

Cornerstone

Cornerstone North East Fostering and Adoption Service
90 Coronation Street, Sunderland SR1 2HE
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

Cornerstone North East fostering and adoption service is a registered Christian faith-based charity located in the north east of England. The agency operates an independent fostering agency as well as the adoption support agency that is the subject of this inspection. The independent fostering agency is inspected separately.

The agency provides adoption support services including birth records counselling and intermediary services to those families who previously fostered through the agency and who then adopted the children who they had fostered. At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing formal post-adoption support to three families.

Inspection dates: 20 to 21 March 2019

Overall experience and progress of service users, taking into account: good

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The adoption support agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 10 November 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency is good because:

- Adoptive families receive a good level of individualised support as soon as the adoption order is made. This provides continuity and enables potential issues to be addressed at an early opportunity.
- Children thrive in their adoptive families. They make good progress in all aspects of their lives. They are safe, secure and loved.
- Adopters access a good level of appropriate training that enables them to parent their children using a research-based approach.
- Adoptive families benefit from social activities and an annual holiday. This provides children with opportunities to meet other adoptive children and have fun.
- Adopters feel valued, respected and listened to. They have informal and formal opportunities to give their views on service provision.
- Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and ensure that adopters are equipped with the skills to keep children safe from harm while promoting their independence.
- Staff are appropriately qualified, experienced and well supported and they have a good understanding of adoption.
- The manager is passionate about ensuring that children achieve the best outcomes. She has a number of systems that enable her to know the progress that children are making.

The adoption support agency's areas for development:

- The agency has not supplied the regulator with the revised versions of its statement of purpose and children's guide. This makes it difficult for the regulator to assess or comment on any change in the operation of the service.
- The adoption support assessment and plan relate to the whole family. It would be preferable if each child had an individual plan. In addition, documents tend to be filed on the adopters' case files when it may be more appropriate to store them on the children's files. Consideration needs to be given to these issues, particularly if children choose to access their case records in the future.

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
The registered person shall— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide; notify the registration authority of any such revision within 28 days of making the revision. (Regulation 6 (a)(b))	31/05/2019

Recommendations

- The agency has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the agency’s files, on the child’s file and prospective adopters’ case records. (Adoption: National minimum standard 27.1)
 This relates to having separate adoption support plans for each child and consideration of where information is located.

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Adoptive families benefit from proactive individualised support that is provided as soon as an adoption order is made. This continues at the same frequency as pre-order support, and it is carried out by the same social worker. This ensures that families experience a consistent service delivered by a professional who knows them well and who understands the needs of the children. Consequently, potential issues are raised and reflected on at an early stage, before they become more serious. One adopter said of the support: 'The value is immense. The social worker really understands and gets it.' Another adopter commented: 'It helps the adults be better parents.' Perhaps testament to the success of the support is the fact that there have been no post-order disruptions since the agency's inception.

Families value the support and know it is available at any time, as they have access to a 24-hour-a-day helpline, staffed by the social workers who know them. One adopter commented: 'I know they are always there. You get all the support you need.' The relationships between adopters, children and staff are very positive. Adopters feel listened to, consulted, respected and valued. One adopter said: 'I can't imagine doing it without them.'

Children are making good progress in all aspects of their lives and they are thriving in their adoptive families. They have become more confident, their behaviour has improved, they are doing well educationally and they are more socially aware. Some children have achieved over and above what was expected of them. For example, a child who was non-verbal can now articulate some words.

Adoptive families have access to a good range of regular training. This includes a research pilot that is being carried out by a local university on the impact of adverse childhood experiences on building emotional resilience in children. Adopters value the training because it equips them with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of their children in the best way possible.

Adoptive families have access to social events and a holiday each year. This provides informal opportunities for children to meet and have fun in an environment where people understand them. It also provides adopters with opportunities to meet informally and socially with other families and share experiences with people who have had similar experiences. One adopter said: 'I feel part of the Cornerstone family and community.'

The agency has developed its systems for obtaining feedback from adopters and children in order to shape its services. Older children now have a closed WhatsApp group through which they can share their ideas. This group includes a social worker to ensure that comments are appropriate and safe. Children decide on the social activities that they would like to do. They are also involved in staff recruitment, and

one adopted young adult has assisted a local voluntary adoption agency by providing a young person's voice for the adopter preparation course.

