

Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Rosemary Dancer
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Domestic adoption

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Responsible individual	Sarah Byatt
Date of last inspection	24/03/2014

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Service information

Brief description of the service

The Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption Agency was established in collaboration with Cambridgeshire County Council. The agency was set up following a successful bid to the Department for Education for start up funding of a new voluntary adoption agency. It was registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency on 24th March 2014. Some aspects of the work commenced on 1 August 2014 and it became fully operational on 1st October 2014.

The agency provides adoption services nationally, as well as for children and adults living in Cambridgeshire. The work the agency undertakes includes: the recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters; pre and post adoption support to adoptive families; support to adults affected by adoption; family finding for Cambridgeshire children. Coram Cambridge has discrete teams delivering these services. The agency works in partnership with its sister agency, Coram Adoption and Permanent Families Service, to develop and deliver a concurrent planning service.

Between 1 August 2014 and 31 December 2014 twelve children were matched with approved families. The agency also approved twenty two households as suitable to adopt. At the time of the inspection four of these had been matched with children and eighteen were waiting to be matched. The agency is also working with some legacy cases.

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**.

The agency has been operational for a short period of time and therefore there are no longitudinal cases that demonstrate the trends in service performance against national trends.

The recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and matching processes are robust. This ensures that children live within safe, stable and loving families that can care for them throughout their childhood and beyond. Children develop secure relationships with their adoptive parents and they grow and develop well in all areas of their lives. When issues arise families are supported effectively by the agency and through access to universal services.

The work carried out with adults is of a high quality and sensitively undertaken. The agency demonstrates a high level of commitment to providing a life-long service to people affected by adoption.

Leaders, managers and staff have developed strong partnerships and working relationships with local authorities and other agencies. The agency is child focused and self-critical; effective action is taken to improve the services provided. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that children and families achieve the best outcomes possible and that children live happy and contented lives. The views of people using the agency are seen as important.

Two areas of shortfall were identified. These relate to the strategic approach to the recruitment of adopters and the maintenance of records relating to children and adults. Neither of these matters are detrimental to the overall service provided or to the safety or well-being of children and young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- implement an effective strategy to recruit and assess prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of those children for whom adoption is the plan (NMS 10.1)
- ensure there are efficient and robust administrative systems; with specific reference to the maintenance of case records for children and adopters. (NMS 28.1)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children placed with this agency's adopters live in stable and secure adoptive placements. They are happy in their adoptive homes and have warm and loving relationships within their adoptive family. As a result they develop secure relationships with their adopters. A child's social worker stated that the adopter and the child, 'absolutely dote on each other.'

Children's overall emotional well-being improves significantly. They have an increased sense of security within their adoptive home and their self-esteem, confidence and trust in the adults around them improves. They develop the skills to regulate their behaviour more effectively. A young person described how they had been helped to understand their feelings better and how they were, 'Not as worried, not as upset.' An adoptive parent spoke about the massive difference in her child's temper and emotions.

Children's social skills develop well and they become well integrated into their local community and feel they belong.

Children's formal learning is well supported by their adoptive parents and support from the agency. Their achievements are celebrated and their adoptive parents have high aspirations for them. An adoptive parent described how their child, who had been supported by the agency, 'can now concentrate on work.'

They are healthier because their health needs are identified, understood and fully catered for through prompt access to appropriate services. Children with ongoing medical needs have these met to a high standard. Adopters ensure that medical appointments are arranged and attended and advice from medical professionals is followed. Children whose speech or language development is of concern, benefit from attending appointments relating to this. A social worker commented, 'The adopters are on the ball and respond well to health and all other needs.'

The use of concurrent placements for some very young children is especially beneficial to them. Children are placed with people who may become their adopters, while decisions are made about their long term future. These children benefit emotionally because concurrent carers fully invest in them and placement moves for the child are minimised. A social worker described how the couple she was working with 'are nurturing as if the child was their own.'

Brothers and sisters maintain their relationships with each other because they benefit from being placed together or are supported to stay in contact with each other.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency is inclusive and interested parties are sent comprehensive written information and offered an interview or invited to an information event in a timely

way. The preparation of prospective adopters ensures that they are well prepared for parenting a child who is likely to have diverse and complex needs. Assessments are thorough and analytical and provide a good view of the applicants' areas of strengths and vulnerabilities; an adopter described the assessment process as, 'appropriately probing.'

The approval processes are robust and timely. Panel members systematically consider all the information available and make sound recommendations. Prospective adopters are subject to an agency decision on their suitability within the timescales and decision making is robust.

Family finding for children is effective and good tracking processes ensure that delays for children are kept to a minimum. The family finders are key in this work and they help prospective adopters consider the needs of children who they may have otherwise ruled out. This work has led to harder to place children being placed more quickly than before. The agency ensures that prospective adopters understand the implications a child's needs may have on them as a family. This is achieved through discussions with them and through, for example, child appreciation days and/or a meeting with the medical adviser. A prospective adopter said they, 'fell in love with the child' the moment they saw her but that they had been supported to think about the wider implications of the child's needs objectively. There have been delays for some prospective adopters in the family finding process; these are legacy cases. This agency now ensures that the adoption register is used and invites approved adopters to consider Be My Parent, Adoption Link and attend adoption activity days.

