

Nugent Care

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

Unique reference number	SC049079
Inspection date	07/02/2013
Inspector	Marian Denny
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Voluntary org placing children

Setting address	6 Chain Lane, ST. HELENS, Merseyside, WA11 9RA
------------------------	--

Telephone number	0151 261 2000
Email	info@nugentcare.org
Registered person	Nugent Care
Registered manager	Martin Sadler
Responsible individual	Robert Lunan
Date of last inspection	30/06/2010

© Crown copyright 2013

Website: 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.

Service information

Brief description of the service

Nugent care, formerly known as the Nugent Care Society, is the social care agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool and provides a variety of children's services, including an adoption service.

The adoption service is based in St. Helens and covers the whole geographical area of the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool. It is a small, well-established voluntary adoption agency and specialises in finding adoptive families for those children, whom the local authority finds difficulty placing. It also specialises in providing a service for inter-country adopters.

The agency provides a comprehensive range of adoption services both pre and post adoption to children and families. These include the recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and support of domestic and inter-country adopters. The agency offers assistance and support to birth parents who may be considering placing their child for adoption and to adults, who have been adopted through the agency or by the former Catholic Children's Society. (Shrewsbury Diocese)

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 **good**.

Nugent Care is a good adoption agency providing a good quality of service to the adopters it approves and supports and the children placed with them. This helps to ensure children's safety. Children make good progress and are helped to achieve positive outcomes.

Its recruitment strategy is inclusive and is open to considering any enquirer, regardless of their ethnicity, sexuality or marital status. Its effective recruitment strategy has resulted in the agency recruiting adoptive parents from a wide cross section of society. This means that it has a very diverse range of adopters who are well able to meet the needs of children needing adoptive families.

The agency provides a very child-focused service and delivers good outcomes for children. Children are safe, and the agency as a whole has robust arrangements which ensure safe practice. It is very successful in placing children with more complex needs. Two placements have disrupted in the past three years. This is a very low rate of disruptions compared to the national average of 10%, particularly when the needs and challenges of the children placed are considered. The agency achieves this as the assessment of prospective adopters is robust and they are well prepared, supported and trained.

The agency is committed to providing life-long support to adoptive families. It therefore works hard to ensure that good levels of support are provided to adoptive families throughout the adoption process. The agency also works positively with placing authorities and other agencies to ensure children and their new families receive the support they need. They will also liaise and if necessary, advocate on behalf of an adoptive family to ensure that a packages of support, including therapeutic input, is put in place to enable an adoptive family to remain together. The staff team is experienced, well trained and well supported and adopters greatly value this.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a real commitment to adoption, as do the trustees, who are experienced and skilled in their work. The agency is on the whole well managed and operated both strategically and operationally. However, while there are a number of monitoring and reporting systems in operation they are not always fully effective, as demonstrated by the shortfalls in the agency's records and documentation. Leaders and managers though are aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the service and are actively driving forward improvements in the service, for example, the development of the children's guides, the Adopters Charter, the electronic records, as well as a tracking and work load management system. The agency is also engaging nationally with latest developments in adoption and this feeds into the agency's planning and development.

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 information is provided on the adoption agency's expectation of prospective adopters. Specifically with the development of the Adopters' Charter (NMS 10.3 (f))
- ensure the agency's has in place children's guides which have been formally approved by the registered provider and manager and is reviewed at least annually (NMS 18.3)
- continue to develop effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the agency (NMS 25.1)
- ensure all staff's work and activity is consistent with the service's policies and

procedures. (NMS 25.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

The agency specialises in providing adoptive families for children with more complex needs. Children are placed in safe and secure adoptive families, are well settled and make good progress in all aspects of their development. The success rate of these placements is good, as demonstrated by the fact that only two have disrupted in the past three years. Consequently, children experience long-term stability once they are placed.

Adoptive parents give their children every encouragement and support to develop. As a result, children do well at school, improve in their reading and mathematical ability, become more socially confident and develop a strong sense of their own self-worth and identity. This greatly improves their children's future opportunities in life.

Children who have previously found difficulties in developing attachments to those caring for them are helped to develop strong attachments to their adoptive parents. Consequently, they grow, put on weight and make good physical progress because they are more emotionally secure. A placing social worker in commenting on an adoptive family stated, 'They have met the child's needs extremely well.' Another commented on the progress that the child had made and said, 'It was more than I expected.'

Children's behaviour improves as a result of living with their adoptive parents, and through the support and advice the agency provides to these families. This enables children to access community resources more successfully as well as to develop positive relationships with others, both within and outside the family.

Children's needs, including those arising from disability or ethnicity, are well met. For example, adopters make sure any necessary medical services are provided and this ensures children's health needs are met. Children develop an understanding of their backgrounds, heritage and identity because adopters support contact arrangements appropriately and effectively. Children access appropriate leisure activities such as swimming, dancing and football. This enables them to develop confidence and also improves their health, as a result of the physical exercise. Adoptive parents express a great deal of pride in the progress their children make and this ensures children's sense of self-worth and self-confidence continues to develop.

