

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

The Catholic Children's Society (Westminster)
73 St Charles Square, London W10 6EJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

The Catholic Children's Society primarily provides access to birth records and intermediary services to adopted adults, birth relatives and their descendants over the age of 18 where it is the appropriate adoption agency.

Although the agency works predominantly with people for whom it is the responsible agency, on occasions, it may offer a reciprocal service to other adoption agencies. 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.

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 September 2018

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 adoption support agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the adoption support agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for service users.

Date of last inspection: 8 March 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency is outstanding because:

- Adoptees, their birth families and descendants receive an extremely welcoming and inclusive approach when enquiring about the arrangements surrounding their or their family members' adoptions. When the agency does not hold records, the agency's staff go out of their way to support service users to find the right provider who can help them.
- The quality of work with adult service users is exceptional. This includes adopted adults, birth family members and their descendants.
- Service users feel that their connection with the agency is lifelong. Often, they return and are delighted to find the same workers who know them well are still working there and remember their history.
- Adult service users make exceptional progress and report how access to the service improves their lives, helping them to feel that they can fill missing gaps and answer long unanswered questions.
- Staff are passionate about the service that they provide and are committed to improving the lives of adult service users and their families. Staff are well supported by regular supervision and access to high-quality training.
- The agency has inspirational, consistent and highly effective leaders and managers.
- The agency places high priority on keeping service users safe. Staff have an excellent understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are guided by a detailed safeguarding policy and procedure.
- The agency focuses on a very specialised area of adoption support and has built up remarkable skills in this area. They are a beacon of good practice for access to records and intermediary services.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

The agency provides an exceptional service to adults, their families and descendants who want access to their birth records and support in tracing and meeting birth or adopted relatives.

Excellent staff, with years of experience and knowledge, carefully support service users through the process of learning about their birth history and their early years in care. Each individual case is given detailed care and attention in considering how best to share records and to reduce the impact on service users of receiving difficult or sad news.

Often service users will have sporadic contact over a period, starting the process, leaving it and then re-referring themselves, sometimes years later. A consistent staff team means that service users will usually be allocated the same worker, despite sometimes years in between contacts. One service user said, 'It was a very efficient service. I had the same worker despite an eight-year gap in between contacts.'

Service users consistently used words such as generous, warm, empathic, respectful, gentle, brilliant and fantastic when describing the service and their social workers. Service users also described how the service had been hugely helpful and how hearing the truth had helped them to move on.

Commissioners who use the service gave extremely positive feedback, using words such as responsive, excellent and committed. One commissioner stated, 'The service goes the extra mile and has a real duty of care towards service users from the cradle to the grave.'

The agency regularly collates service users feedback. There were 19 responses to the Ofsted adoption support agency survey, which is an excellent response. In addition, the agency seeks regular feedback after each piece of work and uses this information to inform and improve practice. Several service users were contacted during this inspection and all had a very high opinion of the service provided. The only slight concern raised was in relation to timescales. However, all service users felt well informed about the waiting time from the outset and stated that they would rather wait for such an excellent service than be redirected elsewhere. The leaders and managers had a good understanding of the demand and had significantly reduced waiting times by requesting additional staff hours through reports and representations to the board of trustees.

The agency keeps itself up to date with new research practice and encourages staff to attend conferences, which support and enhance their understanding of the work. The registered manager is undertaking some analysis of the referral rates, to better understand and respond to need. The work of the agency is relatively short term but

is skilled and demands high levels of experience and competence in this field. The agency is a beacon of good practice and one of the few that continues to offer intermediary work for this client group.

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

Staff understand that their service users need to be able to make sense of their early years and past experiences. This comes from their thorough knowledge and understanding of all of the issues involved in adoption throughout people's lives. Staff also understand that the impact of issues spreads wider to adoptees' families, birth relatives and descendants. Staff help all service users to manage these issues with sensitivity and expertise.

The agency and all the workers in the team understand how adoption issues can affect people's identity, their mental health and emotional well-being. They also understand the impact that the work can have on themselves. Once every month, the team meets with a clinical psychologist to have joint supervision and reflection sessions. This helps to problem-solve, to consider strategies and approaches to case work and to support staff who work with traumatic and difficult scenarios on a daily basis. These sessions protect staff and service users and are effective in supporting positive responses and outcomes.

Commissioning teams report how the agency puts service users at the centre of practice and carefully considers all vulnerabilities to ensure service users' safety. Service users who have special or specific needs will be offered home visits and careful planning to ensure that they gain the most out of sessions when sensitive information is shared. For example, when there are communication and mobility needs.

The safeguarding policy, including the vulnerable adult policy, is excellent and informative. Staff understand their own responsibilities about how, when and to whom they should report any concerns. The safeguarding policy (dated November 2017) is available on the agency's website. A recently updated version is awaiting sign off by the host borough and then the agency's Board of Trustees.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

This agency benefits significantly from strong, consistent and inspirational leaders and managers. The registered manager who runs the day-to-day operations has over 25 years of post-qualification experience and holds a professional postgraduate certificate in social work. In addition, the registered manager has completed the level 5 diploma in leadership and management. The responsible individual for the agency has worked in senior management positions for the past 30 years and continues to show an ambitious vision for the service.

Leaders and managers have recognised that the agency needs to build on its

experience and expertise in the field of birth record counselling and intermediary services. Leaders and managers are passionate that this service should continue to exist and have strongly prioritised the ongoing service, ensuring additional hours via the board of trustees, thus helping to reduce waiting times and improve service users' experiences. Leaders and managers are in the process of redefining and rebranding the service, with a view to commissioning out the agency expertise and thus improving access to birth records and intermediary work for a greater number of people.

Leaders and managers work collaboratively with other agencies. Two outside professionals were contacted as part of this inspection and they provided very positive feedback about their contacts and shared work with the agency.

There is regular communication with other agencies who hold archive records, such as the London Metropolitan Archives, and reciprocal work with other adoption support agencies and local authorities. In addition, there is a service level agreement with the host borough to undertake the statutory component of the access to birth records work. The agency is forward thinking about rebranding and commissioning its specialist services to other agencies and/or local authorities.

Adoptees and their families benefit from the services on offer and are helped to understand their early life experiences and backgrounds as sensitively as possible. The feedback received during this inspection indicates the very positive benefits of the service to people's lives.

Staff receive outstanding support, supervision and training that are focused on service users' experiences, needs and outcomes. Recent training has included pre-commencement records, descendants, general data protection regulation, residential care and safeguarding. The staff team members work well together and staff support one another; this extends to excellent administrative support, which helps the whole service to run smoothly.

The agency meets the aims and objectives of its statement of purpose and function. The leaders and managers are acutely aware of promoting inclusion, tolerance, equality and diversity within the agency and are considering how they can incorporate this more into their staff training agenda.

Since the last inspection in March 2016, the agency building has been refurbished and now offers a bright, accessible entrance with beautifully decorated rooms and facilities.

Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, using the 'Social care common inspection framework', to assess the effectiveness of the adoption support agency, how it meets the core functions as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 and the national minimum standards.

Adoption support agency details

Unique reference number: SC441470

Registered provider: The Catholic Children's Society (Westminster)

Registered provider address: 73 St Charles Square, North Kensington, London W10 6EJ

Responsible individual: Dr Rosemary Keenan

Registered manager: Mrs Irena Lyczkowska

Telephone number: 020 8969 5305

Email address: info@cathchild.org.uk

Inspector

Christine Kennet: social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2018