

Barnardo's – London, East & South East

Barnardo's
54 Head Street, Colchester CO1 1PB
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

This voluntary adoption agency has been registered since 1947. Barnardo's is registered for domestic adoption and for the provision of adoption support services to children and adults. The adoption agency is part of the wider family placement service which has fostering services throughout the UK.

This branch (London, East and South East) is based in Colchester, and has additional office premises in Walthamstow and Faversham and access to office and meeting space in Barking.

It recruits, prepares, assesses, approves and supports prospective adoptive families and works with local authorities to place children in need of an adoptive placement with these families.

The agency offers an adoption support service to adopters it has assessed. Support is also provided to adoptive families from other agencies before and after adoption, on a contract basis. The support includes therapeutic counselling and attachment-focused counselling. The agency also provides, on behalf of a local authority, support and counselling to young people and adults who have been affected by adoption, including birth family members.

Inspection dates: 26 February to 2 March 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
How well children and parents are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good

The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 11 January 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This voluntary adoption agency is good because:

- Children progress well and the vast majority experience stable placements with their adopted families.
- Applicants feel they are welcomed to the agency and that they are valued.
- Prospective adopters are well prepared to adopt a child.
- The family finding, matching and placement processes are of a high quality and the vast majority of children settle well with their adoptive families.
- Support services to adoptive families are of a high quality.
- Support services to adults affected by adoption are of a high quality.
- There is a strong focus on protecting children from harm and making sure their well-being is promoted.
- Managers and staff have good working relationships with professionals in other agencies and therefore, partnership working is strong.
- The leaders, managers and staff are committed to providing a good service that supports children to make progress towards reaching their full potential.

The voluntary adoption agency's areas for development:

- Not all staff have done mandatory and other training relevant to their roles.
- The records of supervision sessions are poor.
- Children's views are not sufficiently well used in the development of the service.
- The monitoring and quality assurance systems are underdeveloped.
- Some case records are not well maintained, and some are incomplete.

What does the voluntary adoption agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered provider, the manager and, in relation to any branch, the branch manager, shall ensure that all persons employed by the agency receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal; and are enabled from time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. (Regulation 15 (1)(2)(a)(b) The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003).	31/05/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that a formal system is developed that clearly shows that children's wishes, feelings and views have been taken into account by the agency in monitoring and developing its service. (Adoption: national minimum standards July 2014, 1.6)
- Make sure that all staff's work and activity is consistent with adoption regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures. (Adoption: national minimum standards July 2014, 25.3)

In particular, refine the systems for monitoring the work of the agency's and staffs' practice to make sure that areas of development are identified and addressed.

- Ensure the adoption team manager checks that the prospective adopter's report is accurate, up-to-date and has evidence-based information which distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information, before it is submitted to the adoption panel. The social worker who wrote the prospective adopter's report should sign and date it, and it should be countersigned and dated by the adoption team manager (or a team manager of another adoption team within the agency) and the prospective adopters. (Adoption: national minimum standards July 2014, 10.12)

In particular, ensure that the manager, in their quality assurance of the adopter's reports, explores any gaps in the evaluation of issues that may have an impact on a

child.

- A written record should be kept by the agency detailing the time and date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record should be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (Adoption: national minimum standards July 2014, 24.5)
- Staff, volunteers and persons on the central list should understand and follow the agency's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). A system should be in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (Adoption: national minimum standards July 2014, 27.2)

This is specific to the shortfall identified regarding the agency's monitoring of the quality and adequacy of some of its records.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

People enquiring about adoption are given a warm welcome. Good-quality information is provided to them in a timely way. This information helps them make informed decisions about whether they wish to pursue adoption. Adopters who have gone through the process said that they are made to feel welcome and valued throughout and are very satisfied with the service provided to them and their children.

Preparation of prospective adopters is effective. Prospective adopters develop a good understanding about the complex needs that children waiting for adoption have. They learn about how children's past experiences have affected their emotional well-being and behaviour. An adopter said that the 'open and frank' style of the preparation training helped them to understand the reality of adoption. Some prospective adopters said they found it 'really useful' that people who have adopted came to talk to them during the preparation course.

The quality of the assessments for prospective adopters is variable. For some, a thorough and analytical approach has been taken to all aspects of the applicants' lives. However, in two cases, issues that may have an impact on children placed had not been sufficiently explored. The quality assurance systems failed to identify these issues.

The staff work exceptionally well with prospective adopters and local authority social workers during the family finding and matching processes. The family finders get to know the prospective adopters very well and make it their business to get to know and understand the child's needs well. They are very sensitive to the needs of all parties, including prospective adopters' birth children. Great care is taken to ensure that prospective adopters have and understand all known information about a child they are considering and how this may affect family life. An adopter said that the worker was 'very thorough in making sure we had all the information [about a child]'. Introductions to, and placements of, children with their prospective adopters are very carefully planned.

Children settle well with their prospective adopters and begin to feel safe and secure in their adoptive family. Children's ability to develop healthier attachments increases, and these form the basis for a future successful family life. Adopters understand the importance of children maintaining a sense of their identity and retaining a link to their heritage; they support their children to keep in touch with their birth families. Adoptive parents support their child's education, and children achieve well. Children develop their knowledge and skills in many areas, through their attainment in education and also through being involved in a wide range of interesting and fun activities. Children's achievements help their self-esteem and confidence to improve and they develop a more positive self-view. Children are healthy and their adoptive parents ensure that they have access to any health professionals they need. Children develop the practical and the emotional skills that will help them become more independent.