Quality of service

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

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 the initial information

provided was extremely 'helpful'. It was promptly followed up with good quality written information and this, together with the encouragement they received from staff had been one of the reasons they had pursued their interest in adoption with this agency. During the past three years, the agency has worked hard to increase the number of adopters' applications and approvals. Consequently, this has enabled the agency to provide more adoptive families for children requiring adoption.

The preparation, assessment and approval process is generally robust and results in adopters being able to understand and more effectively meet the needs of adoptive children. Adopters also confirmed this and stated that they would not have been able to parent such challenging children without the thorough preparation, training and support provided by the agency. Adopters also talked about the adoption process stating that at the time of their approval, they had thought the adoption process was 'rather long and drawn out'. However, once the child was placed with them, they realised how useful it had been to have the time to reflect on the nature of adoption, its implications and to prepare for their role as an adoptive parent.

The service provides some preparation training to other family members, for example, other relatives. This is effective as it enables those connected with the adoptive family to have a good understanding of the needs of the children likely to be placed for adoption. It also enables them to determine how best they can support their family to maintain secure and successful homes for the children.

The preparation training together with the home study usually results in good analytical assessments of the competencies of applicants. Applications are generally completed within eight months, unless there is an adopter-led reason for a delay.

The adoption panel is robust in its consideration of applications to adopt which supports safe and secure placements. Panel members contribute differing experiences, both personal and professional, which ensures a full and balanced discussion of differing views. The panel chairperson meets with the agency decision maker twice a year in order to discuss agency practice. An annual adoption panel report is also produced, which addresses this. These mechanisms are effectively used to support improvements in the adoption service. Decision making is similarly robust, as the agency decision maker makes well-considered and timely decisions.

While the ultimate responsibility for matching lies with the local authority, this agency demonstrates a rigorous approach in ensuring adopters know and understand the implications of a child's needs and whether or not they can meet them. For example, staff ask the local authority if they can read the child's file and any additional information obtained, is carefully considered, analysed and shared with the adopters. Adopters are also provided with the opportunity to meet with the agency's medical adviser to discuss any issues relating to a child's health. Adopters commented on how well their social worker was in scrutinising information, exploring relevant issues with them and supporting them to make informed decisions regarding matching.

Good work is undertaken in both the preparation training and the assessment of

adopters regarding the importance of contact with a child's birth family and their relatives. The agency also works effectively to support contact arrangements, if this is in the child or young person's interests. This depth of understanding regarding contact has helped children understand their history, develop positive self-esteem and make good developmental progress.

The agency provides lifelong advice and support to the adoptee and adopters. It provides a range of support services, which is tailored to individual needs. This includes support groups and social events for adoptive families. Training events and support with education and if required, therapeutic services can also be commissioned. The social events are particularly effective in enabling adoptive families to meet together and form positive relationships with each other and the agency. They are also beneficial in enabling adopted children to develop an understanding of their adoptive status. The agency is also good at challenging local authorities to provide more support, if this is identified as necessary, to meet children's needs and support placements. This includes the provision of therapy, or financial support to enable an adopter to stay at home for longer.

The majority of adoptive families commented that they felt well supported by the agency. One adopter commented: 'My social worker is fantastic and will go the extra mile to support us.' Another adopter said: 'We really appreciate all the support the worker has given us over the months.' One adopter stated: 'They really go out of their way to help you; I can't fault the support.' In a letter to the agency another adopter stated: 'Thank you so much for the hard work, advice and support through good and bad times.' Adopters know they can contact the agency at any time for advice and support. A very large majority of adopters comment that their social worker always gets back to them, and they are extremely confident in their abilities. There is generally a level of trust between the worker and adopters, which is based on consistent and positive relationships. This good quality support has been instrumental in ensuring that children remain with their adoptive families. One adopter stated: 'Without the support of our worker we would not have remained together as a family.'

The agency provides a service to adopted adults and birth relatives, where the agency and the former Catholic Children's Society (Shrewsbury Diocese) were involved in the adoption. It is supported by well-considered policies and procedures and access to the post adoption social worker, who specialises in this work. This ensures the service is delivered extremely sensitively, safely and well, with consideration to the needs of all those involved. This enables people to understand their situation and make or re-establish relationships where this is appropriate. Those using the service expressed a great deal of satisfaction in the service received, as demonstrated by the comments: 'Thank you so much for bringing us together again, I cannot thank you enough.' 'I know where I came from now and have met my really great family.' Another said: 'My worker was exceptional, incredibly caring, patient, understanding and supportive. The work she did for me was a great help, I cannot thank her enough.' In the past, there had been significant delays in this area of work, but this has now reduced considerably, with people waiting no longer than six weeks.

