

An Independent Social Work/Play Therapy Service

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Inspector	Rossella Volpi
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Not judged: this aspect of the provision was not judged

Service Information

Brief description of the service

The agency is a registered individual offering therapeutic play sessions to adopted children and consultations to adoptive parents through a contract with local authorities and through other routes, which may be publicly funded or privately commissioned.

Play therapy is a mode of therapy that helps children to explore their feelings, to express themselves and to make sense of their life experiences. A range of play therapy services are available including: therapeutic assessments of children's needs; individual play therapy with adopted children and children who will move on to adoption; filial therapy with parent and child; theraplay with parent and child; therapeutic life story work; family consultation and family work; training for adoptive parents and adoption professionals.

Summary

The overall quality rating is Good

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an announced key inspection. It assessed all the relevant standards and regulations relating to adoption support agencies where the registered provider is an individual and sole practitioner. Service users and referral agencies participated in the inspection by means of verbal and written feedback.

This agency provides a good service overall, with outstanding practices in the outcome areas relating to user focused services, service delivery and having the appropriate skills to do so effectively.

What the service does well

The provider works closely with parents and social workers in order to best meet the children's needs with consistently excellent results.

The service is delivered with high sensitivity to individual needs and a strong ethos and commitment to empowering families. Families understand the nature of the intervention from the beginning and appreciate being involved in the therapeutic process. There is clear understanding of the complexities and issues involved in safeguarding.

The individual provider is experienced and very skilled in working with children and families and she is held in high esteem by both users and referral agencies.

What has been improved since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of this service by Ofsted.

What they could do better

The children's guide lacks specific details regarding this particular service, its complaints process and how to access the Children's Rights Director.

The safeguarding children policy does not make specific reference to responding to allegations of historical abuse.

The disaster recovery plan does not include provision for safeguarding hand written records.

Although the provider controls the agency's conduct well overall; she has not regularly completed the periodic written reports on service delivery to aid monitoring progress and review of the service.

What sort of service is it?

Statement of purpose

The provision is good.

Service users and referral agencies are well informed about the service provided, its theoretical basis and the code of ethics because there is a clearly written document containing the required information. The details of Ofsted as the registration authority have been incorporated into this document and details of the practitioner's qualifications and experience are also clearly stated.

Children are informed well about what to expect in the sessions because the agency uses the children's guide to play therapy produced by the British Association of Play Therapists and also draws up an individual contract with older children. The guide is colourful and informative about play therapy; but it lacks specific details regarding this particular service, its complaints process and how to access the Children's Rights Director .

Safeguarding and promoting welfare

The provision is good.

This agency is very committed and able to protect children and families to whom a service is offered.

The provider demonstrates a clear understanding of the complexities and issues involved in safeguarding. The provider is an experienced child protection social worker and worked as children's guardian in the court arena for many years undertaking detailed risk assessments. She has kept up to date with new research, publications and recommended interventions.

The provider informs children and parents with whom she works of her duty to report any concerns of a child protection nature, including historical abuse. If necessary, she does not hesitate to persist in following referrals up with the local authority when she considers that the professionals involved are slow to act.

There is a safeguarding children policy for the agency and also the agency abides by the requirements of the local authorities with whom it has a service level agreement. The policy does not make specific reference to responding to allegations of historical abuse.

User focused services

The provision is outstanding.

This agency provides an excellent service, with a clear emphasis on the needs of the child and a good appreciation of the issues that may arise from differences. There is a clear process established for delivering and reviewing the service, with service users being integral to such reviews. For example, referrers, parents and children actively participate in reviews and their views are contained in the written reports.

The agency is conducted in a way that enables potential users' needs to be assessed well and play therapy offered when considered appropriate, taking into consideration the wishes, feelings and concerns of the child and her or his family. To this end, written information is provided to referrers when enquiries are made, an initial meeting is held with the parents, a social history is taken and a comprehensive account of their concerns in relation to their child is completed. The agency's service is offered only after an assessment from the referrer for adoption support that includes play therapy. A written contract is drawn up which details the work that will be offered and the treatment objectives; feedback forms are always sent to the families at the end of each intervention.

The feedback received from families has been consistently positive and demonstrates the excellent outcomes from the intervention. For example, some said: 'Very nice

that she rung me before the second session to find out how (the child) was getting on and our feelings'; 'Very accessible, I will ask for her for therapy with my other children'; 'Her manner is very good and calming; it really helped as it made me very calm'; 'The range of materials she uses is exceptional'; 'I had really felt isolated, she has made it a gentle journey, for (the child) is paying dividends'.

Service delivery

The provision is outstanding.

Referring agencies consider the quality of the service received by people affected by adoption and of that given to them to be excellent. For example, referring social workers expressed very high satisfaction and praised the outcomes achieved for children. They valued that the provider is always available to them and families and the efforts she makes to work collaboratively with them and to meet them regularly, despite a very busy schedule. They have high regard for her opinions and expertise and say that she is a very good source of consultation.

