



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SUPPORT AGENCIES

Cornerstone

**Annie House
Master Road
Thornaby
Stockton on Tees
TS17 0BE**

Lead Inspector
Maureen Moore

Announced Inspection
21st March 2007 10:00 am

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this service are those for *Adoption Support Agencies*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Cornerstone
Address	Annie House Master Road Thornaby Stockton on Tees TS17 0BE
Telephone number	01642 751144
Fax number	01642 751133
Email address	jean.hasnip@cornerstonenortheast.co.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Cornerstone
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Phyllis Jean Hasnip
Type of registration	Adoption Support Agency

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. To provide services to adults and children
2. In addition can provide birth records counselling

Date of last inspection N/A

Brief Description of the Service:

Cornerstone (North East) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It was established in 1999 as an independent fostering agency (and is registered as such) for children on a long term or permanent basis with foster carers who have a practising Christian faith background.

Because so many of its foster carers went on to adopt the children they were looking after, Cornerstone continued to offer support; therefore the adoption support service was registered with the commission as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over two days and was undertaken by one inspector. The agency had prepared very well for the inspection, and had produced all documentation as requested. Everyone at the service was extremely helpful, open and courteous throughout the duration of the visit.

The methodology for the inspection included the following:

- reading of documents provided by the service
- questionnaires received from adopters, young people and staff
- case file reading
- interviews with key managers and staff across the service
- interviews with 4 sets of adopters.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was working with five families.

What the service does well:

Cornerstone provides a continuity of service to adopters who previously fostered their children through the agency, as well as to the children and young people. The agency has known all of its service users a long time and this is reflected in the “excellent support” families confirmed they received. “They have always been there for us”; “A very supportive and caring team”; “it really is a wonderful agency – like an extended family” and “there is nothing we have encountered that they have not responded to”, were just some of the comments received.

The agency is very well managed and led. All staff are appropriately qualified and feel very valued by the agency. Staff comments included: “this is a lovely organisation to work for, and a nice atmosphere to work in”; “[the manager] is very accessible”; “[the manager] gives us fantastic support”.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first time the agency has been inspected by the commission.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to revise some of its policies and procedures to ensure that they are in line with the regulations and the NMS. For example, the safeguarding procedures do not meet the criteria, and the agency does not have a policy for assessing the needs of service users at the point of referral.

At the time of the inspection, all policies and procedures to do with the adoption support service had been added to those covering the fostering activity. It is recommended that the agency develops a discrete set of policies and procedures to aid clarity.

Cornerstone should develop a policy stating how it will ensure continued support for young people who have issues regarding their sexuality.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Statement Of Purpose

The intended outcome for Standard 1 is:

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption support agency and the agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives

1 Statement of purpose

JUDGEMENT

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. The statement provides much clear information about the service, but does not cover all of the points under schedule 1 of the regulations.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose is clearly written and sets out the philosophy, aims and objectives of Cornerstone. It has been approved by the board of trustees and is reviewed annually.

However, the service must amend it to include the procedures for assessing the needs of those requesting adoption support services, as cited under Schedule 1 of the regulations.

The document should also be revised to make clearer the agency's status in relation to adoption support services.

Cornerstone has an appropriate children's guide that is user-friendly and made available to all children and young people who use the service.

Safeguarding And Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for Standard 2 is:

The adoption support agency safeguards and promotes the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who wish to use its services.

2 Safeguarding and promoting welfare

JUDGEMENT

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. Staff within the agency demonstrated sound knowledge of child protection issues and procedures, but the written policies did not meet the regulations at the time of the inspection.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Discussion with staff across the service confirmed their knowledge of what to do if child protection issues arose within the agency, and practice was found to be very child-focused, with the child's welfare clearly of paramount importance.

However, the written policies and procedures did not meet the NMS and regulations. For example, they were not couched in the framework of the local safeguarding children board's procedures and were not sufficiently in line with the DfES 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' or 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused' documents.

Although the manager responded immediately to the issues raised, and confirmed that the procedures had been updated before the writing of this report, the inspector had not had sight of them.

User Focused Services

The intended outcome for Standard 3 is:

People affected by adoption receive a service from the adoption support agency that is appropriate and tailored to their particular need. They are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout their contact with the agency.

3 User-focused services

JUDGEMENT

Quality in this outcome area is good. Adopters and young people are treated fairly, openly and with respect by Cornerstone, which makes it more likely that help will be sought when it is needed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The provision of user-focused services is central to Cornerstone's philosophy. Discussion with staff and service users, as well as comments on questionnaires from adopters and young people, confirmed this to be the case in practice.

Because the children and families receiving adoption support services have been known to the agency for many years (as they fostered the children first via the service), access to provision is seamless as support is maintained at the same level post-adoption. Therefore, the agency provides access to all and discriminates against no one.

Several adopters spoke of the agency being akin to "an extended family" and one spoke of there being "24 hour support, if needed". Comments from young people included "they are always very helpful and listen to us when we need help" and "they don't let me down".

However, Cornerstone should consider how best they can elicit confidential feedback from children and young people about the services they use as one young person stated that they "don't know" whether the agency understands what is important to them.