There is generally considerable satisfaction with the service provided by the agency, from stakeholders, other service users and adoptive families alike. More than one adopter said: 'I wouldn't think twice about recommending them.' A children's social worker said: 'I am impressed with the worker, who has been very professional and supportive to the adopters.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There are good arrangements in place to protect children from harm and promote their safety and well-being. The agency ensures that anyone who works with children is safe to do so through robust recruitment and selection practices. Prospective adoptive parents are thoroughly prepared and assessed to ensure they understand how children's previous experiences impact on their behaviour and how they should be parented. Adopters are also made 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. The thoroughness of adopters' preparation and assessment results in the approval of adopters who have the competencies necessary to care for adopted children.

Staff address potential safeguarding issues at an early stage. They are encouraged to recognise and deal with any concerns which may develop into a more serious issue, by providing support and working closely with the child's social worker. Any concerns are discussed in supervision and carefully monitored. This approach ensures that safeguarding is always at the forefront of staff practice and is effective in preventing the escalation of concerns developing into a safeguarding issue. There have been no allegations in the last year. However, staff have good access to appropriate policies, procedures, advice and guidance. They also receive regular, updated safeguard training. This ensures staff know how to respond promptly and appropriately to safeguard children.

Once children are placed, the agency works closely with the local authority social worker to ensure children are visited regularly. If requested, the agency will undertake some of these visits on their behalf. Since children are placed from all over the country, significant distances are often involved, and this cooperative working is essential to provide adequate protection for vulnerable children placed in new families a long way from anyone they know. This ensures that children have the opportunity to talk to someone and raise any concerns they may have.

Children's safety is also assured in practical ways, for example, by robust health and safety risk assessments. Adopters also receive advice on a variety of other issues, which enables adopters to balance risk-taking as part of a child's normal development, with safety.

Work with adopted adults and birth relatives is undertaken in a way which is very mindful of their and other people's vulnerabilities. It is also supported by staff with a

remit to consider safeguarding in its wider sense, including data protection and historical abuse. Consequently, all those receiving a service from this agency are very well safeguarded with services delivered in a safe and sensitive manner.

Leadership and management

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

The agency has a strong awareness of the needs of looked after children who require adoptive families and has worked hard to recruit an increased number of adopters. It has an inclusive approach to recruitment, which has resulted in the agency developing a reputation locally for its non-discriminatory approach. Social workers are also very good at helping applicants expand their initial thoughts about the needs of children they can realistically meet. Consequently, it has been able to recruit and approve a diverse range of adopters, who are able to meet the needs of children and prevent delay.

The agency has implemented the recommendations made at the last inspection. These have been appropriately addressed to improve the service and provide more positive outcomes for children. For example, employer references are now obtained for all applicants. This ensures all relevant information is obtained in respect of prospective adopters and children are placed in safe adoptive homes.

There is a strong and effective leadership management team, which is supported by a board of trustees, who are extremely experienced, very knowledgeable and committed. They have very differing qualities and skills as well as their passion for improving outcomes for children. This results in good governance and there is regular and detailed reporting on all aspects of the agency's work, including professional issues and finance.

The agency has clear plans in place to develop practice. Work is also being undertaken in preparation to implement a more streamlined assessment process, in line with government plans for adoption. There is a good level of expertise in the agency's staff and this ensures that best practice is identified and included in the agency's plans.

Two complaints were received in the last year. These complaints were dealt with effectively and the learning from them was used to inform agency practice.

Social work practice within the agency and service delivery are usually well monitored and managed at an operational level to ensure the quality of the agency's work. However, a couple of shortfalls were identified in relation to agency records; for example, in one adopter's assessment, the written record of the interview with the adopter had not been completed. However, this had no impact on the outcome for the adopters or the child with whom they were to be matched, as it was ultimately addressed by the manager. On occasion, the agency policy has not been fully complied with. However, this again had no impact on the outcome for the adopters or the child.

The views and opinions of adopters at all stages of the process are sought and used to inform the development of the agency. The agency seeks children's views during its direct work with them and their adopters. However, a process of more structured consultation and engagement with children and young people is to be established in the near future. There are positive working relationships with local authorities. Stakeholders confirm the agency works well with them, attends meetings where appropriate and communicates effectively.

The agency's social work and administrative team are experienced, well qualified and well supported. Social work staff are very child focused and committed to their work. They provide good levels of support to adopters at all stages of the process and adopters greatly value this. At the time of the inspection, the agency did not have an Adopters' charter in place; however work is taking place to address this.

The Statement of Purpose gives comprehensive and clear information to anyone using the service so they know what to expect. The children's guides are currently in draft form as there are plans to involve adopted children in their development. Both the Statement of Purpose and the draft children's guides can be translated into other languages and formats, on request, to improve accessibility of information.

The premises are accessible, secure and are appropriate for the purpose. Rooms are available for meetings, training, and staff supervision. There are displays promoting diversity, both in the reception areas and meeting rooms. This ensures there are positive images of people from a range of backgrounds and experiences. It also emphasises the service's commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. Records are stored with appropriate security and accessibility. There is a business continuity plan which addresses all the required information. This plan ensures there is no disruption of the service in the event of a crisis.

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.