

Family Action

Family Action

C/O Fosse Neighbourhood Centre, Mantle Road, Leicester LE3 5HG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

Family Action is a children's charity that provides a range of services throughout the country. This adoption support agency, registered in 2010, is part of the children's therapeutic services team based in Leicester, but only the adoption support work is the subject of this inspection. The permanent staff team comprises a registered manager, a psychotherapist who is the children's therapeutic services coordinator, and two part-time social workers. The agency also has access to a number of therapists who are commissioned on a spot-purchase basis. In the year March 2016–April 2017 the agency delivered adoption support services to two children.

Inspection dates: 2 to 3 May 2017

Overall experience and progress of service users, taking into account: **good**

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The adoption support agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 6 August 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency is good because:

- Children and families benefit from good-quality adoption support. The service is delivered promptly and flexibly, in accordance with the wishes of the people receiving the support.
- Adoption support is individually tailored to meet the assessed needs of children and families. Staff, including contracted therapists, can offer a range of therapeutic intervention. Good matching ensures that the right therapy and therapist are allocated to achieve the best outcomes.
- Children build positive relationships with staff and they benefit from having consistent support. Parents benefit from information and advice to enable them to care for their children with a better understanding of their emotional needs and how these manifest themselves in behaviour.
- Safeguarding has a high priority. Effective protective work with children enables them to become safer and happier.
- Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported. They offer a child-focused service that places a high premium on the voice of the child.
- Leaders and managers are committed to providing a high standard of adoption support. They provide a supportive environment for staff to deliver a service of good quality.

The adoption support agency's areas for development:

- The agency is starting to develop again, after a period of limited activity when no registered manager was in post. Consequently, monitoring and evaluation systems and processes are not fully embedded.
- Records that relate to staff are not complete and therefore they do not provide full and accurate information about each member of staff's performance and competence.
- Telephone enquiries have not been made to verify the written references on staff. Recruitment is therefore not as robust as it could be.

What does the adoption support agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person shall maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 3. This includes training and supervision records as well as recruitment checks and information. (The adoption support agencies (England) and adoption agencies (miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2005, regulation 22 (1))	30/06/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written reference. (National minimum standards 21.1)
- Ensure that a written record is kept by the agency detailing the time and date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. This relates to the supervision of therapists. (National minimum standards 24.5)

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Children benefit from high-quality adoption support that meets their assessed and emerging needs. The agency is able to offer individualised support because it uses a range of therapists, all of whom are qualified and registered with the relevant professional regulatory organisations. Thorough and effective matching, based on written information that is then further explored with the referrer, ensures that the most appropriate therapist is allocated to support the child. This gives the intervention the best chance of promoting a positive outcome.

All parties understand the purpose of the intervention and the proposed methods to be used to achieve the goals. There is a clear focus of work and this is regularly evaluated through discussion with the child and their family. Children are fully involved in shaping the service they are offered. Their views are listened to and are paramount in the work that is undertaken with them. The voice of the child is very strong, and support is tailored around what the children wish to talk about and what they hope to achieve.

Children develop positive relationships with staff. They welcome their visits and engage well with the therapists. This enables them to share their thoughts, feelings and worries so that they benefit from the therapeutic input. Creative, interactive and skilful work about managing feelings, self-regulation, understanding their life story, and keeping safe helps children manage better at school and at home.

Adoption support achieves positive outcomes and children make progress. One parent said: 'It has taken a massive strain off us and has given the children what they need.'

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected: good

There is a strong focus on keeping children safe. Risks are identified appropriately, and the management of the risks is clearly assessed and documented. Therapists undertake pieces of protective work to help children identify what safe and appropriate behaviour looks like. They also help children manage their feelings of grief and anger. This helps children become safer. Therapists work with parents to help them understand their children's feelings, and how these may be expressed in behaviour that on the face of it seems unrelated. This enables parents to provide more appropriate support. A parent said: 'This gives us a focus on how we can deal better with things.'

Staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, based on training, professional accountability and access to the agency's comprehensive safeguarding procedures. The manager is the adoption

support agency's designated safeguarding lead, and is experienced and knowledgeable about the role of the local authority's designated officer as well as the role of children's social care. Family Action, as the wider organisation, has a senior manager who is a designated safeguarding lead, to provide an additional tier of advice and support. There are clearly defined escalation procedures to use if the agency is not happy with the local authority's response to safeguarding referrals.

Parents and children receive clear information about the agency's response to safeguarding concerns, both verbal and written, so that they understand what will happen in the event of a concern or allegation.

Staff are recruited in line with safer recruitment practices, but telephone verification of references has not been carried out, which would make the process more robust. The agency has already highlighted this as a shortfall and put a system in place to rectify this.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The agency has had a period of significant change since its last inspection in 2014. It has had to completely rethink how to promote and provide the service, after a local authority decommissioned the service in June 2015. In addition, the agency was without a registered manager for a lengthy period of time, and as a result of this, the adoption support aspects of the service could not be progressed. Consequently, adoption support is currently only a small part of the therapeutic services the organisation offers to children.

The registered manager has only been in post for four months. She is appropriately professionally qualified, knowledgeable and experienced, and is registered on the relevant management course. She has identified areas for improvement and has started to implement systems and processes. However, this work is still in its early stages, and the changes identified have yet to fully embed. Monitoring arrangements currently include auditing files and reading case records, but there are now systems, not yet implemented, to gather feedback from service users and stakeholders, as well as more formal review processes of the work. This is to enable the agency to provide a more evidence-based demonstration of the impact its service has on improving outcomes for children.

The agency's ethos is clearly documented within its statement of purpose, and it is embedded in practice. It is child-focused, with an emphasis on respect, and a desire for excellence. Tolerance, equality and diversity underpin every aspect of service delivery, from recruitment of staff to the positive promotion of identity and challenge.

The agency is appropriately resourced to meet the current needs of the service. It has a small permanent staff team, but it also has access to a number of individually contracted therapists who offer a range of different therapeutic interventions,

including art therapy, drama therapy, play therapy and psychotherapy. This enables the agency to provide a flexible response to requests for support in order to meet individual assessed needs.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the agency's strengths and the areas where developments are needed. The commitment and diverse knowledge and skill base of staff, the flexibility to respond quickly, and a child-focused approach are evident strengths. The underpinning structure of being part of a wider, supportive organisation is also pivotal. The organisation is committed to provide financial support until the therapeutic team is self-supporting and financially viable.

Developments include work with schools to expand the service to adopted children, forging links with other local agencies, involvement with adopters to canvass their views about what services they see as important and necessary, and diversification.

Staff are supported well so that they in turn can provide good support to children and families. Managers are visible, and accessible 24 hours a day through the out-of-hours service. They provide regular supervision, including reflective case discussion, and annual appraisals of performance and development needs. However, the case management supervision of the therapists is not recorded, and there is therefore no record that this took place, or of its content. As a result, accountability is limited. An additional shortfall in recording is staff training. The agency does not have its own record of the training that staff undertake in order to maintain their registration and keep their skills and knowledge up to date. Consequently, the agency cannot fully demonstrate the competence of its staff.

Information about this inspection

During this inspection, inspectors looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children, young people and adults. They watched how professional staff work with children, young people, adults and each other and discussed the effectiveness of the help provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people, adults and their families. In addition, inspectors have tried to understand what the adoption support agency knows about how well it is performing and what difference it is making for the children, young people and adults who it is trying to help.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, using the 'Social care common inspection framework', to assess the effectiveness of the adoption support agency, how it meets the core functions as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 and the national minimum standards.

Adoption support agency details

Unique reference number: SC418586

Registered provider: Family Action

Registered provider address: 24 Angel Gate, London EC1V 2PT

Responsible individual: Mr David Holmes

Registered manager: Ms Katherine Gledhill

Telephone number: 0116 216 8334

Email address:

Inspector(s)

Ros Chapman, social care inspector



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