



Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Inspection Report

St David`s Children Society

28 Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BA

Type of Inspection –Announced and Baseline
Date(s) of inspection 21 May 2013 and 10,11,12 and 13th June 2013
Date of publication – 30 July 2013

You may reproduce this Report in its entirety. You may not reproduce it in part or in any abridged form and may only quote from it with the consent in writing of Welsh Ministers

Please contact CSSIW National Office for further information

Tel: 0300 062 8800

Email: cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk
www.cssiw.org.uk

Summary

About the service

St David's Children Society is a registered charity with its offices at 28 Park Place in Cardiff. It has been registered as a Voluntary Adoption Agency since 9th June 2006 and has provided adoption services across Wales and Hereford since 1947.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This announced and baseline inspection employed the following methodology;

Review of self assessment, statement of purpose and quality assurance reports
 Checking of case files, other records and policy and procedural documentation
 Consultation took place with adoptive and prospective adoptive parents; Social Work staff, managers, panel members and local authorities responsible for placing children with adopters approved by the agency
 The methods of consultation included questionnaires, telephone discussions, face to face discussions and home visits.

What does the service do well?

As will be seen in the report, consultation and other evidence indicates that the quality of managers and staff at St David's is good. Their work in assessing, approving and supporting adopters and children is also of a good standard.

They have been responsive to feedback from service users and stakeholders in informing their continuing improvement of their services and there is an evident commitment to children in their work.

They have responded positively to demands to undertake an increasing number of assessments and to proposals for changes to structures for adoption services in Wales.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The feedback from the wide ranging consultation indicates that every aspect of the service provided by St David's is very good and that they are genuinely committed to the continuing improvement of the services they provide.

Their very positive response to the increasing demand for assessing adopters needs to be acknowledged in terms of its impact for children. Their responsive approach has had the affect of ensuring that adopters have been available for children that might otherwise still be in short term placements. This approach is typical of the agency but the impact of their work in terms of children finding permanent homes has provided positive outcomes for children.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

No areas of non compliance were found.

The following recommendation is made;

To consider any opportunities for further developing systems for quality assurance and for providing reports that demonstrate the impact of their work in supporting and facilitating positive outcomes for children in the short, medium and longer term.

Quality of life

Consultation and other evidence indicated that the support and other work fulfilled by the agency to optimise the quality of life of children and adopters are of a good standard.

Local authorities are responsible for safeguarding and monitoring the welfare of individual children placed with St David's adopters until adoption orders are made. Legislation does not require or make provision for systems to monitor their quality of life beyond that stage.

The role fulfilled by St David's in regard to children is to contribute to matching their adopters with children whose needs they can meet and for providing them with initial and ongoing placement support. Alongside the support and monitoring undertaken by respective local authorities St David's makes weekly support visits for one month after children are placed, then fortnightly and then monthly or more frequently if assessed as necessary. Their role is to assist and support adopters to be able to understand and respond effectively to the support needs of the children and adopters. They offer what they refer to as 'lifelong' support for their adopters and the children placed with them. Feedback indicated that the quality of support they provide is excellent.

It was clear from all consultation that the ethos and values promoted by St David's when assessing, preparing and supporting adopters placed the rights and needs of children as paramount. Their networks and systems for placement finding and matching were effective and the very low disruption rates of children's placements is testament to them providing sustainable placements to support children in achieving good outcomes.

To support their ethos of supporting the rights of service users, the agency provides information to both children and adopters about making complaints if they are dissatisfied with their circumstances or the services they receive.

Quality of staffing

People using the service are supported by experienced and qualified staff.

Feedback from adopters indicated that they acknowledged and appreciated the skills and experience of the Social Work staff group. They said their initial contact with the agency had been managed professionally and that they quickly received an initial visit and information pack. They said their initial visits had been reassuring and dispelled some of their earlier concerns about their ability to become adopters. They all commented on the skills of the Social Worker who fulfils this role and said they had been able to understand how they were feeling as prospective adopters and gave them encouragement to proceed on their journey to adopt.

They gave glowing feedback about the three day training that precedes the assessment process and considerable recognition of the ability of the trainer in helping them in understanding the adoption process and about children that are adopted.

They said the assessment process had been rigorousness and on occasions challenging. Again, they acknowledged the skills and ability of their assessing Social Worker and said that they endorsed the conclusions they had reached in their assessment reports. Some said that assessment timescales had seemed lengthy when taking place but recognised in hindsight that the duration of the process had been necessary. It was confirmed that unsuitable applicants had not been accepted for assessment and that where necessary and for a variety of reasons, some assessments had been discontinued.

