

Placement Support

Placement Support Ltd

12 Princess Road West, Leicester LE1 6TP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

This adoption support agency is privately owned. It is located in Leicester, but it offers support to adoptive families in other parts of the country, dependent in part upon the location and suitability of therapists. Therapists are self-employed practitioners, contracted to undertake particular therapeutic interventions with families. This is usually funded through the adoption support fund.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing adoption support to 13 families. Adoption support is only one aspect of Placement Support's remit, but only adoption support was considered during this inspection.

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 March 2020

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: 15 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Children and adoptive families benefit significantly from the high-quality adoption support that they receive. Children's outcomes are improved and adoptive parents develop a far better understanding of the impact that the children's previous experiences have had on their behaviour and emotions. This understanding helps the parents to respond more appropriately to their children, and it also helps them to manage their own emotions and reactions. One adoptive parent said: 'The therapist is worth his weight in gold. He helps us to help the children.'

The children being supported have very complex histories and needs. The support provided can be long term and flexible to changing situations. It can be support to parents, to children or a combination of both, whatever is most appropriate. It is individualised and takes into account the differing and emerging needs of family life.

The support provided is underpinned by a very thorough assessment, which is based on information gathered through a number of sessions with the family, supplemented by historic written reports. The detailed assessment report is shared with the adopters and with the commissioning authority, but the detail of the support plan tends to be given verbally. It would be helpful if this was formalised so that adopters have written information about the aims of the service and how it will be evaluated and reviewed.

The impact of adoption support is evident. Family life is improved and maintained, and children begin to develop a better understanding of their histories, their emotions and their behaviour. Chaotic and stressful family life is now much calmer. Children find their voice and they become better at expressing their feelings. One adoptive parent said: 'The progress is huge. We now have a wonderful period of slow, steady and progressive improvement.' For example, children who have struggled either to attend school or behave in a way that is manageable have become more settled and have attained their GCSEs. A teacher said: 'That couldn't have happened without Placement Support.'

This progress has been brought about by therapists working with the family's network as well as the family, for example by going into the school to provide advice and attending meetings with parents to empower them. One adoptive parent said: 'Without the therapist, we would not have had the confidence to go into school.' Another commented that the time that the therapist gave to helping teaching staff to understand the issues was 'transformational'.

If families cannot be maintained intact, the work that the therapists do enables the transitions to be more positive. For example, adoptive parents are supported to do what is best for the child, and this positive transition provides hope that relationships will improve over time in a different model of family life.

Adopters speak very highly of the therapists, describing them as 'amazing'. They form trusting and meaningful relationships based on openness and honesty, and this enables adoptive parents to engage well and respond to challenge in positive and reflective way. One adoptive parent said: 'The therapist has been brilliant. He has helped us enormously to focus on the issues.' Adopters are appreciative of the experience, skills and knowledge that the therapists bring. They feel able to raise any concerns with their therapist or the manager, and they feel confident that they would be listened to. More formal systems for feedback would strengthen these informal arrangements.

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

The children who are referred to this service have complex needs and are vulnerable in many ways. The risks include self-harm, exploitation and social isolation. Therapists are trained to understand and work with these risks. This is underpinned by safeguarding training, which the therapists access through their individual professional bodies. The manager is supplementing this with additional training in the safe use of digital technology. He has recognised the increasing risks and wants to ensure that all therapists are fully up to date so that they can support adoptive parents to manage these risks more effectively. Therapists also receive and sign a copy of the safeguarding policy and procedure that outline their responsibilities. This is in the process of being updated to reflect more current issues and practices.

When children are at risk of harm, the manager is proactive in ensuring that the relevant safeguarding agencies are notified. He cooperates fully with information sharing, attends strategy meetings and conferences as appropriate and is dogged in his determination to hold agencies to account. When they have identified that additional support is needed to either minimise the risk of harm or promote a child's well-being, the therapists have also referred families, with their permission. This proactive and determined practice keeps children safer and improves their outcomes.

The staff recruitment arrangements need to be strengthened so that the suitability of people working with vulnerable adults and children is fully assured. One therapist had started to work with a child without the agency being in possession of some of the required information. The current processes do not include telephone verification of referees or independent verification of why employment has ended when there has been previous work with vulnerable adults or children. The manager was not aware of this shortfall, but has taken immediate and robust action in response to ensure that the systems are improved in line with safe recruitment practice guidelines.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, both the leadership and management of the agency and its location have changed. This was a well-planned transition. The previous owners remain involved in an advisory capacity and all concerned with the agency have

commented that it has been a seamless succession. The responsible individual and registered manager roles are now held by two separate people, and this is working well. The registered manager is experienced, qualified and knowledgeable about the impact of trauma and loss. He is child focused, enthusiastic and fully committed to improving the lives of children and families. The responsible individual is similarly committed, experienced and knowledgeable. He takes his responsibilities seriously and provides effective oversight, as well as constructive challenge.

