

Action for Children – Adoption and Permanency Service Midlands

Action for Children

Wheatfield Close, Birmingham B36 0QP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

Action for Children is a well-established national children's charity that is also registered as a voluntary adoption agency.

It provides services for domestic adoption and adoption support, including birth records counselling. There are three adoption teams operating out of three offices in Birmingham, Bristol and London. They find adoptive families for children of all ethnic backgrounds and ages, children with a disability or developmental uncertainty, brother and sister groups of all ages and single children.

Since April 2019, 25 children have had adoption orders made. Nineteen children have been matched and placed with adopters and 13 approved adopters are waiting for a match with a child.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account	good
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How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 12 January 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Adopters feel highly valued and well supported. The agency responds quickly to people enquiring about adoption. Staff work therapeutically and are empathetic. They care and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities towards children and adopters. This shines through all of the work undertaken by the agency, throughout preparation, assessment, approval and post-approval.

Assessments are thorough and of a good standard. They are analytical and give good attention to adopters' motivation to adopt, any loss or trauma, and the support networks that are available. They give an accurate reflection of adopters' strengths and vulnerabilities, enabling effective matching to take place. This ensures that adopters are suitable and skilled to care for children.

Adopters promote children's well-being and help them to make progress. Staff work collaboratively with adopters to ensure that they are well prepared for the task of adoptive parenting. They receive intensive and well-prepared training and supervision, which enable them to build their knowledge, confidence and capacity to meet the developing needs of their children.

Matching of children to their future families is well considered and takes place in conjunction with local authority social workers. Staff play an active part in ensuring that adopters consider all information and help them make the right decision. Extensive preparation is given to adopters to ensure that they have all the knowledge and skills necessary to care for their linked children. As a result, placement stability is very good.

Children make good progress and thrive living with their adoptive families. They build trusting, secure attachments and increase in confidence. Their health, educational and emotional needs are well met. For example, they settle quickly into school and make new friends.

Meeting children's needs is the key focus of this agency. Staff support adopters to see the world through an adopted child's eyes. This supports adopters to empathise with children and better parent and nurture them.

Staff provide good post-adoption support. This is not time-limited but is built around the individual needs of the adopters and children. The range of support is varied and includes training, theraplay sessions and support groups such as 'Little Stars', run by adopters for adopters. Managers continue to develop these resources. For example, four adopters have recently been recruited into an adopter champion role. They are contributing to a quarterly newsletter, attending preparation training and giving direct support to other adopters. The agency has also recently recruited an experienced adopter to talk to the team and to provide talks at preparation training.

Access to records is a real strength of this agency. Response times to requests are very good, and the records are of a high quality. Passionate and experienced workers provide an efficient and organised service and have a good understanding of the lifelong impact of adoption.

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

Managers and staff place a high priority on keeping children safe. Staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They adopt a multi-agency approach to ensuring that children are helped and protected. When necessary, managers and staff provide robust challenge to other professionals to ensure that they fulfil their duties. As a result, adopters and children's well-being is safeguarded.

Managers and staff ensure that appropriate actions are quickly taken to support adopters and ensure that children are safe and risks are managed. However, this good practice is not consistently evidenced in health and safety documents, safer caring plans or child protection records. This makes it difficult for managers to fully assess the quality of staff practice. Systems are now in place for managers to better quality-assure files and improve the quality of future records.

Adopters are well prepared for the challenges that adoptive parenting can bring. They have a thorough understanding of the potential impact of children's previous experiences and how these may affect their presentation and behaviour. A focus on safeguarding children is threaded through preparation, assessment, training and post-adoption support. Adopters have access to the agency's safeguarding procedures. These have been updated to reflect risks such as radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and e-safety. As a result, adopters are well informed and are able to confidently advocate on their children's behalf.

The recruitment of prospective adopters, staff and panel members is thorough. This ensures that only suitable people have contact with, or have information about, children, adult service users and adoptive parents.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are forward-thinking. Their monitoring is regular and robust. They are reflective in their approach to issues that arise and make changes to improve practice. They work collaboratively with other partners so that adopters and children have positive outcomes.

Senior leaders invest in the agency's management team. All managers have the level 5 diploma in leadership for health and social care and children and young people's services. They have also completed external assessments and received additional mentoring to develop and understand their management styles as a team.

Managers create the right environment for staff to work effectively. Staff are suitably qualified, highly experienced and committed. They receive regular, good-quality supervision and appraisals and attend team meetings and awaydays that

enable them to reflect on their practice. New workers feel welcomed to the agency. They describe an intensive and supportive induction. Staff comment that leaders and managers are approachable and accessible, and staff feel that their views are listened to and valued.

Staff are generally well trained. However, although staff have individual knowledge about radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and e-safety, the agency does not provide mandatory training in these subjects. This does not ensure that the staff have the most up-to-date knowledge.

Managers have successfully improved key aspects of this service. For example:

- Significant work has been undertaken to align and consolidate practice between the three offices. For example, quarterly information-sharing team days now take place involving staff from all three offices.
- Some systems have been improved. For example, response times to enquiries have reduced because of a change to the process for following these up. This has seen an increase in uptake of prospective adopters.
- Some resources, such as the agency's panel, have been centralised. As a result, the panel works effectively and promotes safe, secure and stable placements. The panel provides feedback to the agency and it acts as an additional quality assurance tool. The panel membership is diverse, and panel members are dedicated and experienced. They receive regular training, support and appraisals which assist them to be competent and effective.

Managers continue to develop the agency by undertaking learning reviews, focused monitoring and regular audits. These are used to improve systems and practice. For example, there have been no disruptions in the last 12 months. However, in the previous year there had been two. In both cases, the service manager involved the organisation's performance and development team in reviewing and identifying lessons that could be learned. This involved a review of records and discussions with the social workers and team manager. Outcomes were discussed in the whole-service workshops involving the three regions and resulted in changes to practice. These changes have improved outcomes for adopters and children.

Managers have met all of the recommendations made at the previous inspections. However, managers had failed to notify Ofsted of some key events. This was addressed during the inspection and Ofsted has now been informed. This shortfall has not had a negative impact on children or adopters.

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>The registered provider and the manager shall prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) shall provide in particular for—</p> <p>notification to the registration authority of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries. (The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003). (Regulation 10 (1) (b) (2)(d))</p>	29/02/2020

Recommendations

- Ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted and children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm. (Adoption: national minimum standards, page 18, paragraph 4.1) This specifically relates to reviewing and updating health and safety checks and safer caring documents.
- A clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations or concerns about a prospective adopter or member of the prospective adopter's household, or staff member or volunteer, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, should be kept on the prospective adopter's or person's confidential file. (Adoption: national minimum standards, page 64, paragraph 22.7)
- Ensure that there is a good quality learning and development programme which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children and service users, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business of the agency. (Adoption: national minimum standards, page 66, paragraph 23.1) This is with particular reference to e-safety, radicalisation and child sexual exploitation awareness training.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, 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: SC051421

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