

Adoption Support

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector	Rosie Dancer
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Date of last inspection	21/01/2015

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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 for 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 has supported 15 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

Requires improvement: 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**.

The work carried out with children and their adoptive families has led to significant improvements in their lives. The progress that children and families make is impressive. Children develop an understanding of their past history and come to realise that what has happened to them is not their fault. They develop more effective strategies to deal with their emotional frustrations and they feel safe and secure. Parents also develop a clearer understanding of the impact their child's past has had on their emotional well-being, and develop the strategies required to support their child effectively. For some, the work carried out with them has prevented family breakdown.

The provider is exceptionally skilled and experienced in supporting children and their parents. She has a good understanding and strong commitment to ensuring that their lives improve. She is extremely sensitive to the needs of all and works in a flexible and supportive way to ensure that people get the best out of the work.

The provider has a good awareness of how to deal with safeguarding matters. She has excellent working relationships with the social care agencies that are involved in the protection of children.

The service is effectively operated overall. Two recommendations have been made to further develop the service. These relate to formalising the health and safety policy and assessment in relation to the premises she operates from, and developing a formal system for reviewing the overall work of the service.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

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

Monitor the management and outcome of the services to be satisfied that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children. ('Adoption: national minimum standards', page 75, paragraph 26.4)

Develop a comprehensive written health and safety policy in relation to the premises, which covers all legal requirements. ('Adoption: national minimum standards', page 76, paragraph 26.9)

Experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**

There have been some impressive results achieved for adoptive families that are experiencing difficulties. Adults and children using the service report a very positive experience of working with the provider. Children trust and like the provider and look forward to their sessions with her. A child said: 'I would like extra support from Kate.' A social worker said: 'Through the play therapy, the child's voice was paramount.'

The exceptional progress some families make is achieved through the flexible approach the provider takes to working with families and her exceptionally astute skills when carrying out assessments of families' needs. She ensures that work is focused on those areas that families identify they are struggling with the most. As their life as a family improves, their confidence in their ability to deal with issues that cause them concern increases. An adoptive parent said: 'The changes we have seen in both of our children during the year that we have worked with [the provider] have been incredible.'

The provider uses research-based practice techniques and this ensures that the work is underpinned by a clear framework. She is exceptionally skilled in finding the right approach to use with each individual so that the best possible outcomes are achieved. For example, she is adept at identifying how each child processes information and what their optimal learning style is. From this information, she engages the best therapeutic method or mix of methods that best supports their progress. An adoptive parent said that the provider 'addressed [the children's] difference and needs within the same session so the children are still together but have their needs dealt with individually.'

The exceptionally skilful work with children provides them with an insight into and understanding of their backgrounds and situation. They learn that none of what has happened to them is their fault. Through this understanding, they develop in their self-esteem and emotional resilience and acquire ambition for their future lives. For some children, it is the first time they have been given clear and effective frameworks from which they can develop appropriate coping strategies. Using these sound bases, they have learned strategies to manage their anger more effectively, reduce their anxieties and overcome phobias. They begin to feel safe and secure for the first time in their lives. They experience improved family and social relationships, increase their self-esteem and confidence, and develop healthier attachments to their adoptive parents. An adoptive parent said: 'The sessions have given our children a way of discussing their issues at home with a framework they did not have before.'

The work with adoptive parents is also highly effective and equally skilfully undertaken. Parents develop a sound understanding of how their child's past experiences have impacted their emotional well-being, development and behaviour. An adoptive parent said: '[The provider] has definitely helped us understand the

issues relating to the abuse of our children.' Adoptive parents also understand the impact the child's behaviour has had on them. One said that the provider 'has been useful in helping the adults to manage their feelings of rejection, loss and lack of competence at times when parenting.'

Adoptive parents develop strategies to support their child effectively. One parent said of the strategies: 'They are brilliant – they are really working.' Another said: 'These [strategies] have enabled us to better parent and focus on our children's needs and take things less personally. It has helped us see our child's perspective.' Parents' confidence in their parenting skills increases because they are using techniques that make a difference. The work has undoubtedly prevented family breakdown for some families. An adoptive parent said that the provider 'has been absolutely invaluable. Without her support the placement could have [been] disrupted.' Another said: 'It is helping us to become a family again.'

Quality of service provision

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**

The services are provided in a prompt and efficient way. People using the service report that the provider is very welcoming. Her calm and sensitive approach puts people at their ease and they get the best out of the work because they trust her. Children and their parents are highly motivated to work with the provider, who is very knowledgeable and skilled in adoption work. A social worker commented that the provider has 'expert knowledge where adopted children were concerned.' An adoptive parent felt that they benefited from the feedback and encouragement they received from the provider. She said: 'It's helpful to get feedback that you are doing a good job as sometimes it feels like you are getting nowhere as you are too exhausted to reflect.'

