

Catholic Children's Society Westminster - The Adoption and After Care Service

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector	Bridget Goddard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Adults

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Registered person	The Catholic Children's Society (Westminster)
Registered manager	Carol Cicely Roper
Responsible individual	Rosemary Anne Anselm Keenan
Date of last inspection	N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This adoption support agency was previously a registered voluntary adoption agency run by the Catholic Children's Society Westminster. The agency ceased to recruit and assess prospective adoptive parents in December 2008 and the last adoption order was made in September 2011.

This is the first time this agency has been inspected following its change of registration in becoming solely an adoption support agency.

The adoption support agency has assumed all the responsibilities of the former voluntary adoption agency in relation to its post adoption support work. This work includes: access to birth records and intermediary services to adopted adults and birth relatives over the age of 18 for whom the agency is the Appropriate Adoption Agency; providing information, advice, support and training to adoptive parents who were approved by the former voluntary adoption agency; the facilitation of letterbox contact. The agency only works with adults, and children placed with its adopters are supported by their own local authority.

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**.

This is an adoption support agency of high quality which is tailored to the needs of individual service users, and sensitively delivered by very experienced and knowledgeable staff. They are well-supported by their manager, and the service is very well-led by an involved and committed Responsible Individual who has forged very effective local partnerships. There are some minor shortfalls around involving service users, and in the accessibility of procedures about historic abuse. Records, particularly archive records, are well-kept and business planning is effective in securing the future of this important service.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- enable service users to know how the service will be monitored to ensure that it is delivering the intended outcome (NMS 15.3)
- ensure that the procedures for allegations of historic abuse, provide effective support for the person making the allegation. (NMS 22)
- develop a more robust system to seek feedback from service users on the success of the service provision, which helps the agency to make use of service users' views to improve the service. This feedback to be recorded centrally and on the case record of the service user. (NMS 15.6)

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

The agency offers a high quality, direct, service to adopted adults and birth relatives that it has been historically involved with. Service users define the pace of this service, for example, they describe face-to-face interviews as taking, 'as long as is needed, there are no clocks in those rooms'. They value the flexibility of a service which allows them to, 'dip in and out' sometimes over years. This individualised pace gives service users the best opportunities of achieving their preferred outcomes.

The agency also ensures that their service users are well-prepared for possible disappointment for example, 'I hadn't thought that he might have mental health problems.', or that, 'she might want more of me than I want to give.' The agency does this both through discussion and through written information which the service user can keep for reference. Service users say, 'I heartily recommend it. It is a very emotional process and you need someone experienced to help you manage expectations.'

Individual service users receive a personalised service which is usually successful in achieving very good personal outcomes. The quality of adoption support they receive is of very high quality. However, although service users' views on the service are generally sought and there are historic examples of these having had an influence on the service delivered, there is less evidence of this more recently.

Quality of service

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

The agency is prompt in responding positively to requests for information and/or reunion from both adopted adults and birth relatives. The historical reach of the agency was such that these contacts frequently come from other countries, and staff have developed considerable expertise and knowledge about the different cultural

expectations that may be involved. This means that they are able to tweak the service that they offer accordingly, for example being aware of the impact of official letters in small, rural communities. The agency has also forged effective working relationships with social workers in other countries, which means that service users have access to an ordered programme of support.

All service users receive generalised, written information about the services provided. There are different versions provided to broadly meet the different aims of those being served. However, these do not include details of how the service given will be monitored to ensure it is delivering the intended outcome. This misses an opportunity to fully involve individual service users in the delivery of the service.

In practice, service users receive a bespoke support package, which may for example involve staff being present at a reunion in the agency itself, or workers helping a service user think through their preferences and supporting these. Staff are sensitive to the different emotions that birth relatives or adopted adults might have, for example shame and guilt. Service users say, 'they don't judge you, they are just there to support you.' Staff are seen as, 'very approachable with an easy manner and questioning style.' Services are therefore given in a professional but accessible fashion.

Staff are highly experienced having all been in post for several years, and remain very committed to their work. They demonstrate extensive knowledge about the impact of adoption on all parties, and this helps them offer a high quality of support to service users.

Staff work hard at keeping themselves updated. They highlight to each other articles of interest and they attend respected events around their area of expertise. For example, recent training on the impact of trauma has helped staff interpret negative comments about birth mothers from long ago. They are highly skilled at supporting service users through each stage of their process for example, accessing birth records or seeking a reunion with birth relatives. Service users say, 'I really appreciate having them in the background to guide, it made it a lot easier than I suspect it might have been.' Service users often give very appreciative feedback to staff who have worked with them.

Safeguarding

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

Recruitment processes are thorough, and include verification of references and re-checks at appropriate intervals. This helps ensure that all working for the purposes of the agency are suitable to do so.

The service is also mindful of the safeguarding implications of family reunion for all parties, and initially acts as the go-between in these situations. Service users say that staff advise on a safe environment in which to meet. This helps promote the welfare of all affected by reunion.

The agency's safeguarding policy is a detailed document appropriately covering various types of safeguarding issues. It includes a section on historic abuse, but this is not currently in a user-friendly format.

The service has effective working relationships with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LCSB) in that the responsible individual is a member of the Board. This helps maintain knowledge and awareness of safeguarding throughout the agency, and enables effective links on relevant issues. For example, staff are able to access appropriate local safeguarding training in relation to both vulnerable adults and children.

Leadership and management

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

The Responsible Individual (RI) is very committed to both securing the future of this agency and continuing to develop the premises. She has forged a very effective partnership with their host local authority, which has produced important, additional funding. This, and the enduring financial commitment from the Catholic Children's Society Westminster, enables modest service user charges. This secure funding also means that the agency is able to meet its Statement of Purpose for the foreseeable future.

Staff are very positive about the recorded, regular supervision they receive from the Registered Manager. They say, 'supervision is invaluable and it is very enabling.' Appraisals are appropriately held, include discussion of training needs and outcomes, and effective systems are in place to monitor and progress these. Team meetings are routinely held and provide further, valuable opportunities for both professional dialogue and how the service might be developed.

Written documents about how the service is run are regularly internally reviewed, but service users' contributions to this are rare. Complaints from service users are very unusual, but when received are thoroughly and fairly considered. The Registered Manager helps ensure the high quality of the service by her effective monitoring. Although the frequency and scope is not made explicit, records evidence the impact of her interventions for example, deciding when a case is closed or left open. There is an appropriate three-year business plan in place, and the manager reports regularly to the board covering key areas such as staffing requirements and service trends. This scrutiny helps ensure that service users continue to receive an effective service.

The service has a particular responsibility for a very large number of historic, personal records. These are well-kept in an archive which is accessible to staff, and invaluable for their work with adopted adults. Contemporary records are well-summarised and clear. Overall, the building provides suitable accommodation for the agency's purposes and includes pleasant and private interview rooms.

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 adoption support agencies.