

Father Hudson's Society

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Inspector	Rosemary Chapman
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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 relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The key 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

Not judged: this aspect of the provision was not judged

Service Information

Brief description of the service

Father Hudson's Society, which has been in existence since 1902, is the social care agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. It has provided a specialist service to adults affected by adoption since the early 1990s as part of a registered adoption agency.

In July 2009, Father Hudson's Society registered as an adoption support agency. It provides services for adopted adults and members of their birth family where the adoption was arranged by the society. This includes access to records held by the agency and intermediary services. It has a service level agreement with a voluntary adoption agency to support families approved by Father Hudson's Society who have adopted children placed by local authorities. This includes the provision of support groups, social events, newsletters, training and direct work with children until the age of 18 years.

Summary

The overall quality rating is Outstanding

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

This was an announced key inspection which assessed how the agency is complying with the national minimum standards and regulations associated with the provision of adoption support services. This was the first inspection following registration as an adoption support agency, and usually an overall judgement of outstanding would not be made at a first inspection. However, the agency has a long history of providing adoption support services as a voluntary adoption agency and because there is evidence of excellent practice over a lengthy period of time, the overall judgement is that the agency provides an outstanding service.

What the service does well

The agency excels in the service it provides to service users. Its main strengths are its prompt and appropriate response, attention to detail, the sensitivity and professionalism of staff and an extremely strong understanding of the impact of adoption on all those affected by it. Individuals are given a service which is tailored to their needs. For example, transport is offered to those unable to travel far, and documents are provided in large print for those with failing sight. The team leader, who is responsible for the practice, is viewed very positively by all who have received a service from her, and they talk about her hard work, kindness, professionalism and sensitivity. The written information provided to adoptees which supports the birth records counselling is of an extremely high standard to reflect the value placed on their history. All the written information, including that available to service users, is

very clear and emphasises that people are respected and will receive an appropriate service irrespective of any differences.

The agency is extremely well managed at all levels; there is good managerial oversight, all service users are asked for feedback, which is evaluated and acted upon, and the committed and well-qualified trustees provide a very regular monitoring role to ensure the quality of the service provided remains high.

What has been improved since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of Father Hudson's as a registered adoption support agency. However, the same service was previously provided under the auspices of Father Hudson's Society when it was a registered adoption agency. The last inspection of that service had no actions or recommendations which pertained to this aspect of the service.

What they could do better

There are no actions or recommendations made as a result of this inspection.

What sort of service is it?

Statement of purpose

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a very clear and up-to-date Statement of Purpose which gives good information about the services it provides and the arrangements for accessing these. This is supplemented by comprehensive information, including referral forms, on the website, to make access easier for those who wish to use the service. All information can be made available in different formats according to need. For example, some service users have failing vision and a larger print version can be made available, both on the internet and in hard copy.

The agency has two children's guides for children and young people accessing the support services. One guide is written for younger children and the other for older children. Both guides are appropriately written, colourful, attractive and child focused; the use of pictures and photographs makes them more attractive and the information more accessible. For example, there is a photograph of the Registered Manager in relation to her being one of the people to whom they can make a complaint, which makes this more meaningful and easier to do. The agency has clearly thought how it can make information as accessible as possible for anyone wishing to use its services.

The work of the agency is underpinned by comprehensive and easy to read policies and procedures which give good guidance to staff to enable them to carry out their work in accordance with the aims, objectives, philosophy and ethos of the agency.

Safeguarding and promoting welfare

The provision is outstanding.

The agency demonstrates an outstanding commitment to safeguarding service users from abuse and staff are very aware of their responsibilities and duty of care both to children and vulnerable adults. There are very clearly written policies and procedures to ensure staff are fully aware of what to do if they suspect or are made aware of any allegations of abuse, including historical abuse. These have been agreed with the local authority, both in relation to child protection and vulnerable adults. Staff have regular training to maintain their awareness, and the team leader and administrative assistant have recently completed an on-line safeguarding course. The team leader is also attending a course in relation to the use of the internet and how this impacts on tracing. Before providing a service, the team leader always completes a risk assessment to ensure the welfare of all of the parties will not be compromised in any way.

There have been no allegations but there is a system to record this, should this occur.

User focused services

The provision is outstanding.

The agency is very clear to whom it can provide a service and what those services are. It offers birth records counselling, intermediary and reunion services to people whose adoptions were arranged by Father Hudson's Society when it was a registered adoption agency, or members of their birth family, and will give appropriate advice and information to those who it cannot help. Service users have very clear information about the service, both written and verbal, including the comments, compliments and complaints information. All its work is guided by comprehensive, clear policies and procedures which promote respect for individual needs and wishes and consideration of welfare and safety. There is a prompt response to all requests for a service; currently there is no waiting list although there is a system for prioritising if this becomes necessary. The team leader is very empathetic to the needs of service users and recognises the need to respond promptly.

