

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

Inspection report for adoption support agency

Unique reference number SC441470
Inspection date 8 March 2016
Inspector Christine Kennet
Type of inspection Full

Setting address 73 St Charles Square, London W10 6EJ

Telephone number 020 8969 5305
Email info@cathchild.org.uk
Registered person The Catholic Children's Society (Westminster)
Registered manager Irena Lyczkowska

Responsible individual Rosemary Keenan
Date of last inspection 24 May 2013

© Crown copyright 2016

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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

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.

The agency changed its registration in 2011 and became 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. The majority of the agency's work is to provide 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. It also provides the facilitation of letterbox contact and information and advice to adoptive parents who were approved by the former voluntary adoption agency. The agency works only with adults. Children placed with its adopters are supported by their own placing local authority.

Although the agency works predominantly with people for whom it is the responsible agency, on occasions the agency may offer a reciprocal service to other adoption agencies and, for example, to birth relatives who live abroad and cannot easily access a service. In addition to the adoption support work, the agency also works with those who grew up in the Society's care and those who migrated to Australia and Canada as children, and their descendants.

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

Requires improvement: 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 adoption support agency provides positive outcomes for service users where expectations are skilfully managed and careful preparations for a number of possible eventualities are considered.

The agency is clear about pieces of work that it undertakes, using helpful systems to record and manage work. Summaries of work and outcomes at each stage of the process would support the agency to measure achievements better.

Obtaining and collating service users' feedback has improved significantly since the

last inspection and helped to develop services. For example, a key area influenced by feedback is the current refurbishment and upgrade of the building, which address the comfort and accessibility of people using the service.

The knowledgeable and experienced staff team provides individual support to service users. The team is well supported by a new registered manager who has taken over from a longstanding and established predecessor. This transition has been managed well. The responsible individual has worked at the agency for some time, knows the service and maintains effective local partnerships.

There were two minor breaches of regulation, which were amended during the inspection, and there is one minor shortfall about staff appraisals. Records are kept well, including archive records. The responsible individual remains very involved in the service and is the link to the board of trustees. Regular reviews of practice are undertaken and reports provided keep the board informed. Business planning from these meetings helps to secure and develop the ongoing service.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendation:

- Ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. This recommendation is made in respect of improving the quality of this review and ensuring that this is an opportunity to develop staff and improve practice. (National minimum standards (NMS) 24.6)

Experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users

Outcomes for service users are **good**.

Service users, irrespective of background or diversity, receive an adoption support service and influence the delivery of the services by providing valuable feedback. There are many examples of positive changes in their circumstances, for example feeling unburdened by guilt, being able to share information that has been secret or held for many years, finding birth relatives whom they didn't know they had and receiving important health information.

Staff manage expectations well and sensitive help allows service users to understand that their desires may not be fulfilled. Staff work hard to gain trust and to forge positive relationships with service users, which have subsequently helped to support them with hearing difficult things. All service users the inspector spoke to felt very positive about the service and even when things had been tough they felt helped and supported. For example, words such as 'confidence', 'sensitivity', 'balanced' and 'professionalism' were used over and over again to describe the workers' approach.

Many service users have already used the service previously and appreciate the flexibility of approach, describing it as 'an open door' and enjoying continuity of workers. Staff also feel that this is a strength of their service and is due to the length of service of the workers. Each case is assessed individually and the pace of the work is dictated by the service user, but sometimes sensitively slowed down by the workers. For example, one service user said, 'I would dictate the pace, but she pulled me back, made me think things through.'

Quality of service provision

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

The agency provides a prompt response to service users irrespective of their personal circumstances. The agency responds within a week to initial enquiries and general information is sent, including leaflet information, about how the agency responds to issues of historical abuse and how to complain. Service users said about initial responses: 'good response', 'quickly passed on to a worker', 'email in a week' and 'came back within a day'. Service users are also well informed about waiting times, and comments included: 'kept in good touch', 'kept me posted' and 'aware of waiting list'.

The agency has a clear strategy and plan to meet service users' needs. There are good reciprocal arrangements set up with other agencies, both in this country and overseas. This ensures the best outcomes and optimum service for service users. Staff work with service users at their own pace, providing helpful information throughout the process.

The whole team receives training opportunities and has recently been to the Tavistock Clinic for training on historical abuse and its impact. The workers hold

extensive experience between them and regularly share their knowledge with one another. They keep up to date by attending conferences in their area of expertise and access training via the South East Post-Adoption Network (SEPAN) and the post care forum. In addition, the agency holds excellent networks with the borough's local safeguarding children's board (LSCB) where they are invited to attend relevant training.

Workers hold vast knowledge and understanding of adoption issues and the impact these can have on service users. This shows in service provision, where repeatedly service users are subtly helped to prepare for all eventualities. Workers help service users to consider the impact of what might happen, not just for themselves but their own families and the birth relatives that they are trying to trace.

