

After Adoption - South Wales

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Rosemary Dancer
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Date of last inspection	19/01/2012

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Service information

Brief description of the service

After Adoption is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. It was established in November 1990 to offer information, counselling and support to people whose lives are affected by adoption. It has been registered as a voluntary adoption agency since November 2000. From May 2000, After Adoption began delivering services in Wales with formal registration as a branch taking place in December 2011.

Currently this branch provides the following support services: support groups for children and young people; general support to children and their families; access to records and intermediary services for adults affected by adoption; birth records counselling and support to birth parents and relatives, who are losing, or who have lost their child to adoption.

Services are delivered from the main Cardiff office and a sub office in Carmarthen. The branch has three workers delivering services who have admin support and are overseen by a manager who is based part time in Wales. Services can be delivered on a self-funded or spot-purchase basis and the branch is also able to respond to local authority contract work throughout Wales.

In the past 12 months the branch has provided adoption support service to twenty eight children and young people, four families, thirty five birth parents and relatives and eight adopted adults or relatives of adopted adults wanting to trace birth family members.

Because this agency is operating in Wales, it is also obliged to ensure there are no breaches of Welsh regulations or standards. This has been considered in this inspection.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is

safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The manager and workers of this branch fully understand the life-long implications adoption has on all parties. They are child-focused and value the views of the children and young people using the service. Children and young people are fully involved in choosing the activities they would like to undertake during the group sessions. Some are supported to have their voices heard within the wider community and are helping to shape national developments in adoption in Wales.

Adult service users have a high level of involvement in shaping the service they receive; service users' views are seen as important. People using this branch experience positive outcomes as a direct result of the service provided. Where outcomes are not as hoped, the workers support people to come to terms with the disappointments that they have experienced and help them to move forward in their lives.

Staff working for the branch are committed individuals who strive to improve their practice. They are well supported by managers and by an organisation that is proactive in improving the lives of people affected by adoption.

Shortfalls identified from this inspection have no direct impact on the safety or overall well-being of people using the service. They are as follows: an addition to the Statement of Purpose is required to clearly set out how adoption support needs are assessed; some attention is needed to case recording to ensure that all entries made are comprehensive; all applicants need to have references that comment on their competence for the role they are applying for.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
3 (2003No367)	include in the Statement of Purpose the procedure for assessing needs for adoption support. (regulation (3) (1))	06/04/2015

(7A))

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that all people working in or for the adoption agency have written references, that are relevant to the role they are to undertake, and that these are checked to assess their suitability before taking up their duties (NMS 19.3)
- ensure comprehensive case records are maintained (NMS 25.1)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Young people learn new skills through their attendance at the TALKadoption group and their life chances have increased. They take part in lots of fun activities, of their choosing, that help their self-esteem and confidence develop. Young people said that a drama session had been such a good confidence builder and said how going sailing in Cardiff bay had, 'Helped me to learn to trust.' A young person called a session during which a singer song writer sung a song that they had written, 'a very powerful experience; she translated my work into something real.' Some young people, from this group, have represented the views of adopted young people at a local and national level. They have, talked to adopters about talking to their children about being adopted, spoken at conferences about their experiences of being adopted, delivered a speech at the launch of the National Adoption Service at the Senedd and made an informative film about adoption from their perspective. Young people are rightly very proud of their achievements as a group and as individuals.

Young people develop and sustain relationships with other adopted young people, learn to socialise with others and learn how to work effectively as a team. A young person said, 'I have made special friendships; these are important as they understand adoption in the same way. One young person who attends the young person's group has found it so useful to them in building their self-esteem and confidence that they want to support other children and young people affected by adoption. They have applied to be a volunteer at a group that has been set up for the younger age range.

Young people's birth parents feel well supported by the workers when things are difficult for them. Their understanding of why their child is to be adopted develops and they begin to come to terms with the adoption. They are enabled to maintain planned contact through writing letters that are appropriate and useful to their child. This ensures that children maintain a link to their heritage. One birth parent said, 'I don't know what I would have done without them (After Adoption) at a time when I really needed it.'

Adults receiving an intermediary service are satisfied with the service they have been provided with. They feel that the workers support them well through what is an emotional time. They said that the work has helped them to understand the impact tracing may have on them and on the birth relative they wish to contact. They also feel that the work has helped them to make informed decisions about tracing. One person using the service said, 'I have learnt how complex the situation is and the limitations of confidentiality and the distress that it could cause making hasty contact with relatives...I feel I have been very well supported.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The service is promptly provided and professionally delivered. The branch is child-centred and the workers are skilled at developing effective working relationships with adults, children and young people. Young people have full involvement in the work undertaken with and on behalf of them, and this confirms to them that their views are valued. A young person said that the worker was, 'very encouraging of our ideas.'

The workers undertake the work in a sensitive and caring way and clearly are dedicated to and passionate about their roles. A manager of an external agency said in her view the workers are 'dedicated and committed professionals.' Staff have an up to date knowledge and understanding of issues relating to adoption and are skilled in this area of work. Local authority social work team managers say they have used the workers for consultation when they have been uncertain about an issue relating to adoption.

