

Adoptionplus Limited

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Unit 3, Moulsoe Business Centre, Cranfield Road, Moulsoe, Newport Pagnell,
Buckinghamshire MK16 0FJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

Adoptionplus is a voluntary adoption agency that provides domestic adoption and adoption support services, birth relative counselling and a range of training services. The agency specialises in recruiting, assessing and preparing adoptive families for children with a history of trauma and attachment difficulties. All adoptive families have access to a multi-disciplinary team of therapists until their child is 18. The team adopts a relationship-based, trauma-informed approach to the provision of a range of interventions, including Theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Practice-based family work, DDP-informed Therapeutic Life Story Work, and Nurturing Attachments Group Programmes, in addition to a focused approach to the needs of families caring for adopted teenagers.

The therapy service is also commissioned by local authorities and by individual families who require pre- and post-adoption support. A specific service is provided to adopted teenagers and their families, which is accessed by families on a spot-purchase basis. Adoptionplus also provides therapeutic counselling services to adults in connection with adoption, through a number of service-level agreements which are in place with some local authorities.

Since the last inspection in February 2016, the agency has placed nine children with seven families. The agency currently has one approved adoptive family which has been linked with two children. Seventeen Adoptionplus families have received therapeutic support during this period, in addition to 221 families who have received support through spot-purchase and contract arrangements. Two hundred and four birth relatives have received support through commissioning arrangements during this period.

Inspection dates: 5 to 11 March 2019

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The voluntary adoption agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the voluntary adoption agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children, young people and adults.

Date of previous inspection: 8 February 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This voluntary adoption agency is outstanding because:

- The agency succeeds in providing a centre of excellence for adoption services. It is extensively involved in adoption research, which is disseminated across the sector resulting in a positive impact on the lives of many adopted children and their families. Staff practice is research based and makes an exceptional difference to service users' lives.
- High-quality assessments are undertaken in a timely manner and fully involve the adoptive parents. Adopters benefit from exceptional training and support prior to adopting their child that comprehensively prepare them for their parenting role.
- The agency specialises in finding adoptive families for children who have experienced trauma and attachment difficulties resulting in highly complex needs. Adopters are actively involved in the thorough and effective matching process and are given extensive support throughout.
- The agency skilfully matches the children with the right adopters, who have the skills and attributes to meet the identified needs of the child. This diligent process is effective and has resulted in no adoption disruptions since the last inspection.
- The relationship-based, trauma-informed therapeutic offer to both adults and children covers a range of approaches, which illustrates the experience and skills of the staff team. This ethos is prevalent throughout all aspects of the service and is deeply embedded into the culture of this agency.
- Safeguarding is at the centre of practice in this agency. Managers and staff have an excellent understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and they adopt a multi-agency approach to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are helped and protected.
- The agency's flexible approach to the provision of support to adopted teenagers has resulted in an exceptionally effective and high-quality response to non-Adoptionplus families, on a spot-purchase basis.
- Managers are inspirational, committed and forward thinking. Robust monitoring and a reflective approach have ensured continued exceptionally high-quality performance and outcomes for children.
- Staff are skilled, passionate and committed to improving the lives of children, adult service users and families. They receive high-quality clinical supervision and training that equip them to do their job well.
- The agency provides exceptionally high-quality counselling and support to birth family members. Adults who have used this service described the support they have received in glowing terms. People spoke about the efficiency of the service provided, the timeliness of the responses they received and sensitivity of the provider.
- Service users reported the positive impact of the agency on their lives. Their experiences frequently far exceed their expectations in terms of the support they receive. One adopter said, 'Adoptionplus has completely changed our lives for the better. Our future is full of hope and joy. We have been supported to recognise our

strengths as a family, and our ability to ensure that our child has the best childhood possible.'

The voluntary adoption agency's areas for development:

- Ensure that the panel provides a report to the agency on a six-monthly basis, describing the quality of the reports being presented to panel.

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

Recommendations

- **Adoption panels and decision-maker**
Adoption panels provide a quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.
(Adoption: national minimum standards, standard 17.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

Children benefit significantly from the high-quality services provided by this agency, because it is able to place children who have the most complex needs with approved adoptive families, thereby enabling them to experience a stable and secure family life.

Adopters commented very positively about the adoption assessment process. Adopters stated that, from their first enquiry, the process was extremely well managed by the agency and that they were kept fully involved and informed at all stages. Adopters benefit from individualised, high-quality assessments and excellent preparation. One adopter said, 'The agency were open and transparent throughout the entire process. They supported and challenged us but also held our hands every step of the way.'

Children are exceptionally well matched with their prospective adoptive families and this helps them to settle well. They develop trusting relationships with the adults caring for them and as their ability to form healthy attachments to adults improves, they develop a strong sense of belonging with their adoptive family. One placing social worker said of a placement she had made, 'The child has formed an embedded relationship. Adoptionplus offer a realistic lifelong therapeutic service, and I know that the child has been left in very safe hands.'

Adopters are highly attuned to their child's needs and feelings and understand how children's past experiences have affected their emotional well-being and behaviour. One parent said, 'Adoptionplus feel like an extension of my family. I can go to them whenever I need, and I can talk to them about anything. They do not judge or blame, and I know that they truly understand my own and my daughters' needs; they are professional and knowledgeable and I trust them entirely.'

Practice within this agency is innovative and of high quality. Children make excellent progress, as a result of the thorough assessments and ongoing support offered. The agency demonstrates a long-term commitment to families throughout the different stages of a child's development. It provides excellent, high-quality packages of individual trauma-informed support to the children, their families and adult service users.

