

# Adoption Focus

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Carole Moore
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<b>Provision subtype</b>	Domestic and inter-country adoption

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<b>Setting address</b>	St Gerard's Offices, Father Hudson's Campus, Coventry Road, Coleshill, Birmingham, B46 3ED
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<b>Responsible individual</b>	Kevin Patrick Caffrey
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	01/12/2010

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Adoption Focus is a registered adoption agency which previously operated as Families Through Adoption, part of Father Hudson's Society, a Roman Catholic organisation. It became registered on 12 May 2009 under its new name, but is essentially the same agency, with the same manager, although no longer affiliated to either Father Hudson's Society or the Roman Catholic Church.

It provides a comprehensive range of services both pre and post adoption to families and children. These include the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive parents; post approval and post placement support; and post adoption support services to children and families.

The main office is in Coleshill, but the agency has two other office bases, one of which is in Newcastle under Lyme in Staffordshire and the other in Witney in Oxfordshire.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

This is an extremely good agency with a passionate approach to adoption. The agency continues to provide outstanding outcomes for children. Adoption Focus has a total commitment to treating people fairly, openly and with respect throughout the process. Adopters confirmed they felt well supported throughout the adoption journey.

The agency is highly effective in recruiting adoptive parents from a wide cross section of society. Prospective adopters confirm the extremely welcoming approach they receive from Adoption Focus, from their initial enquiries right through to the agency's decisions and beyond. The agency has a proven track record of successfully placing children with more complex needs as well as sibling groups.

The assessment of prospective adopters is robust and they are exceptionally well

prepared, supported and trained. The agency is open to considering any enquirer, regardless of their ethnicity, sexuality or marital status. This has resulted in an increase in the number of applicants. This means that the agency has a very diverse range of adopters who are well able to meet the needs of children needing adoptive families. The service has provided placements for 29 children in the year 2011-2012, of which 10 were sibling groups. This has necessitated an increase in staff to carry out these assessments.

Children are well settled in safe and secure adoptive families where they make excellent progress in all aspects of their development. A proactive approach to safeguarding, combined with a good understanding and formalised approach to assessing risks, keeps children safe.

Managers demonstrate a significant commitment to adoption, as well as outstanding leadership. They are a well-respected and imaginative group which engages nationally with the latest developments in adoption and this feeds into the agency's development plan. Trustees are highly experienced and provide excellent oversight. All staff are passionate and committed to ensuring excellent outcomes for children and families. The agency routinely seeks the views of people using its service at a variety of stages throughout the process and these views feed into the development of services. However, although children's views are sought, they are not formally taken into account in monitoring and developing the service. Continuing and building on this aspect is an important part of the agency's development plan. Feedback from other professionals working with the agency spoke highly of the staff's practice and commitment.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that a formal system is developed that clearly shows that children's wishes, feeling and views have been taken into account by the agency in monitoring and developing its service. (NMS 1.6)

### Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Children are encouraged and are exceptionally well supported to make progress in all aspects of their development. Their needs, including those relating to ability, ethnicity and identity are extremely well met. Children have a variety of skilled support to enable them to settle into their new adoptive families. For example, one social worker commented on the 'excellent progress' one child had made; another said that 'the progress of siblings has been tremendous.'

Children feel safe and are safe living within their families. They are well supported to develop extremely well, despite their past experiences. Children are enabled to develop positive relationships with those around them and they form secure attachments to their adopters. Feedback from young people indicated the positive experiences they have had and the development of their confidence. Children also develop very positive relationships with children already living in the family. The agency supports this through the skilled preparation of these children. An adopter said, 'our birth daughter has been fully involved from the start and she has felt very much part of the journey.'

Children's behaviour improves because adoptive parents manage this well, with tremendous support and guidance from the agency. Parents adapt their parenting styles to meet the needs of their child. One adopter said, 'the training was a real eye opener, it made me appreciate why children behave in certain ways and how to manage that effectively.'

