

Intercountry Adoption Centre

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Mike Stapley
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The Intercountry Adoption Centre is a voluntary adoption agency. The agency undertakes all the required work in respect of the preparation, assessment and approval of intercountry adopters. The agency also undertakes a range of adoption support services for adults affected by adoption. This includes support for adoptive families and adopted persons, birth records counselling and intermediary work.

It runs an advice line, preparation training for those wishing to adopt from overseas, including specific courses for kinship adopters and those adopting again. It runs information days for prospective adopters, information days for families and friends, support workshops, intermediary services, courses, practitioner workshops and publications.

Summary

This is the first inspection of the Intercountry Adoption Centre since its registration as a voluntary adoption agency. It was carried out on an announced basis and all key national minimum standards were inspected. The service operates to a very high standard with a clear focus on meeting and exceeding the national minimum standards.

The agency recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. It is committed to building strong, empathetic and supportive relationships with its adoptive families and adult service users. Services are user-focused and tailored to meet individual needs. The agency is strongly focused on ensuring that the welfare of its service users is safeguarded and promoted.

Leadership of the agency is strong and effective. The management and administrative systems provide a strong framework for the efficient and effective operation of the agency. Managers and staff are well qualified and skilled, with good knowledge and expertise in overseas adoption matters. There is a strong focus on delivering and disseminating good practice.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the Intercountry Adoption Centre since being registered as a Voluntary Adoption Agency.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The Intercountry Adoption Centre is a national resource that prepares, assesses and approves potential adopters who wish to adopt a child from overseas. It has service level agreements with a number of local authorities to undertake this task. The preparation, training and assessment of prospective adopters is thorough, rigorous and generally of a very high standard. There is good management oversight of the preparation course. The preparation is thorough and takes into account the particular needs of those wishing to adopt from many different

countries. Adopters reported that they found the preparation course to be thorough, well planned and organised and that it helped them to gain a better understanding of all aspects of overseas adoption. One said that it was 'very useful' and 'raised issues we had not considered' while another said it was 'in-depth and challenging'. An adoptive parent is part of the team that deliver the preparation. Prospective adopters almost always state on their feedback form that the opportunity to talk with people who had gone through the process is the most valuable part of the preparation training. They were clear it is an integral part of the assessment and is well received by all adopters spoken to. The agency provides a separate course for second time adopters and kinship carers which focus on issues that are most relevant for them including how their existing children will react to another child and how the family dynamics might change.

Assessment reports are for the most part well written, cover all necessary areas and include good analysis by assessing social workers. All appropriate checks and references are carried out, which ensures that the safety of any children placed for adoption is promoted. The agency undertakes a second opinion visit if the assessing social worker has any concerns, which provides additional scrutiny and quality assurance to the assessment process.

The agency has an appropriately constituted adoption panel which is underpinned by a comprehensive set of policies and procedures. Prospective adopters are encouraged to attend the panel meeting. Adopters said that their social worker prepared them well for the panel so it was not quite as daunting an experience as it could be. The adoption panel is chaired by an experienced, independent person who has proven abilities in this area. Panel members have a good range of personal and professional experience. All panel members have appropriate checks in place and have undertaken induction, training and appraisal. They are well prepared for the panel, having read the papers in advance, pick up relevant issues and ask appropriate questions. There are good mechanisms for the feedback of any issues of concern to the agency. This promotes robust recommendations which inform the decision-making.

The agency is managed and staffed by appropriately qualified, suitable people in order to provide a safe service for children. Recruitment practices are robust and all the necessary checks are carried out. The assessing social workers are all very experienced practitioners and have a wealth of knowledge about overseas adoption.

The agency has comprehensive representation and complaints policy and procedure in place. Although there have not been any complaints, the agency is responsive to any concerns or suggestions made and uses them to improve the services provided.

The agency has appropriate safeguarding procedures in place which make reference to historical abuse. All of the staff have undertaken safeguarding training. The agency recently dealt with a potential safeguarding issue that was managed well and recorded appropriately. This provided clear evidence that staff at all levels are aware of how to follow the procedures and protect children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency is committed to providing support to prospective adopters during the matching process. The agency will share medical and social reports with the prospective adopters. In addition the intercountry adoption agency medical advisor will offer an opinion on the health

and development of the child. Following the placement of any child the agency undertakes a home visit which is included in the agency's fees. The agency offers numerous workshops on different topics including exploring adoption with children; race, culture and difference; intercountry adoption and schools and intercountry adoption and the teenage years. As part of the assessment package intercountry adopters are offered one such workshop free of charge. Further adoption support can be obtained from the local authority or the agency itself. The agency has also developed a video interactive training package for adopters with pre verbal children to help them manage trauma. In addition the agency has developed links with many organizations that offer specialist support in health care and education.

