

Clifton Children's Society

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

Unique reference number SC048462
Inspection date 01/07/2015
Inspector Paul Clark
Type of inspection Full
Provision subtype

Setting address CLIFTON CHILDREN'S SOCIETY, 162 PENNYWELL ROAD, BRISTOL,
BS5 0TX

Telephone number 0845 122 0077
Email maggie.pitts@ccsadoption.org
Registered person Clifton Children's Society
Registered manager Ms Margaret Pitts
Responsible individual Mrs Jadwiga Ball
Date of last inspection 19/10/2012

© Crown copyright 2015

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

Clifton Children's Society is a voluntary adoption agency. It is a charitable, not for profit organisation. The agency's offices are located just outside the city centre of Bristol. The agency carries out the recruitment, assessment, preparation, and approval of domestic adopters based in the South West of England. The agency also undertakes a range of adoption support services for both children and adopted adults. It does not undertake recruitment in respect of inter-country adoption. The agency focuses on recruiting adopters who can offer a permanent home to children for whom finding a placement is difficult. This would include, for instance, large sibling groups, older children and children with a disability. There is a staff team of 12 social workers, a marketing and communications officer, and a small team of sessional workers and independent therapists supported by an office manager and small team of administration staff. There is an adoption team manager and a chief executive officer who also acts as the panel advisor. During the period from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, 24 children were placed for adoption. During the same period, the agency approved 29 adoptive families.

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: **Outstanding**

This voluntary adoption agency provides an outstanding level of service and post-adoption support for adopters, and children and young people for whom it might be difficult to find adopters. Many of the children with whom the agency works have complex and challenging needs; some come from larger sibling groups, are disabled, or are older children. Adoption placements are stable and children and young people report that they feel safe and well cared for and make exceptional progress. Effective post-adoption support work helps to sustain adoptive families, and to support adopted adults. The provision of this support clearly meets the agency's aspirational claim of offering life-long support to adopters and adoptees.

Children and young people make very good progress in their education and in the development of their social and behavioural skills. The agency provides high quality educational support and excellent therapeutic care. Young people enjoy and benefit from forum meetings, arranged by the agency, which are based around social and recreational activities. One young person remarked that they regard meetings as "Very much part of their adoption 'family'."

Adopters receive high quality preparation training. They report that they also have good access to post-approval training and that there are regular adopters' forum meetings which inform them about all service developments and enable them to gain a wider awareness of issues affecting adoptive families. Adopters are actively involved in the matching process and in the planning and review of children's care prior to the adoption order being made. Their views are fully taken into account with regard to service development and improvement.

Supervising social workers are well managed, trained and supported. The manager of the adoption team, the responsible individual and the chair of the board of trustees are actively involved in the day to day running of the service and practitioners feel that they are visible, available and approachable.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

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

ensure that prospective adopters are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's development needs. Specifically, that prospective adopters undertake direct work with children which enables them to experience the challenges of child care (NMS 10.11).

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children make exceptional progress in many areas of their lives in relation to their starting points. This progress is achieved by the agency working with placing authorities to conduct comprehensive assessments of children's needs, effective assessments and preparation of adopters, careful matching of children with potential adopters and effective ongoing and post adoption support.

Adopters receive comprehensive training and support in all aspects of adoption, particularly in regard to the effects of early life trauma and in their understanding of the later behaviour of children who have experienced attachment and loss. They receive this training both during their preparation period and following approval. This prepares adopters to cope better with children's emotional distress and any possible challenging behaviour that might occur and helps them to better understand the causal factors behind these behaviours.

One outstanding feature of the agency is the life-long, post-adoption support provided. This includes the provision of therapeutic care for adults placed with agency adopters and who still require support with adoption related matters that affect their lives. Several young adults maintain links with the agency and contribute to the adoption service in such areas as leading training sessions for prospective adopters. These young people said that they see the agency as "very much part of their adoption 'family'." The agency works closely with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to support children and adoptive families with emotional or mental health needs. Additionally, the agency employs a team of sessional therapeutic workers who provide adopters with a high level of service support. In addition, the provision of support from a clinical psychologist, which includes both direct work with families, support to groups of adopters, and consultancy work for practitioners, provides an outstanding level of support for children's emotional development.

