

Diagrama Adoption

Diagrama Children's Services Limited
Airport House, Purley Way CR0 0XZ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

The provider is a registered charity which operates several children's services across Europe. The agency provides the full range of domestic adoption services, including access to records and intermediary services. At the end of the last quarter there were 67 families approved as adopters and 33 of these were waiting to be matched with children. There were 13 children placed but not yet adopted and 14 were placed and had a final adoption order.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 October 2018

Overall experiences 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 voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 8 February 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This voluntary adoption agency is good because:

- Leaders and managers are committed to providing the best service for children.
- Experienced social workers are passionate about providing the best service they can to improve the lives of children and adult service users. They are well supported by

regular supervision and access to training opportunities.

- Diagrama is a learning organisation which is committed to developing and improving services through training and people development.
- Leaders and managers are approachable and available to staff. The responsible individual interviews all staff who want to work for the agency.
- Prospective adopters feel well prepared and supported through the preparation and assessment process for the task of adoptive parenting. Children benefit from being placed within adoptive families who understand their complex needs.
- Prospective adopters choose this agency over others as they value the personal approach and individual support given by its social workers. Many adopters return to adopt second and third children.
- The agency has close and collaborative partnerships with several organisations who support its prospective adopters, adopters and children.
- Children make good progress in their adoptive families. Their health, educational and emotional needs are met competently and they thrive in stable and secure families.

The voluntary adoption agency's areas for development:

- Adult adoptees, birth relatives and their descendants who request access to their birth records wait too long to receive a service. The response of the agency is not yet organised or effective enough, although leaders and managers are aware of this shortfall.
- The agency needs to improve the continuity of workers for prospective adopters throughout the process of preparation, assessment, matching and support.

What does the voluntary adoption 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 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 or any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>Adoption and Children Act 2002</p> <p>60: Disclosing information to adopted adult</p> <p>(1) This section applies to an adopted person who has attained the age of 18 years.</p> <p>(2) The adopted person has the right, at his request, to receive from the appropriate adoption agency—</p> <p>(a) any information which would enable him to obtain a certified copy of the record of his birth, unless the High Court orders otherwise;</p> <p>(b) any prescribed information disclosed to the adopters by the agency by virtue of section 54.</p>	31/01/2019

Recommendations

- Ensure all staff's work and activity are consistent with adoption regulations and national minimum standards, and with the service's policies and procedures. This relates to timescales in the provision of services for adopted adults. (Adoption: national minimum standards, paragraph 25.3)
- Ensure staff understand and follow the agency's policy on dealing with requests for access to or disclosure from adoption case records, and know who is responsible for authorising them. (Adoption: national minimum standards, paragraph 27.3)
- Ensure that the executive side of the voluntary adoption agency's provider/trustees, board members or 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;
 - satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
 (Adoption: national minimum standards, paragraph 25.6)
- The adoption agency/registered person of the adoption support agency formally

approves the statement of purpose and children's guides, and reviews them at least annually. Specifically, to ensure that the agency provides services in line with its statement of purpose, and works to support its ethos in practice. (Adoption: national minimum standards, paragraph 18.3)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Overall, children placed for adoption make good progress from their starting points. Feedback from the placing authorities spoken to demonstrated how happy they were with the placement and the matching of children. One placing authority social worker who was contacted said, 'It's been really straightforward since the match, it has been a really good match.' Other examples were given of how well children had progressed; how they looked different, and had their health and educational needs met; and how settled they were in their adoptive families.

There are good arrangements in place for welcoming prospective adopters and giving them an opportunity to consider adoption prior to the process commencing. Information packs are routinely sent out, regular information evenings are scheduled and prospective adopters described a welcoming approach from all staff. Prospective adopters made comments such as, 'We were impressed with the website and available information'; and 'The information day was really welcoming, very professional and thorough.'

There are clear administrative systems in place at the point of enquiry to ensure a smooth transition through the process. Prospective adopters found it extremely helpful to just have one point of contact to ensure that relevant checks were undertaken and recorded. This supports the social work team to ensure timeliness and efficiency and record reasons for any delays.

Relationships between social workers and adopters/prospective adopters are excellent. The transitions between different workers are managed well. However, prospective adopters felt that having one consistent worker would strengthen the process for them and for their children. When there are changes, adopters/prospective adopters are already familiar with the workers, having met them at training days, panel meetings and information evenings. The agency consistently uses a small group of independent social workers who are regularly commissioned to complete the assessment at stage two.

The quality of adoption support from the agency's social workers is extremely high. One adoptive parent said, 'The way she [social worker] has held us has been incredible in every way.' They are knowledgeable, able and aware of adoption services that can be accessed to support children and adopters. Post-adoption training for adopters is a strength, and is well targeted and well attended.

Adopted children's views are represented in adoption support plans and given consideration at panel. Birth children's views are less well represented within the assessment and matching process. The agency is aware of this shortfall and is training staff and changing practice to address this issue.

Two placement breakdowns have occurred in the past year. The agency has considered these breakdowns in detail, and is collaborating with the placing authority to learn from these experiences.

The services for adult adoptees seeking birth record information and intermediary services have unacceptable waiting times and a backlog of referrals. There has been no organised response from the agency regarding this service. Leaders and managers commissioned an independent expert to report on the current position and the expected standard of this work. This report has proposed several options to ensure that this work takes place. The leaders and managers intend to consider the suggested options and select one which will address and improve the current situation. The manager and the social workers are aware of the deficit in this service, and have completed some good work on prioritising and working through the backlog. They have prompted the senior leaders and managers to commission the independent work which will help promote the development of this service in the future.