The service has access to a range of specialist advisers and services to assist in the continuing support of adoptive placements. This enables the agency to be responsive to a variety of needs, given the complex demands made on adopters. The medical adviser attends panel meetings. She also provides advice and support at the assessment and matching stages. An excellent level of legal advice and expertise is readily available from the legal adviser. The panel also have members with particular specialist backgrounds that add a further dimension to the advice available to the agency.

Service users are provided with services which are well tailored to their particular needs and are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout their contact with the agency. They are given clear information about the service the agency offers. The support is provided by experienced and knowledgeable staff who understand the effects of inter country adoption on families and adopted children. Recipients of such services are highly appreciative of the standard of support provided and the qualities of the agency staff.

The agency has a strong recognition of the life long implications of adoption for all concerned. It ensures that adopters are aware of the importance of maintaining the child's heritage and are supported in helping their child to understand their situation.

The agency has an intermediary service which works with adopted adults to try and obtain information about their families of origin, who are in many different countries. This work is underpinned by clear procedures and is well thought out.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose is up to date and reflects the agency's aims, objectives, structure and services provided. Policies and procedures, which underpin the operation and strategic direction of the service, are regularly reviewed and updated.

People who are interested in knowing more about adopting children from other countries are given clear written information about the process. Adopters report that information they receive from the agency is helpful and informative. Additional information is available for those would-be adopters who are planning to adopt from a specific country; adopters found this particularly

helpful. The agency has regular information days for adopters in addition to an advice line which is a very useful and well used service. Prospective adopters are also able to have an initial face to face consultation with the agency to discuss any aspect of overseas adoption. This is a relatively new service and while there is a charge, it does provide an opportunity for potential adopters to have any questions answered prior to the commencement of the assessment.

The agency is very efficiently and effectively managed so that it achieves positive outcomes for those that use the service. The organisational structure of the agency has been reviewed and a full time assessment team manager has recently been appointed. The managers of the agency are highly skilled, well qualified and experienced in overseas adoption and childcare. Managers demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a strong commitment to the development and dissemination of good practice. One local authority service manager commented that: 'The managers have an immense knowledge of intercountry adoption combined with skills to communicate with adopters and other agencies who are often confused about what they need to do at any one time. The fact that some of the staff also have personal experience of intercountry adoption is undoubtedly useful.'

Staff spoke highly of their managers and feel that there is excellent leadership of the agency. They are well supported to carry out their duties and responsibilities. They said that managers are supportive approachable, 'take an interest in what's happening' and are available for advice and support at all times. Social workers said, 'I feel very clear about who I can go to for support, I feel I have support all around me even though I am an independent social worker'. Individual's skills and experience are recognised as key resources in the agency. Staff are encouraged to develop their own knowledge base, professional expertise and skills, which are utilised to the best advantage of service users. Staff are very happy working for the agency and feel supported to do their jobs well even though they are all independent social workers. All of the staff spoken to during the course of the inspection feel very much part of the agency and are committed to the organisation and its purpose.

There are sufficient staff to undertake the range of duties the service has to manage. The arrangements for team management are effectively organised. There are four administrative staff who each have particular roles and responsibilities that are clearly defined. One member of the team is the panel administrator who has attended appropriate panel training. Social workers said, 'Administrative support is generally very accessible and excellent'.

Social workers are suitably qualified and experienced and knowledgeable about overseas adoption and the needs of people affected by adoption. Although all of the social workers are independent and therefore responsible for their own training the agency is very committed to staff training and development. All staff have regular supervision which is underpinned by an annual appraisal. This ensures that the service users receive an appropriate service of a good quality.

The monitoring of the agency is undertaken in a robust way. The agency feeds the comments and views of people using the service into service development. The work of the agency is well-supported by the Trustees who show a high level of interest in and commitment to providing a high quality service. The Trustees keep themselves informed through a variety of means, including Trustees' meetings, sub-committees and written reports about the work of the agency. There is close, open and effective dialogue between the director of the agency and the chair of the Board of Trustees.

The case records of prospective adopters, approved adopters and people receiving adoption support are well maintained and include all required information. Case files are well presented, suitably indexed and provide a clear and accurate overview. Other administrative records are maintained to a very high standard. This includes personnel records on all staff, whether employed or contracted, and panel members.

The agency operates from its own offices which are suitable for the purposes of the agency. However, they are not accessible to staff or visitors with a physical disability. The agency will make suitable arrangements to hold meetings at an alternative venue if the need arises. There is a suitable disaster recovery plan in place which outlines how the agency will continue to operate in the event of an emergency, and thus prevent unnecessary disruption to service users.

The arrangements for financial management are subject to close internal and external scrutiny and monitoring to ensure the financial viability of the agency. The financial management and administration, as in all other administrative systems in the agency, are very well controlled by experienced personnel.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency strives hard to ensure that due care and attention are given to issues of equality and diversity throughout the whole of its operations. Services are user-focused and tailored to meet individual needs. Service users report that contact they have with the agency is non-discriminatory and that they are treated with sensitivity and respect. Staff are provided with good support and training in this area.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

There are no recommendations.