

Adoption Support

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector	Rosemary Chapman
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This adoption support agency is operated by an individual provider and is registered to provide services to adults and children. Direct work with children and young people includes play therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, and theraplay, which is supplemented by advice, guidance and support to adoptive parents. These services are also extended to children in fostering families, which are not the subject of this inspection. In the last year, the agency supported 20 adoptive families.

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 good adoption support agency delivers outstanding outcomes for families and children. Because of the high quality work undertaken by an extremely experienced, skilful and knowledgeable therapist, families are enabled to stay together, children settle, become more attached and understand their backgrounds. Work is well planned, based on a comprehensive assessment, and carried out sensitively, honestly and with the full involvement of the family. Stakeholders are extremely complimentary about their contact with the agency and comment about its promptness, effectiveness and professionalism.

The provider has a good understanding of safe working practices as well as a robust knowledge of how to respond to any safeguarding concerns. As an individual provider, she is solely responsible for delivering and developing the service, including monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. While it is very clear that feedback is gathered informally during assessment and intervention, formalising these processes would add further robustness and transparency. Similarly, the provider operates within a clear procedural framework but this would benefit from being written down to improve accountability. These shortfalls have no negative impact on the service provided or the outcomes for families and children.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- seek feedback from service users on the success of the service provision. This feedback is recorded centrally and on the case record of the service user (NMS 15.6)
- develop a comprehensive written health and safety policy and equal opportunities policy for all service users which covers all legal requirements (NMS 26.9)
- have and implement a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the agency's files, on the child's and prospective adopters' case records. (NMS 27.1)

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Outcomes for the children, young people and families using this service are outstanding. Feedback is overwhelmingly positive about both the service received and its impact on the family. Service users feel listened to and understood, which in itself is a positive outcome for those who have felt neither listened to nor understood by other professionals. Service users are constantly involved in reviewing how the service is progressing so that it is tailored to meet their individual needs. For example, some families prefer strategies to theraplay, so that is accommodated, providing it meets the overall goal. One adopter commented: 'She listens, takes on board what you say and deals with the issues.'

Service users express a high level of satisfaction with the service. Comments include: 'immensely helpful'; 'invaluable therapy'; 'I feel privileged to have worked with her'; and, 'I can't rate her highly enough.' The impact of the service is such that families are kept together as a result of the very high quality support. For example, adopters say: 'she turned our family life around completely', 'he is a different child', 'it made a massive impact and notable difference', and, 'I question whether the placement would have continued without it.'

Stakeholders also comment on the exceptional outcomes: 'I doubt whether the placement would have held without the support', and, 'she was integral to keeping the placement going.' Because children are enabled to understand their past through therapeutic life story work and play, they become calmer, less oppositional, more settled and secure and can move on with the present and future. This helps them concentrate and behave better in school as well as home, and their life chances are improved as a result. Stakeholders commented in relation to educational outcomes: 'completely different child, calmer and focused', 'it made a massive impact', and, 'she made a real difference'.

Quality of service

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

The service is delivered promptly by a very skilful and knowledgeable practitioner with a wealth of relevant experience. This results in a service of exceptionally high quality. Families comment that she is, 'consistent, compassionate and wise', 'respectful and sensitive', and, 'she totally understands our family'. As a result, parents and children trust her, feel at ease and are able to share their concerns. The provider responds without delay and makes herself available by telephone for additional support, should this be required. A stakeholder commented that she goes 'over and above' what is expected, and another said, 'it was exciting to work with her. I learnt a lot.'

The provider undertakes an extremely comprehensive assessment, using a variety of measures based on up-to-date research, prior to undertaking any therapeutic work. This forms the basis of a thorough report which is shared with the referrer and the family, so it is completely transparent. Other work is identified as part of this where appropriate, for example, counselling for the parents if any areas of need have come to light during the assessment. The therapeutic intervention is well planned and executed, although the provider is responsive to emerging needs and wishes. One adoptive parent commented, 'she took it at my child's pace'. She engages well and elicits trust. There is also excellent communication with partner agencies such as schools and social workers. One stakeholder commented, 'we speak every week'. She attends reviews, network meetings and gives regular feedback so that all agencies can work together consistently. The therapeutic intervention is usually carried out at a very well-equipped play room at the provider's premises.

Safeguarding

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

This adoption support agency provides a safe service. The provider is registered with the appropriate professional bodies and has undergone the necessary recruitment checks to ensure she is suitable to work with children. She offers a wealth of experience in working with children and young people and demonstrates a robust understanding of how to protect them and keep them safe from harm. Her working practices are well thought out, particularly when working alone with a child. The provider makes it very clear at the start of the service, in her written information as well as verbally, that safeguarding issues cannot remain confidential. Everyone spoken to as part of the inspection was very clear about this.

Children are provided with written information about other avenues of support in the children's guide. The provider engages well with children, who trust her and her ability to deal appropriately with the information they share. As a result, they open up and tell her about their experiences, some of which may include disclosures of previous harm. These are all appropriately referred to the relevant agencies.

The children and young people who are referred to the service have all experienced

trauma, abuse and neglect prior to placement with their adoptive families. Thus understanding the impact of this on their behaviour and presentation is fundamental to the work she does. Families are reminded of this during the intervention and are therefore clear about the reasons their children behave as they do. This helps them be more empathetic and therapeutic in their parenting styles. The provider also undertakes specific pieces of work with children and young people to help them keep themselves safe and understand their bodies.

The provider has a strong understanding of how to manage any allegations, be they historic or current. This also includes any concerns about the care being provided to the children or young people. She is extremely child-focused and puts their well-being above all else, even if it may mean working relationships with other professionals are more difficult. She uses her own local authority's procedures to guide her practice and has recently made contact with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Local Authority Designated Officer to enhance her training and knowledge.

The provider is always mindful of the well-being of the adults too, for example, if she feels their mental health is a risk. She ensures they access appropriate help and support in these circumstances.

Leadership and management

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

The work of the agency is under constant review and evaluation, as the provider is keen to do the best she can for the families who use the service. It is evident that families feel involved, are asked for their views and that these are taken into account when providing the service. However, these systems are informal and would therefore benefit from being formalised to demonstrate more easily the impact of the service, the improvements made and how it can develop further.

The provider has excellent relationships with partner organisations such as local authorities and schools. Comments include: 'I am always kept up to date'; 'the service is prompt, available and reports are always on time'; 'I am confident about the service; it is good and she knows what she is doing'; 'I can't fault her, she is extremely helpful, very good at what she does, and very approachable'; 'I am very pleased with the relationship'; and, 'I have lots of confidence in her.' This ensures that all agencies work together for the benefit of the families and children.

The provider ensures she keeps her professional knowledge and practice up to date through regular supervision with an appropriately qualified supervisor and membership of relevant professional bodies. She attends relevant training events, and she purchases numerous books and other resources. The latter are shared with families, who comment on how helpful these have been.

The aims and objectives are clearly set out in the Statement of Purpose and children's guide, which are further supported by leaflets which give more detailed

information about what to expect from a particular therapeutic intervention as well as information on how to complain. Accounts are regularly audited and demonstrate that the agency is financially viable, which ensures continuity of service for its users. The provider also has relevant insurance cover.

Record keeping is appropriately detailed and secure. Records are scanned and sent to referring local authorities for long-term storage. Additionally, records of the direct work are sent to the families concerned as they give the children and young people materials to refer back to, to enable them to reflect on what they have undertaken and achieved. However, there is no written policy on record keeping although the provider is very clear about what she does and why. Similarly, policies on equal opportunities and health and safety are not in writing and therefore diminish the service's transparency and accountability.

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.