Adopters give informal feedback regularly and they know they are taken seriously. For example, they made suggestions about how to improve the training, and, as a result, they are now benefiting from an in-depth course in attachment and trauma.

The support provided is underpinned by a written assessment of needs that informs the adoption support plan. This is a comprehensive document that is written with the involvement of the family and the child's local authority to ensure that it addresses the support required. Currently, one document addresses the needs of each child and their adoptive family. This would be improved by having a separate plan for each child to make their individual support needs clearer. In addition, some information about children is maintained on the adopters' files when it may be more appropriate to keep it on the child's file. The agency has agreed to reconsider its recording policy.

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

Children are safe and secure in their adoptive families. The children who are currently receiving adoption support are not engaging in risk-taking behaviour. Potential risks are identified through the adoption support assessment. This informs the adoption support plan so that adopters are provided with written guidance that relates to the specific needs of their children. This includes the safe promotion of age-appropriate independence.

Adopters have good training in safeguarding children that enables them to understand behaviour and minimise risk. Training in understanding the impact of abuse and trauma is instrumental in assisting adopters to parent in a therapeutic way. Adopters are also trained to understand and manage the risks from internet and social media use.

The agency's staff and manager are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and take these seriously. There have been no safeguarding concerns, but there are clear written policies and procedures to guide any actions staff need to take, should any occur in the future. The agency has good links with the local safeguarding agencies and contact details for the local authorities in which the adopters live so that referrals or requests for advice can be made quickly and easily.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led and managed by an experienced and suitably qualified registered manager. She is passionate about the service and she is committed to providing adoptive families with proactive support of a high quality so that adopted children achieve the best possible outcomes.

The manager knows each child by name and has a good understanding of the

progress that they are making and the effectiveness of the service. Each child is discussed at every monthly team meeting, their progress is discussed in every supervision and each child completes a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) that is assessed and reviewed by the SDQ champion. The manager has a file audit system to enhance the monitoring systems. She has also implemented a feedback system to give adopters a formal opportunity to comment on the service that they receive.

The agency has a sufficient number of well-qualified and experienced staff who have a good understanding of the impact of adoption. The caseloads are low, which enables staff to respond promptly to requests for advice or help. Adopters said that they really value the responsiveness of the service.

Staff are well supported both informally and formally. They have regular, recorded supervision that enables them to reflect on the work that they are doing. Staff have access to a wide range of relevant training so that they can keep abreast of current issues, and they have regular team meetings so that they can share practice and information. Staff enjoy working for this agency, and they said that they work well together as a team to deliver positive outcomes for children.

Staff's performance is appraised annually, and this includes the use of the views of children, adopters and other staff to ensure that it is a thorough process that addresses any developmental needs and ensures that they remain competent. Children developed the staff appraisal feedback form to ensure that it is child friendly and fit for purpose.

The agency is a faith-based charity that operates in line with Christian principles. Adopters and staff are practising Christians. Adopted children come from diverse backgrounds and have differing needs. Some children have significant disabilities, and children come from a range of cultures. Children are supported to follow their own path and be accepted for who they are or choose to be, even if this is counter to the values that the adopters hold. Staff are clear that they would challenge intolerance, as this would be contrary to the code of conduct for the regulatory body for social workers, with whom they are all registered.

The agency works well in partnership with other agencies. It has developed links with local voluntary adoption agencies with a view to sharing good practice in relation to post-order support and training. The agency has good communication with children's social workers, but this does not prevent appropriate professional challenge when this is required.

The service is child focused and it is run in accordance with the stated aims of its statement of purpose. However, although the statement of purpose and children's guide have been reviewed and updated annually, these documents have not been sent to the regulator as required. Consequently, the regulator has not been able to assess or comment on any proposed changes made to the operation of the agency.

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: SC066944

Registered provider: Cornerstone North East Fostering and Adoption Service

Registered provider address: 90 Coronation Street, Sunderland SR1 2HE

Responsible individual: Mrs Janet Lancefield

Registered manager: Mrs Pamela Birtle

Telephone number: 0191 565 6423

Email address: office@cornerstonenortheast.co.uk

Inspector:

Ros Chapman, social care inspector



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