

# Coram Adoption East Midlands

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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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

Coram Adoption East Midlands developed from an established adoption project run by the Children's Society. As part of Coram's adoption service the East Midlands branch recruits, prepares, assesses and supports domestic adopters. As well as local support they have access to a range of specialist services through Coram.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This agency provides an outstanding service to children and their families. Children's safety and well-being are at the heart of all the agency does. Adopters are extremely well prepared for the task of adoptive parenting through a very thorough programme of preparation and assessment. The agency is rigorous in this process to ensure children are kept safe. Significant attention is given to matching to ensure children are placed with adopters who can meet all their needs and help them develop, enjoy and achieve.

The agency has a new manager who is well qualified and committed to her role. All staff are equally as committed, very skilled, knowledgeable and the child is at the centre of their practice. There are excellent systems to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation, and these contribute to the outstanding level of service which children, adult service users and adopters receive. The agency is innovative and continually looking at ways to develop and improve their services. To quote a stakeholder; 'It has been a pleasure working with this agency and I would be more than happy to recommend other colleagues.' An adopter commented; 'The agency provides a brilliant service, and provides life long support and most of its prospective adopters refer themselves from recommends from other adopters.'

No requirements or recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection.

### Improvements since the last inspection

Nine recommendations to improve practice were made at the previous inspection. Most were in relation to improvement of policies and procedures and ensuring records are stored safely as well as backing up electronic systems. The children's guide needed updating and personnel files for all panel members needed to be put in place. These have all been met.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The work of the adoption service helps keep children safe and well cared for. A significant part of this is achieved through the adopter preparation group, with sessions on managing behaviour, caring for abused children and child development. Assessments of adopters assure their suitability and ability to care for children, and placements are well matched and extremely well supported. Adopters and children receive support and advice in safety matters. For example, training and support are provided in online safety, safe care and issues around contact. Additionally, a great deal of work is done with regard to parenting children with emotional difficulties and behaviours that challenge.

The agency ensures that children's health is promoted and they are able to access all the appropriate services. The agency obtains full health information for any child placed with adoptive families, and ensures adopters, together with their social worker, have a full understanding of any health implications. As part of their assessment, adopters are encouraged to understand issues about healthy living. The agency has access to a clinical psychiatrist for consultation, in addition to their own medical adviser, who is also available to talk to adopters about the implications of any medical issues. This also ensures adopters are given appropriate advice about how to access relevant services.

Matching of children with adopters is robust and timely. Children are very well matched with adopters who can meet their needs, and benefit from very stable placements. The agency has an extremely robust and thorough approach to ensuring the adopters have full information about any child they are considering. Social workers are proactive in seeking out missing information and spend a lot of time talking with families to assess what needs and challenges they can realistically manage. Adopters are fully supported by their social worker, who in turn are supported by their manager, in ensuring the match is appropriate. To quote an adopter; 'Coram are a very impressive organisation whom we would recommend to anyone considering adoption.'

Children are provided with a family book to help them know more about the proposed family once a match is proposed. To make this more effective, the agency has also used a DVD of a walk around the proposed adoptive home, showing all the rooms and this has helped to bring it alive for the child.

Any allegations are dealt with appropriately, so children are protected and others are supported. Coram has a designated officer who is responsible for monitoring all

safeguarding matters and ensures appropriate action is taken to protect children. The policy and procedures are thorough and clear to give excellent guidance to staff on how to handle any allegations. Staff and volunteers have appropriate training on an annual basis to ensure they are up to date with current procedures. There is also the addition of the Head of Service providing extra safeguarding training to members of the panel. Adopters are given very clear information about the agency's expectations of managing behaviour, as well as appropriate advice and guidance. This promotes transparency and clarity about expectations and everyone's responsibilities.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Coram provides adopted children with excellent support to help them enjoy and achieve. The service provides intensive, focused work to help children develop positive relationships with their adopters throughout the matching and transition process. This work continues after the child is placed. For example, preparation work with children includes: life story work and a variety of therapeutic interventions. Introductions and transitions to adoptive families are managed in a structured way that helps develop attachments and reduce trauma. Information about children is good and adopters are supported to maintain any routines or activities that are important to children as well as to offer them positive new experiences.

