

Chrysalis Associates

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector	Mandy Williams
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Chrysalis Associates was registered as an adoption support agency in 2008 and is a registered company. The agency specialises in the assessment and treatment of developmental trauma and attachment difficulties. Its multi-disciplinary therapeutic team offers services to adopted, looked after children, parents and carers. Families receive an individually designed service, tailored to their needs, which is drawn from a variety of therapeutic models. In addition, the agency offers training, consultation and supervision for other professionals involved in this work. However, this inspection only relates to the adoption support work undertaken by the agency. The agency has four directors and they currently employ eight staff in a variety of roles. At the time of this inspection the agency were working with 10 families and their children.

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 **good**.

This is an effective adoption support agency with some outstanding features. The agency has positive relationships with commissioners and service users. It provides a prompt service following referral. The agency provides an individualised therapeutic support package to best meet the needs of the particular family. The intended outcomes are clear and progress is regularly reviewed and assessed. Very successful outcomes are evident. Families have been enabled to re-parent their adopted children with an appreciation of their needs and in a manner that has maximised the opportunity for the development of healthy attachments.

The service seeks the feedback of service users and professionals to help inform its future development. Constructive dialogue ensures that the agency continues to offer a service that is able to meet demand. Managers have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and have targeted development plans in place. They demonstrate an enthusiasm for further development.

Shortfalls identified at this inspection largely relate to inconsistencies in the organisations record keeping and monitoring, to ensure that the service consistently operates in line with its policies and procedures.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted; specifically that the agency has a policy on the use of physical intervention and that detailed records are maintained of any interventions that are required (NMS 4.1)
- ensure that the agency's safeguarding procedure is in line with Government guidance and requirements; specifically that this is amended to include referral to the disclosure and barring service(DBS) (NMS 22.2)
- ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the agency to ensure compliance with the agency's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends; and that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2)
- ensure that the system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping is robust and that action is taken when needed. (NMS 27.2)

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

The majority of service users report that they have researched a number of adoption support agencies in their region prior to making a decision to access a service from this agency. Some families have made the decision to travel some considerable distance in order to access this service. Many have also received support and intervention from other organisations, with limited degrees of success prior to approaching this agency.

Service users feel involved in planning the delivery of the support package and are clear about the desired outcomes. Adoptive families feel that they are kept up-to-date with the progress that they are making. The agency involves them in any evaluation and review, ensuring that the therapeutic service being provided continues to be effective. They also report on the flexibility of the agency who will try to accommodate their needs. This supportive approach has helped families fully engage with the service.

Service users speak exceptionally well about the service that they receive. Without exception, service users report successful outcomes following the intervention of the agency. One adoptive parent commented, 'Chrysalis have been excellent throughout

our therapy and their support and guidance has literally 'saved' our family. We cannot praise them enough for their professional, yet caring approach which enabled us to be very open and honest with them from the outset'. Many families comment on the critical situation they felt they were in prior to commencing work with the agency. However, the involvement of the agency has enabled them to think positively about their future when they had felt close to disruption at the start.

In addition, the agency will provide support with education if necessary. Staff provide individual consultation for teaching staff as well as training for the wider school. This has enabled teaching staff to develop a better understanding of the child and to alter their approach to meet the needs of the child. This has been effective in maintaining a child's educational placement; has enabled them to fit in with their peers; and enabled them to make educational progress. One adoptive parent commented, 'our therapist has worked with the school, enabling them to set up a therapeutic approach to our child's schooling. The combination of therapeutic parenting, and a therapeutic based education has helped him to self-regulate and also improved his attachment with us. As a result we have felt able to proceed with our adoption application'.

All families and commissioners spoken to during the inspection, as well as those who have responded to Ofsted surveys, hold this service in high regard. They were unable to identify anything that they could improve upon.

Quality of service

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

The quality of the service provision is exceptional. The staff team comprises of individuals with a range of skills and specialisms. This includes social workers, clinical psychologists, psychotherapists and support workers. They all demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues pertinent to supporting adoptive families, particularly attachment issues. They are able to draw on a variety of therapeutic interventions and are able to develop individualised support packages to meet the needs of any particular family. Staff receive support to access a range of specialised training opportunities to enhance their skills and the agency is keen to embrace research and new models of working.

The emphasis of the agency's work is on enabling adoptive parents to understand the needs of their child and in teaching them techniques to parent in a therapeutic manner. This ensures that children continue to benefit from a therapeutic approach when they are at home and enables them to develop healthy attachments to their adoptive parents. Adoptive parents also become more confident in their parenting skills. One adoptive parent commented, 'the therapy at Chrysalis has had a very positive impact on my life. It confirmed to me that my parenting skills are good but I also learnt new techniques. My child's attachment and self-esteem improved significantly as a result'.

Services are delivered in a timely fashion. Adoptive families often experience delay in

the agreement of funding from local authorities and so appreciate that they are able to access support quickly from the agency once this is agreed. An initial assessment determines the length and type of therapeutic intervention felt to be the most appropriate. This is tailored to the support needs of the individual family. Support packages are also subject to review to ensure that they are on track to meet the desired outcomes. At the conclusion of the intervention an evaluation is conducted, which involves the service user and commissioner if appropriate, in order to assess the effectiveness of the support. This ensures the therapeutic approach remains focussed on positive outcomes.

