

# Father Hudson's Society (Adoption Support Agency)

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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<b>Inspection date</b>	28/01/2014
<b>Inspector</b>	Rosemary Chapman
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<b>Registered manager</b>	Josephine Mary Clemons
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Timothy Bradford
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	01/12/2010

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This adoption support agency, known as the Origins Service, is part of Father Hudson's Society, a charitable organisation which provides a number of social care services for both adults and children. The adoption support services include access to records held by the agency. It also provides intermediary services for adopted adults and members of their birth family, primarily in cases where the adoption was arranged by Father Hudson's Society when it was registered as a voluntary adoption agency. The Origins Service also provides a service to adults affected by child migration and residential childcare, but this does not come under the remit of this inspection.

Although the agency is also registered to provide adoption support services for children, it does this through a service level agreement with Adoption Focus in relation to the adoptive families who were approved by Father Hudson's Society when it operated as a voluntary adoption agency. Adoption Focus is a voluntary adoption agency which was formerly provided by Father Hudson's Society under a different name, until it became a separate entity in 2009. Adoption Focus is currently providing a service to 15 children and young people, based in 10 families.

The manager undertakes all the work in relation to adoption support, assisted by a part-time administrative member of staff. In the year April 2012 to March 2013, 129 people received a service, 97 of whom were adult adoptees.

### 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 agency provides a service of an exceptionally high quality delivered by a manager with a wealth of experience, knowledge, skill and understanding. This results in a welcoming, prompt, effective, professional and sensitive service which delivers positive and beneficial outcomes. Recurring comments from service users include: 'I couldn't have asked for better', and, 'I couldn't want for anything more.'

The manager demonstrates a real passion for the work she undertakes and is supported in this by the wider organisation, which is fully committed to the adoption work in which it was historically involved. The manager is keen to use research and learning from her own practice to inform the service delivery, additionally acting on the regular service user feedback she obtains and welcomes. Her aim is to continue to learn and improve practices so the service continues to be one of the highest quality. The rigorous and regular monitoring by the trustees and service user involvement are instrumental in influencing service development.

### **Outcomes for service users**

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Service users benefit greatly from their involvement with this agency. One person said: 'I have had the most incredible personal boost in terms of my identity. I know where I am from and it has helped me move on.' Other comments included, 'it was the most marvellous experience ever'; 'it has been remarkably positive'; and 'it exceeded my expectations.'

A small number of service users do not achieve their desired outcome, but this is due to circumstances outside of the control of the agency; for example, birth parents not wishing to engage in any contact. One service user commented, 'I know I will have the best possible outcome by using this service.'

All service users define the service they receive throughout the course of their involvement with the agency. They are informed of the options, possible outcomes, timescales, next steps and processes, but they decide how and when they wish to proceed. All service users commented that everything was done at their pace. Typical comments included, 'I was not rushed'; 'there was no pressure to progress'; 'it was the pace I wanted'; and 'I was totally in control.'

All service users receive adoption support of an exceptionally high quality which leads to positive outcomes. One person commented: 'I wouldn't have wanted it to be any different.' Another service user said: 'I could not have asked for kinder, more supportive treatment.' Service users attribute the success of their reunions to the high quality work of the agency; 'it went so smoothly because of Father Hudson's.'

### **Quality of service**

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

Birth records counselling and intermediary services are delivered to an exceptionally high standard and fully meet the needs of service users at all stages of the process. Service users receive a very warm and prompt response to their enquiries, which enables them to establish an effective rapport with the agency. The agency responds very promptly. There is no waiting list and any delays, for example, by another agency, are always explained and acknowledged. This ensures that service users are well informed about what is happening to them and understand the reason for any

delay.

The agency provides a service which is very much tailored to the individual needs of the people who use it. For example, if a birth relative is elderly, the manager will see them in their home, rather than offer an office appointment. Communication in larger print can be used. Likewise, if a service user is disabled, the service will be tailored to meet their individual and specific needs. Service users commented on the manager's flexibility in all aspects, from finance to service provision.

The manager has a wealth of experience and knowledge in this area, in which she has specialised for 20 years. This means that the service is professionally delivered with sensitivity and understanding. The manager manages the expectations and hopes of service users very well, drawing on both her knowledge of research and her own practice, demonstrating exceptional empathy in a very emotional situation. All work progresses at the service user's pace and they are not pressurised. Service users are very well informed of the implications, all possible scenarios and enabled to think about how they will deal with these, both practically and emotionally.

