

# London Borough of Enfield Adoption Service

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC055062
<b>Inspection date</b>	26/01/2012
<b>Inspector</b>	Stephen Smith / Lynn O'Driscoll
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Caretower Ltd, Triangle House, 305-313 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, LONDON, N13 4YB
<b>Telephone number</b>	02083798490
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	London Borough of Enfield
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Debbie Michael
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	23/10/2008

---

© Crown copyright 2012

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 Crispins, 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 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

The agency undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption work with children and those affected by adoption. This includes the recruitment, preparation assessment and approval of domestic adopters and the family finding and the matching and placement of children. It also includes support to placements both pre and post adoption order; post adoption support to adult adoptees, including intermediary work; post adoption support to relatives of adoptees and support to birth parents whose children will be or have been placed for adoption. The agency also manages direct contact arrangements and a letterbox contact system. The agency refers adopters who wish to adopt a child from overseas to a voluntary adoption agency specialising in this work. The agency also has a contract with two adoption support agencies to provide independent support to adoptive families and birth parents of children for whom the plan is adoption.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is a strong agency. It works effectively to provide individually focussed work that provides good outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption that are outstanding in some respects.

The agency recruits, prepares and assesses adopters who are well suited to the needs of the children who need adoptive families. It works to recruit the sorts of adopters it needs for the children who need families. Matches are made carefully and the service works well to reduce delay for children despite some children's significant needs. Children receive good support to help them prepare for and settle into their new families. The agency works well with these families providing good emotional and practical support. Children receive any specialist therapeutic input they need.

Support needs are well assessed and understood. Support is provided by a range of staff who work effectively together with the aim of supporting placements and improving outcomes. Consequently, when combined with the agency's careful preparation of adopters and good matching, children experience well managed transitions into adoptive placements that they are well prepared for. This promotes the agency's excellent levels of placement stability.

The adoption agency works well to support birth families and to seek their views about their children's adoption and takes these into account where possible.

Work to help children understand and come to terms with their background and heritage is outstanding. Life story work is given a high priority and, where necessary, the agency repeats this work later with children as they grow older. Clear

information, guidance and support is provided to all people working with children who are, or who are being, adopted to ensure the work is of a high standard. Contact with birth families is very well promoted and facilitated where this is desirable and the agency works proactively to plan for this contact and ensure children's safety and well-being. Support for adults looking to trace and be reunited with families from whom they were separated by adoption is also outstanding. Highly skilled and creative work and excellent levels of support ensures that this is a positive experience.

This well managed agency delivers a good adoption service and effectively monitors its work and service provision. The children's guides lack some information for children about who they could contact about the agency if they needed to raise a concern. Additionally, recruitment records do not demonstrate well enough that the authority consistently follows good recruitment practices. Decision making in the authority is effective and robust and the service is well managed and controlled.

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

At the last inspection seven recommendations were made. It was recommended that improvements were made to the agency's safeguarding procedures; that the assessment of risks in adopters' home were more effective; that the agency decision maker read all reports provided to panel as part of the decision making process and that the recruitment of panel members was more robust. The agency has addressed all these matters. It was also recommended that support for birth parents to access independent counselling was improved and that work done to help children understand their life story was more effective. The agency has also addressed these matters and, consequently, it now provides an improved service which enhances outcomes for children and others affected by adoption. It was also recommended at the last inspection that additional information was added to the children's guide. The agency took action to address this but, due to an error, did not add one piece of key information. However, the guide provides young people with a list of places and people for them to contact should they have concerns about the service or their care.

### **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 work of the agency helps keep children safe and well cared for. Assessments of adopters assure their suitability and ability to care for children. Placements are well matched and very well supported. Adopters and children receive support and advice in safety matters. For example, training and support is provided in online safety with a very proactive approach being taken to encourage awareness of safe social

networking. The safety of children and their families is given priority in terms of service provision. For example, house moves are supported where necessary in situations in which contact may present a risk.

Children's health is well supported. Information about children's health is good and guidance and advice provided by the authority's medical advisers is effective and timely. Children have access to the universal and specialist health support they need and a wide range of therapeutic support is provided if necessary. The agency ensures that adopters' homes are safe and healthy places for children to live in.

Matching of children with adopters is rigorous and timely. Positively, senior managers in the authority meet regularly with the judiciary to address any problems including issues around some court related delays. The adoption team have carried out training in adoption matters for judges with further training planned. Despite some court delay, effective working arrangements mean that most children are placed within twelve months of the decision that they should be adopted. Early planning for children is good with staff from the adoption team working early with children's social workers to support planning and begin to consider the sort of adopters suitable for the child. Transition plans to introduce children to their new families are well considered and children and adopters are well prepared and supported throughout this process. Placement stability is very good which demonstrates the effectiveness of the good planning, matching and support arrangements in place.

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

The provision is good.

The adoption agency provides adopted children and their families with excellent support to help them enjoy and achieve. The service provides individualised 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 therapy including play therapy. Adopters are supported to maintain any routines or activities that are important to children as well as to offer them positive new experiences.

The agency works with a multi-disciplinary team comprising, health, education and psychological service to provide a wide range of support services to children and their adoptive families on an ongoing basis. The support needs of children and their families is individually assessed and is clearly focussed on providing positive outcomes for each individual child and family. For example, support is provided to birth children of adopters to help maintain the placement.

The agency provides very good quality training in conjunction with the local consortium to help adopters manage behaviour and promote positive attachments or their children. A range of support groups for adopters, adopted children and adopted adolescents are also provided through the consortium with the authority playing a lead role in some of these areas.