A wide range of support services are available to children and their adoptive families on an ongoing basis. These are either provided directly by the workers from the adoption service or are commissioned by the service where necessary. For example, play therapy, music therapy, attachment work and group work with the children and young people. The service has access to a consultant psychiatrist and music therapist for support, and additional work such as psychotherapy is accessed if needed. Excellent support and training is provided to adopters to help them manage children's behaviour in a positive and safe manner. Training in therapeutic parenting and attachment is provided to adopters. Ongoing support is provided to adopters and children to help build positive relationships that help children to manage their own behaviour.

As part of the preparation, adopters are encouraged to look at the practicalities of parenting, for example, sourcing local leisure facilities and thinking about the sorts of activities children may be interested in. It is very clear from talking to adoptive families, that their children are engaged in all the sorts of usual activities which children enjoy, such as swimming, music and sports. There are a variety of children's groups, which runs several times a year providing excellent opportunities for adopted children to meet together with children in similar situations and engage in a wide variety of leisure activities and trips. To quote a young person; 'There is drama and music workshops and creative workshops that help children to express their emotions. I love the Saturday groups and how they concentrate on us.' Adopters spoken to could not praise the agency enough for the innovative thinking behind these workshops. One adopter stated; 'I consider Coram to be innovative and

imaginative and they have an expertise in adoption, which provides for the needs of children in secure, lifelong families.'

Children live in homes which are safe. This forms part of the adopter assessment and includes a very comprehensive health and safety assessment and lots of written guidance on how to maintain safety in all aspects of family life.

Adopters are given a very comprehensive pack of information which includes issues such as welfare rights and benefits. It is also an opportunity for adopters to give feedback to the agency on how they have viewed the service they have received. Comments from adopters include; 'Coram have provided constant support and encouragement through the difficult times.' As well as direct work with families, social events, workshops and several children's group, the agency has a variety of camps for different age groups and feedback has been exceptional positive from the young people. This is particularly innovative and gives children further opportunities to be with their peers.

The agency works effectively with education services to ensure that adopted children receive the education they need. There is good joint working at a strategic level and this translates in practice to excellent support for children. For example, adopted children receive excellent support to get into the most appropriate schools, and the adoption team works with the education service and schools to help them understand and work with children who have been adopted. There is a training pack and DVD for schools, 'The Adoptables' which has been produced by the young people to ensure staff within schools understand the adopted children's issues. This has been exceptionally well received.

Adopters are kept informed about what is going on through regular newsletters, which maintain their link with the agency. Some adopters are used to befriend other adopters to provide peer support, which again has proved an effective initiative. A few of the social workers have worked for Coram for some time and adopters have said, 'the consistency is so important'. Those adopters who completed surveys and those visited had nothing but praise for the agency stating: they had had a 'fantastic experience with Coram'; 'I cannot put into words how much they have supported me' and 'Coram was vital to the success of the placement.'

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

The provision is good.

Coram continually consults with children and listens to their views. It provides events and activities for adopted children and their families at which their views can be sought. Information provided to children about adoption is good and really child friendly. These packs have been developed and designed by the children themselves with the support from staff. They provide a lot of information that will be of use to children as they grow up, including how to express concerns and consult advocacy services.

The agency is very child focused in all it does; it seeks and acts upon children's views wherever this is possible and appropriate. For example, during an assessment of a potential adoptive family, social workers are very clear that any birth or adopted child of the family must be fully involved; they ensure they speak privately to them and assess the impact of a further child in the family, so it is not detrimental to their well-being. Once children are in placement, social workers elicit their views during visits to the household and ensure they are able to contribute to the statutory review. Adopted children's views are sought and acted upon following activities and groups. They are asked to complete child-friendly feedback forms in a variety of formats and the agency evaluates and acts on the suggestions. For example, it widened the range of activities for the children's group.

Adopters are extremely well prepared to understand and parent adoptive children. Throughout the process, adopters are helped to think about the importance of understanding the birth parents situation in a sympathetic and non judgemental way. They are helped to understand the importance of maintaining a child's heritage, contact, and the effects of loss. They are given strategies to use to be proactive parents, communicate with children and develop a child's emotional resilience and self-esteem. An appropriately qualified worker in the agency undertakes direct therapeutic work with children and staff can also access consultation with a clinical psychiatrist as a further tool to guide and inform their practice. Contact arrangements, including direct contact, are supported.