Children and young people are well supported to achieve in their education, in line with their potential. A great deal of support is put into schools in order for them to understand the needs of the adoptive child and how to manage the behaviour. This in turn allows the child to engage fully and to enjoy the school experience and therefore to enjoy learning.

For some children, their health has improved significantly since being placed with their adoptive families, because they are supported to access relevant services to support and sustain improvement. Routine registration and appointments with health providers, such as general practitioners and dentists, ensures that any health problems are identified and addressed promptly.

Children develop a positive self-view and a rich understanding of their identity. Children are supported in contact arrangements, both direct and indirect, which meet their needs and which enhance their knowledge and understanding of their history. Siblings are placed together to enhance their sense of belonging. Children also develop a good understanding of their cultural identity and are enabled to feel safe, secure, valued and to achieve a sense of belonging. Children have a positive view of their adoptive status as they make friends with other adopted children at the social events and groups which the agency provides. All the children are extremely positive about these events and really enjoy the activities as well as making new friends.

### **Quality of service**

The quality of the service is **outstanding**.

The agency is very inclusive and encourages enquiries from anyone who may be suitable to care for an adoptive child. Adopters commented that they were made to feel very welcome when they first approached the agency, and this was instrumental in them making their application. One adopter said, 'it was a very personal service, we were treated respectfully and as individuals'. There is a very timely response to any interest shown, including information of a very high quality being sent out

promptly, followed by an initial interview with two workers.

As a voluntary adoption agency, this service does not have direct responsibility for the children placed. However, the agency has a significant input into ensuring that children's assessed needs are met. Work supporting children with the development of their social, physical and psychological development is of a very high standard. The agency has a very good history of low disruption rates and this is a good indication that quality of the support services provided is excellent. It also is an indication that prospective adopters' preparation and assessments are of a consistently high standard. This means they are well placed to parent children with very complex needs.

Several placing authorities commented on how well prepared the adopters have been and this has enabled some very challenging placements to be successful. Applications are completed within eight months unless there is an adopter-led reason for a delay. An additional workshop for the family and friends of the adopters is highly effective in ensuring that those connected with the adoptive family have a good understanding of the needs of the children likely to be placed for adoption and how they can provide the best support to maintain secure and successful placements. Family members have said, 'I am now more able to support the couple with the challenges ahead.'

The vast majority of applicants and adopters feel valued and listened to and have gone on to develop a long and lasting connection to the agency. Some adopters have taken on a co-facilitator role in the preparation groups and others have wanted to be part of the training in giving their experience of the process. Young people are also invited to talk to the prospective adopters about their personal experiences and this has been truly effective.

A thoughtful adoption panel, which comprises a very good mix of people with differing but relevant backgrounds and experiences of adoption, adds further rigour to the process by ensuring a thorough discussion of all the issues. Decision making is robust and the agency decision maker makes timely and well-considered decisions. The panel chair provides a rigorous analysis of the work of the agency, which has led to improvements in practice.

The agency demonstrates an exceptionally rigorous approach in ensuring adopters know and understand the implications of a child's needs and whether or not they can meet them. The agency carries out additional assessments to ensure there is as much information as possible prior to matching to ensure they capture all the historical events the child may have encountered. This provides an extra level of professional analysis and highlights the vulnerabilities of the match so that extra support can be provided at an early stage to maintain the stability of the placement. One adopter commented, 'without the incredible support, I would not have managed.' Another said, 'they go the extra mile to support us.'

Support after placement is also of an exceptional quality. The agency sees adoption as a lifelong event and families know and are confident that whenever they need

support it will be available. The agency offers coffee mornings, a variety of social events and training workshops as well as individual direct pieces of work with children and their families. Adopters' comments about the support include, 'there is a range of support available and I can ring evenings and weekends.' Another said, 'I adopted some time ago and I still feel I can pick up the phone and there will be someone there to help.'