Committed staff remain in post after a number of years and know the work and the processes which work for service users. Last year brought changes to the staff team with a new registered manager and administrator starting together. This transition was managed well, with ongoing support and overlap from the outgoing manager over several months. Staff feel that this transition went smoothly and created little or no impact for service users.

The agency has good systems to manage the work effectively. The manager looks at all referrals as they come in, or in the manager's absence a duty system scans new referrals in case an urgent response is needed. Referrals are allocated in order unless there is a good reason for them becoming a priority, for example terminal illness or very old age. Initial checks establish if the service user was adopted through the Catholic Children's Society and if not, staff will signpost to other helpful or potential agencies that can assist.

If a service user has already accessed a service, then if appropriate the same worker is allocated. Basic information taken at this stage determines if service users have any special support needs when accessing a service, for example home visits for someone who struggles to travel or an interpreter to communicate. At this stage, workers hold discussions with service users about where they would like to access a service, and they hold reciprocal arrangements with various other agencies to facilitate this process.

Safeguarding children, young people, adults and families

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

The agency has a good working knowledge of child protection issues and is clear about what actions it should take where there are concerns about safeguarding. The responsible individual, registered manager and staff are mindful of how safeguarding issues may affect some of their service users.

The responsible individual is a voluntary sector member of the LSBC Partnership Board, where the agency's staff access regular update training in safeguarding.

These links allow for informal discussions, where the responsible individual can pick up the phone and have a discussion. One of the trustees of the agency is a child protection chair for another local authority area. She has provided helpful training and understanding of safeguarding issues for the other trustees. All the agency's team attended training on historical abuse recently. They understand the impact of historical abuse and the importance of collating clear reports even when enquiries are closed, in case relevant information is needed at a later stage.

The agency has worked hard to put safeguarding at the centre of its practice and to protect service users. The agency no longer works directly with children, but has safeguarding policies which are comprehensive, and it offers guidance to staff about how to keep service users safe and supported. This includes a policy on protecting vulnerable adults, and a separate policy on historical allegations.

Service users are sent a leaflet at the first point of contact, advising them about the agency's complaints procedure and about its response to allegations of historical abuse. Service users advise that they are aware of these processes, although at the time of inspection they had made no complaints and the agency had dealt with one allegation of historical abuse.

The recruitment of staff and volunteers is thorough and effective to ensure, as far as possible, safe and responsible workers. The workers are registered with their respective professional bodies, and regular update checks are undertaken by the personnel department to ensure their continued compliance.

Staff are supported in this area of difficult work and when a case of historical abuse did come up, the registered individual felt staff needed more support. A decision was made to make clinical supervision available, and this is being offered to the team from a child and adolescent psychotherapist.

Leadership and management

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

A suitably experienced and qualified registered manager runs this service with the close support of the responsible individual. The registered manager has over 25 years of post-qualification experience and holds a professional postgraduate certificate in childcare social work. In addition, the registered manager is enrolled on a relevant management qualification to fulfil the requirements of registration. All of the professional staff hold professional qualifications in their field and are registered with their relevant professional body.

Leaders, managers and trustees show a strong commitment to continue to provide effective adoption support services. There are continued positive relationships with their host local authority, which ensure continued and important additional funding.

The Catholic Children's Society Westminster continues to provide enduring financial commitment to the service, keeping service users' charges at a nominal rate.

There is effective monitoring of the service delivery as set out in the national minimum standards. The registered manager provides regular written updates on the running of the service and the collated feedback from service users, and reports this directly to the trustees. This leads to an overall internal business plan, which sets out the agency's vision for ongoing services.

The agency regularly reviews and updates its statement of purpose and function, which is easily accessible on the agency's website. During the transition of the new manager, the agency omitted to send a copy of this document to the regulator. This was amended during inspection and no further action is required.

There is effective supervision of the staff team and the registered manager. This is clearly recorded and agreed by both parties. The responsible individual has also accessed clinical supervision, which is available to the staff team to support them with the complexities of historical abuse, loss and attachment issues, which regularly come up in this area of work. Appraisals are completed at timely intervals. These do not effectively develop staff, address emerging practice issues, or set targets. A recommendation is made for these to become more meaningful and robust.

The agency keeps good contemporary records of services provided that give a clear picture of how the agency is currently working with service users. These files are subject to regular scrutiny and audit by the registered manager. In addition, the agency has responsibility for a very large archive of historical files, of both adoption and care records. These files are securely stored on site, in locked metal cabinets in cool storage. The agency has appropriate insurance cover and an effective administrator who implements systems to ensure good accessibility.

There is a current refurbishment taking place which will make the building more easily accessible to wheelchair users and provide further facilities to enhance service users' experiences of attending this service.

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.