The provider is exceptionally child centred. She works with children to help them understand and deal with their complex histories, but she also works with parents and the family as a whole. The work sees shifts in the parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's situation. Parents develop the skills needed to parent their child effectively. A social worker stated that the provider is 'highly experienced and knowledgeable, whilst also providing a nurturing and supportive environment. This enables children and young people to achieve targets and reach their full potential.' An adoptive parent stated: 'She understands what is happening and offers suggestions that are constructive and practical.'

People using the service greatly appreciate that the provider makes herself available to them between appointments. This means that they get support and advice from her when they need it and this avoids situations escalating. A parent said that the provider is 'always there for us.' Another said: 'We can call her any time for advice...

we have not had to wait until the next appointment.'

There is excellent joint working with commissioners of services and stakeholders. Social workers report that they are kept very well informed about the progress of a case. The provider works in an open and transparent way with families and social workers and this means that there is a shared understanding of what is happening and what the aims of the work are. The provider listens to people, and her exceptionally astute assessment skills mean that she understands people's situations well. Social workers described how exceptionally skilful the provider is in providing challenge to parents in a non-threatening way. This has led to some parents understanding the impact their approach may be having on their child's emotional well-being and development. Once they understand this, they are highly motivated, and successful in developing more appropriate strategies that are based on the child's specific needs.

The provider works at the client's pace and this ensures that the strategies they develop have time to be consolidated into their everyday life and then can be built upon. Some families have used the service intermittently over a long period of time. Improvements made have been sustained and they have come back for further work to build upon past successes.

Safeguarding children, young people, adults and families

Judgement outcome: **good**

The provider ensures that the safety and well-being of children are promoted at all times. This is achieved through the work she undertakes with parents and children. She works with children and parents to increase their understanding of the impact their past experiences have had on children's emotional well-being and behaviour. She helps them, individually and as a family, to develop safe and effective coping strategies.

The provider has a very good understanding of the vulnerabilities of children and families who are dealing with the impact of past trauma and abuse. She is skilful in her assessment of needs and in identifying potential risks to the children due to these. Her work is focused on mitigating risks and enabling adoptive parents to provide the child with a safe, secure and stable home life in which they can bond as a family. An adoptive parent said: 'We have received play therapy to help us bond as a family. This has been invaluable.'

The provider's approach to any concerns arising about a child's safety or well-being is clearly stated in the contract that adoptive parents sign, so parents are fully aware of the action she would take if she were concerned about the safety of a child.

The provider understands her duty to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and she has taken action when she has been concerned about a child's physical or emotional well-being. There have been no safeguarding or child protection issues that have needed to be formally referred to safeguarding professionals. The provider

has, however, informed the relevant social workers or professionals about any concerns she has had when she has assessed that a family may be reaching breaking point.

There have been no formal complaints made to the provider about her work. She is open to constructive criticism and acts to resolve differences of opinions promptly and effectively.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**

The provider has a full and sustained commitment to supporting families affected by adoption who are finding life together hard. A child stated that the provider is 'helpful and kind and mature and she supports anyone.'

She works highly effectively with families, social workers, education staff and other professionals and agencies involved in the lives of families. Her insightful reviews of individual cases provide a helpful and honest view of the strengths and areas for development in families' lives and relationships. She makes recommendations about further work families may benefit from, including referral when she is not qualified to deliver this work. This honesty is appreciated by social workers who then seek this support from an appropriate person. It is not only families who report that they learn from the work carried out with them. One social worker said: 'I have learned so much from her.'

The provider has a good understanding of the provision's strengths, and addresses areas that need change or development in her individual casework. She seeks and receives extensive feedback from people using the service and the commissioners. However, there is no formal monitoring process during which she considers the overall functioning of the provision to help to develop and improve the delivery of services.

The provider has regular, good-quality clinical supervision. She is appropriately challenged by her supervisor and uses these sessions to reflect on her practice. The sessions are used effectively to solve problems and to develop her practice.

The provider takes her responsibility to ensure that she is engaged in continuing professional development activities seriously. Through this, she keeps up to date with current thinking and practice in working with adoptive families.

Since the last inspection, the provider has developed a written policy regarding the information maintained on the agency's files. Files are well maintained and kept up to date. She gains extensive feedback from children, parents and professionals about the quality of her work, but as stated above, there is no formal system for monitoring practice and processes across the service as a whole. The provider has also developed an equal opportunities policy statement. She is very sensitive to people's values and beliefs and addresses any shortfalls in her understanding about these as issues arise. While there was adequate consideration given to health and

safety issues and there is appropriate insurance cover for the service, there was not a recorded policy or risk assessment in relation to the health and safety of the premises. During the inspection, the provider began working on these.

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.