The agency specialises in the provision of adoption places for larger sibling groups of three or more, and it has a large degree of success in this area. Adoptive placements are generally stable. This means that larger sibling groups can stay together and this helps them to maintain a sense of personal identity. The agency contributes to a local academic institution's research into supporting adopted children in larger sibling groups and they have achieved a national reputation for the high quality of this work. Additionally, adopters are well trained and supported in maintaining children's life story books and in supporting agreed arrangements for birth family contact and letterbox exchange. Children say that this helps them to be aware of their life circumstances and personal histories and this helps them to maintain a sense of

personal identity.

Children receive an exceptionally high level of support from the agency to help them make educational progress. The manager of the service and social workers from the team routinely go into schools where adopted children are placed and advise head teachers and teaching staff about the best ways that adopted children can be supported. Adopters state that they have been informed by supervising social workers about how they may access government grants to provide additional educational support for adopted children and young people. These measures help to give adopted children an additional degree of educational support.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The quality of the service provision of this voluntary adoption agency is outstanding. This is evident in the way that potential adopters are received and recruited, in the high quality of the preparation and training that adopters receive, in the thoroughness of analysis seen in prospective adopter assessments, and in the rigour and timeliness given to the adopter approval process. Additionally, adoption support work is wide ranging, of a high quality, is ongoing and truly meets the agency's stated claim of giving "Life-long support to adoptive families".

The agency has established a 'Team at the Door' approach to welcome and inform potential adopters for whom decisions about adopting may occur following an emotional time in their lives linked to personal fertility problems. The team is made up of professional social work practitioners and administrators who have been specifically trained in this task. Adopters report that the main reason that they chose this agency rather than others was as a result of the excellent way that they were received and informed about adoption.

In addition to receiving high quality information material at the initial meeting, and the introductory events that the agency organises, prospective adopters attend good quality preparation training at both stage one and stage two points of their assessments. The agency has been chosen to take a primary role in the arrangement of the preparation training for adopters who are being assessed by some members of the South West Adoption Consortium, thus indicating the high regard in which this agency's training is held. This high quality training ensures that children are adopted by families who have a thorough knowledge of the general needs of adopted children. Stage one assessments are conducted by two social workers and this provides greater analysis to the decision-making process about adopters' suitability. Whilst these assessments have generally produced good outcomes for the young people adopted, an analysis of the small number of disruptions that have occurred in

the last five years indicates that there is a need to ensure that all prospective adopters have undergone extensive personal 'hands on' experience of caring for children. This learning by the agency will ensure that children will be only placed with families who have a good knowledge of the practical needs of adopted children.

The independently chaired panel is well constituted and has members with medical expertise and with personal experience of adoption. Minutes of panel meetings indicate that social workers' prospective adopter assessments are looked at with more rigour and this ensures that recommendations of approval are given the best possible scrutiny. Recommendations are timely, as is the further scrutiny given by the agency decision maker before approval is made. The chair and the agency decision-maker conduct a six-monthly analysis of the panel function and make changes to their function when this becomes necessary.

The agency provides excellent packages of post-adoptive support, both in the form of regular forum meetings for adopters led by a clinical psychologist, and regular social and recreational events for adopted young people and adopters birth children. When difficulties arise in adoptive families, a clear plan of support is put in place, and that support is extensive and far reaching and the plan is appropriately reviewed. This helps to maintain adoptive families and results in the low numbers of adoption disruptions that occur within this agency compared to the national average. As previously stated, post adoption support work has included undertaking therapeutic work with adults who were adopted by this agency. The agency also conducts birth records tracing and will engage in intermediary work with people who were placed for adoption by the agency.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The arrangements for the safeguarding of children undertaken by this agency are central to its practice and are outstanding. The agency works closely with the local safeguarding children board, the local authority designated officer and local safeguarding children teams in following up any concerns that may arise. The agency has a safeguarding children policy which is reviewed annually; adopters receive training on the long-term impact of abuse on children; staff, panel member and adopter recruitment and vetting is robust to ensure only suitable people are recruited.

The local authority safeguarding team and the local authority designated officer, within which the agency is placed, report good cooperation with this agency in reporting and following up any safeguarding concerns. Adopted children say that they feel safe and are safe in their adoptive families.

Safeguarding training at the appropriate level for managers, social workers and panel

members is frequently updated and adopters receive safeguarding children training during their preparation period and after approval. This includes training on the particular dangers to adopted children that might occur through social media networks. Of particular note is the contribution that the agency makes to safeguarding training for some of the other members of the South West Adoption Consortium. This training is highly regarded by the other members of the Consortium. Arrangements are in place on the actions to be followed by staff and prospective adopters in conjunction with local police in the event of a child going missing and adopters interviewed during the inspection are aware of these.

The arrangements for the vetting and recruitment of managers and staff, panel members, and adopters is thorough and complies with statutory requirements. This helps to prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children and young people.

Social workers confirm that prior to an adoption order being made, managers arrange for children to be seen individually by placing authority social workers and asked if they feel safe with their adopters.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The leadership and management of this agency is outstanding and succeeds in providing effective and stable adoption places for a range of children, including children who may be more difficult to place, and in fulfilling the agency's aspiration to provide life-long post-adoption support for adoptive families.

Senior management and trustees are directly involved in the day-to-day running of the service and are actively involved in service monitoring and development. This ensures that there is a sound knowledge of service provision and development at all levels of the agency and this means that any problems with service provision can be acted upon swiftly and effectively. Additionally, senior managers undertake consultation with all relevant stakeholders in service review and development and this ensures that the views of all those connected with adopted children are taken into account.

The agency benefits from being led by a well-qualified and experienced manager who oversees the work of the supervising social workers through highly effective working relationships with placing authorities and other professional bodies.

Managers employ an effective recruitment strategy supported by a designated marketing officer to attract potential adopters. This means that the agency are able to focus upon, and identify potential adopters for children who might otherwise be difficult to place, such as larger sibling groups.

Excellent administrative support from an experienced team is provided to managers and practitioners. They provide clearly written records and well-ordered

administrative systems to support the recruitment, preparation and assessment task, and post adoption support services. Adopters say that they value the support and assistance given by the administrative team, and that this is seen to be particularly evident in the welcoming response given by administrative staff at the time of adopters' first contact with the agency. This helps to ensure that potential adopters are not put off from applying to be considered as adopters.

Managers and staff are actively involved in research activity in collaboration with academic institutions and constantly strive to make improvements to the service and implement learning.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the chair of the trustees are actively involved in service review and development. Both attend the adoption panel, the CEO as the panel advisor and the chair of trustees as a professional social work member. This means that they have a wide and extensive knowledge, understanding and awareness of day-to-day concerns affecting the adoption service. The CEO produces a six-monthly report for the board of trustees in consultation with adopters, adopted people, partnership agencies and all relevant stakeholders which includes a service review and which identifies aspirational areas of service development.

All members of the social work team have a professional qualification and all are members of the appropriate professional body. All staff benefit from regular team meetings and social workers receive one to one supervision at least monthly. Managers and staff undertake an annual personal development appraisal which identifies their ongoing training and development needs to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to undertake their role.

New appointees are well inducted and social workers report that they are well managed and supported and that they can access any necessary training. Similarly, there is an induction process for new panel members and an annual review of training and development needs. This means that adoptive families are supervised and supported by well trained professionals who themselves are well supported.

The agency has met the recommendation of the previous inspection and now has a system in place to ensure that a record is kept of all action taken in response to all notifiable events.

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.