

Adoption NCH - London Black Families

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Sean White
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Date of last inspection	21 July 2007

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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

The NCH London Black Families project was set up in 2003 to address the need to recruit adopters to provide permanent homes for children from minority ethnic backgrounds. It has grown in size and service since that time and now approves around 25 families a year; it has also established developments in the Midlands and Yorkshire. It is managed as a branch within the NCH adoption business unit and has two deputy managers and eight social workers; these are supported by an administrative team. The branch recruits, prepares, assesses and approves families that are able to provide permanent adoptive homes for children from different ethnic backgrounds. It also provides adoption support for all approved adopters. It is located in a small business park in Stockwell.

Summary

This branch, which has only been in operation for just over three years, has developed both in size and effectiveness during this period. It is managed by an experienced, qualified and knowledgeable professional and has an effective team of workers. The agency's approach to approving adopters to meet the needs of children where heritage is a major factor is dynamic and informed by sound policies and practices.

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 three years ago there were 21 requirements and 17 recommendations made. The manager has addressed most of these and has taken seriously the need to improve and develop the service. The branch has made particular improvements in respect of the assessment and approval of adopters, and the recruitment and selection of workers.

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.

This agency has a positive and committed outlook regarding the safety and permanent well-being of children placed for adoption. Its development over the last three years has seen a significant growth in business. This has been embraced as a fundamental need to find adoptive parents from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds for children where heritage is an integral aspect of their needs. Recruitment activity is underpinned by a written Marketing Strategy. A recruitment and marketing worker is in post whose responsibilities include developing models of reaching a range of people from all sections of the community. This activity has been successful and is continuously developing; the volume of interest has been high and applications are carefully screened and prioritised to ensure that the most appropriate applicants are received in order to meet the needs of children requiring placements where heritage is a major factor. Preparation groups are run over four days and follow the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) model. They are comprehensive and ensure that applicants are fully informed about the processes of adoption, the children who require adoptive placements and the lifelong

implications of adopting children. To enable the branch to deal with the volume of applications, the groups are run every six weeks. In addition to agency workers, presentations and assistance is provided by co-opted people with experience of adoption and fostering. The branch has a commitment to thorough assessments of applicants and a rigorous approach to working through people's backgrounds and circumstances is encouraged and supported. The assessment reports (Forms F) reflect this thoroughness in most instances but there is some inconsistency in the overall quality of the reports. Some did not provide a full analysis of the circumstances as found and the adoption panel was not able to make a recommendation in one case because of missing detail. Branch workers work as closely as possible with placing social workers and their authorities to ensure that all necessary information about children is available when matches are being considered. This is being extended to ensure that agency workers read the files of children being considered for placement so that they are able to keep adopters fully informed of children's backgrounds and current situations. The adoption panel is governed by written procedures and guidelines and is suitably constituted. There is some confusion, however, regarding the formal membership titles as recorded on the minutes of the panel meetings that suggested panels may not have formed a quorum on every occasion it met. It is chaired by a suitably experienced professional who, in the main, conducted proceedings satisfactorily. All members of the panel are encouraged and enabled to participate fully and due rigour was brought to the deliberations. In one difficult and complex case, however, the panel did not handle proceedings as sensitively as it could have, and did not invite the applicants to participate in the panel. The panel is administered to an efficient standard, with all panel members and the decision maker receiving full, well presented sets of papers well in advance of the meeting. The panel minutes are well presented overall, but do indicate clearly the reasons why they have made their recommendations. The extracts of panel minutes placed on case files do not indicate who was present at the panel when the recommendation to approve was made. Decisions are made in a timely way by an experienced manager. The recruitment practices of the agency are suitably robust and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and references are carried out on all workers and managers before they take up duties. The systems for ensuring references are verified by telephone, however, are not formalised. The branch manager does the verification but there are no records on personnel files to show this. The branch is staffed by committed and enthusiastic workers and within the team there is a broad range of experience and understanding of adoption practice, law and current thinking on permanence issues for children. They were able to demonstrate knowledge and experience of adoption and its importance in planning for children who require permanent families.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The branch has a high level of commitment to the adopters it approves and offers a permanent support service that stretches beyond an adoption order being made. Information packs for both post-approval and post-adoption are provided to all adopters that detail the range of support services and opportunities that are available. There is regular contact maintained between the social workers and adopters after approval and close working with placing agencies, which enable families to be fully informed throughout the process. This also extends to assisting with introductions and placements, through to advice and support when an adoption order has been applied for. It provides support groups for approved adopters, is putting in place a group for adoptive fathers and encourages further training in specific areas, for instance, attachment issues. The medical advisor is a committed and experienced paediatrician who provides specialist medical knowledge and can be approached for advice by both social workers and adopters.

Legal advice is readily available and is always provided in writing to the adoption panel. The branch also has access to further specialist services wherever required. There are annual informal events, such as the summer picnic and Christmas party where all adults and children are invited and welcomed and informal networks of support amongst adoptive families are encouraged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency's statement of purpose is clear, well presented and includes all required information; it outlines the aims and objectives of the branch and underpins the policies and procedures that govern the operation of the service. Similarly, the information packs for prospective adopters, which are dispatched in a timely way to enquirers, are informative, well presented and outline clearly what an applicant can expect from the process of adopting a child. The manager is able to demonstrate significant knowledge and understanding of adoption matters and the complexities of providing a service where heritage and diversity are central factors. The arrangements for allocating and managing workloads are efficient and staff are supported and enabled to undertake their responsibilities and duties effectively. There have been times, however, when formal supervision has not been provided as regularly as expected. Difficulties in recruitment have led to the administration of the service being somewhat problematic in recent times, which has led to some mistakes being made, although, overall the administrative systems are generally well organised. The staff team is well experienced and all are suitably qualified; they are able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the complex issues of adoption and its importance in meeting the needs of children from a range of backgrounds. The team is working to full capacity and is supplemented from time to time by agency workers. Training has a high priority and there have been a range of development opportunities made available, including specialist areas, which staff have attended. Case records were well organised, contained all relevant and required information and are quality controlled for content and accuracy. They are kept securely, with confidentiality being a prime consideration; archive files are kept in a purpose built facility at an NCH branch elsewhere. Information about adopters is made available to other agencies as appropriate in a timely way and all adopters are lodged with the national register following approval. Records in respect of staff are kept at the human resources department at central office; they are well maintained and include all required information. The records in respect of panel members were well ordered and also contained all required information.

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):

- develop greater consistency in the writing of adopters' assessment reports (NMS 4).
- identify clearly the status of adoption panel members and indicate their attendance on the extracts of panel minutes placed on case files (NMS 11).
- provide greater stability and consistency in the administration of the branch (NMS 20).
- provide formal casework supervision on a regular basis (NMS 20).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for voluntary adoption agency