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. The agency provides training for teachers and school staff to help them understand the needs that adopted children may have. This produces improved outcomes for children.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The authority consults with children and listens to their views. It runs groups for adopted children in conjunction with the consortium. These help the agency understand children's views of adoption as well as providing them with support. The authority also offers staff training in 'total respect' which is provided with input from young people. Children's views are well reflected on their child permanence reports. Where children are too young to express their views verbally, reports describe children and their behaviour in order to allow their preferences to be inferred. Children receive good information about their backgrounds and birth families. Child permanence reports are well written and contain appropriate information in an accessible form for children to access later in life. Efforts to gain information for children from their birth families are good.

Children are provided with excellent support to help them develop the emotional resilience to understand their background and the reasons why they were adopted. Work to help children understand and accept their heritage and birth families is thorough and creative. Arrangements to help prepare children for adoption are identified in the early stages of permanency planning and multi-disciplinary work takes place with children to help prepare them for adoption. Life story work is undertaken in a timely manner with workers from the adoption team supporting children's social workers to undertake this work. Where necessary, the agency continues to work with children long after they are placed to complete additional life story work to help children develop positive attachments. This work has had considerable success in supporting and maintaining placements. The adoption team are proactive in undertaking this work and also provide training and support materials for children's social workers. For example, it has produced a guide for social workers about life story work and another for adoptive parents entitled 'Telling Difficult Stories' as well as templates on which to base therapeutic life story work. This work means that children's need to understand their past and develop firm attachments to their adoptive parents is very well understood and promoted by staff throughout the service leading to excellent outcomes for children.

In line with this commitment to enable children to retain an understanding of their heritage the support for contact is very good. The agency supports and facilitates indirect contact effectively through its letterbox and is creative at supporting and encouraging direct contact between children and their birth families where this is

appropriate. Prospective and approved adopters and children are well prepared regarding safe contact. For example, the agency has done a great deal of work regarding social networking and how to manage this safely, including the development of its own on-line presence. This proactive approach has enabled more children to have planned direct contact than would have been the case otherwise. Strong support for contact between siblings separated by adoption is provided with creative work being done when adoption plans are being considered.

The adoption service provides outstanding support for people requesting post adoption support. Work is undertaken in line with effective assessment and is regularly reviewed. The service is able to respond promptly to requests for birth records and provides highly focussed, relevant and supportive counselling and tracing services. Users of these services are provided with excellent support and advice as well as practical help that exceed their expectations. Work is sensitive and considers the needs of all parties in an exceptionally sensitive manner.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The adoption service places an individual value on all people it deals with who are affected by adoption. It works hard to recruit a range of adopters to meet the diverse needs of children needing families. It works with other adoption agencies to find appropriate families for children it is unable to match internally. Assessments consider applicants' ability to care for children in a non-discriminatory manner and to promote equality and diversity. Matches are made carefully taking into account detailed information about the backgrounds of both parties. Outstanding individualised support is provided to adopted children to help them attach to their families. This support helps ensure that adoption meets children's needs and increases their opportunities and life chances.

The adoption agency has a clear statement of purpose which accurately describes the service and its operation. This is underpinned by appropriate policies and procedures which guide practice. It has two children's guides to adoption, one suited to older and one to younger children. These are very good guides that help children understand the adoption process. The service has amended these guides in response to a recommendation made at the last inspection. However, information about the Children's Commissioner was added in error rather than how children can contact the Children's Rights Director and consequently children do not have access to all the information they should.

The recruitment of prospective adopters is based on a good understanding of the



needs of children who need adoptive families. The agency works with the local consortium to target its recruitment activity towards specific groups in the community in order to reflect the needs of children. Assessments of prospective adopters are rigorous and careful. Thorough checks are carried out to ensure applicants' suitability and the preparation and assessment process ensures that approved adopters are well prepared to care for children.

The adoption service's decision making process is timely and equally rigorous. The agency's adoption panel is well chaired and benefits from a committed membership with a broad experience of adoption. Clear recommendations are made to the agency decision maker along with the reasons for these. This allows prompt, well considered decisions taking the views of panel into consideration as well as all the case paperwork. The decision making process includes a process for feeding back to the service on the quality of information produced and presented to panel.

The adoption service is well managed both strategically and operationally. Adoption workers receive very good training in the specialist areas that they need and much of this training is extended to adopters. The adoption team is well supported and managed and has a clear focus on meeting children's needs through adoption. The agency understands its strengths and the challenges it faces. It benefits from a strong commitment from the council and works very effectively with other agencies to provide good adoption services.

Recruitment arrangements for staff and members of panel are generally sound. Panel members' files are in good order and demonstrate an appropriate recruitment process. However, recording in staff members' recruitment files does not always demonstrate that all the required checks are carried out. For example, files do not contain up-to-date photographs although the authority does possess these. Similarly, files do not record clearly the action taken to explore any gaps in applicants' employment histories or to verbally verify written references. This means that records do not demonstrate the suitability of staff members as well as they should.

Records held by the service in relation to adopted children and adults are good and records of key decisions are clearly retained on files. The agency works proactively to ensure that its electronic recording system is effective and appropriate for its use. Records are securely maintained to protect their confidentiality and appropriate administrative systems are in place. As a consequence records underpin, support and record the work of the adoption agency effectively.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

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

- ensure that the children's guide to adoption and adoption support contain information about how a child can contact the Children's Rights Director (NMS

18.6) (breach of Regulation 3.1 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003)

- ensure that the agency can demonstrate, including from written records that it consistently follows good recruitment practice. Specifically, that files contain evidence that the required checks on applicants are undertaken. (NMS 21.2)