

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

Pathways Post Adoption and Aftercare service is a registered adoption support agency and forms part of the Catholic Children's Society (Westminster), a registered charity and former voluntary adoption agency. It was registered as an adoption support agency in 2012, and it then changed to its current name in 2018. It provides access to birth records and intermediary services for adopted adults, birth relatives and their descendants over the age of 18 where it is the appropriate adoption agency. It does not provide adoption support to children.

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. It also provides signposting and advice to enquirers who may have no connection to the agency but who are seeking advice about how to obtain information about their, or their relative's, adoption. 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.

In the last year, it has provided signposting and advice to 157 people whose records were not held by the agency. The agency has provided birth records counselling to 110 service users and intermediary services to 54 service users, including adopted people, birth relatives and their descendants. It also continued to work with service users who had established contact with the agency prior to April 2023, the numbers of whom are not included above.

It is a small agency, staffed by a manager, three part-time social workers and a full-time administrator. A volunteer is also currently assisting with developing an electronic database for the records to improve the ease of searching.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 March 2024

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

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

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: 18 September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

This agency provides an outstanding, highly specialised service for adopted adults and their birth relatives. It is highly valued by them, and there is an exceptional level of user satisfaction. One service user said, 'It's made a complete difference to my life.' Another said, 'It's been life-changing.' The manager and her staff team consistently go above and beyond expectations to provide the very best individualised service possible. For example, staff do not usually visit service users in their own homes, but there have been occasions when this has been done to meet the particular needs of the people concerned, due to their age or vulnerability. The staff alter their working patterns to accommodate service users' commitments. One service user confirmed this, saying, 'I was given far more information and support than I was expecting. [The staff member] went above and beyond to help.' Another service user said, 'The service is very personal, polite, professional, kind and caring. I just couldn't fault it.'

Relationships between service users and staff are excellent. Service users said of their social workers, 'I can't speak more highly of her,' and 'She has invaluable expertise in dealing with people who have done similar things.' Service users continue to remain on social workers' caseloads to reflect the fact that their needs may be long term and they may require a further service at a later stage. This results in a continuity of service and positive, warm and effective relationships.

Service users are always listened to, and their views are respected. The service is delivered at their pace, and their consent is always gathered before progressing any actions. One service user said of her social worker, 'Her listening skills are superb.'

The agency has very good, detailed and clear guidance about how the service is developed so that staff fully understand the expectations. This supports consistency of practice while ensuring that the service is delivered in a way that responds to individual needs. The work is very sensitively carried out, and it is evident that a lot of thought and care go into talking to service users and undertaking the complex work behind the scenes, such as tracing and following up possible leads. Even if an enquiry is not the agency's legal responsibility, there are many occasions when the manager provides expert help and guidance which results in positive outcomes. One service user in this position said, 'I wouldn't have got anywhere without her.'

Service users are provided with very detailed information about the service so that they are fully aware of what they can expect, as well as any legal limitations on access to records.

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

Staff have clear guidance, through readily accessible agency policies and procedures, about how they should respond to any safeguarding concerns. These would generally be in relation to adults who have experienced non-recent abuse (historical abuse), although staff are mindful of the impact on any children in the family. The wider service has a safeguarding lead. The implementation of an improved data and recording system has enabled the safeguarding lead to monitor any safeguarding concerns more effectively and to ensure that they have been progressed appropriately. There have not been any recent safeguarding concerns in relation to any service users.

Staff use a trauma-informed approach in their work with service users. This enables them to understand why people may be acting as they are, and to provide an appropriate response. The work that staff undertake with adults who have been in the former society's care enhances and deepens their understanding of the impact of trauma and their knowledge about resources and support that may be needed.

Staff are mindful of risk. This is always assessed as part of the initial contact with the service user, taking into account the needs of everyone who might be affected and their expectations. This is clearly recorded in the case records.

The individualised support and the depth of the relationships built between staff and service users enable service users to feel safe when unexpected issues arise or when they want to progress their search. One service user said, 'It feels a safe service. I have trust in it.'

