

Adopters for Adoption

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Suzanne Young / Carole Moore
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Domestic adoption

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This voluntary adoption agency is operated by a limited company on a 'not-for-profit' basis. It recruits, prepares, trains, assesses and approves adopters to provide homes for children from a range of local authorities who need new families. The agency approves adopters for domestic adoption. It provides adoption support to the adopters it approves, children placed or adopted by them and other adoptive families requesting support.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Adopters for Adoption is a good agency. It provides clear analytical assessments and high quality support to adopters and children. It has committed staff and strong leadership. There are no breaches of regulation.

At the time of this inspection the agency has only been functioning for eight months. As a result, there have been few placements made with adopters. The agency is part of the larger organisation of Core Assets. This allows it to have access to resources and facilities which enables it to provide a high level of support to adopters and to the children placed through them. Leaders and managers are committed to adoption and to improving outcomes for children. The agency uses independent social workers who are recruited through a recruitment agency which is also part of their larger

organisation. The agency has a three year commitment to the Department for Education and is currently exceeding targets for year one.

Children have all been relatively recently placed with their adoptive families but have made significant progress during this time. They are settling very well and developing good attachments.

Adoptive parents are well prepared and understand the importance of safe care practices. This ensures children's safety and welfare are protected. Applicants undergo a robust assessment to ensure they are suitable and possess the right qualities to be an adoptive parent.

Adopters express satisfaction with the agency. They are happy with the assessment process and the support offered to them post placement. They feel the agency is welcoming and inclusive. One adopter commented, 'I felt encouraged by their modern and forward thinking... I didn't feel I was being judged at all.' Another stated, 'We cannot fault the agency for the support that they have given to us so far.'

Two recommendations have been made in respect of the timeliness of the written agency decision and the children's guide.

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 written confirmation is given to prospective adopters within five working days following the decision makers decision (NMS 17.11)
- Ensure the children's guide is appropriate to the child's age and understanding. (NMS 18.5)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This is a very new agency with few placements made with adoptive families. There have not been any disruptions. Although children have only been living with their adoptive families for very short periods of time they are having good experiences and are making progress. This is because there is careful matching to ensure children are placed with adoptive families who can meet their assessed needs.

Children are settled. They feel safe and secure which helps them to develop attachments to their new family. Children, who often have very complex needs, demonstrate progress in making attachments to their adoptive parents, such as,

accepting cuddles and hugs. One adopter commented, 'Progress has been brilliant.'

Children enjoy good health because adopters ensure they are registered with healthcare professionals and access specialist services as required. Children's development is further promoted by assessing social workers who continue to support adopters after placement. For example, one child who previously struggled with bedtimes is now settling and sleeping through the night. Children settle well into school and nursery. This is because there are considered adoption support plans in place. One children's social worker stated, 'There has been brilliant progress made. I couldn't ask for anything better'.

The agency supports the placements of brothers and sisters together. This enables children to understand their backgrounds and maintain a positive sense of identity.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Adopters receive comprehensive and helpful information at all stages of the process. Prospective adopters receive clear, concise information which is well presented. Initial visits and subsequent contact is welcoming. This is a strength of the agency. All prospective adopters spoken with feel highly valued and welcomed. For many the initial response they received was the reason they decided to proceed with the agency. One prospective adopter commented, 'all our contact with you has been first class.'

At the time of the inspection three adopters have been approved and one adopter has children placed. Two adopters have identified links and are waiting formal matching.

Preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopters are effective. Prospective adopters feel preparation training is thoughtful and measured. This is made even more so by the inclusion of the views of existing adopters during the training. Early adopters who were not able to experience the group training were offered an individual bespoke training package.

The prospective adopter reports (PARs) are clear and analytical. This supports the matching process. The processes of assessment and decision on suitability of prospective adopters are made within timescales set out in the regulations. If the reasons for delay are beyond the control of the agency these are recorded. In the first few months after registration the agency experienced a high volume of interest from prospective adopters. This led to some difficulties in processing applicants through to assessments in a timely way. Since September the agency has developed clearer processes and as a consequence this has significantly improved.

The agency's first adoption panel was in September 2014. There is a very experienced panel chair who is in the process of developing induction training for panel members and is expanding panel membership. The chair is aware of the need

to provide six monthly oversight of panel to drive improvement. The adoption panel is robust. For example, panel have deferred making a recommendation about suitability of a prospective adopter when they have felt further information is required. The panel administration is efficient and the minutes are clear.

The agency decision maker (ADM) makes considered decisions about adopters' suitability to adopt within appropriate timescales. Adopters are informed verbally within two working days of the decision although the written confirmation of the ADM's decisions is not always within five working days. The agency are aware of this shortfall and have put measures in place to rectify this.

Prospective adopters are given sufficient information to be able to make an informed decision about whether they feel they are able to parent a child. Assessing social workers attend meetings with children's social workers and other professionals working with the child alongside adopters. This helps support the matching process by ensuring appropriate matches are made.