Staff in the agency are skilled at dealing with difficult issues sensitively. Service users also comment on the high level of support they have received during their involvement with the agency. One adoptive parent commented, 'we feel they have gone over and above what we expected. We have even had contact over the weekend and always felt there was someone there if we needed it'. Similarly, commissioners report positive working relationships with the agency and comment on their reliable and professional approach. Following the completion of a support package the agency has a system for tailoring off their involvement. Follow up review meetings take place at three, six and 12 month intervals, so that families have the opportunity to raise and address any continuing concerns. Families appreciate this opportunity to keep in touch and value the opportunity for consultation.

All adoptive parents who are currently involved with the agency, or have been in the past have the opportunity to attend regular support groups at the agency. Additionally, the agency provides staff to attend a regional support group that families involved with local authorities can access on a monthly basis. This provides families with an opportunity for informal discussion and the agency present an element of training and a theme for each meeting. Recent topics include; 'How my child understands the world around them'; 'Helping my child manage their emotions and stress'; and 'Engaging and structuring your child'. Feedback taken by the agency has been very positive. One individual commented, 'this was the most positive learning experience in the whole adoptive process so far' and 'it is good to be in the company of people who understand our situation'. Adoptive parents clearly value this opportunity.

The agency works effectively with those commissioning its services. Written contracts are in place and feedback is provided to commissioners routinely, so they are aware of the current situation. One commissioner commented, 'Chrysalis work well with us and they are responsive to our needs'.

Safeguarding

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

Staff recruitment processes are thorough. Appropriate checks and references are undertaken prior to an individual taking up employment. Criminal record checks are also repeated periodically and confirmation is obtained to ensure that staff are

registered with the appropriate professional body. This ensures that only those suitable are able to work for the agency.

The agency has a safeguarding policy in place and the concept of safeguarding underpins all the work of the agency. Regular update training is completed by staff to ensure that they are kept up-to-date and that safeguarding remains at the forefront of their practice. However, this policy has not been updated to include the need to refer serious safeguarding issues concerning staff to the disclosure and barring service(DBS). The agency's policy has been forwarded to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and staff are familiar with the policies for the local authorities for the areas where the service users reside. This ensures that they would be able to take the appropriate action should any safeguarding concerns arise.

The agency has a specific policy acknowledging historic abuse. Families working with the agency are aware at the outset that the agency has a duty to pass on any safeguarding concerns that they may become aware of during their involvement.

The agency has a clear complaints policy. Service users are informed about this at the start of their involvement as leaflets outlining the procedure are distributed in the initial information pack sent out by the agency. A child friendly complaints leaflet is also available and given to children at the outset. However, there have been no complaints made since the last inspection.

Commissioners are positive about the safeguarding ethos of the agency and they express no concerns regarding the agency's willingness to pass on any concerns. Service users similarly feel that they are in safe environment, one reported 'myself and my child always feel safe here'.

Staff are trained in a recognised method of behaviour management. This includes how to engage in a physical intervention; which staff may need to implement on an occasional basis in order to protect the child or others from harm or injury. This is usually in the presence of the child's parents and is recorded on video tape, if it occurs within therapy. However, the agency do not have a written policy on physical intervention and written records do not include sufficient detail of the intervention utilised. Hence, it is difficult for managers to effectively debrief and evaluate the incident.

Leadership and management

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

There is an appropriately qualified and experienced Registered Manager in place, who is a director of the agency. The agency has a recently revised Statement of Purpose that clearly outlines the aims and objectives of the agency. In addition, the agency has two children's guides suitable for children of different age or ability. There is also an audio version available. These contain details about how to contact an independent advocate and Ofsted. A children's guide to therapy is also available which is personalised for each child with their details and those of the therapist. This

helps introduce the idea of therapy to children and young people, so that they have some idea of what to expect. The procedure for young people to follow if they are unhappy with their therapy is also clearly outlined.

At the last inspection of the agency in March 2010, two recommendations were made. One related to additional details in the children's guide which has been actioned as outlined above. The remaining recommendation related to decision making being clear on case records and the need to sign and date records made. Although, the agency has made progress with this, some concerns remain evident in relation to the quality and adequacy of records. The standard of record keeping is variable. While some contain clear and detailed recording, including supervision discussion and decision making, this is not the situation in all cases. Thus making it difficult to assess the progress of the intervention. Suitable arrangements are in place for the secure and confidential storage of records.

Staff feel well supported by the directors of the agency, who acknowledge the difficulties and stress that their work entails. The agency provides many and varied opportunities for personal development. One member of staff commented, 'the training I have had at Chrysalis has been first class. I have been fully supported to access training in a variety of therapeutic approaches'. Training needs are reviewed annually as part of the staff appraisal process. Staff also receive regular supervision by a consistent supervisor, as well as clinical and group supervision. However, this is not always at the frequency outlined in the agency's policy and decision making is not always evident on the case record as highlighted above.

The agency has expanded since the last inspection. Managers prepare reports to the board of directors on the progress and delivery of the service twice yearly. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and have ambitious development plans in place. They are keen to be involved in new developments and volunteered to be involved in a pilot inspection for Ofsted prior to the introduction of the current inspection framework. Thus, demonstrating their willingness to embrace change and develop their services.

They regularly review the quality of the service that they are providing and are keen to engage with commissioners to ensure that they are able to continue to meet demand. Feedback from service users helps inform the development of the agency. Financial reports confirm that the agency continues to be financially viable.

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 the inspection of adoption support agencies.