

The Children's Society

The Children's Society (Services) Limited

Whitecross studios, 50 Banner Street, London EC1Y 8ST

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

The Children's Society operates this adoption support agency, providing access to adoption and birth records to adults adopted from public care and adults placed by the society for adoption between 1936 and 2005, and their descendants.

Since November 2024 the adoption support agency has progressed 175 enquiries about accessing records. This includes through direct work with adopted adults as well as providing information and records to local authorities and other adoption agencies.

Inspection dates: 26 to 27 November 2024

Overall experience 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: 17 April 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

As a result of a change in the regulations governing the registration of adoption support agencies in December 2018, this inspection has considered a very targeted area of practice, that being the holding of and access to birth records, provided by The Children's Society to adopted adults. This includes the provision of records through local authorities and other adoption agencies.

Staff and managers are dedicated, experienced professionals who provide a sensitive and highly individualised service. People applying for access to their birth records receive a warm, empathic, thoughtful response that is tailored to their personal needs. The person centred approach is embedded throughout all of the agency's work to ensure that people receive a bespoke service.

Adopted adults are very positive about their interactions with all staff in the agency. Staff take their role seriously and understand the significance of their work. Adopted adults have the opportunity to build trusted relationships with the staff who are sharing their records. One person told inspectors that their social worker was a 'credit to his profession' and that they could not praise them highly enough.

Adopted adults are treated with dignity and respect. Staff go above and beyond to ensure that people receive their records in a format that is well documented. Thoughtful summaries are provided and staff make sure that any areas of potential sensitivity are identified. Staff take time to skilfully prepare people for the content of their records, helping put them into context of what was happening in society at the time. Summaries are written directly to the adopted adult and the use of thoughtful language is evident throughout all aspects of the service.

Staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to the people that contact the service. If requests are outside of the role of the agency, staff signpost adopted adults to alternative options, ensuring that they are well informed about the services and support that may be available to them.

Adopted adults told inspectors that the service has had a significant and positive impact on their lives. Several adopted adults said that staff provided guidance and reassurance throughout the process that supported them well. One adult told inspectors that having access to their records had given them insight into their early life.

Staff members' attention to detail means that the work with people to access their records is done at the adult's pace and is developed in response to their individual circumstances. For example, one social worker went to meet with an adopted adult despite them living some distance away, because they felt this was the right thing to do to support that person through the process. This level of person centred approach can mean that work takes time and as a result there can be delays in

people accessing their records. Managers are aware of this and have taken steps to create capacity in the service. This work is ongoing and where delays occur, staff make sure that people are regularly updated as to what is happening.

Feedback from people who access the service is valued. Managers strive to understand people's experiences, they listen and take action. For example, following feedback the language used in the agency's forms has been amended.

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

The safety and welfare of the adopted adults who are contacting the service are paramount to all staff and managers. Careful and thorough consideration of risk ensures that all elements are factored into how staff will work with adults. This includes exploration of people's current circumstances, their support networks, health issues and any other relevant factors.

Staff and managers are very mindful of the potential impact accessing records can have on adopted adults when they receive their file. They ensure that there is a planned follow up session with signposting to other services where necessary.

Staff are exceptionally skilled in the work that they do. They receive a range of safeguarding training, ensuring that they are attuned to potential risks and vulnerabilities for each adopted adult, as well as the impact that adoption has had on their lives. Staff are trained to understand vicarious trauma and all of their practice is trauma informed. This supports staff to provide a bespoke service.

Staff are often dealing with non-recent disclosures of abuse where an alleged perpetrator may be deceased and adults may be disclosing information for the first time. Processes ensure that matters are reported to the relevant agencies where necessary. The agency undertake a thorough review of their information to see if there is any learning for the agency and if there is any information to share with the adopted adult. As well as following the policies and procedures, there is also strong focus on the welfare and wellbeing of the adopted adult. Staff support to adults who have made disclosures is considered and caring.

Managers have clear systems of accountability that ensure oversight of safeguarding within the service. Reporting to the board of trustees means that any emerging themes and the learning from these is approached from an organisational perspective, with learning shared across all services operated by The Children's Society.

Adoption records are held securely. There are robust systems in place to ensure that records are protected and are only accessed by those people who are entitled to see them.

Staff are safely recruited with agency checks exceeding the expectations of the national minimum standards. Ongoing compliance checks ensure that management oversight is retained.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Since the last inspection there have been changes to the senior leadership of the service. There is a new responsible individual and a new registered manager in post. These managers are passionate about the service and are driven by a wish for adopted adults to receive high quality, individualised support when accessing their records. They understand the service, are aware of the strengths and have plans to improve and develop that take account of current challenges.

Staff report that they are extremely well supported and managers are visible. Although the team works predominantly online, managers have worked hard to implement structures and systems to ensure that there is a strong team culture.

Regular supervision provides opportunities to reflect on and develop practice. The staff team have access to a range of training and development opportunities that enable them to remain up to date with sector practice. Managers are aware of the highly emotional environment in which the work takes place and appropriate support and training is available to staff to address this. The arrangements for training and supervision of those social workers who work independently of the service are not as clearly defined. However, regular management oversight of their work and assurance processes for the quality mean that the overall impact of this is low.

Clear systems of governance ensure that the role of the adoption support agency is understood and reviewed by the overarching organisation. This ensures clear management accountability for the quality of the service provided.

Strong networks across the adoption sector means that the agency is up to date with current developments in practice. Managers ensure that practice is informed by current research. For example, managers have overseen work to ensure that the language used in the service values adopted adults and is understanding of their stories. This approach has developed in response to learning from a recent publication. This has been well received by adopted adults.

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

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers should ensure that supervision and training requirements for Independent Social Workers are reflective of the role as employees of the service as set out under regulations (Adoption: national minimum standards page 71, paragraph 24.1)

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: SC067198

Registered provider: The Children's Society (Services) Limited

Registered provider address: Whitecross studios, 50 Banner Street, London EC1Y 8ST

Responsible individual: Nerys Anthony

Registered manager: Philippa Geddes

Telephone number: 0300 3037000

Email address: nerys.anthony@childrenssociety.org.uk

Inspectors

Tracey Coglán Greig, Social Care Inspector
Leanne Grant, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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