One adoptive parent told us how much they had appreciated the insightful support and guidance provided by St David's when their adopted daughter was first placed with them. They said they had become overwhelmed with self doubt about their ability 'to do everything right' for them. They said they will be eternally grateful for the support and reassurance they received from St David's and that this had given them confidence in themselves and in their ability to provide a loving home for a child that is now thriving as a member of their family.

Adopters also spoke positively about the ability of the staff that facilitated support groups for them and for their wider families. They said these groups and workshops assisted their ongoing learning and in particular they valued the reassurance they were able to gain from the experiences of other adopters.

The adoption panel was not attended during this inspection but written records of their proceedings were checked to confirm their scrutiny of assessments. Discussion with the panel adviser confirmed that all members remain within the permitted tenure of their office and that they had received relevant training and appraisal of their performance.

.

Quality of leadership and management

Consultation and other evidence indicated that the quality of management and leadership is excellent.

The information included on their website and in their statement of purpose made clear the operation, resourcing and underpinning values of the service. Feedback from adopters at various stages of the adoption process indicated that this information was exactly what they had needed to understand adoption and the roles and resourcing of St David's. They said they appreciated in particular the testimonials and live discussion boards on their website.

Feedback from consultation indicated that the services provided by St David's have consistently met their statement of purpose. Feedback commonly referred to the high levels of expertise that characterise the service. Feedback also highlighted their commitment to recognising the diverse needs and circumstances of children when assessing the ability of prospective to become their adoptive families.

Considerable demands have been made of St David's to assess and support increasing numbers of prospective and approved adopters. They have been effective in recruiting additional staff and managers and there was no indication of 'slippage' in the quality or consistency of the services they provide. It was apparent, that managers had been effective in maintaining standards and in supporting the development of new team members.

Specialist training had been provided for the Social Workers responsible for assessing prospective adopters. Their training reflected the implications and complexity of their role in assessing a diverse range of people to become adopters to an equally diverse range of children. In addition to other training opportunities, group supervision was employed to share and learn from the considerable expertise available within the agency.

Managers and staff had maintained their commitment to providing a high quality service whilst there has been uncertainty about future structures for adoption services in Wales. They have managed change and uncertainty extremely well and have ensured they are well placed to maintain their role within any new arrangements.

The statement of purpose was being revised following feedback from service users. Their aim was to make it more concise and to provide more specific operational objectives against which to monitor, review and inform the ongoing improvement of the service.

Discussion took place about the opportunity to further develop their systems for providing such reports that would be available for stakeholders and others that would provide the findings of consultation about the experience and outcomes for service users in the short, medium and longer term.

.

Quality of Adopters

Evidence showed that St David's had been professionally responsive to applications from prospective adopters and in assessing and supporting them in their wish to adopt.

Adopters said they felt confident that their experience with St David's had given them good preparation to begin their journey as prospective adoptive parents and that they would receive good quality support when a child was placed and on an ongoing basis. Many adopters said they had approached St David's when they had not been satisfied with the responses they had received from local authorities. They said they had not handled their initial enquiries well and that there were extensive delays before they could attend initial training or begin an assessment.

St David's had approved a diverse range of prospective adopters and clearly understood their primary role in ensuring they were suitably prepared and supported to understand and meet the challenges and needs of children.

Feedback from Social Workers responsible for children placed with St David's adopters indicated that they appreciated their diverse range of prospective adopters and that they were typically confident and well informed as a result of the quality of their preparation. They said that St David's adopters were also well supported when children were placed and that they could be confident that they would receive any ongoing support they needed. We sought evidence of children's progress in the reports of adoption reviews undertaken by the respective local authorities but many were not in place. We were told that there were often delays in these being circulated by local authorities. Managers confirmed they will be liaising further with local authorities regarding the need for them to provide the conclusions and recommendations of their reviews without undue delay.

St David's self assessment stated that the disruption rate for children placed with their adopters was exceptionally low at about three percent of one hundred children placed. Whilst validating this as an indication of good placement sustainability, managers accepted the recommendation to further develop their systems to gather and collate information about placement disruption and breakdown on an ongoing basis.

St David's had paid for all of their adopters to be members of Adoption UK until their child reaches 18. This is so they can access an additional source of advice and support and to receive ongoing communication about adoption support networks for adopters and children.

How we inspect and report on services We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. Both consider the experience of people using services.

Baseline inspections assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

Focussed inspections consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focussed inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

Further information about what we do can be found in our leaflet 'Improving Care and Social Services in Wales'. You can download this from our website, [Improving Care and Social Services in Wales](#) or ask us to send you a copy by telephoning your local CSSIW regional office.