Cornerstone negotiates post-adoption support packages with the relevant local authorities on behalf of their adopters, and ensures that these are reviewed as necessary. There was evidence on files as well as from adopters of the agency advocating for adopters and their children. One adopter spoke of how their social worker “had taken the pressure off us” during protracted dealings with a local authority.

The service provides activity based fun days for its young people during every school holiday and always send birthday cards and letters of acknowledgement for achievements.

Adopters expressed concern at the introduction of the Sexual Orientation Regulations and the possible negative effect this would have on the agency. Some spoke about the possibility of their children being gay in the following terms: “we wouldn’t like it, but we love them unconditionally” and “we wouldn’t condemn, but we couldn’t condone”. Although there was evidence of young people had been signposted to other (secular) agencies if they had issues around sexual orientation, it is recommended that the agency produces a clear written policy on how it will provide continued support for children and young people in such cases.

Service Delivery

The intended outcome for Standard 4 is:

The adoption support agency's service users receive a good-quality, professional service, based on their needs identified by an assessment.

4 Service delivery

JUDGEMENT

Quality in this outcome area is good. Service users receive a good quality, professional service, but the agency should develop clear assessment procedures to ensure that intervention is explicitly tailored to identified needs.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service is extremely knowledgeable about all cases currently open to the agency. Case records and discussion with staff and adopters demonstrated that the work is carried out in a professional manner. The agency only offers support services to those adoptive families who have been involved with the agency long-term, as all adopters were previously foster carers to their children.

However, this means that intervention is offered in a reactive, open-ended basis. The agency must develop a clear policy and procedural guidance for the assessment of need, so that there is a clear framework within which the work is undertaken. This is a requirement of the regulations, but it would also enable work to be more solution-focused and time limited. Additionally, it would provide a structure within which the provision could be monitored and reviewed regularly, to confirm the service is delivering the outcomes it is intended to achieve; as well as ensure that any issues can be analysed in a broader context than the presenting problems alone.

The agency provides extensive post-adoption training, which in response to requests from service users. Adopters spoke highly of this training - one said it is "amazing, especially in relation to [helping] children with behavioural problems".

Fitness To Provide Or Manage An Adoption Support Agency

The intended outcomes for Standards 5 and 6 are:

The adoption support agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable and have the appropriate skills and experience to do so effectively and efficiently to provide the services specified in the Statement of purpose

- 5 Skills to provide or manage
- 6 Suitability to carry on or manage

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is good. The manager is very experienced and has demonstrated considerable skills in ensuring professional service delivery.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The manager at Cornerstone was registered with the commission in 2006, for which she had to demonstrate suitability to oversee the provision and management of adoption support services. Interviews with the manager and staff confirmed that her knowledge, insight and commitment to providing a quality service for adopters and their families. The manager provides effective leadership and has a sound awareness of all operational issues within the service.

Management Of The Adoption Support Agency

The intended outcomes for Standards 7 and 8 are:

The adoption support agency safeguards and promotes the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who wish to use its services.

- 7 Managing effectively and efficiently
- 8 Monitoring and controlling

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is good. Cornerstone is managed effectively and in a way that promotes the welfare of service users, which means that people are more likely to seek support.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Discussions with the manager, staff and adopters confirmed that the service is managed efficiently and that lines of accountability are clear, and that communication is open across the agency. The provision of service is a clear reflection of the statement of purpose.

Cornerstone has several ways of monitoring its activities which include monthly, recorded supervision; feedback from adopters; regular monitoring visits from the responsible individual and reports to the board of trustees.

The agency has clear agreements with the local authorities on whose behalf they provide services, and charges are in line with the standard BAAF rates for post adoption support services.

Financial oversight is provided by one of the trustees who is a qualified chartered accountant, and all staff have been given copies of the agency's financial procedures.

Employment And Management Of Staff And Volunteers

The intended outcomes for Standards 9 to 14 are:

The staff and volunteers who work in the adoption support agency are suitable to work with the agency's service users and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for service users. The number of staff and volunteers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoptions support agency.

- 9 Suitability to work with service users
- 10 Organisation and management of staff
- 11 Sufficient staff with the right skills and experience
- 12 Fair and competent employer
- 13 Training
- 14 Accountability and support

(These standards 9-14 do not apply where the registered provider is an individual and does not have staff or volunteers)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is good. All staff at Cornerstone are suitable to work with service users, and are well managed, trained and supported. This helps ensure the best possible outcomes for those receiving services.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Cornerstone has clearly set out staff recruitment and selection policies and procedures, which translate into safe practice, which ensures that no one is appointed without having undergone appropriate background checks, including CRB. The agency has a comprehensive induction programme for all new staff.

All staff are appropriately qualified and demonstrated a sound knowledge of the criteria listed in 11.10 and 11.11 of the NMS.

The manager is responsible for the allocation of work, and staff confirmed that their workloads were manageable. Cornerstone provides regular supervision for all staff and appraisals are carried out annually. The play therapist receives external clinical supervision, which is funded by Cornerstone. Staff have access to regular, relevant training courses, which Cornerstone commissions externally. This ensures that practitioners are kept up to date with professional development.