The therapeutic support service 'LINK' is available to Barnardo's adopters and other agencies' adopters through contracts with local authorities. When difficulties arise,

therapeutic work by skilled and experienced therapists from the LINK service has been key in helping address these. The services provided range from support in the early days of a placement, to help the bonding and attachment processes, through to support to teenagers struggling with their self-esteem and identity. Children, through the work, have been able to come to terms with their past and develop a more positive sense of identity. They develop strategies to manage the difficulties of life more effectively and learn that what happened to them in the past was not their fault. The work with adoptive parents leads to them developing the skills to parent their child in line with his or her needs. An adopter spoke about how the work has given her good ideas about how to deal with her child's emotional distress. In some cases, the support has prevented family breakdown. Barnardo's-approved adopters also have access, over the year, to further training, adopter support groups and social events. These enable adoptive families to spend time together and share experiences.

Placement stability over the past 12 months has been good, with only two placements breaking down. The manager has not carried out an evaluation of these cases, and the local authority for the two children has not provided the manager with the disruption meeting minutes. This means that, to date, lessons to be learned and areas for development have not been identified.

The agency delivers services to people affected by adoption for a local authority through a contract. All of the services provided are of a high quality, and they include the following:

- Arranging contact between children and their birth families: The services and support provided to make sure contact is meaningful for the participants are of a high quality. Through indirect or direct contact, children maintain or develop a sense of their heritage and parents are reassured that their birth child is doing well. However, the project workers who supervise the direct contact arrangements have not been trained in the supervision of contact.
- Support to adults affected by adoption: This work is undertaken with sensitivity and makes a significant difference to people's lives. For example, the work undertaken with birth parents has helped them to move on in their lives. For some, this has improved the chance of them being successful in parenting further children born to them. Adoptees and birth relatives seeking information about their own adoption or that of a family member are well prepared for different outcomes. This means that they make informed decisions about progressing their case and are well prepared for disappointments. They said that the staff working with them are professional, sensitive to their needs and knowledgeable.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The managers and staff maintain a strong focus on protecting and safeguarding children. There are effective systems that make sure that all applicants undergo thorough checks and assessments to establish if they are suitable to adopt.

Prospective adopters develop a good understanding, through the preparation, training and support provided to them, of safe caring principles and of how children's past experiences have had an impact on them. They are successful in adapting their parenting styles to suit

their child's needs. Children have people they can talk to about their fears and worries. These include their adopters or their therapists.

Not all staff are up to date with their safeguarding training, and staff who run the helpdesk have not had training to help keep children safe from child sexual exploitation, radicalisation or female genital mutilation. There are discussions about safeguarding within supervision and team meetings and these help to keep staff up to date with issues emerging nationally.

The processes for recruiting staff, panel members and therapists are thorough and ensure that the risk that an unsuitable person may work with the children and families is minimised.

There have been no allegations against staff or carers made by children or adults in the past 12 months.

The effectiveness of leaders and manager: requires improvement to be good

The nominated manager for the service oversees all of the placement work. Another manager oversees the support work. There are plans to strengthen the relationships between these teams and areas of work to provide a more integrated service.

The national picture of adoption has presented agencies with uncertainty over the past few years. The leadership has closely monitored the changing picture and made efficiency savings where required. The management is actively involved in the developing regional adoption agency programme. The agency runs training for professionals nationally, for example training for education providers about the impact that trauma has on children's emotional well-being.

A comprehensively written statement of purpose underpins the work of the agency. The agency targets the recruitment of adopters in line with the statement and with regard to the needs of children waiting for adoption nationally. There is a guide for children about adoption and the support services available to them.

The quality assurance systems do not provide managers with an accurate view of all of the shortcomings in practice and service delivery. For example, in two cases the quality assurance of the reports, including the panel and decision-making processes, failed to identify gaps in social workers' assessments. These are matters that could have an impact on children placed. There were also lost opportunities to develop practice. For example, there was no evaluation of the reasons for the two disruptions that occurred in the early summer of 2017. This means that, to date, there has been no learning from these cases used to improve practice. There has been some work on a recommendation made at the last inspection about gaining children's views. However, there is still no formal system to gather children's views so that these can be taken into account in the development of the service. The managers have learned lessons from complaints and used these to make improvements. For example, as the result of one complaint, managers have had training in dealing with a complaint.

The managers and staff work highly effectively with other professionals and agencies. The commissioners of the support services spoke highly of the quality of the work and of the calibre of staff.

A shortfall in the number of staff has been recognised and new staff are being recruited to fill the gaps. Staff are committed to providing the best service possible to children and their adoptive families and to making sure they are well supported. An adopter said, 'We have been well supported by the social worker through many challenges.' Staff said they feel well supported through supervision, team meetings, and peer support, but the quality of supervision recording is poor. For example, the records do not show that there has been reflection on or feedback about the staff member's practice. Details, such as the time and length of supervision, are not recorded.

Training is focused on developing staff members' skills and professional practice. Records showed that not all staff were up to date with the Barnardo's mandatory training. Training in supervising contact has not been provided to staff who do this work, and the front-line helpdesk staff have not had training in protecting children from child sexual exploitation, radicalisation or female genital mutilation.

Case records were not complete or kept up to date. Staff spoke of difficulties using the electronic systems. They and their managers spoke about not having an adoption-specific recording policy and that this caused them uncertainty about where to file some documents. Consequently, not all required information was filed on the respective files. These shortfalls have the potential to inhibit service users' understanding of their situation, should they seek to access their files.

The panel is properly constituted. Attendees are treated with sensitivity, made welcome and are supported to put their views across. The panel provides the agency with quality-assurance feedback every six months. The administration of panel is good, and the written minutes of panel meetings provide a clear view about the key issues discussed.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They discussed the effectiveness of the help and care provided with professional staff. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the voluntary adoption agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous

Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: SC051838

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