

Parents and Children Together - Reading Office

Oxford Diocese for Social work incorporated (PACT)

P A C T, 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading RG1 4QS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

Parents and Children Together (PACT) is a voluntary adoption agency providing domestic adoption and post adoption services, birth records counselling and intermediary support.

Since the last inspection, the agency has approved 180 adopters, placed 241 children with adoptive families, and provided support services to more than 300 families.

The agency has offices in Reading, Brighton, London and Milton Keynes.

The registered manager has been in post since March 2021.

Inspection dates: 2 to 6 March 2026

Overall experiences 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 voluntary adoption agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the voluntary adoption agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children, young people and adults.

Date of previous inspection: 13 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

The agency provides a consistently high-quality service to children and adults alike and this has a very positive impact for children. Adopters are consistently positive about the service they receive, with many saying that they felt well prepared and informed about both pre and post-adoption expectations and the children's needs. Social workers are described as 'incredible' and 'brilliant,' with adopters highlighting that staff routinely go the 'extra mile' in the support they provide. One adopter shared, 'They were 100% brilliant and I don't know how to offer any constructive comments on how to improve their service, as from our perspective, it was seamless.'

Initial enquiries made to the agency are responded to promptly, giving prospective adopters a positive and reassuring first impression. Many adopters said this early response influenced their decision to continue their adoption journey with the agency. They describe feeling encouraged from the outset and well informed about what the process would involve.

Adopters said that although the process was understandably demanding at times, this was eased by the agency's non-judgemental approach. Assessing social workers were described as 'meticulous' while remaining transparent about expectations. This enabled adopters to feel well informed and supported during every stage of the assessment.

The agency is committed to ensuring that both they and adopters have all the information needed about children's early experiences and birth family history. When gaps exist, social workers take proactive steps to seek out and obtain any missing information. This supports well-informed matching decisions and helps to identify the level and type of future support children may require.

Children are well supported to access education that meets their needs, with adopters receiving clear guidance to identify suitable schools. As a result, children are attending school and making progress from their starting points. The agency's education lead provides valuable links between adopters and education professionals, including direct liaison with schools, the provision of practical resources and access to learning platforms. This helps ensure that a consistent trauma-informed approach is applied across the support provided to children.

The agency ensures that forums are organised for children of all ages, giving them meaningful opportunities to share their views on the service and activities provided. Children are consulted on a range of topics, and their feedback is used well to inform practice. They participate in a variety of activities and act as outstanding ambassadors for the agency.

There is excellent advocacy for those seeking access to their birth records. Staff take a sensitive but persistent approach with partner agencies, recognising both the emotional and practical challenges involved. This determination enables adoptees to gain a clearer understanding of their histories. One individual said, 'the support exceeded my expectations.'

There is a wide range of accessible therapeutic and practical support services available to adopters and children. These services are delivered by skilled staff and individuals with relevant lived experience. Support is carefully tailored to individual needs, ensuring families receive the right help at the right time. This leads to consistently positive outcomes for families.

Staff fully recognise the importance of children knowing about, and when appropriate maintaining, connections with their birth relatives and this importance is stressed early on to those considering adoption. When it is suitable to do so, meetings between adopters and birth relatives are arranged. Many children continue to spend time with birth family members, with adopters acting as strong advocates in sustaining these relationships.

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

Managers and staff maintain excellent communication with adopters and professionals, creating a solid foundation for effective safeguarding practice across the agency. Robust governance and quality assurance arrangements further embed a strong safeguarding culture, resulting in well-established processes that ensure children's safety is consistently prioritised.

Proactive action is taken in response to any concerns, with managers monitoring closely for any patterns or possible escalation. Safeguarding concerns are addressed quickly and shared without delay with relevant agencies. There are strong and well-established links with safeguarding agencies, and social workers ensure that adopters are clear about the expectations and processes for reporting any concerns.