There is sufficient administrative support within the agency, and staff across the service confirmed the workers to be efficient, committed and sensitive to the work involved.

Cornerstone is a fair and competent employer, for whom staff are happy to work. Staff commented that it is a "unique organisation with very high standards of care" and that "I feel valued and cared for". One worker also compared Cornerstone very favourably with a previous employer.

Staff confirmed that they are fully consulted on and involved in service development.

Individual Practitioners

The intended outcome for Standard 15 is:

The registered provider manages the agency effectively and efficiently and is suitable to work with the agency's service users. He or she is trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for service users.

15 Managing effectively and efficiently

(This standard only applies where the registered provider is an individual and does not have staff or volunteers)

JUDGEMENT

This section does not apply.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Complaints And Representations

The intended outcome for Standard 16 is:

Complaints and representations are resolved quickly and handled in a sensitive, thorough and non-biased manner.

16 Complaints and representations

JUDGEMENT

Quality in this outcome area is good. Cornerstone has a clear complaints policy, of which all service users are made aware demonstrates an open approach to dealing with any complaints.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a formal complaints procedure of which all staff and service users are aware. Workers go through the policy with all children and young people, and ascertain their level of understanding.

There are appropriate systems in place to record complaints and it is the duty of the responsible individual to monitor them. Cornerstone had not received any complaints in the twelve months prior to the inspection.

Records

The intended outcomes for Standards 17 to 21 are:

All appropriate records are securely maintained, retained and are accessible when required.

- 17 Records with respect to services
- 18 Adoption case records
- 19 Access to adoption case records
- 20 Administrative records
- 21 Personnel files for members of staff and volunteers

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is good. Cornerstone maintains appropriate records which are securely kept, thus ensuring service user confidentiality.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Cornerstone keeps appropriate records on work done with service users, from when they commence their fostering career. Advice was given and acted upon during the inspection on the development of separate files for recording work done in relation to adoption support.

There was some evidence of management oversight of files; however it is recommended that the manager sets up a simple monitoring form to be kept on the files, which indicates what if any, remedial work needs to be completed and when it has been done. All recording should be typewritten, signed and dated, with the author's full name and designation clearly printed.

The agency has a written policy and procedural guidance on case recording which must be amended to take account of regulation 14 and standard 17 of the NMS.

Staff personnel files comply with regulations.

Fitness Of Premises

The intended outcome for Standard 22 is:

The premises used by the adoption support agency are suitable for the purpose of providing the services as set out in the agency's statement of purpose.

22 Fitness of premises

JUDGEMENT

Quality in this outcome area is good. The premises are fit for purpose, and provide comfortable surroundings for both workers and service users.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency is housed in specially converted premises, which provide sufficient resources for the agency's work to be undertaken. They are protected by an appropriate security system.

Paper files are stored securely in lockable cabinets and rooms, and IT records are password secure and are backed up automatically.

The agency has adequate insurance cover from a specialist broker.

Cornerstone must develop and implement an appropriate disaster recovery plan.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcomes for Standards 23 and 24 are:

The adoption support agency is financially viable

- 23 Financial viability
- 24 Financial processes

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is good. The agency is financially viable, which enables it to provide appropriate adoption support services.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a financial viability policy and procedural guidance, of which all staff have a copy. The administrator is responsible for the day to day oversight, and the bank account is checked daily. One of the trustees, who is a qualified accountant, supervises the accounts weekly – and an external auditor checks them annually.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2

SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTING WELFARE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	2

USER FOCUSED SERVICES	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3

SERVICE DELIVERY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
4	3

FITNESS TO PROVIDE OR MANAGE AN ADOPTION SUPPORT AGENCY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
5	3
6	3

MANAGEMENT OF THE ADOPTION SUPPORT AGENCY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
8	3

EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
9	3
10	3
11	3
12	3
13	3
14	3

INDIVIDUAL PRACTITIONERS	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
15	N/A

COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
16	3

RECORDS	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
17	2
18	N/A
19	N/A
20	3
21	3

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

Continued

FITNESS OF PREMISES	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
22	3

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
23	3
24	3

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD1	5, ASA Schedule 1	The agency must revise its statement of purpose to ensure it includes all information in Schedule 1 of the regulations.	31/07/07
2	AD2	12, ASA	The agency must revise its safeguarding procedures to ensure it meets all the criteria in the regulation and NMS.	31/07/07
3	AD4	13, ASA	The agency must develop and implement a policy and procedural guidance for the framework of assessment.	31/07/07
4	AD17	14	The agency must revise its policy and procedural guidance relating to the keeping of records to ensure it complies with the regulation and NMS.	31/07/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD1	The statement of purpose should better reflect the agency's status in relation to adoption support services.

2	AD3	<p>The agency should consider how best they can elicit confidential feedback from children and young people who use the service.</p> <p>The agency should produce a policy and procedural guidance stating how it will support young people who have issues regarding their sexual orientation.</p>
3	AD20	The agency should develop and implement a system to indicate what remedial work needs to be undertaken in relation to case files.

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