Clear adoption plans support the adoption process. The agency gives clear information to prospective adopters to ensure they are fully aware about their right to an assessment of support. A clear strength of the agency is the continuity of support provided by the same social worker to adopters throughout the assessment process to final order. Intensive support is provided to adopters during the introductory period and early weeks of placement. This support continues to be provided at a frequency and level agreed with the adoptive family. This builds trust as the relationship adopters develop with assessing social worker is able to be continued until the final order is made. This support is highly valued. One adopter commented, 'We were lucky and had a fantastic social worker who is still working with us now.' Another stated, 'Our assessor has stayed with us to become our supervising social worker and will remain with us until the adoption order goes through...We like the consistency that this has offered to us.'

The agency also has access to a therapy service which is able to provide adoption support to children placed with adopters. This service also provides support to those placed by other agencies. This service may be commissioned by local authorities or by adoptive parents.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has a strong focus on safeguarding. Assessments of prospective adopters are robust with all the necessary checks and references taken up as required. Children's safety is ensured in practical terms through the completion of health and safety assessments of prospective adopter's home environments.

Staff receive training in safeguarding which helps develop their knowledge and ensure they have a clear understanding of effective and safe practice. The safeguarding policy has recently been updated to include historical abuse and

neglect. There have been no safeguarding issues or allegations against adopters or staff since registration. The agency has developed good working relationships with local authority child protection teams through its work with adoption support.

There is a clear process for complaints which is independent of the agency. Adopters, children and young people are made aware of how to make a complaint. There have been three complaints since registration, of which two have been made by prospective adopters. Outcomes are clearly recorded and one complaint is ongoing. The agency has learnt from previous complaints and has improved their service as a result.

Prospective adopters understand the importance of safeguarding as this is fully discussed during their assessment and in their preparation training. This ensures adopters are fully aware of the action to take should a child disclose possible abuse. Adopters also build good levels of trust and communication with their assessing social workers which helps them to seek advice promptly in the event of any concern. As a result, adopters are well prepared for the role, including how to protect children in their care while encouraging them to take age- appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up.

Recruitment is robust for all staff, panel members and independent social worker assessors. There is a clear system in place which ensures all are suitable to work with children and prevents unsuitable people having access to children, vulnerable service users and their information.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This is an agency which although is still in its infancy has the resources and facilities of Core Assets. This allows managers to have a clear vision to develop the agency and deliver an ambitious service to children. The agency has strong leadership with a dedicated board of directors. This is the first inspection since its registration in March 2014.

The agency has a three year commitment to the Department for Education and are currently exceeding targets for year one. The agency is committed to ensure the views of adopters are to be part of how the agency will continue to develop and operate. They have a steering group who ensure they capture adopters' experiences and views and make sure adopters are at the centre of the agency's thinking. There is a clear vision for the agency, which includes approving more adopters, placing more children and developing post adoption services.

Over the short time the agency has been functioning it has constantly been striving for improvement. It has developed effective working relationships with various local authorities and work closely with children's placing social workers to match and support placements. Children's social workers speak highly of their involvement with the agency and assessing social workers. One children's social worker commented,

'Partnership working has been brilliant.'

The agency has developed a quality assurance role to manage and monitor service delivery. Quality assurance systems have been developed which have been extremely effective in improving the service to meet its required timescales. Feedback from prospective adopters and assessing social workers are sought to develop their service although they have not been running long enough to formalise these responses into a review of the service. These monitoring arrangements inform regular reports to the directors.

Recruitment of prospective adopters has been extremely successful. They have received 443 enquiries since registration. There is an information website which has had 4152 hits. This has led to challenges for the agency in processing applications and starting assessments. As a result there has not been a need to intensively market the agency. Managers have recognised that there has been a shortfall of adopters from the immediate area and plan to actively market from the immediate locality of the office. They also plan to recruit adopters specifically for children with disabilities.

The agency is inclusive and welcomes prospective adopters from all sectors of the population including single adopters, lesbian, gay and older applicants.

The Statement of Purpose is clear and accessible on the agency's website for all service users and stakeholders. This provides an accurate description of the ethos and the services the agency provides. The children's guide is generic for all age groups and is not available in different formats to suit individual ages and communication needs. This therefore cannot be accessed by all children and young people involved and placed by the agency.

Staff, panel members and managers are appropriately qualified, experienced and supervised. The agency uses independent social workers who are recruited through a recruitment agency which is also part of their larger organisation. All staff and those working for the agency receive up to date and relevant training which reflect the new legislation and practice. There is a strong commitment from the staff team who have been with the agency since its beginning. Staff have been flexible and adaptable during this period. They feel highly valued, respected and feel part of the growth of the service. One member of staff stated, 'Love working for the company... I feel well supported and supervised.' Another stated, 'There is excellent support...The organisation really look after you.'

The agency is financially viable and is part of a much larger organisation. The office environment is pleasant and supports effective administration systems. The agency has clear, secure electronic records which ensure appropriate accessibility and confidentiality.

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, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

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.