The work is exceptionally well planned and organised in a systematic way, which would enable another worker to understand how to deliver the service, if, for any reason, the manager was unable to do so. All communications are clear, sensitive, empathetic and professional, with full regard to confidentiality. Reunions are very well organised, with discreet support available where necessary. The premises can be used, and these provide a comfortable and relaxing environment with private access to kitchen facilities. The manager also provides good advice if service users want to arrange reunions themselves.

The presentation of the information about a person's adoption is second to none. It is organised chronologically and professionally presented in a bound folder, with original documents clearly identified and placed in individual wallets. This gives real value to the information and is a clear and meaningful representation of the person's adoption story. One service user commented, 'it was really well done and really helpful in the breadth and quality of information.'

## **Safeguarding**

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

This adoption support agency only works with adults. The manager demonstrates a robust understanding of historic abuse and how to safeguard vulnerable adults, in addition to safeguarding and child protection. This is underpinned by recent training. There is easy access to appropriate policies and procedures. These have been shared with the local authority, with whom there are good links for advice and guidance. This ensures that anyone who discloses abuse receives a service which is designed to protect not only them but also other people who may be at risk of harm. There have been no such allegations within the adoption support agency, although the manager demonstrates her knowledge, skill and understanding through her work with other users of the Origins Service.

Service users are further protected by risk assessments, which the manager undertakes prior to commencing the service. This considers the possible risks to the welfare of all parties, the likely impact and how any identified risk can be safely managed. This may lead to contact with other agencies which have involvement with any of the parties, to discuss how to progress; for example, the manager of a care home where a birth parent is currently living.

The complaints procedure is made available to all service users at the commencement of a service, as it is included in the information pack. However, there have been no complaints.

Father Hudson's Society has robust staff recruitment procedures which are in line with best practice guidance. This ensures that all staff are suitable to work with vulnerable service users.

## **Leadership and management**

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

Leaders and managers demonstrate significant commitment and passion to provide and develop a service of exceptionally high quality. The improvement agenda is underpinned with service user feedback, robust monitoring and strong governance. The trustees are very well informed through regular monitoring mechanisms which includes quarterly reports on the work of the agency, case studies and the manager's attendance at committee meetings to answer any questions. There are well-tested structures which ensure all trustees receive full information, with specialist sub-committees to challenge more specific issues. Trustees have a wealth of personal and professional experience to enable them to carry out this role effectively to provide challenge where necessary.

The service is provided by the manager who has an exceptionally high level of knowledge, experience and skills in this area. She demonstrates a deep understanding of the issues of the time, particularly in relation to Irish, Roman Catholic single mothers. She has an excellent understanding of the research in this area and is promoting her knowledge even further by undertaking a piece of her own research as part of her managerial qualification. Although there were no requirements or recommendations from the last inspection, the manager has continued to build on the outstanding practice identified then, based on service user feedback and other learning. Examples of this include providing maps of Ireland so that adult adoptees have a better understanding of where their birth families originated from; providing maps which locate the mother and baby homes; ensuring that the telephone number of the agency is more clearly identified in emails and simplifying the feedback form to encourage more response.

The manager is well supported by regular and effective supervision, access to peer support, and involvement in two related professional groups. The manager supports and supervises a part-time administrator, who is the only other member of staff in

the adoption support agency. Administration is excellent. One local authority manager commented, 'the response to whether Father Hudson's holds an adoption record is instant. I believe they hold an excellent database which makes searching efficient.'

There are excellent relationships with partner agencies such as local authorities, local registrars and other adoption agencies. There are positive two-way dialogues with colleagues, which not only promote the professional practice of this agency but support improvement elsewhere. The manager is extremely highly regarded among her peers. For example, one local authority manager said, 'the experience and knowledge of the manager in all aspects of birth record work and searching is invaluable.'

The adoption support agency is financially supported by the wider organisation, which is viable and has rigorous business procedures. The trustees are committed to this financial support, as adoption is recognised as an important part of the society's history and there is a moral commitment to continue this work for as long as necessary.

The Statement of Purpose has been recently updated and is available on the website for anyone to access. It gives clear information about the aims and the services, so that anyone wanting to contact the agency knows what to expect. The website contains a lot of information to supplement this. There are also information packs for each type of service to ensure anyone who wishes to use the service is fully informed. Adoption Focus supplies the children's guides as it provides that aspect of the service and is separately inspected.

There are excellent arrangements for the storage of records and access to the archives, which form the bedrock of the agency's work. All records are stored on site to promote ease of access. The storage is secure and safe from damage from fire and water, as the cabinets are of a very high quality. This results in historical adoption records which maintain their integrity. The registers are separately stored in similar cabinets, but additionally there is an electronic database as back-up, which also promotes ease of access. Current records are clear and well organised, so that information is easily understood and accessible.

## **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.