Referring agencies are confident that the play therapy services complement extremely well other services offered by the local authority's adoption support team. This is because the provider responds promptly to enquiries, completes clear working contracts with the families and works closely with parents in order to best meet their children's needs. In describing the quality of the service offered to children, referring agencies said, for example: 'Always amazing work'; 'Very good piece of work, the child is calmer, the family is calmer'; 'Very good at identifying individual needs'; 'Empowers parents and also empowers them in dealing with schools'; 'Very good at helping children understand their life stories'.

Referrals continue to be at a high level. The provider is very clear of her responsibility to refer children and adults for other services that she does not provide when such needs are identified during her therapy sessions. She has done so, for example, for counselling and occupational therapy assessments or psychiatric assessments.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption support agency

The provision is outstanding.

The individual provider is experienced and very skilled in working with children and families. She is a qualified and knowledgeable social worker and play-therapist with significant experience in statutory child care work including: child protection, fostering and adoption, family placement, family finding for individual children and sibling groups. She has been a children's guardian for fifteen years, undertaking detailed risk assessment of children's situations. She has been subject to all necessary and required checks to determine her suitability.

Her skills, experience and the way she conducts her work have resulted in excellent outcomes for children and families and she is held in high esteem by both users and referral agencies, as discussed above under the areas relating to user focused service and service delivery. For example, referring social workers said: ' Very highly regarded and makes every effort to keep up with her training'.

Management of the adoption support agency

The provision is good.

The agency's conduct is well monitored and controlled by the provider.

The feedback questionnaires, which are sent to each user when the therapy sessions are completed, provide valuable information from adopters and from children to evaluate the service. There is external oversight and monitoring because the service provided is reviewed annually by the main referring adoption agency.

Written reports on service delivery, to aid monitoring progress and review of the service, have not been regularly completed.

Employment and management of staff and volunteers

The provision is not judged.

Individual practitioners

The provision is good.

The provider manages the agency effectively and is suitable to work with the agency's service users. She is very well qualified and knowledgeable about play therapy and child care; she receives regular, professional supervision on her case work to ensure that there is an opportunity to discuss her work demands and that commitments, entered into, are kept.

The provider strives to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children receiving the therapy sessions and their families and conducts the service with professionalism and passion.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service is sensitive to the differing circumstances and needs of the users, is skilled in creating an environment where all children can feel represented and valued and abide by the British Association of Play Therapists equal opportunities policy. Within the play room there are play materials and books which reflect different ethnicities and family compositions.

Complaints and representations

The provision is good.

This provider is very aware of the importance of complaints and representations being resolved quickly and handled in a sensitive, thorough and non-biased manner. She is also very aware of the issues that are likely to cause misunderstandings and discontent. She strives, in her practice, to ensure that this should not happen by giving clear information about the service to be provided; maintaining open and regular communication with the service users and the referring agencies; encouraging feedback, comments and suggestions.

The adoption support agency abides by the Code of Ethics of the British Association of Play Therapists and service users have access to the association's complaints procedure as well as to that of the referring authorities. Details of the complaints procedure are found on leaflets given to parents and children. The provider ensures that children are able to access other agencies if they wish to raise concerns.

Records

The provision is good.

The agency maintains accurate records of the work done with each service user. These provide clear details of that user's contact with the agency, the reasons for the work undertaken and an end report, which is shared with the service user, including the child concerned if she or he is of an appropriate age and level of understanding.

There are separate records kept for all aspects of the agency's work, therefore ensuring clarity and ease of monitoring. Case records are well ordered, with contemporaneous notes taken that reflect the work that is being undertaken and are kept with due regard for confidentiality.

The registered provider is the only person providing the service offered by this adoption support service. She maintains a registration file containing the legislative documentation underpinning her service and details of her qualifications and experience.

Fitness of premises

The provision is good.

There is a comfortable well equipped room in which to offer play therapy within a well furnished and bright small suite of offices, in a complex created in a mews conversion. The play therapy room is child friendly and has toys and resources aimed at making all children feel represented and welcome.

A disaster recovery plan is in place, proportionate to the size of the business. This includes all electronic records being stored on an external hard drive, so that a copy is available should the originals be destroyed, but it does not include provision for safeguarding hand written records.

Financial requirements

The provision is good.

The adoption support agency is financially viable.

End of year accounts are maintained, available and properly audited; they indicate that the service is financially secure. Charges are clearly stated to purchasers of services and written estimates are provided when requested, for example, written details of her fees and estimates for particular pieces of work. This provider has been self-employed for over 20 years and has maintained financial viability.

Statutory Requirements

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

Std	Action	Due date
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">ensure that the children's guide contains all the information required by the relevant legislation.	31 December 2010

Recommendations

These recommendations relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the registered provider(s) to consider carrying out.

- Safeguarding and promoting - ensure that policies include written reference to historical abuse. (National Minimum Standard 2)
- Individual practitioners - complete periodic reports on service delivery to aid monitoring progress and review of the service. (National Minimum Standard 8)
- Fitness of premises - include, in the disaster recovery plan, provision for safeguarding hand written records. (National Minimum Standard 22)