

Clifton Children's Society

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The Park Centre, Daventry Road, Knowle, Bristol BS4 1DQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

This agency is a not-for-profit organisation. The agency carries out the recruitment, assessment, preparation and approval of adopters. The agency also provides a range of adoption support services. The agency specialises in recruiting adopters for sibling groups, older children and children who may have additional needs. In 2023, the agency approved 19 prospective adopters and placed 21 children. There were 183 adoptive families who accessed the agency's support services.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 February 2024

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The voluntary adoption agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the voluntary adoption agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children, young people and adults.

Date of previous inspection: 14 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

The agency provides a long-term commitment to adoptive families and offers high-quality and extremely supportive services to adopters and their children. A particular strength of the agency is the wraparound support offered, from the first point of enquiry to the extensive post-adoption support.

Feedback from adopters is overwhelmingly positive. Adopters report many examples of how the excellent support from the agency has prevented disruption and helped to build the adoptive families' resilience through difficulties and challenges.

The agency prioritises finding adopters for children who are 'harder to place'. These include older children, sibling groups and children who have additional needs. Many of the children have very complex needs and have experienced extreme trauma and neglect. This is made clear to prospective adopters at an early stage of the adoption assessment process. The agency very skilfully and carefully matches children with the 'right' parents who have the skills and qualities to meet the identified needs of the child. This thorough process is effective and results in an extremely low level of adoption disruptions.

Children and adopters benefit from a wide range of high quality and individualised support services offered by the agency. They proactively work with the local regional adoption agency to promote access for adopters to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. Adopters and children benefit from accessing support groups. These groups are also open to adopters from other agencies. There are holiday activities and adopter support groups. Social work assistants and the agency therapy team provide timely and extensive therapeutic support. Adopters report that the agency feels like an extended family.

Adopters speak with pride about the progress that their children make. Children with often complex needs are helped to thrive, to make exceptional progress, and to feel safe and loved. Staff strongly advocate for children at school meetings and visit schools to ensure that education professionals understand the needs of children. Staff also advocate for families so that children obtain the specialist health services they need to meet their needs. One adopter described this support, saying, 'I feel like I have an army of advocates from the agency around my child.'

The recruitment of adopters is effective. The agency has a sufficient and diverse pool of adopters available to meet the needs of the children requiring adoptive families. Many adopters approach the agency following a recommendation from other adopters. The agency offers a valuable and alternative choice for adopters who, for personal reasons, do not wish to approach an adoption service operated by the local authority.

This is a listening and learning agency that seeks feedback from adopters, children and professionals and uses this feedback to improve practice. Adopters are fully involved in their assessments, which are undertaken in a timely, very honest and transparent manner. These comprehensive assessments give the panel all the information that they need to make clear decisions about the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt a child.

The agency understands the importance of continually expanding their knowledge and improving their practice. The staff are actively involved in adoption research and are developing and implementing innovative and creative projects. For example, the agency is currently involved in research looking at the benefits and challenges of birth parent contact for adopted children.

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected: outstanding

Potential adopters are extremely well prepared and supported to understand the impact of abuse and neglect on children and how to safely manage behaviour through excellent-quality, safer care training and thorough assessment and preparation. The welfare and safety of children are at the forefront of the staff's practice. Adopters are equipped with the knowledge and strategies that they need to safely manage the complex needs of their children.

The staff are vigilant and demonstrate excellent professional curiosity. They know the adopters and children well and are quickly aware if, for example, adopters are struggling to manage their child's behaviour. High-quality support is promptly provided to adopters to give them the strategies they need to help keep their child safe.

Any safeguarding concerns are taken seriously and referred to the appropriate safeguarding professionals when necessary. These concerns are closely monitored by leaders and managers and practice is consistently reviewed for any learning or training needs.

The adopters, staff, panel members and trustees benefit from regular, high-quality safeguarding training. The safety of children is assured through a rigorous assessment of prospective adopters. Extensive checks and references are sought and verified. This process is undertaken in a transparent and very professional manner that fully involves the prospective adopters. Comprehensive health and safety checks are undertaken, including pet checks.

The agency uses research-informed safeguarding practice. For example, the agency has recently been involved in training, drawing learning from safeguarding practice reviews involving adoption, fostering and kinship over a twelve-year period. This learning will promote the safety of adopted children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers have worked hard in recent years to ensure the evolution of the agency in a changing adoption landscape, where many small independent adoption agencies have closed. The agency has downsized, restructured and appointed a new manager and CEO and is financially viable. Through these changes, staff have succeeded in ensuring that adoptive families have not been negatively impacted. The agency has continued to provide very high-quality adoption services and has remained focused on achieving very positive outcomes for children and their adoptive families.

The agency benefits from exceptionally high-quality leadership and management. Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and ambitious for the agency and for children and adopters. The agency's development plan is very detailed. It demonstrates a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the agency to ensure that it remains financially viable and continues to offer adoption services of high quality.

A strength of the agency is the successful working partnerships that have been developed with other agencies and professionals. For example, the agency is an active partner with the local regional adoption agency, the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies and meets with the Department for Education monthly. The agency's expertise in adoption is an asset for informing future government policy and shaping adoption services. The agency benefits from an effective working relationship between the trustees of the agency, who provide regular challenge, scrutiny and oversight to leaders and managers.

The staff team is consistent, committed, experienced and skilled. Staff report that they are proud to work for the agency and that they are very well supported, so that in turn, they can offer high-quality support to adoptive families. Caseloads are manageable so that the staff can offer unhurried and comprehensive support to adoptive families. There is high morale and a shared sense of purpose among the staff. They succeed in offering the very best assessment experience and support to adopters and ensuring that children thrive and make progress when they are placed with their adoptive families.

The staff benefit from an extensive training programme that includes topics such as safeguarding and therapeutic parenting. Specialist training can be requested by staff to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge they need to undertake their roles. Regular supervision is held both formally and informally. The staff report that these sessions are reflective and comprehensive. However, this is not always comprehensively documented in supervision minutes.

The adoption panel provides a rigorous quality-assurance function. The panel is well organised and runs efficiently. Adopters report that they are put at ease during the panel and that it is an open and transparent process. Panels are held regularly and make timely and well-informed recommendations to the agency decision maker. Panel minutes are comprehensive and clearly identify an applicant's strengths and

vulnerabilities. Any vulnerabilities are comprehensively explored, and it is clear why an applicant is suitable to adopt a child.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that a written record is kept by the agency detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person, and that the record is signed by the supervisor and member of staff. This particularly refers to ensuring that the records of staff supervision reflect the discussions held and promote learning and reflection. (Adoption: national minimum standards, standard 24.5, page 71)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, 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: SC048462

Registered provider: Clifton Children's Society

Registered provider address: The Park Centre, Daventry Road, Knowle, Bristol
BS4 1DQ

Responsible individual: Emma Simpson

Telephone number: 01179350005

Email address: charlie.delahunty@ccsadoption.org

Inspectors

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector

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