

Family Action

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Family Action is a children's charity which provides a range of services throughout the country. The Promoting Active Choices Team (PACT), based in Leicester, comprises a team of five qualified and experienced social workers who specialise in therapeutic work with children, young people and their families who live in Leicestershire. Some of this work is with adoptive families and children and it is only that service which is subject to this inspection. In the year April 2013-March 2014, PACT offered a service to 13 adoptive families and 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 a good adoption support agency overall. It provides an outstanding quality of service which results in outstanding outcomes for children, young people and their families. Children and young people gain a better understanding of their past and families are enabled to move on together wherever possible, with improved relationships. There is a high level of service user and stakeholder satisfaction, which particularly reflects the high calibre of staff. One stakeholder commented: 'They are brilliant. It is a life line.' Families pay tribute to the experience, knowledge, understanding, commitment and non-judgemental attitude of the staff, who manage to balance the confidential work they do with the children and young people while keeping families appropriately informed. This is testament to their skills and ability to work with children and young people in an open, honest and therapeutic way.

Safeguarding is a priority, with good arrangements to ensure children and young people are kept safe and their welfare is promoted. There is thorough assessment of risk, regular discussion of safeguarding in supervision and good managerial oversight. Cooperative working with the local authority ensures children's well-being and safety are prioritised.

Leaders and managers are clearly committed to providing a service of high quality, while being realistic about the impact of their reliance on local authority

commissioning arrangements. A very well-established team of experienced social workers are supported by a clear managerial structure with accessible and approachable senior managers. Regular and reflective supervision, appraisals and training ensure that staff maintain their skills and competence. Families, including children and young people, are regularly consulted about the service they receive. This includes young people's involvement in developing the children's guide.

Shortfalls identified relate to documentation and have minimal impact on the service received. The Statement of Purpose and children's guide have not been sent in to Ofsted as required, and the guide, although recently reviewed, does not include Ofsted's address and telephone number. Although families feel they are well informed about the service they are receiving, this is not fully supported by a comprehensive written agreement. Similarly, although there is regular oversight by the board of trustees, this relates to Family Action as a whole and it is therefore difficult to demonstrate how the board are specifically monitoring the outcomes and service provision of the adoption support agency.

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
5 (2005)	ensure the children's guide includes the address and telephone number of the registration authority (Regulation 5 (4)(c))	26/09/2014
5 (2005)	ensure the statement of purpose and children's guide are provided to the registration authority. (Regulation 5 (2)and (6))	26/09/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure the service user knows, and 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 it is delivering the intended outcome (NMS 15.3)
- ensure the adoption support agency's provider/trustees, board members and/or management committee members: receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months; monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the

agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users; and satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration. (NMS 25.6)

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

The outcomes for children, young people and their adoptive families are outstanding. A strong and consistent theme from the feedback from all service users is that they feel listened to and understood. One service user commented: 'The worker would never do anything without us being consulted; we were consulted all the way.' Parents comment that the workers understand their children and, 'really get in touch with their feelings'. One parent commented: 'She really "got" my child.' One young person said the best thing about the service was that the worker, 'listened, talked and helped'. Another commented on their worker's understanding and that, 'she listened to me'. For example, if young people want to be seen away from their family home, this is arranged.

All families and their children have a very clear understanding of the purpose of the intervention and welcome it, as it is a service which meets their needs. It is fully discussed in the initial assessment visit and reviewed on an ongoing basis in response to changing circumstances.

Families are extremely happy with the service and feel it has had very beneficial outcomes. For example, relationships improve, placements stabilise, there are major improvements in school, children are calmer, happier, have a better understanding of their backgrounds and have more confidence. Families are referred to this service when they are at breaking point. They comment that they would not still be together without the intervention of this service. If this is not possible, the intervention of the service has made the transition more positive and sustained family relationships. Many people said of the staff: 'I cannot praise them enough', and, 'I would not have got through it without her.' One young person said of her worker: 'She helped me a lot.' A stakeholder fed back: 'The support was exceptional; the insight and ways of working with the family helped them move forward together positively.' Given the situations at the point of referral, these outcomes are significant.

Quality of service

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

The service is responsive and delivered very promptly by highly skilled, knowledgeable and professional social workers. All children and young people are referred by the local authority, using a detailed referral form. Any further information is sought by the social work staff prior to the manager allocating the work. This ensures that there is as much information as possible so that the best match of worker is made. One stakeholder commented how impressed she was that the worker allocated was fully apprised of the family's situation prior to meeting them.

This enables them to provide a relevant and effective service tailored to the family's needs.