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

There is an established training programme for prospective adopters, which covers various aspects of safeguarding. The focus of the training is on attachment behaviours and trauma in early childhood. Evidence of this learning was seen through prospective adopters' feedback at the panel, and discussion with prospective adopters and placing social workers.

Placements of children are well supported, and guidance and advice are available for adopters to help them understand behaviours and the impact of abuse.

Notifications evidence that the agency understands the process for making a referral to placing authorities and/or the designated officer. Appropriate referrals have been made and investigated to ensure the safety and protection of children.

The prospective adopters' training includes many different areas of safeguarding, such as e-safety, neglect and abuse. Training is regularly discussed within the team and additional areas are added to ensure that prospective adopters receive effective and up-to-date training in key areas. Training is delivered by experienced staff and the agency is focused on the needs of children in the wider community. For example, it suggests outside training such as specific attachment training for schools. Prospective adopters can also access friends and family training, and additional training in fostering for adoption if they choose to take this track.

A strength of this agency is the offer of ongoing training. This training is targeted via an online tool which asks adopters what training they require. The most popular courses include: sensory integration, attachment and trauma, parenting teenagers and trauma-fuelled violence. Since the agency began including adopters and asking them what training they wanted, inclusion and attendance rates have increased.

Prospective adopters are thoroughly checked at each stage of the process. Partner checks and references are taken up, and individuals are interviewed directly. The administration team ensures that health, police, school, financial, local authority and any other checks are routinely completed and recorded.

The agency adheres to safe recruitment practice, including all relevant checks for new staff employed. Some minor gaps in safe recruitment practice were seen on old files inherited by this agency. However, these gaps were quickly rectified during the inspection and the agency proposes to review all staff files to ensure that references, appropriate checks and qualifications are held on files. The panel members are included in the same rigorous safe recruitment checks and application and interview processes, which is good practice and supports children's safety.

Appropriate referrals are made when safeguarding issues arise. The manager has a strong focus on safeguarding. She ensures that clear records are kept and appropriate notifications are made to the regulator when necessary. The agency has good links with placing authorities, is aware of the designated officer's role and has shared the safeguarding policy with the local borough's multi-agency safeguarding hub.

The agency is currently updating its policies and procedures which inform staff about their responsibilities regarding allegations of historical abuse. The manager and the staff team ensure that any historical abuse allegations are appropriately reported, and that they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and those of the local authority, including the designated officer.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A new registered manager came into post at the beginning of August 2018. This followed the previous manager giving a long notice and a transitional period for handover. The new manager is appropriately qualified and has recently completed additional personal development through completing a Master of Arts in Advanced child protection.

The current manager is also the registered manager of the organisation's independent fostering agency. She is supported in her role by deputy managers in both services. However, the adoption service deputy manager currently retains an adoption caseload. Further recruitment has identified two new workers in the service, which will free up the deputy to move her caseload and thus enable her to support the manager.

The manager is effective, transparent and passionate about the service. Despite her short time in post, she has strengthened processes and brought the team together to work to a good overall standard. She has a clear vision for the service. She has written an agency action plan and intends to write an expectations document to ensure a good standard of service which is consistent across the agency. The new manager is very clear about, and has an appropriate understanding of, the shortfalls of the agency.

When leaders and managers purchased this agency, they did not recognise their statutory responsibilities in respect of adult adoptees' access to birth records. There is no signposting for adult adoptees on the agency's website to guide them in what they need to do to seek access to records in the absence of a consistent service from the agency. The agency is not working effectively within its own ethos or in line with its statement of purpose in respect of adult adoptees and their birth relatives. Senior managers have given assurances that the agency will put some immediate resources in to strengthen the

agency's response and to address the unacceptable backlog that has been created. Inspectors were reassured that leaders and managers intend to consider the recommendations of the independent report, and give consideration to how the agency manages this work going forward and in the long term.

Overall, leaders and managers show great commitment to and passion for the work of the agency. They are very involved and hands on, for example in interviewing all staff who are proposed to work for the agency. The ethos and values of the agency are conducive to achieving good outcomes for children. Managers are very open and transparent about their work.

Leaders and manager provide an open and supportive environment for staff. All staff without exception stated how 'held' and 'supported' they felt by the current management arrangements. There is an overall feeling of a supportive structure. Staff are supported by regular good-quality supervision and access to relevant training, which helps them to do their jobs well.

There is good monitoring of casework. This occurs through regular reflective supervision sessions with a psychologist, and through casework audit, quality assurance and the agency panel.

The panel is extremely experienced and knowledgeable, and plays a critical role in quality assurance and feedback. The panel asks probing questions and there is a real depth to the level of questioning, which is done in an extremely sensitive manner. The panel is aware of its diversity limitations (e.g in gender) and is in the process of recruiting to address this.

Case records show an overall good standard of recording. However, some assessments and plans were of variable quality. The agency manager is working on templates to improve the quality of some risk assessments and some adoption support plans. Inspectors consistently found that the manager was aware of shortfalls in practice across the service, and had plans in development to address these shortfalls.

The agency is financially viable. There was some concern about this from the last set of audited accounts, but updated financial information showed a much healthier position. The inherited situation with respect to the agency's financial position has significantly improved.

The agency recruits a diverse range of adopters, including adopters from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community; single carers; and adopters from a mix of cultural, religious and ethnic groups. The agency is also working in collaboration with several partner agencies to both increase the numbers of prospective adopters and to support them. Several placing authorities were contacted as part of this inspection and from discussion with them and social workers it is evident that there is good partnership working taking place.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have 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 help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families, and adult service users. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the voluntary adoption agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children, young people and adults whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: SC484605

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