

Adoption Support Agency of Registered Therapists

19 Lenten Close, Peaslake, Guildford, Surrey GU5 9RA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

The adoption support agency's registered office is in Guildford. There are therapists based in the south east and in the north of England.

All therapists have professional qualifications that include psychotherapy and counselling and are registered with professional counselling bodies. The therapists carry out counselling and support services to all those affected by adoption.

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 November 2017

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| Overall experience and progress of service users, taking into account: | requires improvement to be good |
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| How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected | requires improvement to be good |
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| The effectiveness of leaders and managers | requires improvement to be good |
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The adoption support agency is not yet delivering effective services for children, young people and adults. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 18 February 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection:

Good.

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The safeguarding policy does not provide therapists with clear guidance about how to deal with safeguarding issues. Consequently, therapists are uncertain about the action that they should take when dealing with safeguarding concerns. The policy does not provide guidance for the therapists about record keeping in relation to safeguarding matters.
- Not all children have been encouraged and supported to explore their identity.
- There are significant shortfalls in the arrangements for monitoring the work of the agency. Monitoring is not carried out in line with the regulations, national minimum standards or the agency's statement of purpose.
- The manager does not have a management qualification.
- The arrangements for management supervision of the 'associates' are poor and are not recorded. There is no management supervision of the 'affiliates'.
- The statement of purpose has not been provided to Ofsted after it was amended.
- There are some minor shortfalls in staff recruitment practices.
- The quality of case recording is variable.

The adoption support agency's strengths:

- Clients develop good relationships with their therapist.
- Therapists are successful in engaging clients in the work, especially children who may have been reluctant to engage initially.
- Most clients make good progress in their emotional well-being.
- Children's attachments to their adoptive parents improve and, for most, their self-esteem and confidence improve.
- Adoptees come to terms with their situation.

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 |
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| <p>The registered person in relation to an agency providing adoption support services to children shall prepare and implement a written policy which— is intended to safeguard from abuse or neglect children receiving adoption support services from the agency; and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) shall provide in particular for liaison and co-operation with any local authority which is, or may be, making child protection enquiries in respect of the child; written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect and the action taken in response; and arrangements to be made for persons working for the purposes of the agency and adults and children to whom the agency has provided adoption support services to have access to information that would enable them to contact— the local authority in whose area the agency is situated and any other local authority on behalf of whom the agency is providing adoption support services to a child, and the registration authority, regarding any concern about child welfare or safety. (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b)(2)(b)(c)(i))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that there is clear guidance about the procedure to follow should an allegation or concern arise. The policy must be clear about the expectations in relation to the record keeping of safeguarding concerns.</p> | 09/02/2018 |
| <p>The registered provider shall appoint an individual to manage the agency if the registered provider is— an organisation or a partnership; is not a fit person to manage an agency; or is not, or does not intend to be, in full-time day-to-day charge of the agency.</p> <p>The registered provider shall forthwith notify the registration authority of— the name of any person appointed in accordance with this regulation; and the date on which the appointment is to take effect. (Regulation 8(1)(a), (2)(a)(b))</p> | 30/04/2018 |

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| <p>A person shall not manage an agency unless he is fit to do so. A person is not fit to manage an agency unless he has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for managing the agency. (Regulation 9(1), (2)(i))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the person managing the agency has a management qualification.</p> | 30/4/2018 |
| <p>The registered person and the responsible individual (if any) shall, having regard to the size of the agency, the statement of purpose and the number and needs of those receiving adoption support services from the agency, carry on or manage the agency with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 10 (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the agency is monitored and controlled effectively.</p> | 9/2/2018 |
| <p>The registered person shall ensure that all persons employed by the agency receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 20(2)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that a suitable representative of the agency supervises all therapists' work.</p> | 9/2/2018 |
| <p>Review of statement of purpose and children's guide. The registered person shall keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide; notify the registration authority of any such revision within 28 days of making the revision. (Regulation 6(b))</p> | 9/2/2018 |

Recommendations

- Make sure that adopters are supported to promote the child's social and emotional development, and to enable the child to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014 2.3)

In particular, ensure that therapists help parents to understand that children need to be encouraged and supported to explore their identity.
- The agency has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks, which have been carried out for staff. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014 21.3)

In particular, record the results of telephone enquiries made to referees and ensure that, where there is doubt about the authenticity of a document, this is followed up.
- Ensure there are effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the

agency. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014 25.1)

- Ensure 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. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 25.2)
- The management committee members: receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every six 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. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 25.2)
- The agency has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the agency's files. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 27.1)
- Ensure 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. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 24.5)

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: requires improvement to be good

Generally, children's and adults' experiences of the service are positive. The therapists are skilled in helping people to develop a therapeutic relationship. Therapists listen to clients' views about what they want to change in their lives. Plans are individualised and therapists use the therapeutic model best suited to the client. A client said, 'Everything I said was considered and thought about before being implemented.'