Adopters benefit from training and extensive learning resources that supports their understanding of trauma and attachment. This equips them with the insight needed to recognise the effect of early childhood experiences and to understand how this may be displayed through children's behaviour. As a result, adopters are prepared to respond effectively to their children's needs at different stages of their development.

The support package available from the agency is substantial, providing invaluable resources that help families navigate the uncertainties of pre and post adoption life. Many of the resources have been created through either feedback or in collaboration with adopters. Adopters spoke about the reassurance they feel knowing this support is 'for life.'

In addition to the support offered to all, the agency provides creative and timely interventions tailored for families experiencing crisis. This targeted approach has proved effective in supporting families through periods of difficulty and has helped to prevent against potential disruption.

The training team provide a structured but flexible programme that reflects current research and responds to the diverse learning needs of attendees. Training includes practical examples and meaningful contributions from experienced adopters. Feedback is routinely gathered and used to further develop the quality of the training. One adopter commented that, 'The training was excellent. We didn't just feel trained, we felt mentored and coached.'

The process for safe-recruitment is robust, helping to ensure that staff are suitable and well-skilled for their roles. Managers set high expectations about the standards and experience required to work at the agency. Several staff have personal experience of adoption, which adds further first-hand insight to their practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The service is led by a knowledgeable, highly visible, and highly effective leadership team. Managers demonstrate a strong commitment to every stage of the adoption process, from delivering assessments of a consistently high standard, to ensuring families receive timely and effective support. There is a strong focus on learning, and managers make purposeful use of feedback to drive continuous improvement in practice.

Senior managers are innovative and forward-thinking, which enables the agency to play an active role in the wider adoption arena. They actively contribute to discussions and research, helping to shape practice, improve services, and refine support across the sector.

Staff morale and retention is high. Staff report a positive working environment in which they feel trusted and valued. Staff say that they feel well supported by managers through consistent supervision and regular progress discussions. There is a strong focus on development for staff with some taking on lead roles and others being supported to complete bespoke qualifications.

Staff are invested in their work and take clear pride in being part of the agency. They demonstrate dedication to helping children and families to achieve the best possible outcomes. This is reflected in the quality of the support they provide.

Professionals consistently report positive working relationships with agency staff, describing them as knowledgeable, reliable and highly effective. One Independent Reviewing Officer highlighted the 'transformative' progress of a child. They credited both the adopter and the agency's contribution and praised the accountability staff demonstrated in relation to their role.

Many adopters identified the agency's inclusive practice as a primary reason for choosing to adopt with them. The agency demonstrates a strong and embedded commitment to inclusion, with diversity actively considered and reflected across all areas of practice. The recent introduction of practice frameworks has further strengthened this approach. This commitment is clearly reflected in the accessibility of the service to all prospective adopters.

Panel members come from a range of backgrounds and bring diverse experience to the process, with panels thoughtfully selected and rotated to ensure this diversity is consistently represented. Regular reviews and training help members remain current in their knowledge and practice, supporting well-informed recommendations. Panel members are routinely updated about any disruptions and learning from these is used to drive continuous improvement. Although adopters acknowledge that attending panel can feel daunting, they speak positively about the preparation and support provided and value the panel's sensitive approach when exploring complex issues.

The Agency Decision Maker and panel advisor maintain rigorous oversight of assessments and the quality of panel work, ensuring that social workers' reports are robust and child focused. On the rare occasions when minor gaps are identified, these are explored so they can assure themselves of the sufficiency of information ahead of any decision making.

No requirements or recommendations were raised at this inspection.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: SC049093

Registered provider: Oxford Diocese for Social work incorporated (PACT)

Registered provider address: P A C T, 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading RG1 4QS

Responsible individual: Lorna Hunt

Telephone number: 0118 938 7600

Email address: info@pactcharity.org

Inspectors

Kerry Howarth, Social Care Inspector [Lead]
Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector

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