

# About Children

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

About Children is a private limited company. It is an adoption support agency that provides services to children. It provides therapeutic support, including play, sand and art therapies to address difficulties resulting from trauma and dissociation to children who have been adopted or matched with adoptive parents.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

This adoption support agency provides a good quality of service to the children and families who use its services. This helps keep children safe and leads to improving outcomes for them. However, management arrangements of the service are inadequate and do not support the delivery of services as well as they should. This results in the judgement of adequate for the agency's overall effectiveness.

The agency staff team are experienced and well qualified in their fields. They provide therapeutic services which are carefully based on each young person's individual needs and situations and take into account the needs of their families. Services provided are agreed with parents and children, although the written record of these agreements are not specific enough. The agency takes care in selecting the most appropriate therapeutic model for a child and ensures that this is reviewed regularly. Therapists receive good quality professional case supervision from appropriately qualified and experienced people. Therapy is effective in improving outcomes for children and young people. For example one parent said her child has made 'vast progress' as a result of the therapy provided to him and the agency's support for the family.

The arrangements for formally monitoring the quality of work and outcomes produced from this work are not sufficiently comprehensive. Additionally, the agency's contingency planning is not well enough developed and recorded. Additional work is required to its children's guide.

Most significantly the agency's recording and record keeping systems are not good enough. For example, some basic records required by regulation are not in place and electronic records are difficult to access, and understand. This means that the ability to monitor the quality of work carried out is difficult and it would be very difficult for someone in later life to understand what had happened to them from reading the records. Most significantly, children's personal information is not kept securely or safely enough by the agency's system of electronic record keeping. This could lead to highly confidential information being lost or accessed by unauthorised people.

## Areas for improvement

### Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets 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 with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
19 (2005)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to each person working for the purposes of the agency in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2 (Regulation 19(2)(d))	30/11/2012
14 (2005)	maintain records indicating in respect of each person to whom the agency provides adoption support services all the matters identified in this regulation (Regulation 14(1))	30/11/2012
23 (2005)	ensure that there are secure facilities for the storage of records and that any records which are, for any reason, not on the premises are nevertheless kept in conditions of appropriate security. (Regulation 23(2))	14/12/2012

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the service user receives written information about the service they are to receive; what the service is designed to achieve; what is involved in the particular service provision and how the service will be monitored to ensure that it is delivering the intended outcome (NMS 15.3)
- ensure that the children's guide contains information about how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director and how to secure access to an independent advocate (NMS 18.6)
- ensure that board members monitor the management and outcome of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving

good outcomes for children. Specifically, that directors' meetings consider matters including complaints, allegations, practice issues, outcomes of therapy and any feedback received (NMS 25.6)

- develop and implement a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the child's case records. Specifically, that records contain comprehensive and readily accessible information about the service provided and its outcomes that allows ease of access for monitoring purposes and reference for a child in later life (NMS 27.1)
- develop a Business Continuity Plan which include both provision of premises and safeguarding/backup of records (NMS 28.3)
- ensure that the registered manager has a qualification in management at least at level 4. (NMS 19.3)

## Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children and their families receive a service that provides them with positive outcomes. They have a clear involvement in defining the type of therapeutic support that is most appropriate based on the needs and preferences of the child or young person. Thorough assessments clearly identify children's needs to ensure they get the most benefit possible from the therapy. Children and their families help shape services both formally, in periodic reviews and on an on-going basis. As their needs and situations change during the course of therapy they are able to have these reflected as necessary in the delivery of future sessions.

Children and their families achieve positive outcomes because of the therapeutic help provided by the agency and the way it is tailored to their own situations. Children learn to understand themselves better and to cope with their negative feelings arising from their life before adoption and the adoption process. Consequently, children's emotional health is improved. They make more meaningful relationships and their behaviour often improves. This enables young people to function more effectively in society. Relationships within families improve as a result of the work done with young people and the advice given to their families. For example one parent said their child has made 'vast progress' as a result of the agency's work and that, 'we were given the tools and awareness to help' the child. This helps families to stay together or, where inevitable, can make separations less traumatic.

## Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

The agency undertakes careful assessments of children and their families and needs to ensure it is able to provide them with support. It provides parents and children with good verbal information. It works with them to ensure that they have realistic expectations of the outcomes being aimed for. Written agreements are made but

these are too generalised. They do not make both parties' expectations of the service clear, or the specific objectives and how this work will be delivered and monitored. As such, they do not support the verbal discussions between the agency and parents well enough.

