

Adoption Focus

Family Society

TS3, Pinewood Business Park, Coleshill Road, Marston Green, Birmingham B37 7HG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

Family Society operates two registered services, Adoption Focus and Triangle Project. Adoption Focus is a voluntary adoption agency. Triangle Project is an independent fostering agency that provides early permanence services. The two agencies were inspected at the same time.

Family Society is based in Marston Green near Birmingham and has specialist adoption and fostering social workers located throughout the Midlands and Oxfordshire.

Family Society supports children assessed as needing adoption through the recruitment, preparation and assessment of fostering for adoption carers and adoptive families. Children are either placed with families approved as suitable to adopt by Adoption Focus, or with families who have dual-approved status by Adoption Focus and Triangle Project. Following the fostering for adoption and adoption process children and families have access to a wide range of services that provide long-term support.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 25 to 29 October 2021

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

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

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: 14 February 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

Trustees, managers and staff are exceptionally responsive and inclusive in their approach to people enquiring about adoption. Adopters feel highly valued and welcomed. They comment positively about the first contact they have and the comprehensive level of information they receive. This ethos is reflected throughout preparation, assessment, approval, matching and adoption support.

Well-trained social work staff undertake high-quality and thorough assessments. Analytical assessments show excellent attention to an applicant's motivation to care for children, their experience and understanding of loss and trauma, and the support networks available to them. Applicants told inspectors that the assessment process was safe and respectful to them as individuals and left them extremely well prepared for their new roles. Managers continue to look for new ways to develop and innovate in assessment. This includes staff being involved in projects to review current practice and to develop a new assessment tool for use in the wider adoption sector.

Adopters are highly trained to promote the well-being and progress of children. Training is an outstanding feature of this organisation. The training provided is tailored to the individual needs of each family. This enables adopters to build their knowledge, confidence and capacity to meet the developing needs of their children. As a result, adopters feel empowered to parent. This means that children benefit from belonging with families that understand the impact of their previous life experiences. This is evidenced in the low disruption rates within the organisation.

Well-considered matching of children to their future families takes place in conjunction with local authority social workers. Managers have recently strengthened this practice with clearer evidence of early consideration of risks and gaps in need. Excellent planning to address these matters promptly ensures that there is no unnecessary delay in planning for children's permanence.

Children experience thoughtful planned moves into their new homes. They build trusted and secure attachments and flourish in many aspects of their lives. Families ensure that their children's health, education and emotional needs are met by working in close partnership with other professionals. They are proud of their children's achievements.

Adoption support is extensive and has a positive impact. This includes access to a range of therapeutic services. The support is readily available to adopters throughout their parenting experience. It is highly individualised and can extend into children's wider networks. For example, adoption support staff offer specific training to health visitors and children's schools. This helps education and health colleagues to fully understand children's behaviour as a way of communicating trauma. In addition, the agency offers workshops and support groups to the extended support

networks of adopters. This ongoing support and partnership working is key to the success that the organisation achieves for children and their families.

Trustees, managers and staff think creatively of ways they can involve children in developing resources. For example, staff from the agency have been working with two children to produce a comic book to make the adoption process understandable for other children. In addition, the organisation has involved a child in reviewing the resources available to adopters to help them keep children safe online. This demonstrates the organisation's commitment to reflecting the child's lived experience in their ongoing service improvement.

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

The well-being and safety of children is paramount. Everyone throughout the organisation has a good understanding of their role and responsibilities through regularly reviewed policies and procedures and informative training. An established multi-agency approach ensures that there is close partnership working. Trustees, managers and staff fulfil their statutory responsibilities to safeguard children and when necessary they challenge placing authorities to fulfil their own responsibility.

Adopters are well prepared for the challenges that parenting can bring. They are supported to develop a thorough understanding of potential risks to children and recognise signs of concern in children's presentation and behaviour. This understanding and learning is threaded throughout preparation, assessment, training and post-adoption support. As a result, adopters provide nurturing homes for children, with consistent boundaries which encourage positive experiences and celebrate progress.

The recruitment of adopters, staff and panel members is robust. This ensures that only suitable people are recruited.

Children and adults know how to complain, although complaints are rare and far outweighed by compliments. Complaints or concerns are resolved promptly in a spirit of transparency and openness. Adopters are confident that they can raise issues with trustees, managers and staff, and that any learning identified will be used to improve the organisation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Trustees and managers have a clear understanding of what constitutes excellence and innovation. Their monitoring is regular and robust. They are reflective in their approach to issues that arise to improve practice. They work collaboratively with other professionals and partners so that adopters and children experience positive outcomes.

Trustees and managers create the right environment for reflective practice to take place. Staff are highly qualified, experienced and committed. Staff feel well

supported by managers on both a formal and informal basis. Their practice is formally observed throughout the year. They receive high-quality supervisions, appraisals, team meetings and away days that enable them to reflect on and develop their expertise and safeguarding practice, and then feed into the development of the service.