There is a thorough system for receiving feedback; all service users are asked to complete a feedback questionnaire following the end of the service. The team leader

evaluates all responses and there is no indication that anyone feels there is room for improvement. In fact, the comments are all extremely positive.

The agency has a written service level agreement with Adoption Focus, a voluntary adoption agency, to provide a post adoption service to the children and families who were approved and matched when Father Hudson's was a voluntary adoption agency. This is closely managed and reviewed; the Registered Manager of the adoption support agency is also the manager of Adoption Focus so she has a detailed overview of both services and is responsible for both.

Service delivery

The provision is outstanding.

Service users receive an outstanding service from this adoption support agency. The service provision is guided by clearly written policies and procedures which are implemented in practice. Robust managerial oversight ensures that the work is delivered to an extremely high standard. Referral forms for the different services (birth relatives applying for an intermediary service, adopted adults applying to access information and adopted adults asking for an intermediary service) are colour coded to ensure there is clarity about the type of service being applied for, who is making the application and to aid monitoring.

The team leader always undertakes a risk assessment before offering a service. This is to ensure that the service user is of an appropriate age, there are no safety or welfare issues and that no one else will be adversely affected by the provision of a service. Written information is provided in an extremely professional format. Service users who are receiving birth records counselling are given a very professional portfolio of information following the counselling, which includes original documents and a very sensitive explanation of the context of their adoption. Comments from service users and stakeholders have been overwhelmingly positive about the presentation of information and the sensitivity of the team leader in providing the service. The team leader is frequently described as kind, helpful, dedicated, sensitive, professional and hard working, and someone commented: 'I couldn't speak more highly of her'. Other comments include: 'The story was presented so beautifully' and 'I was impressed with the way the documentation was set out and documented'. These comments are echoed by stakeholders: 'Your family room is fantastic, as is the attention to people's needs.' Another commented: 'This is an excellent service and there is a high standard of records presentation. I was impressed by the inclusion of original letters and the speed with which this was sent to us.'

The team leader is extremely knowledgeable and understanding and pays great attention to detail, particularly when assisting with reunions, which can take place at the office, in rooms which have been specifically designed for the purpose. She ensures that arrival times are staggered, so people do not bump into each other unexpectedly, makes periodic checks to make sure everyone is coping and to offer appropriate support, and she often assists with transport, particularly for birth

parents who are likely to be older and particularly vulnerable. If service users do not want her active participation in reunions, then she gives very appropriate guidance to help them go as smoothly as possible. All this work is underpinned with great respect and sensitivity to people's needs.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption support agency

The provision is outstanding.

The adoption support agency is managed by suitable people with appropriate skills, knowledge and experience which ensures the services are provided efficiently, effectively and to a high standard. Both the registered people have a wealth of knowledge and experience in the childcare and adoption field, as well as managerial and business skills and acumen. The manager has an appropriate professional and management qualification to support and underpin her practice. The day-to-day operation of the adoption support agency is undertaken by the team leader, who is appropriately qualified and experienced. At the time of registration in July 2009, all the appropriate suitability checks, including an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and references, were in order, to promote safe and effective practice.

Management of the adoption support agency

The provision is outstanding.

The agency is managed extremely effectively to ensure all services provided are of a very high quality and service users are safeguarded at all times. There are clear written arrangements which identify duties, responsibilities and lines of accountability. The team leader carries out the day-to-day work of the agency, assisted by an administrative assistant, and both are responsible to the Registered Manager. The Registered Manager supervises the team leader on a very regular basis and there is good communication and information sharing, not only in supervision sessions but also in team leader meetings.

The trustees provide an extremely thorough and robust monitoring of the service to ensure it provides a service of good quality; they receive detailed written reports about all aspects of the service and they meet regularly to discuss the service and ensure it is operating in line with the Statement of Purpose. The Registered Manager attends these meetings to answer any questions. The trustees take their responsibilities very seriously, have a breadth of personal and professional experience to enable them to undertake their monitoring role effectively and are very committed to the work of the agency.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is a clear commitment, underpinned by written policies and carried out in practice, to respect everyone regardless of any differences and provide services tailored to individual needs. All the documentation reflects the agency's commitment to equality and diversity and the

values are stated in the Statement of Purpose: 'Father Hudson's Society aims to provide a high quality service to people regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, social conditions, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age. We believe in the values and protection of all human life, the dignity of each person and have respect for their rights, view and values.' The implementation of these values in practice is confirmed by service user feedback and how staff demonstrate their commitment to meeting people's needs in a practical way to ensure the service is accessible and meaningful.

Employment and management of staff and volunteers

The provision is outstanding.

There are extremely rigorous staff recruitment and selection procedures which are implemented in practice to ensure that only suitable staff are appointed and service users are safeguarded. All staff have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and a robust system ensures these are renewed every three years.