A strength of the agency is the proactive approach it takes in ensuring children have information about themselves and their birth family. Social workers go that extra mile to ensure as much information as is possible is available and will meet with birth parents to talk through the reasons for this.

There is a clear and robust process for chasing up later life letters and life story work if local authorities have been slow to pass this on. Social workers will also undertake this on behalf of local authorities and have produced excellent examples of such work. The team also facilitate letterbox contact and will support and assist adopters to write their letters to the birth family.

The work the agency undertakes with adopted adults is outstanding. There are regular groups and camps organised by the young people with the support of the research and development officer and volunteers. These adopted adults are also a support network for the younger children. A great deal of work is being carried out to help children understand any difficulties they may have and to provide them with a forum of like minded children and adults. This has proved most successful and feedback has been really positive.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.



## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency's aims and objectives are outlined in an up-to-date Statement of Purpose, which gives clear information for anyone wishing to know about the services the agency provides. Children are given appropriate information in a very child-friendly children's guide. This guide can be made available in other formats and languages if needed. The work of the agency is underpinned by relevant policies and procedures, which are readily accessible to staff to inform and guide their practice.

The adoption agency has a very clear aim to provide secure and sustainable adoptive placements for looked after children, and it demonstrates that it achieves this aim very effectively and to a very high standard. It has a very focused recruitment strategy, regularly monitored and reviewed, which recognises the value of diversity; to this end it has been proactive in targeting a variety of groups and networks to raise awareness and ensure the message that anyone is welcome to approach the agency is heard. The integrated preparation and assessment of applicants is a very rigorous process, underpinned by robust quality assurance mechanisms. This ensures that only those applicants who can demonstrate competence, sensitivity and skills to parent adoptive children are presented to the adoption panel for consideration of their approval.

The adoption panel adds further rigour to the process. It is efficiently administered, and information is sent to panel members well in advance of the meeting to enable them to give it their full consideration. Panel members have a wide range of personal and professional experience of adoption and the agency are actively recruiting new members for their central list to ensure a mix of cultural backgrounds. They also provide a very important monitoring role, giving feedback to the agency on a regular basis to enable practice to be improved. Decision making is timely, professional and well considered, with the interests of children at its heart. The adoption service's decision-making process is equally rigorous and takes place in a timely manner. Clear recommendations are made to the agency decision maker who makes prompt decisions, taking the views of panel into consideration.

The staff are well organised and supported to provide an effective service. There are clear roles and responsibilities to ensure accountability, and good communication at all levels. The manager is very experienced, appropriately qualified and very committed to supporting both the staff and the adoptive families. Staff are similarly well qualified, experienced, knowledgeable and committed, and demonstrate very child-focused, professional practice. They receive regular supervision and feel very well supported by their manager. The level of training is good and staff are able to access external courses for their ongoing professional development.

The arrangements for administration are very good, and the administrative staff are described as 'fantastic' in the level of support they give. There is a new back up system for electronic files and records and this takes place daily. The agency is financially viable to ensure it can continue to provide a consistent service to the

families and children. There is a clear business plan which demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to the future operation of the agency.

The premises are accessible, secure and appropriate for the work the agency undertakes. Administrative systems are robust and records are stored with appropriate security. A business continuity plan addresses the relevant issues so that the agency can continue to offer a service in the event of a disaster. Although there have been no notifications to Ofsted, the agency is fully aware of its responsibilities to notify Ofsted and other agencies of certain significant events.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. These issues are promoted throughout the agency on many levels. The premises are accessible, and images on the walls are diverse and child focused, as is the literature. The agency is proactive in targeting diverse groups to raise awareness of adoption, for example, minority ethnic and gay and lesbian communities. All staff demonstrate a great sensitivity to, and awareness of, the importance of difference, for example in how they manage the preparation and assessment of applicants who have a disability or whose first language is not English. Children's needs are assessed and met on an individual basis.