

# About Children

About Children Limited  
78 Appleby Road, Kendal LA9 6HF  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this adoption support agency

About Children is a private limited company. The sole director is the only full-time employee. This adoption support agency provides therapeutic services to children, young adopted adults and support to their adoptive families. A range of self-employed therapists in specialisms such as art, drama and music therapies work with children experiencing trauma and loss who are struggling in their everyday life. A social worker also provides support to families and undertakes therapeutic life-story work.

At the time of the inspection the agency was working with 14 adopted children. Seven therapists, one social worker and two administration staff are employed on contracts of varying hours.

The agency also works with children who are not adopted, such as those in residential care, but this work was not considered as part of this inspection.

**Inspection dates:** 10 to 12 July 2018

**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 **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 25 November 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## **Key findings from this inspection**

This adoption support agency is good because:

- Staff are skilled in their area of expertise.
- The owner who is also the registered manager is passionate about her work and leads by example. She is dedicated to improving outcomes for children.
- Safeguarding is at the forefront of the agency's work. Staff ensure that they are alert to indicators of concern and involve other agencies when they need to.
- Everyone involved with the agency is positive about the difference that attending therapy has made to the outcomes for children attending.
- The agency is expanding. They have recently moved into new and more appropriate premises.

The adoption support agency's areas for development:

- Improve the quality of supervision records and the staff performance appraisal process.
- Make further improvements to the staff recruitment process.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that the agency can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable statutory requirements and guidance in the recruitment of staff. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these good practices. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 21.2)
- Ensure that there is written record kept by the agency relating to the supervision held for each staff member includes details of the discussion that relate to general management issues and actions that need to be taken, (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 24.5) and that casework decisions made during supervision form part of the child's record. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 27.4)
- Ensure that the formal appraisal of staff takes into account the views of children the service is providing for and that the appraisal process includes objective setting and the individuals learning and development needs. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 24.6)

## **Inspection judgement**

### **Overall experiences and progress of service users: good**

Staff understand the impact of children's early life experiences on the way that they present today. This can manifest in a variety of ways. Therapists develop trusting relationships with children, understanding that therapy needs to go at a pace suitable for the child.

Families feel welcome at the outset. Good quality initial assessments help to inform the focus of therapy. These include consultation with other professionals involved. Thus, ensuring the most appropriate therapy and agreement of objectives. Contracts ensure that all parties are clear about the arrangements for therapy. This includes expectations, confidentiality, review processes and how to raise a complaint if required. Everyone spoken to during the inspection was positive about the service. One commissioner commented, 'We have a good working relationship with the agency. Communication is good, and they are responsive to need.'

Similarly, children and their families speak highly of the service. Many report significant improvements in their family life as a result. An adoptive parent commented, 'I don't think that we could have kept going without their support. We are in a different place now.' A young person accessing therapy also said, 'It didn't take a long time to start to see a difference, a couple of months. Without this place I don't think I would have made it through school.' Such testimonies illustrate the positive impact that therapy is having.

The introduction of a social worker to the staff team provides an additional means of support. She meets routinely with parents while the child is receiving therapy, to review progress and suggest parenting strategies. She is also able to undertake therapeutic life-story work. Thus, enabling children and their families to process the child's past experiences and helping them to put these into context.

The agency will also provide support with education. This enables teaching staff to gain a better understanding of the child and their needs. This has been effective in maintaining children's school placements.

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

The agency has a strong focus on safeguarding, which is at the forefront of their practice. Staff receive training in safeguarding and sound procedures support their practice. They understand their roles and responsibilities and liaise with other safeguarding bodies if they need to. Social work commissioners are positive about the safeguarding ethos of the agency.

Therapists are aware of the implications of a child's early life experiences. This includes neglect, abuse and multiple care givers, often resulting in attachment difficulties. Staff are alert to their own presentation and behaviour and how a child may perceive this. Consequently, all therapists operate to an agreed code of practice within therapy, so that there can be no misunderstanding. Children are also made aware at the outset that staff will act on any safeguarding concerns.

Staff are equipped with the skills that they need to provide effective support to children, for example they have received training in self-injurious behaviour. If necessary staff draw up safety plans with children or young people. This ensures that all parties know what to look for and what action they need to take to keep young people safe.

The agency has made improvements to its recruitment processes since the last inspection. Yet, some shortfalls were still evident at this inspection. Such as, a reference not being verified and failing to ask referees to confirm dates of employment. Nonetheless, the agency has made significant improvements to their recruitment procedures. A further recommendation is made at this inspection to ensure procedures are satisfactory.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The sole director is the registered manager of the agency. She completed the formal registration process with Ofsted in April 2016. She is an experienced therapist and has a level 5 management qualification. She is passionate about improving the lives of children who have suffered early trauma. This enthusiasm and dedication permeates through the whole staff team, who display a similar dedication and commitment to their work.

The agency has moved premises since the last inspection. The current premises are of a high standard, providing an accessible, secure and confidential location for the work of this adoption support agency. It is a pleasant working environment for the therapists involved and for those attending for therapy and support. There are also meeting room facilities for reviews and meetings with social workers.

Therapists are employed on a self-employed basis. They receive regular clinical supervision in their area of expertise. The registered manager provides casework and line management supervision. A central record is kept of casework discussion and decisions. However, this does not form part of the child's record and no record is kept of other issues, such as performance management discussions. Hence, it is not clear if there are actions to follow up and it makes it difficult to check progress. Despite this, staff are very positive about the support that they receive and the availability of the registered manager.

Staff complete their own self-evaluation of their performance on an annual basis. Yet, the manager is restricting her own views to a short sentence on the same

document. Furthermore, appraisals are not taking into account the views of the children and families that the therapist is working with. Objectives for the forthcoming year are not agreed or training needs evaluated. This would ensure that the individual is performing to their full potential.

Improvements have been made to the auditing of records since the last inspection. Regular management oversight is evident, and the standard of recording has improved. Regular review reports also help commissioners track children's progress. They demonstrate the positive impact of the agency's support.

The statement of purpose illustrates the aims of the agency and reflects the service that the agency provides. The agency has two children's guides for adoption support. These are age appropriate and help give children an understanding of what will happen in therapy. They include details of staff who they will meet and information about how to make a complaint. This helps to ensure that children are well-informed.

The agency has a business continuity plan. This ensures that the agency can continue to operate in the event of an emergency. A business development plan also reflects the ambition of the registered manager to further improve. It demonstrates that she has a good understanding of the agency's strengths and weaknesses. With the exception of staff recruitment, action has been taken to address the two requirements and six recommendations resulting from the last inspection.

## **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 differences 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:** SC431970

**Registered provider:** About Children Limited

**Registered provider address:** 78 Appleby Road, Kendal LA9 6HF

**Responsible individual:** Mrs Lesley Ritchie

**Registered manager:** Mrs Lesley Ritchie

**Telephone number:** 07891032793

**Email address:** [lesleyritchie@aboutchildren.org.uk](mailto:lesleyritchie@aboutchildren.org.uk)

### **Inspector**

Mandy Williams, social care inspector



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