Staff have undertaken recent safeguarding training and have been instrumental in developing leaflets that are appropriate for adult service users in relation to non-recent abuse. Staff were proactive in ensuring that the leaflet was appropriately written in adult language, which shows a commitment to the service users and an understanding of how information may be both perceived and received.

Staff are recruited safely, and the agency has taken more references than the minimum required on some occasions. However, the reason why employment has ended when staff have worked with children or vulnerable adults has not been verified. This is potentially important information which may have an impact on the employment of staff and provides an additional level of safeguarding. The responsible individual and manager have accepted that this is a gap and are taking immediate action to rectify this in relation to future employees.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is led and managed by a very well-respected, highly experienced manager with many years' experience in post-adoption work. The manager's expertise, skills and knowledge are highly valued by other renowned professionals who work in this field. One professional said, 'She is always very wise and helpful

and pays a huge attention to detail.' The manager is regularly asked to contribute to the development of practice guidance to assist with developing the skills and knowledge base of other professionals through training, as well as being sought out for informal advice and support for peers. One external professional said, 'She is an extremely knowledgeable manager who goes above and beyond [expectations] to promote the needs of those who use their service. She works with external bodies to influence best practice with adults affected by adults.' Another external professional said, 'She can't do enough to help you. I can't fault the relationship.'

The manager is very committed to this specialised area of work and has high aspirations for the service. This inspires staff to have similarly high expectations of themselves. One staff member summed this up by saying, 'We want to provide the best service we possibly can.' Staff do this by being very flexible, going above and beyond what is reasonably expected of them and by working with service users over many years.

Staff feel very well supported and describe the manager as 'amazing'. They appreciate the open-door policy and the manager's willingness to discuss any issues or concerns that arise outside of their planned, formal supervision. Supervision is regular, and cases are thoroughly discussed as part of that process. This ensures that the manager has a thorough understanding of how cases are progressing and is aware of any issues.

Staff have access to appropriate training. However, due to the highly specialised nature of their work, they are, to some extent, the experts in the field, so training at an appropriate level can sometimes be hard to find. However, they have had recent training in safeguarding as well as trauma-informed practice. They also benefit from the South East Post Adoption Network (SEPAN), where they can share learning with other practitioners in the field. Team meetings are used for training and case discussions, and learning is shared as a result of these discussions. Staff describe the team as 'mutually supportive' and 'fantastic'. Staff have access to an employee assistance service if they need any additional support. The administrator's help and support are also highly valued, and this enables the social workers to focus on their social work roles and for the service to operate smoothly.

The manager is well supported by the responsible individual and the trustees and through professional supervision that enables her to discuss any issues of concern or practice with a similarly experienced professional.

There is a waiting list for the service. This has been decreasing, and there is an expectation that this will reach a more acceptable level in the next few months. There are several reasons, outside of the agency's control, why it increased but the manager has this in hand. The development of the electronic database will assist to some extent as this will make searching the archives quicker. A planned audit of the archives will also ensure that there is more detail about the records the agency holds, which again will make the process of initial searching more effective. In the meantime, service users who have a more urgent need for the service are prioritised so that their waiting time is minimised.

There are effective monitoring systems that ensure both the manager and the responsible individual know what is going on in the agency and can take remedial action if necessary. There is a good level of reporting to the board of trustees, who are highly experienced and knowledgeable as well as committed. Service users complete feedback forms on an annual basis, and their feedback is used to inform part of the report to the board of trustees. There is a good level of feedback, which is universally positive. This is indicative of satisfied service users who want to provide positive feedback in gratitude for the service that they have received.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person shall maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. This includes recruitment checks and information. (The adoption support agencies (England) and adoption agencies (miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2005, regulation 19 (1))</p> <p>This requirement specifically relates to Schedule 2, paragraph 4 only.</p>	<p>31 May 2024</p>

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults, using the social care common inspection framework.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 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: Gregory Brister

Registered manager: Irena Lyczkowska

Telephone number: 0208 969 5305

Email address: info@cathchild.org.uk

Inspector

Rosemary Chapman, Social Care Inspector

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