The workload of the agency, as a whole, has increased at a far quicker rate than anticipated. While this is positive, it is also a challenge. The manager undertakes some of the therapeutic interventions himself, in addition to his managerial tasks, and this may have contributed to some of the shortfalls identified during this inspection. The manager has recognised this and is already considering how to manage his increasing responsibilities.

The manager has very good oversight of the interventions that the agency is providing. He knows the children and the families well and can talk in detail about the progress that is being achieved. He recognises the need to formalise this, and he is in the process of developing a working party to discuss the best way of addressing this.

The manager has a 'can do' approach and is creative in his thinking about how to use resources most effectively. For example, he has developed a therapeutic parenting input whereby therapists meet with families online. This means that more sessions can be provided, travelling time is not required and both parents can be available at different locations, if necessary. This has been well received. In addition, the manager is trialling therapeutic parenting group supervision. This provides a multidisciplinary consideration of the intervention when more than one therapist is involved with a family, overseen by a consultant clinical psychotherapist. Therapists really appreciate getting together online to discuss their work from multiple professional perspectives and they feel that this enables them to work far more effectively with families.

Partnership working is well developed and effective. Communication is excellent and detailed. Social workers, commissioners and other stakeholders were very complimentary about the registered manager. They find him open and transparent, and they say that the service is flexible, responsive, provides value for money and promotes good outcomes for children. One social worker said: 'Placement Support is a pleasure to work with. The manager and his staff are very accommodating and respond immediately.' Another stakeholder said of the manager: 'When he is at a meeting, I always think, "Thank goodness he is in it." He is so child focused, and he does an amazing job. He is very helpful and professional.'

The agency has a number of therapists whom it contracts. The therapists are highly skilled professionals with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma and adoption. They are all registered with the relevant professional bodies and, as part of their registration, they have to demonstrate their continuing professional development. The manager does not currently have oversight of the

training that they undertake, and it would be useful if this could be developed so that he can assure himself of the therapists' ongoing competence.

The therapists feel very well supported by the manager and describe him as easily accessible at all times. Therapists have regular case supervision, in addition to their own clinical supervision. The records are limited in scope and are not currently signed by both parties. Signing them would add an additional layer of accountability.

The manager is keen to receive and act on feedback and complaints in order to improve the service. However, there are no formal systems for obtaining feedback from stakeholders or service users, and this would be of benefit by providing opportunities for constructive comment.

One recommendation was set at the last inspection. This related to making the children's guide more accessible. Although this has been achieved in part, as the guide is now on the website in a downloadable format, it does not contain all the information required. This recommendation is therefore repeated.

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
<p>(1) The registered person shall not–</p> <p>(a) employ a person to work for the purposes of the agency unless that person is fit to work for the purposes of the agency; or</p> <p>(b) allow a person who is employed by a person other than the registered provider to work for the purposes of the agency unless that person is fit to work for the purposes of the agency.</p> <p>(2) For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of an agency unless–</p> <p>(a) he is of integrity and good character;</p> <p>(b) he has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work he is to perform;</p> <p>(c) he is physically and mentally fit for the work he is to perform; and</p> <p>(d) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to him in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2. (Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005, regulation 19)</p>	<p>31/03/2020</p>

Recommendations

- Adoption agencies seek feedback from service users on the success of the service provision. This feedback is recorded centrally and on the case record of the service user. (Adoption: national minimum standard 15.6)
- The service user knows, and receives written information about, the service they are to receive; what the service is designed to achieve; what is involved in the

particular service provision and how the service will be monitored to ensure that it is delivering the intended outcome. (Adoption: national minimum standard 15.3)

- Management of the agency ensures all staff's work and activity are consistent with adoption regulations and national minimum standards and with the service's policies and procedures. (Adoption: national minimum standard 25.3)

This is with reference to: the records of supervision; managerial oversight of staff training and recruitment; and obtaining formal feedback from stakeholders.

- The Children's Guide to adoption support services is provided to the child by the adoption agency or adoption support agency who is providing adoption support. The guide is appropriate to the child's age and understanding and includes a summary of what the service sets out to do for children and is given to all children and/or their representatives. The Children's Guide also contains information on how a child can find out their rights, how they can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted, if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate. (Adoption: national minimum standard 18.6)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 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: SC369714

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Registered provider address: 21 The Point, Rockingham Road, Market
Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 7NU

Responsible individual: Philip Faulkner

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Inspector

Ros Chapman, social care inspector

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