The service is very well structured. The initial assessment visit defines the service which is to be given as well as ensuring that the whole family are aware of how to complain, the policy on confidentiality and the agency's response to safeguarding issues. Although this, in the main, is done verbally, and recorded in case notes, it could be further enhanced by a more comprehensive written agreement which covers the purpose of the service, what it hopes to achieve and how it will be reviewed. Currently a very child-friendly working agreement is signed by the young person and the worker but it does not cover every aspect. Weekly visits are evaluated, workers constantly reflect on their practice and regular reviews ensure the service continues to be relevant and effective.

Local authority social workers describe very effective working relationships; they often co-work cases, they are clear about their differing roles and responsibilities and communication is described as 'excellent'. The staff also engage well with schools to improve their understanding of how attachment difficulties influence young people's behaviour. Families have found that invaluable in improving the school's response to their young person's behaviour.

There is exceptionally positive feedback about the calibre of staff, which results in the positive outcomes and effective relationships which are established with children and families. One stakeholder commented that the practitioners are 'very highly trained and of a high quality'. Another commented that the 'invaluable advice' had helped improve her own practice and understanding, and she had 'learned a lot'. Families feel the staff go 'above and beyond', are 'incredibly diligent and flexible', have a 'fantastic understanding' and are 'always there for you'. Staff have had access to specialist training and consultation, including up-to-date research findings which have enabled them to deliver a service of an exceptionally high quality.

Safeguarding

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

Safeguarding is given a high priority in this service. At the commencement of the service, families are clearly told that any concerns relating to safeguarding will have to be passed on to the relevant agencies, and how confidentiality is limited by the need to protect children. This ensures that the work is transparent and families know what to expect. Children are also given the guide to adoption support at the start of the work so they have information about other agencies they can contact as well as how to make a complaint. However, this guide does not contain the address and telephone number of Ofsted as required.

The safeguarding policies and procedures are comprehensive, clear and readily available to staff so they know what to do if they are concerned. This is underpinned by mandatory safeguarding training which is regularly refreshed. Additionally, some staff have had training in child sexual exploitation to further enhance their

knowledge and understanding. When there have been instances of concern, staff have followed the procedures promptly and been rigorous in their follow-up of the local authority to ensure children's safety and well-being are promoted. Staff take part in regular signs of safety meetings when these are arranged by the local authority, enabling them to both give and receive information so that risk is appropriately gauged and responded to. Staff demonstrate a good level of awareness of safeguarding issues and the risks when families are in crisis.

Ensuring families understand the impact of their children's former experiences of abuse and neglect is fundamental to staff practice. One parent commented: 'They reminded me of what I was told at approval.' The result of this work with families is evident in the improved outcomes and stabilised relationships.

The agency places safeguarding at the centre of its practice. Safeguarding is an agenda item on every staff supervision meeting, risk is assessed when undertaking any piece of work with a family and it is reviewed in the light of changing circumstances. Risk is also reported to senior managers on a regular basis. The agency uses safe recruitment methods to ensure all staff are appropriate and suitable to work with children and families.

Leadership and management

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

This is a responsive service which canvasses the views of its users on a regular basis. For example, young people were asked for their views on the children's guide to ensure it was child-focused and user-friendly and families are asked for comments about their worker to inform the appraisal process. Any feedback on the service, be it formal or informal, is reflected on and used to make improvements.

There are good and effective relationships with commissioners and partners, such as schools and social workers. All the work is commissioned by one local authority under a contract agreement. The local authority is positive about the working arrangements and feels that the agency is open to listen and discuss the local authority's needs and put any recommendations in place. Arrangements for reporting back and communication are effective.

The staff team is very well established. The social workers are experienced, knowledgeable and skilled in working in therapeutic way with children and families. Their competence is underpinned by regular and reflective supervision, team meetings including peer supervision, access to training and research findings.

The Statement of Purpose provides an accurate reflection of the service and is made available on the agency's website so that service users and professionals know what they can expect. The children's guide is very child-focused and helpful. However, neither document has been supplied to Ofsted as required.

There is regular budget monitoring to ensure the service is financially viable. There is

regular reporting to the board of trustees on the work of Family Action as a whole. However, this does not specifically, or regularly, refer to the work of the adoption support agency, nor does it provide sufficient detail to enable the trustees to effectively monitor that this service is providing good outcomes and complying with its conditions of registration. This shortfall does not have an impact on service users as the managerial structure and reporting systems are such that deficits are highlighted at an early stage. The manager monitors the work through regular file audits, supervision, strengths and difficulties questionnaires and feedback. This provides good information on which to base a review of operations.

The service is in the process of moving to new premises which will offer more facilities for group work and therapeutic work. Appropriate security, including file storage, is currently in place and the service plans to replicate this in the new location. Recording is of a good quality and staff have a robust understanding of data protection and confidentiality to protect service users' private information.

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.