New staff feel welcomed. They describe an intensive but supportive induction process. Staff commented that trustees and managers are approachable and accessible, and staff feel that their views are listened to and valued. Trustees and managers have increased their communication with staff due to COVID-19 and are continually enhancing support networks. For example, all staff now receive regular group clinical supervisions. They are also able to work flexibly from home while the focus on excellent-quality support to adopters remains.

Trustees and managers invest heavily to ensure that staff have the experience and skills required for all aspects of their specialist roles. This includes supporting staff to undertake advanced training in a variety of disciplines, including subjects such as therapy play and dyadic developmental psychotherapy. This means adopters and children are well supported by staff with an exceptional skill base.

Staff work well in partnership with other professionals. Placing social workers are very positive about the support and excellent level of communication staff provide to adopters. Managers and staff chair and sit on working parties with local authorities, regional adoption agencies and other voluntary adoption agencies to develop and inform regional and national initiatives. Learning is fed back into the organisation and, as a result, staff practice already underpinned by strong theoretical bases is enhanced by an awareness of research and current practice developments.

Trustees and managers proactively involve adopters in the development of the organisation. They gather views through regular feedback, consultation, events and an adopter committee. They are currently consulting on the further development of the organisation's website to include a platform specific to the needs of adopters. These ongoing conversations and initiatives ensure adopters feel they belong, are valued and have access to the right support to meet the needs of their children.

Panel membership is diverse and knowledgeable in the field of adoption. They receive regular training, support and appraisals which assist them to be competent and effective panel members. Robust scrutiny ensures that there is an excellent oversight of the quality of assessments, with clear reasons given for the recommendations made. Regular permanence development meetings between the panel chair, panel advisers and the agency decision-maker ensure that there is ongoing review and development of the practice and function of the panel.

The quality of the agency decision-making is exceptional. It demonstrates comprehensive reflection and consideration of all elements of the application and approval process of adopters.

The effectiveness of early permanence arrangements

Trustees, managers and staff are forward thinking in their approach to permanence for children. They have created an independent fostering agency offering fostering for adoption placements to children. This is integral to the operation of the voluntary adoption agency and means that stability and positive early life chances are maximised. This is at the heart of the organisation's practice from the outset of the child's journey.

Staff support both the fostering for adoption and adoption processes. They are experts in both fields; they are therapeutic and empathetic. They have a very clear sense of care and responsibility towards children, fostering for adoption carers and adopters. This shines through in all the work undertaken by the organisation.

Fostering for adoption carers have access to an outstanding quality of assessment, preparation, approval, matching and after-placement support. These services run alongside and dovetail with the organisation's excellent adoption resources.

Fostering for adoption carers receive practical support as well as theory and research-based solutions, which enables them to develop resilience and understanding. For example, a therapist provided bespoke training to a fostering for adoption family, delivered through a series of learning modules. This supported them to understand their children's behaviours and build stronger attachments.

Fostering for adoption carers ensure that children experience consistent nurturing from an early age. For example, one child had been with her fostering for adoption family for 22 months due to significant delays with the court processes. She moved in with them at birth and does not face the disruption of moving again because she is living with a fostering for adoption family. As a result, children make significant progress often in a very short time and form extremely positive relationships with their lifelong families.

Fostering for adoption carers are also supported to understand the potential delays to permanence, changes to plans for children and how to work with birth parents. Staff are honest and realistic throughout the preparation, assessment, approval, matching and placement stages. They provide excellent and very sensitive support and advice and do not underestimate the challenges and impact on carers. As a result, carers are as prepared as they can be and ensure that the focus is always on what is best for the children.

Fostering for adoption carers are supported to ensure that children's health needs are met to the highest standard. They benefit from extensive training that encompasses all aspects of a child's development, including their emotional and psychological well-being. Fostering for adoption carers receive excellent support from their supervising social workers. One fostering for adoption carer stated her supervising social workers have been 'amazing', offering emotional support when needed and going over and above by sitting with her child in hospital on a regular basis to enable her to have a break.

The organisation's permanency panel considers applications for the dual approval of fostering for adoption carers as well as the approval of adopters. Panel members are experts in both fields. Specific fostering for adoption learning for panel members is ensured through training and the regular permanence development meetings between panel chair, panel advisers and agency decision-maker.

The agency decision-maker, who is also responsible for decisions in relation to fostering for adoption carers, is excellent.

Managers provide staff with strong supervision and guidance. This helps staff to reflect on their practice and focus on helping children living with their fostering to adoption families to thrive.

All recommendations from the previous independent foster agency inspection are met in full.

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, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

This voluntary adoption agency is also registered as an independent fostering agency to provide early permanence services (for example, fostering for adoption/concurrent planning) as their only fostering activity. We have undertaken the inspections of these agencies at the same time and published a combined inspection report.

Voluntary adoption agency details

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Registered provider address: Kemp House, 152 City Road, London EC1V 2NX

Responsible individual: Benjamin James

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Independent fostering agency details

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Responsible individual: Benjamin James

Registered manager: Howard Parker

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