Once the service agreement has been made the agency provides a service promptly and without delay. Initially, there is a period of assessment with the child to determine the most appropriate form of therapy. This assessment is thorough and well-reviewed. The agency is able to offer a range of play, sand and art therapies as well as more specific work where required. The effectiveness of and outcomes from therapy sessions are then formally reviewed on a regular basis to ensure the correct support is being provided. The agency keeps families well informed of any issues arising from therapy and its progress without breaching children's confidentiality. Families are confident in the agency's work. For example, a parent said that the agency is addressing the child's 'core issues'. Reviews of the work being done and the progress achieved are recorded and reports are produced at key times and at the end of the agency's work with the child.

The agency's directors, who are also its staff team, are well qualified and experienced practitioners in their own fields. They undertake appropriate training to allow them to undertake the specific therapeutic interventions they used. The agency ensures that therapists have access to supervision from professionals who are trained and experienced in the appropriate fields. This provides the therapists with the insight, guidance and support they need to work with the children concerned.

## Safeguarding

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The agency's work with children ensures their safety while receiving services and helps promote their safety and well-being in their wider lives. The agency's staff team are alert to signs and symptoms of abuse and ensure that any concerns are passed on to appropriate authorities. The agency has an appropriate safeguarding procedure in place and has links with key people within the local authority in which it is situated. Neither the agency, or its staff, have been subject to any allegations or complaints, but suitable arrangements are in place to respond to these should they occur.

Therapists understand the impact of early experiences of abuse and neglect that many adopted children will have experienced prior to their adoption. They are skilled at selecting a suitable and appropriate therapeutic method to help young people address the on-going effects of these experiences in their lives. For example, therapists are trained and well experienced in helping people deal with the effects of early trauma. Therapy is undertaken in line with children and young people's needs and current situations. Work is sensitive and flexible to reflect children's changing situations and circumstances. Children's emotional health and ability to manage their own feelings and behaviour improves because of the therapy provided. This helps ensure their future safety.

The agency's staff team is made up solely of the three directors. Records relating to staff do not include all the key safeguarding information required by regulation. However, this has not impacted on children's safety as no staff members have been recruited by the agency.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the adoption support agency are **inadequate**.

The agency's Statement of Purpose sets out how the agency will operate and accurately describes the services to be provided. The children's guide provides an appropriate summary of this but does not include information about how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director or how to secure access to an independent advocate. This means that children's ability to seek support and advice is more limited than it should be.

The agency works appropriately with other agencies or services that work with the children and their families. For example, the agency works with social workers, the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) and is able to work with children's teachers where appropriate and agreed with them and their families.

The agency's staff team is appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced. They receive on-going training to maintain their expertise and appropriate levels of professional supervision. The manager is experienced and professionally qualified. However, the manager does not have a qualification at level four in management.

The monitoring and quality assurance of the work of the agency by the directors is at an early stage of development. The manager and directors have a system in place using monthly meetings to monitor and review the work of the agency. However, these are not sufficiently wide-ranging or effective. For example, they do not specifically address matters such as: the services provided; the quality of outcomes being achieved; practice issues; any allegations or complaints received, or any feedback received. This means that the directors' ability to formally identify and address any areas for development is not supported well enough by this process.

The agency has an appropriate business plan in place but has not developed a business continuity plan. This means that the agency has not given sufficient thought to how it would continue to operate and provide a service to vulnerable children and their parents in the case of foreseeable emergencies or significant incidents. Recording and record keeping arrangements are a significant weakness of the agency. For example, the agency does not keep the records required by the regulations in respect of people working for the purposes of the agency. This omission means that the agency does not have sufficient ability to ensure that all required checks are carried out. Additionally, records of people to whom the agency provides services do not contain the full information required in terms of their specific needs and the nature of the services provided to them.

The quality of records held by the agency is generally poor. Individual records are satisfactory but the way these are maintained electronically means that overall records are not suited to their purpose. The structure and content of records varies between therapists so there is no consistent approach to what is recorded or how. Records are not retained in a clearly structured or accessible format. For example, children's records contain no list of the dates of therapy sessions and the records of each session are not retained in chronological order. This means that it is difficult to identify the number of sessions that have taken place or to follow the work though on a session-by-session basis. Additionally, records are not always retained in the correct folders; reviews and reports are often recorded in different locations. This means that the work done and the outcomes achieved is not always clear. This is compounded further by the fact that not all documents will open on each therapist's computer. This does not facilitate the monitoring of the work undertaken and would make it very difficult for a person accessing their records in later life to understand what happened to them.

Most significantly, the agency does not have suitable arrangements to maintain the integrity and security of the information it retains. It uses an online electronic storage system to which each staff member has access. However, therapists also retain similar information on unsecured memory sticks for use on laptops and, at times, on their home computers. This means that it is not always clear which record is the definitive one. These arrangements also mean that highly confidential and sensitive personal information about the agency's service users is potentially placed at risk access by unauthorised people, loss or theft.



## 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for adoption support agencies.