Adopters know they can contact the agency at any time, and are always provided with contact details when the office is closed, for example, during public holidays. Adopters comment that their social worker always gets back to them, and they are extremely confident in their abilities. There is a high level of trust based on consistent and positive relationships. This intensive support has been instrumental in ensuring children remain with their adoptive families; one children's social worker commented, 'the support has been brilliant.'

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The safety and well-being of children placed for adoption has a high priority in this service. Children are placed with adoptive families who are exceptionally well prepared for the task of adoptive parenting and keeping them safe. Safeguarding, safe touch, attachment and managing behaviour form a significant part of the preparation course and on-going training ensures adopters have a thorough knowledge of how to promote all aspects of safety. It is very much about understanding the impact that trauma and loss has on the development of children and how to keep them safe. Adopters are helped to develop appropriate strategies to manage the behaviour which results from abuse. The training is underpinned by very clear written communication from the agency in the form of a placement agreement, which ensures that adopters are fully aware of their and the agency's responsibilities with regard to safeguarding, child protection and behaviour management. The potential dangers of social networking sites are also emphasised.

Recruitment practices are robust for all members of staff and those panel members on the central list. This ensures that only those people assessed as safe are able to work with children and service users. All staff are appropriately trained in how to recognise and respond to safeguarding situations and this is regularly reviewed. Strong links have been established with partner local authorities for continued safeguarding training opportunities for the agency staff. The importance attached to safeguarding is enhanced through team meetings and formal supervision where it is a standing agenda item. This ensures staff awareness is maintained at a high level.

Once children are in placement they are visited regularly by both their own social worker and the adoption social worker. Children know they can contact the social workers at the agency if they have any concerns they do not wish to share with their adoptive parents; there is clear information for them in the children's guide about this. This ensures that children have a variety of people to contact to share any

worries.

A placing social worker commented, 'the agency has supported introduction visits well and there was excellent working in terms of sharing the statutory visits due to the distances involved.'

Children's safety is also assured in practical terms by robust health and safety risk assessments in relation to the adopter's home environment.

## **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the voluntary adoption agency are **outstanding**.

The leadership and management of the agency are exceptionally strong. There is a culture of continued improvement and this ensures that adopters receive excellent support from well trained and highly motivated staff. The agency has a clear development plan and a growth strategy which ensures the agency is financially viable.

Leaders and managers have established rigorous monitoring at all levels, to ensure a high quality of service and identify areas where the agency can develop further. For example, managers routinely monitor records and case files, regularly discuss cases in supervision, and have a significant input into matching considerations. Service users are consulted throughout the process about their experiences of the service, and their views are given considerable weight. This has led to changes in the preparation training.

The staff, including administrative staff, are highly valued and included in considering how the agency can develop and move forward. They comment that they are 'part of the journey of change,' and feel they have ownership of any changes. They are very well supported by their managers. This includes regular and effective supervision, high quality training opportunities, regular team meetings and agency consultation days. This has resulted in a group of staff which is extremely highly thought of by families and professionals alike, and who deliver a service of exceptionally high quality. They are exceptionally committed, child focused, skilled, knowledgeable and experienced.

All the written information, such as information for adopters, the Statement of Purpose and the children's guide, is clear, comprehensive, child focused, accessible, professionally presented and available in other formats so that it can be accessed by all members of the community. There is the addition of a young person's guide for the birth children in the family which is good. They contain images which promote inclusivity and ensure people feel welcomed, whatever their backgrounds. Record keeping is extremely professional, with a high premium placed on confidentiality, both in terms of access and storage.

The agency has good relationships with a range of placing authorities, both in terms



of the day- to-day work and in terms of the development of its services. A senior manager from a local authority stated she is 'impressed with the staff and their experience'; another said, ' staff were commended by our matching panel for the incredible work that was carried out to secure a placement.' Another manager commented that there was 'superb service from start to finish.'

## 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies.