

# SSAFA Forces Help

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC049105
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 February 2009
<b>Inspector</b>	Sean White / Rosemary Chapman
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Address</b>	SSAFA 19 Queen Elizabeth Street LONDON SE1 2LP
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7463 9231
<b>Email</b>	kate.burgess@ssafa.org.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	SSAFA
<b>Registered manager</b>	Post Vacant
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Kate Burgess
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	14 February 2006

---

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

## 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 voluntary agency undertakes the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters who serve in the armed forces, and to United Kingdom (UK) based civilians serving in overseas commands. This includes both domestic and inter-country adoptions. It also provides, or makes arrangements for adoption support where a child is placed for adoption with such families. The agency will also provide advice and support to service personnel who have been adopted. Prospective adopters are recruited who may be serving either in the UK or overseas.

### **Summary**

The core work of the agency, the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, is carried out to a good standard by well qualified, skilled professionals. The strategic management and development of the agency, however, has been affected by managerial changes and other unfortunate, circumstances. This has not allowed the agency to fully manage an action plan that had been put in place to improve the service overall. These circumstances have led to oversights in certain key areas.

Nevertheless, there is commitment at all levels to service development and it is clear that, now the management and staffing arrangements are in place, the potential for continued improvement is optimistic.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There have been improvements in some areas, notably staffing arrangements, training and more detailed, thorough assessments of adopters. There have also been developments in the way the agency manages the quality of case records and arrangements for record storage and disaster management. There remain, however, matters raised following the last inspection that have yet to be addressed.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

This is an agency that, in recent times, has begun to evolve a more focused and detailed approach to adoption work that is clearly aimed at meeting the needs of those children where finding placements has been challenging.

The service is clear about the kind of families it wishes to recruit and has an open and honest approach with potential applicants. This enables them to understand the wide range of needs that children requiring adoptive placements have and how recruitment has to be carefully managed to meet those needs. This clarity of purpose has been successful and there have been very few disruptions.

The approach to the preparation and assessment of adopters is undertaken with due rigour and thoroughness. The preparation provider was changed reasonably recently and this has brought a more focused and detailed approach to the process. Assessments are detailed and analytical, are always subject to a second opinion assessment and the Prospective Adopter Reports (PAR) are well written.

The adoption panel follows the agency's thoroughness of approach and brings a detailed scrutiny and quality assurance to the overall proceedings. It is well managed operationally by the Chairperson, but it is not particularly well served administratively; also agenda management is not thorough in respect of the gate-keeping of appropriate business. Decision making, nevertheless, is usually well managed and timely, although the pro-forma used suggests actions that cannot be undertaken legally.

There are, however, some issues in respect of the adoption panel that do not fall within the expectations of current legislation and guidance. The constitution of the panel, whilst amended during the course of the inspection, was out of date and had not been recognised as such by anyone in the agency. Also, some of the procedures and literature in respect of the panel provides erroneous information.

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced and was recruited in a safe and appropriate way. Similarly the social workers are fully qualified and experienced, and demonstrate a sound knowledge of adoption issues, the current legislation and good practice. They are also recruited safely but there are some historical gaps in workers' recruitment management. Improvements to staffing issues have brought a more coherent structure to the organisation that has benefited operational and practice matters significantly.

Complaints, of which there have been few, are recorded and managed effectively and with due consideration being given to the views of service users. The policy and procedures that are in place are robust and effective.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has a range of initiatives in place that provide support for adopters; many of these are automatic and structural, and enable families to access facilities that they would find useful. Managers and workers are keen to establish a support service that can meet the needs of all the families they work with.

However, whilst the agency has this commitment to supporting adopters post approval and during placement, there are factors that militate against a full and coherent service. The wide geographical spread of families, both in the UK and overseas, impacts on the service's ability to be able to provide responsive support. The lack of a formal protocol to determine the roles and responsibilities of the agency when working with placing authorities also has a problematic impact on partnership support for families and children.

There is sound advice readily available from the medical and legal advisors and this enables the agency, and the families it works with, to have a clear understanding of the often complex issues they encounter. Other specialist advice or input can also be sourced. There are no policies and procedures, however, that govern the use of specialist advisors.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is not judged.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The functioning of the agency is defined and informed by a clear statement of purpose. There is also a very good website that details the agency's approach to adoption and makes clear what applicants can expect; it is also honest about the types of children requiring placements. This website complements, and in some respects improves upon, the information pack provided for enquirers.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All the publications and information are clear that the agency is committed to equality and diversity; this is also reflected in attitudes and practice throughout the organisation.

The strategic and operational management of the service has faced considerable challenges in recent times. Changes at senior management level and long-term sickness has taken its toll on continuity of service and strategic development. Although an improvement plan had been initiated to develop shortfalls in service provision, and had commenced in some areas, it has not been followed through as a holistic project. Managers are fully aware of this and have been frustrated at the lack of progress. There have been, nevertheless, positive developments in many areas and the service is beginning to demonstrate an optimistic and positive outlook.

The management committee oversees the service and is kept informed of the agency's work and developments through quarterly reports and a 'hands on' approach by the committee chairperson. There is a sound infrastructure in the organisation that enables workers to feel valued and protected.

Staffing arrangements, whilst adequate to meet the demands of assessing applicants, are stretched in respect of providing a comprehensive support service; again, the agency managers are aware of this and are actively analysing ways in which this can be improved upon. There have been changes to the way the service employs staff, which has had a positive impact on workload and overall quality of service. Staff training opportunities are well provided for and workers have benefited from a range of initiatives that has enabled them to increase knowledge and understanding.

The administration of the service is, in the main, efficiently managed, although the adoption panel does not have a dedicated worker; this places some strain on the arrangements for organising panel business.

Administrative and case records are well organised; there is a system in place to monitor the quality and efficiency of records and they are stored securely. Electronically stored information is backed up daily; disaster recovery systems protect all stored information. Archives, whilst stored in an environment that is secure and protected against the risk of fire, may not be fully protected against the risk of flooding. Also, archives are not copied or backed up, only the

originals are available. The personnel records for workers, however, do not contain all required information and were not managed to a satisfactory standard.

There are sufficiently robust financial systems in place, and are suitably audited. The agency has its own budget and is financially viable, with significant resources.

## 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
11	maintain an appropriately constituted adoption panel (Regulation 3 & 10 The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005)	1 April 2009
19	ensure all workers have two references that have been verified by telephone (Regulation 14 The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003)	1 April 2009
28	maintain records in respect of staff and adoption panel members that include all required information (Regulation 14 The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003).	1 April 2009

### Recommendations

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

- ensure adoption panel policies and procedures, including all associated literature, are written in line with current legislation and include all necessary information (NMS 10)
- develop a decision making protocol and pro-forma that is in line with current legislation (NMS 13)
- develop a clear strategy for working with and supporting families (NMS 6)
- develop a written protocol for the role of specialist advisors (NMS 18)
- develop the management arrangements into a clear and effective strategy (NMS 16)
- make arrangements for a more efficient service for families overseas (NMS 20).