adopt children from this country. It does not undertake recruitment in respect of inter-country adoption. The agency focuses on recruiting adopters who can offer a permanent home to children who are more difficult to find placements for. This would include, for instance, large sibling groups, older children and children with a disability. It also undertakes adoption support, which includes birth family tracing and intermediary work. It is controlled by a board of trustees and managed by an experienced professional. The agency is located just outside the city centre of Bristol in new premises that are accessible to people with a disability.

Summary

The agency offers a child focused service that is driven by a commitment to approving adopters who are able to meet the needs of difficult to place children. It welcomes applications from all members of the community, provides them with detailed information and offers a confident, rigorous approach to the assessment of suitable families. It is governed by a conscientious board of trustees, which provides a supportive and encouraging environment within which managers and staff can work and develop the service. Managers and staff are experienced, qualified and skilled professionals that elicit warm praise from those who have received a service and who demonstrate well developed and knowledgeable practice in adoption matters. The agency is well managed, efficient in its operations and administered in a well organised and business-like manner.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last inspection there were four requirements and ten recommendations made. All of these have been attended to satisfactorily. This demonstrates the agency's commitment to improving its services. The relocation to the current premises, which are a major improvement on the previous building, has enabled the service to develop a better infrastructure. The rewriting of policies and procedures has enabled a better organisational framework to be established. The recent upgrade of the IT systems has enabled a more efficient approach to administration to be planned and established.

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 focuses its adopter recruitment activity towards families who are able to meet the needs of children where there have been difficulties finding appropriate placements; for instance, large sibling groups, disabled children and older children. The recruitment policy and procedure has been recently revised and demonstrates the agency's commitment, aims and objectives in this area. The approach to the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters is very

thorough. Preparation training is interwoven into the assessment process and there are two preliminary interviews conducted before a decision is made to proceed with the application. Assessment reports demonstrate a rigorous approach to checking that applicants were suitable to adopt. All checks, including Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), were carried out as necessary and more than the required minimum of references are sought. This includes employers' references in every case. Survey questionnaires demonstrated that people who had received a service were more than satisfied with the rigour of the assessment process. The agency has counselled out several applicants in recent times where it was decided that people may not be suitable, or ready, to adopt children. Adopters are well prepared for the matching and introduction process. The agency staff work closely with placing agencies to ensure that families are provided with the most up to date information regarding children being considered, and are involved in the reviewing process after a child placed. All adopters are placed on the National Adoption Register and are familiar with how it operates. The adoption panel has a written procedure and is appropriately constituted, although there are two vacancies that the manager is taking steps to fill. It has never failed to be a quorum when it meets. The chairperson is an experienced social worker, but it was his first chair duty of the panel during the inspection. The panel undertakes its responsibilities with due care, attention and thoroughness. Appropriate scrutiny is brought to the work placed before it and it was clear that members of the panel are conscientious and committed. Although reasonably well managed, the panel was somewhat inefficient in how it undertook its duties; but as stated above, it was the chairperson's first panel. The decision maker observes every panel and makes and records his decision immediately afterwards. The administration of the panel and its operations are efficiently managed and organised. The manager of the agency is a very experienced and knowledgeable professional. She is suitably qualified and is nearing completion of a management qualification. The team manager and the staff team are also very experienced and knowledgeable in adoption matters. All are appropriately qualified and two workers have the Post-Qualifying award. There have been no workers recruited to the agency for some years, but the recruitment policies and procedures are thorough.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency's approach to supporting families it approves throughout the adoption 'journey', is well considered and sensitive. The best interests of the families and any children placed are at the forefront of practice. Families continue to be supported by their assessing social worker. They are invited and encouraged to be involved in further post-approval training. There is an informal, but well used 'linking' system whereby new adopters are put in contact with someone who has already adopted. There are informal social events and direct contact with other support agencies. Post adoption support is also of a very good standard. Service users who were interviewed, or responded through questionnaires, were delighted with the standard of service they received. The workers who undertake post adoption support, which includes tracing and intermediary work, demonstrated high levels of knowledge, understanding and sensitivity. Case records show that the approach to this area of work is detailed and thorough and that service users' best interests are at the core of all activity. There are a range of support specialists to hand which enable the agency to undertake this area of responsibility. The medical advisor attends most panels and was said to be very committed and very accessible. There is ready legal advice on child care and adoption law.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

The agency does not have any statutory duties to work with birth parents.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Overall, this is a well managed agency that undertakes its duties and responsibilities with commitment, professionalism and with clear focus on adoption being a positive outcome for those children whose needs are best met by this form of permanence. The agency's structures, and underpinning policies and procedures are clear, unambiguous and demonstrate the service's operational and strategic outlook. The policies and procedures have all been recently revised and rewritten. One major change in the organisation's policy is that it has dispensed with a previous ban on the acceptance of same sex couples as applicants to adopt. It now accepts applications from all members of the community. However, the Statement of Purpose, which has also been revised, did not contain all the required information. Although it is accepted that this was due to an administrative error, no one in the agency had noticed and it had been formally approved by the Board of Trustees. There is a comprehensive information pack sent to people enquiring about adoption. It includes details of what the adoption process is, who can adopt, who can't be considered and further reading material. It also explains the relationship within the consortium. This is a good pack that prospective adopters would find useful in their deliberations and decision making. The manager demonstrated significant knowledge and understanding of adoption matters. She showed her skills in management through her methods of organisation and sense of responsibility. All the staff said that they felt supported and encouraged by her. The auditors state the finances are appropriately managed and presented. It was evident when discussing the finances of the agency that it is managed within its resources and that the manager understands the responsibility to ensure it is viable. She writes two reports a year for the trustees. The approach to workload allocation and management is well organised. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and lines of accountability and communication. There are appropriate and satisfactory systems and procedures in place to plan for assessments being undertaken within required timescales. The administrative arrangements are very well managed; staff were clearly in control of the systems in place and all arrangements were efficient and geared towards enabling the core business of the agency to be carried out effectively. There are five social workers in the team, supplemented by a volunteer intermediary worker and a funded development worker. This is sufficient to undertake the range of responsibilities the agency has at any one time. Interviews with staff, managers and trustees demonstrated an organisation that cared for the professionalism and welfare of the workers. It is supportive, enabling and encouraging. There is a low turnover of staff. All team members have been in post for a considerable number of years. There is appropriate insurance in place. There is a whistle-blowing policy in place that staff are aware of. Although the agency has a good track record in respect of training, it has been more limited in recent times because of financial resources being less available. The administration of the agency is conducted efficiently by experienced workers who bring a committed and conscientious approach to their responsibilities. Overall, records are well maintained and case files are particularly well maintained, up to date and ordered. However, staff records and adoption panel members' records did not include all

required information in every case. The premises, occupied for just over two years, are comfortable as a working environment and fit for the purpose of running an adoption agency. Archives are kept at the building which was previously occupied by the agency. These can be accessed by disabled people. There has been a very recent increase in the IT infrastructure. The manager and workers say that this will increase the efficiency of the administrative systems. There is a disaster recovery plan that covers the current premises and systems and the archives at the old premises. The agency is not wealthy, but has resources sufficient to undertake its work. There are also arrangements with their bank for further resources should they be needed. The company secretary and the finance committee monitor the financial processes satisfactorily. This was commented on positively by the auditors in the annual report.

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
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Recommendations

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

- manage the adoption panel more efficiently (NMS 12)
- write the statement of purpose to include all required information (NMS 1)
- place on staff and panel members' records all required details and information (NMS 28).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for voluntary adoption agency