The adoption support agency is small; it comprises a Registered Manager, a team leader and an administrative assistant. It is well managed and well organised which ensures the service is delivered efficiently and effectively. All staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are supported to deliver an excellent standard of work. Administrative arrangements are very good; there are effective contingency arrangements in place so that the service can continue in the absence of the administrative assistant. For example, all the working procedures are detailed in a folder so anyone can access this and know exactly how the service should be provided. Administrative staff are made aware of any sensitive issues, such as the names of people who may be ringing the agency in response to a letter, so that they can be responded to promptly and sensitively.

Service users are responded to very promptly and there is no delay because the agency has sufficient staff who have the right skills and experience. The Registered Manager, who is very well qualified, knowledgeable and experienced, monitors the work of the agency. The team leader, who is also very experienced, knowledgeable, skilled and appropriately qualified, undertakes the work on a day-to-day basis. She demonstrates an outstanding commitment to the work, as well as an exceptional knowledge and understanding of the needs of the respective service users. This is reflected in the extremely positive comments made by service users about her professionalism, kindness, sensitivity and hard work. She has good links with other people in the same area of work and keeps up to date through attending appropriate network meetings and training.

Father Hudson's Society is a good employer and has appropriate employment policies and procedures to support staff, which are all easily accessible on the intranet and in hard copy. Staff feel supported by the organisation and the trustees' commitment to the adoption service.

Staff have access to good training opportunities to ensure they keep up to date with practice developments and legal issues. The team leader has well-established links with other organisations which undertake this work so she can access peer support and consultation, which is extremely valuable in this very specialist area. Staff are supported by regular and relevant supervision and annual appraisals which identify training needs. All staff attend appropriate meetings, such as the administrative meeting and team leader meeting to ensure they feel part of the organisation and are supported in their role.

Individual practitioners

The provision was not judged.

Complaints and representations

The provision is good.

The agency has an appropriate complaints policy and procedure. Adult service users are given a copy of the procedure at the start of their contact with the service and it is also available on the website. The procedure is made more accessible to children and young people by the addition of a photograph of the person to whom complaints should initially be addressed, and is clearly detailed in the children's guides. Although there have been no complaints, appropriate recording procedures are in place should this occur. Service users are regularly asked for feedback, and it is very clear that the agency would take action to rectify any issues raised.

Records

The provision is good.

The adoption support agency has robust arrangements in place to ensure that records are maintained, retained and accessible. Each service user has a case record which includes comprehensive information about contact with the agency and the actions taken. Record keeping is guided by policies and procedures which cover recording, confidentiality and storage. Staff demonstrate a good understanding and compliance with this. Decisions made in supervision are clearly recorded on the case records to provide evidence of managerial oversight.

As a former voluntary adoption agency, Father Hudson's Society hold the adoption case records for adoptees placed by the society over a considerable number of years. Access and storage to these precious records are governed by appropriate policy and procedural arrangements. There is very robust storage to prevent damage from fire

and water and to protect their integrity. Access to these records is governed by clear procedural instructions which take into account the appropriate regulations, to ensure only people authorised to see them have access.

Other records are maintained and stored appropriately; these include a separate record of allegations and complaints, of which there have been none to date. All records are subject to regular file audit to monitor the quality.

Each member of staff has a personnel file which is maintained by the organisation. These contain all the information required by regulations and provide evidence that recruitment and selection procedures are robust.

Fitness of premises

The provision is outstanding.

The premises are eminently suitable for the services the agency provides. They are conveniently located, accessible and identifiable to facilitate access by service users wishing to visit the office. The office is close to public transport facilities including a railway station and bus route, but also has a large car park. The building is fitted with a loop system and is also wheelchair accessible to meet the needs of those who require these facilities. The building and contents have appropriate security systems, adequate insurance and a disaster recovery plan; this addresses the provision of premises and back-up and safeguarding of records so that the business can continue to operate in an emergency and thus provide continuity of service to its users. The premises provide a pleasant environment for visitors, which is particularly important, given the sensitive nature of the work and the likely emotions that service users will be experiencing when contacting the service. A suite of rooms is available for reunions; this area is very pleasantly decorated and comfortably furnished to provide a relaxed environment. A toilet and kitchen area are available within this suite; this is self-contained to allow privacy.

Financial requirements

The provision is good.

The adoption support agency is financially viable to ensure that service users receive a good service without fear of disruption. Its work is underpinned by clear and thorough financial procedures and regular scrutiny by the trustees of the agency. Accounts, which are subject to annual independent audit, are clearly presented and scrutinised on a bi-monthly basis, thus enabling any potential difficulties to be identified at an early stage and plans made to manage these in a structured way. The adoption support agency is part of a larger organisation which is committed to supporting this work. Currently the agency does not charge for any of its services, although is happy to accept donations to assist with its funding.

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered provider(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.