The agency works to secure the best start to placements through providing additional support and/or training to applicants/prospective adopters prior to approval or placement. For example, a therapeutic parenting programme has been introduced to support prospective adopters considering children with high levels of emotional and behavioural needs. An adopter said the therapeutic parenting course had been, 'Very good – helped us to understand (the child)'. Carefully thought out plans for introductions also help to ensure that children settle quickly in their new families.

Direct work undertaken with children and their families is skilled, sensitive and purposeful and based on each family's assessed needs. An adopter whose family has received a support service said, 'She (the worker) helped hold us together.' The support team benefits from a clinical psychologist who provides support and expertise in using therapeutic interventions, for example, the use of therapeutic play techniques and the development of a therapeutic parenting programme. There are also a range of other training sessions and support services available that adopters find useful, for example, support groups.

Work with birth parents and relatives is of an equally high standard. A birth relative stated the work was, 'Very, very helpful and useful', and the workers are, 'so easy to talk to.... absolutely brilliant', the outcome for them was, 'I am totally different – come on in leaps and bounds.' While there are waiting lists for adoptees and

relatives seeking contact with each other the agency are aware of these and have prioritised cases to ensure that those in most need receive a service in a timely way. One adult seeking contact with an adoptee stated , 'I could not be happier, I give them 100 per cent.' another said the worker was, 'very efficient' and that the work was, 'done with a smile, fantastic – there all the way.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding children is central to the work of this agency. The agency has strong links to the local authority. Effective vetting of applicants ensures that people are suitable to be considered as adoptive parents.

Children live with adopters who promote their welfare and overall well-being and feel and are safe. The assessment and preparation of and the further training provided to adopters has a strong focus on safeguarding children. This leads to adopters having a good understanding of the impact abuse has had on their children and how this may affect their behaviour.

The support services provided to adoptive families are also grounded in promoting the safety and well-being of children and young people. Children are enabled to take age-appropriate risks and to develop an understanding of how to protect themselves. Adopters have a good awareness of the need for confidentiality and the dangers of contact through social networking and other means.

There have been no allegations or safeguarding issues arising since the agency was registered. There is a comprehensive policy on the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and a clear complaints policy. Complaints that have been made have been taken seriously and fully investigated.

Staff have a good awareness of safeguarding children. During the course of the inspection all staff attended safeguarding training. This means that the newly formed team have a shared understanding about the national picture of safeguarding and the organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures. Consideration is given to safeguarding matters throughout the work with applicants and following placement, for example, when arranging and supporting contact

The vetting and recruitment of staff and panel member is rigorous and this ensures that people working for the agency are suitable to do so.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The managers of the agency are suitably qualified and experienced and support the social work teams effectively. While the agency is in the very early stages of its development the leadership and management are clear about and focused on

achieving improvements and have progressed some of these well.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are accessible and comprehensive and provide clear information about the agency to interested parties. The statement underpins the work of the agency.

The leaders and trustees of the agency have a very strong commitment to adoption and show a high level of ambition to develop the agency. Governance is good and there are regular trustees' meetings and robust reporting processes that ensure that improvements are driven. The panel, which has operated for six months, has provided the agency with analysis of the agency's performance over this period; this is currently being considered in terms of how it will be used to actively drive improvement.

There are very effective working relationships with placing local authorities, social workers and other agencies and professionals. Leaders and managers have a very well-developed sense of the needs of the local authorities that they work with. However, while there is a draft strategy for the recruitment of adopters, a more planned approach to targeting recruitment is needed to ensure that adopter's abilities fully match the needs of children across the country who are waiting for a placement.

The views of children, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders are gathered. As the agency has been operational for a limited period of time these views have not had the opportunity to be used to develop the agency on a strategic level. However, although views have been used on a practice level, for example, in making adjustments to the operation of the panel. Coram as an organisation has also developed a project, with funding from the Queen's Trust. This project gives a group of adopted young people opportunities to talk about their experiences as adopted children in school and in receiving post-adoption support. The outcome of this project is to feed these young people's views into developing the way the adoption process works.

Staff, managers and panel members are of a high calibre. A child-centred approach is taken to the work of the agency. Staff feel the training opportunities to them have improved and are of a high quality. One social worker stated they were, 'amazed by the opportunities for training'. They feel well supported by managers and the induction process is good. One social worker said it was 'the best induction I have ever had'. All staff have regular supervision; this includes clinical supervision for the worker who works with birth parents. Social workers feel the support and supervision they receive improves their day-to-day practice and supports their professional development.

Currently the records for children and adopters are across the agency and local authority's electronic recording systems. This means that it is not easy to locate some key documents and therefore makes effective audit of files difficult.

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.