Due to the national situation, which led to local authorities de-commissioning support services provided by the branch, means that they are currently only working with a small number of families. The branch offers them an appropriate level of support. When it is clear that more co-ordinated support is required it refers them on to statutory agencies. The branch is a strong advocate for people requiring a service it cannot provide and an adopter described the service as 'a life line.'

Skilful work is carried out with birth families. A birth parent who attended a birth parent support group run by After Adoption said of the staff, 'they are very good at listening and non-judgemental. They went on to say that that, 'It was good to be part of the group ...made me feel good about myself ...someone believed in me.' A birth family member receiving support around the adoption of a relative felt they were well supported to develop their understanding about why the child was being adopted. They said, 'it was hard but (social worker) helped us. When we started did not know anything but (social worker) helped us understand what was happening.'

The service to other adults affected by adoption who hope to trace and have a reunion with a birth family member is also carried out in a skilful and sensitive way. Service users are helped to understand the possible effects of adoption on

themselves and their family and the potential impact on all parties a search and reunion may have. A person using the service said, 'They are mindful of the situation and how I am feeling... they are letting me take things at my own pace and don't pressure me... I feel very well supported.' Young people wanting to have contact with birth family members are also well supported in both the practical and emotional aspects. Should the birth parent not wish to have contact, young people are sensitively supported and helped to come to terms with their disappointment.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The culture of the workers in relation to safeguarding is strong. There is a clear ethos of there being an individual and collective responsibility for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Staff are trained in safeguarding and have a good level of understanding about safeguarding principles and practice. Prompt and effective action is taken if children are unhappy or unsafe; this ensures that children and young people's well-being and safety is promoted. Management oversight of any matters of concern is robust. Issues of concern are followed up on a regular basis by senior managers to ensure they are being addressed effectively.

People using the service are well-informed about the branch's duty in relation to safeguarding children. Staff approach any matters of concern about a young person with tact and sensitively to ensure that people understand what is happening and why.

Some aspects of the branch's work supports adopters to develop an understanding of the impact their child's past abuse and trauma has had on their emotional well-being. Adopters are supported, within the branch's remit, to develop effective strategies for managing behaviour and promoting children and young people's emotional well-being. Children, young people and adult service users trust the staff of the branch and confide in them.

The branch has strong links to local authorities; these links mean that there are effective communication channels between the branch and the statutory body. The branch has submitted the agency's safeguarding policy to the local Safeguarding Children Board for comment.

Overall the branch's approach to staff recruitment and vetting are thorough and conform to safer recruitment practice. However, one case was noted whereby the applicant's capabilities in relation to their management skills and the post being applied for had not been effectively explored. All other vetting procedures had been undertaken that show that there is no question about the applicant's overall suitability to work with people who are vulnerable. However, because of this shortfall the applicant's areas of strength and areas for development, in relation to their management capabilities, are unknown and therefore they cannot be effectively supported to develop any areas of shortfall.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The organisation, through its senior managers, leaders and trustees, shows a strong commitment to delivering good quality adoption support services. Governance of the agency is strong. There are clear arrangements for monitoring the work of the branch that are implemented. Findings from monitoring are used to drive improvement.

At the last inspection there were six recommendations made to improve practice. The majority of these have been fully met. This means that people using the service have information about the specific service they are seeking, children are informed about all required issues through accessible children's guides which are published in English and Welsh, the monitoring arrangements for records have been strengthened and supervision records clearly detail the time, date and duration of the session. More recently decision makers have been recording their decision making on case files. However, not all records made of contact and work with service users are comprehensive and this means that it is not always clear what work has been undertaken and the impact the work has had on the person using the service.

The manager and staff of this branch are passionate about expanding adoption support services to as many families in Wales as is possible. The organisation has supported them in this. Managers of the branch have developed good working relationships with other Welsh adoption agencies. As a group these agencies are proactive in, and committed to, shaping developments in adoption support services across Wales to benefit children and their families.

The branch is keen to learn and develop. While there have been no recent complaints the branch is proactive in gaining, and acting on, the views of children and young people, birth parents, adopters and other stakeholders. A particular strength of this branch is the way in which young people have been supported to feed their views into the local and national agenda for adoption.

There is an organisational Statement of Purpose that outlines the work the organisation does across England and Wales. It does not include the procedure for assessing needs for adoption support services. The statement is not particularly user friendly for people wishing to find out details of what this branch can provide. However, there are information packs that are provided to interested parties that contain information about the separate services, such as the young person's group TALKadoption and the intermediary service. There is also a comprehensive organisational website that provides good quality information about After Adoption.

Staff and managers are appropriately qualified and experienced. They are well supported through regular supervision, appraisals and team meetings. Staff report that managers, including senior managers, are accessible and supportive. They also report that the training opportunities are good and that training helps them to deliver a good quality service.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies.