

# Nugent Care

Inspection report for voluntary 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

This was an announced inspection of the adoption agency. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the agency's compliance with the adoption national minimum standards. All the standards were inspected under the four outcome areas of staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. In the main, the adoption service was meeting the adoption national minimum standards and regulations. The four outcome areas were all judged as good.

The agency has a recruitment strategy, which promotes equality and diversity and is clearly based on an awareness of the children requiring adoption. Its preparation, assessment and approval processes are generally of good quality. However, prospective adopters' employment references, where applicable, are not always sought.

The agency is extremely child focused and works hard to ensure children are well matched with agency adopters. Support services for adoptive families, adult adopters and birth parents are promptly provided, tailored to individual needs and are of good quality. This ensures families are able to access the necessary support to maintain stable and permanent adoptive homes.

The service has a clear understanding of the life long implications of adoption and uses this knowledge to inform its practice. There is a small letterbox system and assistance with letterbox contact is available.

Both the management and staff team have considerable knowledge and experience in adoption. The agency is generally well managed and organised effectively and efficiently. However, there is variability in quality assurance systems in relation to agency records.

Case records are well organised and in good order. However, decisions by supervisors are not always recorded on case files.

There is a sound recruitment and selection procedure, which is followed in practice.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

The last full inspection was carried out in May 2007 and resulted in one action and nine recommendations being made. These related to three of the key outcome areas. The service had made considerable efforts to address these matters and only one recommendation remained outstanding at the time of this inspection. This recommendation related to decisions by supervisors not being included in case records.

## **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's recruitment strategy reflects the importance of equality and diversity and is clearly based on an awareness of the children requiring adoption. The effectiveness of its recruitment activities has enabled children to be placed with adoptive families, who are able to meet their needs; for example, children with disabilities, older children and sibling groups.

There are clear processes and procedures in place to handle domestic and inter-country adoption enquiries and follow up any expressions of interest. These processes and procedures are compatible with the agency's equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice guidance. Adopters confirmed that the information provided had been 'very helpful' and had 'effectively' met their needs.

The agency has a thorough preparation, assessment and approval process for adopters. Preparation training is held regularly. The materials used are appropriate, effective and ensure adopters become fully aware of the complexities of parenting and adopting a child from the care system. Adopters were extremely complimentary about the preparation training, which they stated was 'well organised and presented'. A number indicated that there was 'a warm, inclusive atmosphere' in the groups, which enabled them to share issues more comfortably with each other. Several stated that the information provided was 'thought provoking' and 'helped them to understand the full implications in becoming an adoptive parent'.

Adopters' assessments are well documented and generally of good quality, in so far as they are thorough, analytical and cover such issues, as parenting capacity, life experiences and the impact of adoption and support networks well. The views of birth and adopted children regarding their parents' decision to adopt are obtained and well documented. Written references in relation to the adopters and checks with applicants' former partners are usually obtained. However, in a minority of files, employer references were not obtained. In addition, the agency undertakes all necessary enquiries in relation to any member of an adopters' household, who is aged 16 years old or over. The service also ensures adopters are able to look after children in a safe manner, through the use of comprehensive pet and health and safety risk assessments. Second opinion visits are also undertaken, which are thorough and well documented.

Adopters were very positive about their experience of the assessment process and stated that they found staff extremely professional, skilled and sensitive to their needs. All commented

on the accuracy and realism of their written assessment, which had been given to them in the required legislative timescale.

Adopters receive good written information regarding the matching, introductory and placement processes. This information is also reinforced throughout the preparation, assessment and approval process. Information is also provided regarding the National Adoption Register and the local adoption consortium. Adopters confirmed that the information provided was 'helpful' and ensured that they had a 'good understanding of the process'.

The adoption agency's practice is child focussed, as demonstrated in the care and thought given when determining whether adopters can meet a child's needs. Nevertheless, while the child is at the centre of the agency's practice, their responsibilities to adopters are also fully recognised. Consequently, staff work hard to obtain up-to-date, qualitative information about a child, which is thoroughly discussed with adopters, prior to any match being agreed. In addition, the agency can access a variety of specialist advisers, who can meet with adopters to discuss specific issues relating to a child. This enables adopters to fully consider the implications of such issues for themselves and their family.

There is a clearly written policy and procedures, which govern the adoption panel's function and operation. This documentation contains all the information required under the adoption national minimum standards and regulations. There is a well-established practice of adopters being invited to attend the adoption panel. Good preparatory work is undertaken with them prior to their attendance. Adopters stated that the chairperson and panel members welcomed them, did their best to put them at ease and the questions asked were relevant.

The panel is appropriately constituted and arranged at a frequency that avoids any delay in considering the approval of prospective adopters. It is well organised and effectively chaired. Panel members are well prepared, make appropriate observations and ask pertinent questions. Panel minutes are well structured, informative and meet the adoption national minimum standards.

The agency's decision maker ensures all information relating to a case, as well as the panel minutes, are thoroughly scrutinised before making a decision. However, notifications of the decision are not always sent out within the necessary timescales.

Staff recruitment practices are robust, which ensures children are effectively protected. The manager and staff working within the adoption service are appropriately qualified, knowledgeable, skilled and experienced in their work.

There is a clear written complaints policy and procedure, which is given to adopters. A complaints system is in place, which enables the manager to collate and monitor all complaints. This information is incorporated into the agency's annual adoption report.

The agency has a safeguarding policy and procedure in place. However, this does not fully meet the adoption national minimum standards, as it does not address allegations of historical abuse. There is a good recording system in place to enable staff to record safeguarding issues effectively. All those working in the agency are well supported to handle and manage any safeguarding matters that may arise.

## **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 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', 'they could not have been more supportive to our family, they have been fantastic'.

Adopters are made aware of the various support services available to them at an early stage in their contact with the agency. Requests for support are responded to quickly and the support provided is described as good. Adopters confirmed that they had been informed of the support package available to them and were confident such support would be provided, if required.

The adoption service has access to specialist advisers and written protocols are in place regarding their roles. The range of specialist advisers available, together with their accessibility, ensures adopters receive appropriate support.

People receive a service from the adoption service that is appropriate and tailored to their particular need. They are treated fairly, openly and with respect and sensitivity. In situations where the service is unable to provide a service, people are re-directed to another more appropriate service.

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

The provision is good.

The adoption agency has limited contact with birth families, who are currently going through the adoption process, as this is the responsibility of the placing authority. However, it does have a clear understanding of the life long implications of adoption, as demonstrated in their recognition of the importance of a child's heritage and maintenance of contact agreements. These issues are fully addressed in the adopters' preparation training.

The agency is pro-active and makes real efforts to ensure local authorities provide up-to-date and comprehensive information to adopters regarding their children. This is appreciated by adopters, who recognise such comprehensive information increases their ability to care for their children. Adopters clearly understand the importance of keeping and sharing information about the birth family and demonstrate openness in talking about adoption.

A small letterbox service is operated and maintained, which relates to past adoptions arranged by the agency. This scheme facilitates contact between birth families and their adopted children and is well organised and managed.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good and is an integral part of Nugent Care's philosophy. The service quite clearly reflects this in their practice, as demonstrated by the commitment shown in providing a service that values and supports people's differences. This is also underpinned by their policies and practice. Recruitment of adopters is prioritised to reflect the needs of children awaiting adoptive placements. The service focuses on the specific needs of children when considering matches with their adopters. Children's needs arising from their religion, culture or disabilities are carefully considered. Good support is provided for children and adopters. The service is non-discriminatory in considering the suitability of people to adopt.

There is a comprehensive, up-to-date Statement of Purpose, which contains all the information required. This document is supported by a range of policies and procedures, which accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose and is available to staff. The service has children's guides, which are in a child friendly format and exceeds the adoption national minimum 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 and provide clear, comprehensive information regarding the adoption process. All agency literature effectively addresses equality and diversity issues and clearly indicates that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice. It is also reflected in their practice, as demonstrated in the increased diversity of adopters and the fact that the service is able to provide local authorities with a greater choice of adoptive placements. This is of particular benefit to those children with additional needs, whom local authorities are finding difficulty placing in an adoptive family.

The adoption agency has a clear strategic and operational management structure, which effectively governs the activities of this service. The managerial team are all appropriately qualified, skilled, experienced and knowledgeable in adoption law and practice. The service is operating in accordance with its Statement of Purpose and in an efficient, effective manner; ensuring good outcomes are achieved for children and adopters.

There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the service's adoption activities. However, there is some variability regarding the effective operation of these, for example, file sampling and managerial scrutiny, which are not sufficiently robust.

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. Nugent Care has sound employment practices and sufficient staff with appropriate experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of the agency. Nugent Care's policies and procedures encourage staff retention, which assists the agency to provide a consistent and continuous service to children and adopters. There is a clear commitment to developing staff knowledge, skills and providing ongoing professional development. Records confirm staff receive good training opportunities and support. Staff regard the organisation as a good employer.

There is a complaints policy and procedure, which is available to all staff and service users. This documentation fully meets the adoption national minimum standards. A separate system to record complaints is kept. Records are detailed and fully comply with the standards and regulations. The complaints procedure is regularly reviewed to ensure it is operating effectively and checks are made to identify if there is any pattern to these complaints. Any complaint



received is viewed in a positive and constructive manner, with any learning gained from this, used to inform and improve agency practice.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for case recording and access to records. Case records are well organised and in good order. However, they do not consistently contain a record of supervisor's case decisions. The agency's current records are stored securely and in a manner to minimise harm from the risk of fire and flood.

There are clear, written recruitment and selection procedures. Personnel files demonstrated a rigorous approach to recruitment and selection, all files included the required information, were well ordered and securely stored. Panel members' files contained all the required information.

The premises used by this service was found to be well resourced. There is space, storage, good information technology and communication equipment. The premises are accessible, have sufficient parking and are fit for purpose. All the necessary insurance policies are in place. There is a disaster recovery plan, which fully meets the national minimum standards.

There is 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
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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):

- ensure prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process, with particular reference to employer references (NMS 4.1)
- ensure the agency's safeguarding policy and procedures address allegations made in relation to historical abuse (NMS 32)
- improve the agency's quality assurance systems (NMS 17)
- ensure decisions by supervisors are recorded on case files. (NMS 25.5)