Adopters are supported to understand the process of attachment and the impact of this on children's capacity to grow and to learn. Effective practical strategies are offered to parents to help them support their children through any difficulties that they may be experiencing. The support offered has a profound and positive impact on service users' lives. It is of significance that there have been no placement breakdowns, despite some children having highly complex needs. One child said, 'Coming to Adoptionplus is like coming home. I feel safe and I know the staff really care about me and my mum. They have made an amazing difference to our lives. They are the best!'

Teenagers and their adoptive parents are exceptionally well supported by this agency. The agency provides a highly responsive and flexible approach and families who have used this service reported that this has changed their lives for the better. One parent said,

'Adoptionplus have given us a lifeline. Without them, and the support provided, our family would have fallen apart. We are now much more resilient and the support we have been given has enriched our lives completely.'

The support provided to birth relatives is impressive. Skilful and sensitive work in this area supports birth relatives to manage and understand their children's adoptions. The provider works in close partnership with a number of local authorities. One local authority representative described the agency as 'very professional, reliable and responsive', and said, 'The outcomes achieved for birth relatives are fantastic.' Birth relatives spoke in glowing terms about the service provided and the positive impact which this has had on their lives. One birth relative reported, 'At last, I am able to move on. After so many years, the fear and guilt have been lifted. There is no blame and I no longer feel shame. I can now live with myself and believe that I am actually worthwhile.'

The agency succeeds in providing a centre of excellence for adoption services. It is extensively involved in adoption research, and the initiatives and ongoing work through the partnerships are worthy of dissemination. The sharing of practice through the training and workshops make this agency a leader in providing adoption and support services.

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

The agency ensures that the welfare of children is at the forefront of all practice. Managers and staff have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and work hard to keep children safe and to protect them from harm. The agency takes a strong, proactive approach to safeguarding, and has comprehensive policies and procedural guidance.

Adopters are clear about their responsibilities and are mindful of safe caring, understanding the potential impact that abuse and neglect may have on children. This starts from the first contact with the agency, and is central to the preparation and assessment process. This helps adoptive parents appreciate the implications of the child's early life experiences on their presenting behaviours, and they learn how to manage this appropriately and effectively.

Staff have access to excellent safeguarding information and training. All staff interviewed understood their responsibilities and how to report concerns, both current and historical. The agency utilises research to inform its approach to the behaviours of children and their responses to trauma, loss and attachment. These areas of informed practice help to ensure that the agency trains and supports prospective adopters, which in turn keeps children safe.

Staff recruitment processes ensure that those working for the agency, including panel members and contractors and trustees, are suitable people who are fully committed to the safeguarding ethos of the agency.

Managers and staff have ensured that parents and children understand the concept of

confidentiality and the circumstances in which it is necessary to share information with the appropriate authorities.

There have been no complaints or expressions of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the service offered by the provider. However, those using the service are clear that should they have a cause to complain, this would be dealt with professionally and appropriately. Service users receive written information at the onset of the agency's involvement, the details of which are available on the agency's website and contained within its statement of purpose. Similarly, information is available for children in a child-friendly guide to agency.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Managers have taken action to address the three recommendations made at the last inspection in February 2016. Written supervision records now detail the time, date and length of each supervision, including the supervision of the registered person. The statement of purpose clearly outlines the stages that prospective adopters will need to progress through and this is available on the agency's website. The agency decision-maker records in full all required, and additional, information.

Leaders and managers are committed, passionate and forward thinking. They are inspirational, confident and ambitious for all service users. They have enabled the agency to provide excellent adoption and adoption support services during a challenging time for the world of adoption. The agency leads in many areas of adoption work in the UK and has created a centre of excellence for adoption and adoption support.

Continued evaluation has enabled the agency to understand its strengths and areas for development, and devise a clear action plan for the year ahead. Leaders and managers reflect on what service users need and find innovative and creative ways to provide this. Development plans include clear targets that are regularly reviewed and adjusted accordingly, in order to meet the ever-challenging adoption environment. This ensures that those responsible take actions in a timely way and issues do not drift. Managers are constantly looking at ways to improve the service and improve outcomes for children requiring adoption.

The agency is appropriately staffed and resourced to meet the needs of the children, prospective adopters and the adopters and the birth relatives with whom it works. The staff team is from a variety of disciplines, including social work, counselling and therapy, and is highly skilled and experienced. Some of the practitioners have many years of experience in adoption practice.

Staff are committed and passionate about the work they do and reported that they feel extremely well supported. They described excellent formal supervision, as well as group and clinical supervision, and feel that leaders and managers are available and accessible.

Case files show that good, clear records are kept of all interventions, in a manner which is conducive to the needs and understanding of children who may wish to use these to

enhance their understanding of their adoption journey.

The adoption panel provides a diligent quality assurance function. The panel chair stated that assessment reports provided to panel to inform its recommendations are of an exceptional standard. Panel members are suitably experienced and qualified and the panel is very well organised and runs efficiently. There is a shortfall in relation to the provision of reports from panel to the agency and a recommendation has been made in relation to this.

The agency has comprehensive quality assurance processes which support continuous improvement. The manager and responsible individual compile extensive monitoring reports that are provided to the trustees, who scrutinise and provide oversight of the operation of the agency in an effective manner.

Leaders and managers have an ambitious vision for the agency. There are many innovative and creative projects successfully being undertaken by the agency that are further improving outcomes for adopted children. The agency works in collaboration with local authorities and in partnership with another voluntary adoption agency to provide a centre of excellence that delivers high-quality services to birth relatives, parents and children. There is a shared sense of purpose from all managers and staff and expert knowledge of how to achieve very positive outcomes for adopted children, their families and birth relatives.

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

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Jacqueline Georghiou, social care inspector



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