

Birmingham Children's Trust Adoption Agency

Birmingham Children's Trust Community Interest Company

1 Lancaster Circus, Birmingham, West Midlands B4 7DJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

This voluntary adoption agency is managed by Birmingham Children's Trust Adoption. The voluntary adoption agency recruits, prepares, assesses and approves adoptive families, finds adoptive families for children referred by Birmingham Children's Trust and places children from other local authorities with its own adoptive families.

Partnership with a regional adoption agency went live in January 2022.

The voluntary adoption agency provides support to adoptive families and operates a letterbox facility, which enables indirect contact between adopted children and their birth families. Work with adopted adults, including intermediary work and support to birth parents, is commissioned to another voluntary adoption agency.

The agency is managed by a permanent and suitably experienced adoption agency manager and leadership team.

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 October 2022 and 28 to 30 November 2022

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	outstanding

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

Date of last inspection: 11 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

The agency successfully recruits a variety of adoptive parents, some of whom can care for specific needs identified by the trust, such as brothers and sisters and/or older children. Recruitment continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and is beginning to increase the number of adoptive parents available and children placed. The number of children placed for adoption with external agencies is decreasing as this service grows.

Adoptive parents feel the response from the agency at the point of enquiry is timely. They feel welcomed and are provided with clear information about the assessment and adoption process. This results in them recommending the agency to other prospective adoptive parents.

Adopters are well prepared for the task of adoptive parenting. Assessing social workers are skilled at assessment. They are professionally curious and at the same time work sensitively with prospective adoptive parents. As a result, assessments are analytical and give an accurate reflection of adoptive parents' strengths and vulnerabilities.

Prospective adoptive parents receive good-quality training that is prepared and delivered by a skilled team of adoptive parents and a dedicated trainer. This training successfully supports them to build their knowledge, confidence and capacity to meet the needs of children. Training also provides the opportunity for the agency to promote early permanence and the adoption of brothers and sisters. Courses are also run specifically for friends and family to help them understand, and better support, the adoption process. Overall, adoptive parents are positive about the support and training provided throughout the assessment process.

Panel members consider carefully when deciding whether to approve adoptive parents and when matching children. The timeliness of assessments is currently being affected by a delay in medicals and Disclosure and Barring Service checks, however, managers have put systems in place to address this and there has been some progress in moving the process on. Panel minutes reflect clear decision-making processes. Agency decision-maker decisions are clear and within timescales. Post-adoption support is available for adoptive parents and this is reaffirmed at the point of panel.

Careful consideration is given to matching children with adoptive parents. Assessing social workers, family finders and foster carers work in partnership with adoptive parents to ensure that introductions are child-focused and well paced. Staff work creatively to make this process run smoothly and ensure support continues to be in place once the child has moved in with their new family. Adoptive parents' other children are well considered, to help them prepare for a new sibling coming to live

with them. As a result, children develop positive relationships and experience long-term stability.

Adoptive parents are trained to use therapeutic parenting and foundations for attachment to help them parent and support children through their stages of development. Therapeutic interventions are also used to tailor transition plans or meet the developing needs of children. This, along with good partnership working, successfully supports children to progress in all areas of their lives. For example, when a child struggles with education, the virtual school offers direct support to the child, their adoptive parents and school. As a result of this joined-up working, children are flourishing.

Children are engaging with faith-based activities. They are supported, where appropriate, with their relationship with their birth family and to maintain appropriate contact with those who are important to them, for example, brothers, sisters and foster carers. They are in good health and are supported to improve their health or manage life-long conditions. They are accessing specialist help to meet specific needs.

Post-adoption support is comprehensive, well organised and accessible. Support provided is not time limited and is responsive to specific needs. A post-adoption support worker supports adopters through any post-adoption work, including any commissioned therapeutic interventions. Staff confidently use the experience they have gained of working alongside an in-house psychologist to successfully submit post-adoption support fund applications. Adoptive parents give consistent positive feedback about the impact of the service provided by the post-adoption team and commissioned specialist services.

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

Leaders and managers prioritise the safety and well-being of children. There are clear policies and procedures that underpin staff and adoptive parent training. This ensures that children feel protected and are protected from harm. Adoptive parents and staff feel listened to and that their concerns are taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

Managers and staff respond quickly and appropriately to child protection concerns. They work successfully in partnership with other agencies to ensure the safety of children and where necessary formulate support plans for children in need of protection. For example, an adoptive parent's concerns about their child's vulnerability to exploitation was promptly referred to Birmingham Children's Trust's exploitation team. Further coordinated work then took place with the child's school, which ensured that professionals were working collaboratively and the child was kept safe.

