

# Caritas Adoption Support Service

Caritas Diocese of Salford  
Caritas Diocese of Salford, Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford Street, Salford M3 6DP  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this adoption support agency

The adoption support agency is maintained by a charity, the Caritas Diocese of Salford. The adoption support team provides birth-record counselling and intermediary services. It provides support and counselling for birth families whose children have been placed for adoption on behalf of six local authorities.

From April 2016 to March 2017 the agency provided birth-record counselling and support, advice and intermediary services to 196 adult adoptees and birth family members. The agency offered birth-parent counselling to 93 adults referred from the six local authorities. The agency did not provide services to children of adopted families.

**Inspection dates:** 25 to 27 July 2017

**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:** 11 December 2014

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** None

## Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency is outstanding because:

- Staff are highly skilled and knowledgeable which means they are able to effectively assess service users' needs to provide the most appropriate service.
- Staff provide exceptional, individualised support to each service user.
- The registered manager leads by example. She is highly inspirational and passionate about providing an outstanding service.
- Staff understand how to safeguard service users. They keep risk assessments under review so that they are sure that their service promotes service users' welfare.
- Service users report the positive impact of the agency on their lives. Their experiences frequently far exceed their expectations in terms of the support they receive, as one service user commented: 'Thank you. My life is complete.'
- The registered manager develops highly effective relationships with commissioners and local authorities who view her as the 'go to' person in this specialised field.
- Staff's practice is research-based and makes an exceptional difference to service users' lives.

The adoption support agency's areas for development:

- Staff should verify service users' identities before providing a service and record that they have completed this. To improve, the agency should record how and when they have verified a service user's identity.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Intermediary services: The applicant is met and their identity verified before any information is disclosed to them, contact facilitated; or a veto is registered. In particular, that the agency records how and when the identity has been verified. (NMS 16.2)

## Inspection judgement

### Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

Since the last inspection the focus of the agency has been on working with adults. This has included work with adults accessing their birth records and those who use their intermediary services, as well as birth family members whose children are currently being placed for adoption.

Staff are highly skilled at developing trusting relationships with service users. They make clear assessments of adults' needs and any potential risks. Staff are always sensitive and treat service users with dignity and respect. One service user said: 'The staff at Caritas have been very informative and helpful. All information has been relayed sensitively and in a caring manner, and I have been encouraged to call or ask for help whenever I felt the need. Staff were very professional and empathetic. It was a very positive experience for me.'

Staff have an excellent understanding of the impact of adoption on children and adults, and they use their knowledge of attachment theory and research to inform their practice. As a result, service users report receiving an outstanding service which clearly outlines the options and the possible outcomes. Feedback from those supported through intermediary services is exceptional:

'At the end of the process I have achieved much more than I ever expected. I now speak to my birth mother once a week and I have taken my wife and children to meet her. We have a relationship that I never dared hope might develop and I enjoy her enormously... If I had to rate your service it would simply be outstanding.'

Staff are excellent communicators who keep service users informed about every step in the journey. Their work supports service users through successful reunions and also disappointments with those who did not achieve their desired outcome, reporting great sensitivity and support from staff. One service user stated: 'You have supported me well through the reality of the disappointment I felt.' Staff manage highly complex cases with care. They ensure that they assess and re-assess risks so that all service users are safe and benefit from their support.

The small number of cases involving children which have concluded in recent years shows that staff undertake excellent assessments in order to signpost families to receive appropriate support from placing authorities and the adoption support fund. Staff are sensitive to children's sense of identity and family history. Staff's knowledge of the research into attachment and trauma means they are well placed to quickly assimilate information into a concise referral which elicits a prompt and appropriate service for children and young people.

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

The agency has a strong focus on keeping service users safe. Staff are skilled in assessing the potential risks associated with the process that adult service users are engaging with. Staff make good use of research-informed practice to provide individualised support which outlines the potential range of outcomes. The strong sense of confidence which staff engender is crucial to service users' investment with the agency. One service user commented: 'I felt very safe and I have been informed every step of the way. Confidentiality is very important for me and I felt that was respected throughout my support and continues to be so.'

The registered manager works effectively with local authorities to complete risk assessments for birth parents who are offered counselling at the time of their child's adoption. This safeguards staff and service users while providing a highly flexible service. One commissioner stated: 'Staff are willing to go the extra mile – using different venues to fit in with birth parents. Staff are non-judgemental and persevere to get in contact with them.'

Staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. They have access to appropriate training, support and safeguarding procedures in relation to adults and children. Staff continually develop their knowledge and skills in this area to ensure that they remain aware of current issues such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

The registered manager recruits staff in line with safer recruitment practices. This prevents unsuitable people from working for the agency. Staff are careful in the way that they share confidential information. They check service users' identities when they begin to access the service; however, there is not always clear evidence recorded of how and when these are checked. This would provide additional safeguards for service users and staff.

Staff ensure that service users understand the complaints process. However, no complaints have been received since the last inspection.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The registered manager is inspirational and ambitious for the agency. She has been in post for a year and holds the appropriate qualifications in social work and leadership and management. The registered manager has a wealth of experience in this field. This leads others to regularly seek out her knowledge and skills. She manages the service effectively and efficiently, and over the last year she has developed the service through careful monitoring to a point where waiting times are reduced and recording is more streamlined and improved. For example, all service users receive an acknowledgement within seven days and are usually offered an appointment within two months.

The registered manager is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. She has focused her efforts on improving the service and has further ideas of how this will continue. She leads by example and has high expectations of her staff. They report feeling well supported both formally and informally, which is evident from supervision records and team-meeting minutes.

The registered manager works proactively with commissioners and partner organisations. They value the excellent service that is provided to birth parents, in particular staff's tenacity and flexibility in providing a valuable service for this hard-to-reach group of service users:

'Caritas offers a very good service to birth families. The staff deal with situations very sensitively and often go above and beyond in offering their assistance with sometimes difficult to engage families. They understand that this is a difficult time for birth families who are often still leading chaotic lives, and as such they're flexible in their approach and will accept re-referrals; making further attempts to engage the families.'

The registered manager meets with commissioners regularly to monitor and review the service the agency provides. This ensures that the best possible service is provided to service users.

The registered manager understands the positive impact of the agency on service users' lives. She actively seeks feedback, which shapes the agency's development, for example in revising the feedback forms. Service users value the registered manager's support, one service user commented:

'She interviewed me and I immediately knew that if anyone was going to find my son then she was – I had complete confidence in her and the whole process has been terrific. She also explained the pitfalls... I can't fault her, she was so professional.'

## **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:** SC411743

**Registered provider:** Caritas Diocese of Salford

**Registered provider address:** The Diocese of Salford, Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford Street, Salford M3 6DP

**Responsible individual:** Mr Mark Wiggin

**Registered manager:** Mrs Lorraine Courtney

**Telephone number:** 0161 432 7746

**Email address:** l.courtney@caritassalford.org.uk

### **Inspector**

Rebecca Quested, social care regulatory inspector



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Piccadilly Gate  
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Manchester  
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