In one case, there was insensitivity shown towards a child who was exploring his identity. The child's actions, which were not putting him or anyone else at risk, were referred to the local authority as a safeguarding issue. He was not encouraged and supported to explore and develop his sense of identity. His confidence, self-esteem and ability to develop aspirations for his future have undoubtedly been affected by this.

Therapists are particularly successful in engaging children in the work by using the child's individual interests to capture their attention and make the sessions enjoyable. Children overcome the effects of previous neglect and trauma and deal with the losses that they have experienced. They learn that the things that have happened to them are not their fault. As a result, they develop or improve attachments to their adoptive parents and their resilience strengthens.

Children have benefited from their parents having learned how past abuse has affected their lives, because parents have adapted their parenting style to suit their child's needs. An adoptive parent said, 'I understand my children more and how to better parent them.' Another said, 'I have found the support to be enormously helpful and this has enabled my family to stay as a family.'

The benefits for adults affected by adoption include them gaining insight into how adoption has affected them. They have come to terms with their pasts and have developed strategies to manage their conflicts more effectively. One client said, 'My life is so much easier now, as I understand where my problems were coming from.' Another said, 'The word support says it all: caring, considerate communication, honesty and thoughtfulness.'

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Clients confirmed that they and their children feel safe in their relationships with their therapist and confide in them. A client said that she found the therapy sessions 'a safe place for me to begin to off-load'. While there have been no complaints made, clients spoken to confirmed that they know how to make a complaint.

Despite the therapists having undertaken safeguarding training, they are not all competent and confident in recognising and dealing with safeguarding issues. There was an unnecessary safeguarding referral made in relation to a child exploring his identity. In another case, there was a lack of urgency in referring information to social workers about a child being bullied. Nonetheless, a serious allegation made by a child was referred to the local authority within reasonable timescales. The manager was not immediately made aware of these three matters formally. She was not involved in the decision-making on when and if to refer the information to safeguarding agencies. The safeguarding procedure does not provide the therapists or the manager with the necessary framework and guidance to ensure that children are safeguarded.

Information recorded about child protection or safeguarding issues is not organised in a structured way. This makes it difficult, for monitoring purposes, to establish how an issue is being or has been dealt with.

Therapists recruited to work with the agency undergo an interview and a number of checks of their suitability. While references are verified with the author, these phone calls are not recorded. Additionally, a document relating to a therapist's insurance was not on headed paper and enquiries to check the document's authenticity had not been made.

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers:

This agency has a registered manager who is also the responsible individual. Although the agency has operated like this for some years, in the light of the shortfalls found during this inspection a requirement to appoint a separate individual to be the manager has been made.

The manager/responsible individual is highly qualified and has extensive experience in counselling and adoption work, but she does not have a management qualification.

The therapists, including the manager, have incorrectly viewed themselves as registered by Ofsted as individual therapists, through their association with the agency. None of the therapists understood the responsibilities and accountabilities of the responsible individual and registered manager roles.

The recommendations made at the last inspection about the monitoring arrangements have not been met and monitoring remains weak.

The agency has no clear operational management and decision-making structure in relation to practice. Referrals go straight to the individual therapist and there is no management oversight of cases. The manager does not have oversight of the therapy plans and is not involved in their review. This means that there is a lack of

management decision-making and, in some cases, the manager has had no knowledge of concerns or difficulties that have arisen.

While clients' views are gathered, they are not collated or used to evaluate or improve the services provided. There is no annual review of the work of the agency and six-monthly reports are not produced. This is at odds with the statement of purpose, which states that these things are being done. While the manager knows the strengths of the agency, she has not identified or understood the areas for improvement.

All therapists are registered with their respective professional bodies and undertake training as a condition of their continued registration with their professional body.

Therapists receive clinical supervision from a person unconnected to the agency. The agency's management supervision of associates' work is limited to one case per quarter. These are discussed during the quarterly business meetings. There are no records made of these case discussions. In addition to the associates, there are two therapists (affiliates) working for the agency. The 'affiliates' do not attend the quarterly meetings and their work is not subject to management supervision.

As the manager is not involved in all of the work carried out by the therapists, she does not have meaningful links to commissioners of the services or to clients' social workers. However, one commissioner of the service said that they have had very positive feedback about the quality of work from people whom they had referred to the agency.

Some of the therapists have contributed to national developments in adoption and family support work through their involvement in publications and projects aimed at enhancing parenting.

The standard of record keeping is inconsistent. For example, there is no agreed format for recording the therapy sessions, and the records are variable in quality and content. There are no arrangements for monitoring the quality of case records.

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 whom 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: SC068698

Registered provider: Adoption Support Agency of Registered Therapists

Registered provider address: 19 Lenten Close, Peaslake, Guildford, Surrey
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Inspectors

Rosie Dancer, social care inspector

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