All staff receive child protection and safeguarding training. A lot of work has gone into delivering training on contextual safeguarding, county lines, the 'Prevent' duty

and gangs. This learning is now part of staff's mandatory training. This has helped staff increase their understanding of current and emerging safeguarding themes. Staff spoken to during the inspection were confident in their understanding of safeguarding and its relevance in the work they undertake with adoptive families.

The agency uses research to inform understanding of the behaviours and responses of children to trauma, loss and attachment. This provides staff and adoptive parents with an enhanced understanding of the impact of early trauma on their children's behaviour and emotions. They learn about early childhood adverse experiences and the potential impact these may have on children as they get older. Understanding children's experiences enhances understanding of the impact of trauma, stages of child development and specific areas such as foetal alcohol syndrome. It also then links to future risks, including exploitation.

The long-term stability of children is good and adoption breakdowns are few. Leaders and managers have good operational overview of any adoption breakdowns. This ensures that learning is undertaken, and any lessons or action points are implemented to change and develop practice

Staff and adoptive parents are aware of the complaints procedure. Any complaints are investigated thoroughly and learning is actioned and implemented appropriately when needed. For example, one complaint from an adoptive parent led to the agency providing them with financial support, enabling them to have additional time off work to help them support the child.

The agency ensures that all adoptive parents, staff and panel members are recruited safely. This ensures the safety of children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency's management team is innovative and inspirational. There is a strong focus on the development of the service, improving the quality of staff practice, increasing the number of adoptive parents and meeting the assessed needs of children.

The management team uses a range of tools effectively to inform them of how the service is performing and meeting wider need. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the agency, and this is enabling them to target work that ensures they continue to drive change and improve.

A significant piece of work undertaken by leaders and managers has been the formation of a partnership with a regional adoption agency. There are clear working arrangements under way, and aims and objectives that will inform the future development of the agency.

Managers have also taken effective action to commission a psychological consultancy service following the departure of their in-house psychologist. Staff

value this service and consider it directly impacts on the support they are able to offer families.

Creative work has also been undertaken by the agency's managers to support change and develop practice in the wider trust. For example, a delay in carrying out children's life-story work prompted the agency's manager to escalate concerns. He then prioritised work and involved the adoption team in its completion. The adoption team has also been running child permanence report workshops for the children's teams' social workers. This has improved the quality of the reports, making them more accessible to children.

The management team has a clear understanding of the benefits of effective partnership work on improving outcomes for children. For example, the adoption agency is taking an active role in influencing early permanence planning for children in Birmingham. They have developed a close working relationship with the trust's legal services, children's social work team and independent foster agency to support and lead early permanence planning. They have also taken an active role in promoting early permanence with the local family judiciary. As a result, the number of children achieving early permanence is continuing to increase. This is reducing the number of placement moves children experience and promoting secure attachments.

The skilled, experienced and stable staff team has expanded since the last inspection. The majority of staff are trained to at least dyadic developmental psychotherapy (DDP) level 1. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the regular DDP consultations they attend. They say they were helpful in anchoring the service through change and providing staff with a regulating, reflective space, which supported them with the impact of challenging circumstances and complex work. The consultations were described as helpful in keeping the trained staff connected with the theory's principles and in supporting them to consolidate skills and translate principles into practice in their roles.

Staff members receive excellent support from the management team. A range of staff support forums and inspirational leadership promote highly individualised and child-focused work.

The adoption panel provides an effective quality assurance function, while being welcoming but appropriately challenging to the applicants attending panel. Panel members have a range of experience and professional backgrounds. They provide feedback to the agency on the quality of reports and practice of social workers. This enables managers and staff to reflect and develop practice quickly. Managers keep panel members informed of developments in the agency, and panel members attend regular training events. This helps to ensure that panel members keep up to date with developments in practice.

The agency's managers have ensured that the two recommendations from the previous inspection have been met. One recommendation was made as a result of this inspection, to ensure the statement of purpose details how the adoption agency

supports early permanence by working with the independent fostering agency, for example, completing foster to adopt assessments.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the adoption agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by staff, volunteers, children, birth parents and guardians, prospective adopters and adopters, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. This specifically relates to ensuring the statement of purpose details how the adoption agency supports early permanence by working with the independent fostering agency. (Adoption: national minimum standards, page 53, 18.1)

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: 1273493

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