

Family Action

PAC-UK

Hollyshaw House, 2 Hollyshaw Lane, Leeds LS15 7BD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

The agency employs 89 staff, of whom 47 are on fixed hours contracts, with seven being full time, and 15 are on zero hours contracts. In addition, there are 15 sessional staff who are associates and 12 volunteers.

During the period 26 November 2021 to 25 November 2022, the agency delivered 5,010 appointments to 1,434 service users. Of these, 3,635 delivered appointments were funded by local authorities, supporting 1,310 service users. Additionally, it provided a telephone advice service, which handled 4,664 enquires. During this period, the agency also delivered 12 commissioned training events to 440 professionals and provided group support to adopted adults, adopted teenagers, birth parents and adoptive parents and carers.

The manager is in the process of registering with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 December 2022

Overall experience 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 adoption support agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the adoption support agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for service users.

Date of last inspection: 5 December 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

Children, families and adult service users benefit immensely from a consistently high standard of adoption support. The commitment to service users is a priority for the agency. Leaders and managers have created a culture in which adoption support has flourished. The agency is a highly enabling and intuitive service that is based on a shared understanding of service users' needs, which is a golden thread of exceptionally good practice. This ethos promotes the experiences of service users who are involved in adoption and ensures that their view and opinions are heard and acted on.

Children, families and adult service users feel that the agency has given them a voice. As a result, they feel empowered to attend conferences and adoption panels, and to visit parliament to talk about their experiences. Children and adult service users have recently delivered training courses to over 100 professionals across social care, education and health. These speaking events create opportunities to influence and shape the adoption sector. One professional commented, 'The opportunity to experience the voices of young people and see in action how they are being supported to use their voices and experience to influence and impact social work and education is so long overdue. These were exceptional young people who were engaging, brave and appropriately challenging of professionals.'

Staff work highly collaboratively with children and service users. As a result, the adoptees' views are shaping the adoption sector. For example, the leaflets produced for schools to explain about adoption were developed by an adopter on the back of their child's experiences at school. Adopters also designed a detailed brochure to raise awareness on child-to-parent violence. This group has made a significant difference to families. In some cases, this support has prevented family breakdown and had helped to reduce the stigma and shame associated with accessing support for this issue.

The agency receives many requests for access to birth records and intermediary work. This support is well organised for adopted adults and their birth families. Birth parents feel that the agency has given them a voice, with staff supporting them to sensitively understand their experiences. Many feel that they receive exceptional support, which exceeds their expectations. One birth parent service user said, 'I searched high and low for support and came across this agency, who, from the start, have been a lifeline for me.'

The leadership team coped exceptionally well during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders and managers adapted and implemented their response to the pandemic while also continuing to focus on service development and innovation. For example, support groups and therapy continued online. Children did online cooking sessions. Workers sent the ingredients to the households so that everyone could cook

together online. This ensured that the agency continued to provide a seamless service to the children and adult service users.

The agency has sustained the support groups and this has provided a strong network for the children and adult service users. They have monthly meetings and the groups provide a lifeline for service users. One young person, who had not come across any adopted individuals before attending the group, described the group as a 'life saver', and another said, 'I feel like I have found my tribe'.

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

The agency's approach to safeguarding is robust. Since the last inspection, the agency has continued to embed strong safeguarding practice. They have developed an audit system where each safeguarding case is reviewed by the safeguarding lead. This provides another layer of senior management scrutiny, and ensures that safeguarding concerns are tracked effectively.

The agency ensures that the welfare of children and adult service users is at the forefront of staff's practice. Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. Staff receive excellent training in safeguarding, which ensures that they are fully conversant with current safeguarding issues. They have a very clear understanding of effective and safe practice with regard to keeping children and adult service users safe. As a result, staff are explicit in their concerns when making referrals to safeguarding professionals. They meticulously follow up on any referrals, making sure that appropriate action has been taken. This highly effective multi-agency working ensures that children and adult service users are safeguarded.

The agency has a strong understanding of service user risk. This is because they consult with service users, and use this information to undertake research and develop interventions. For example, the agency collaborated with a university to carry out research on child-to-parent violence in response to service user needs. This work is now fully embedded into practice and the agency delivers excellent training to social workers, educational and other professionals on child-to-parent violence. This helps professionals to fully understand children's behaviour as a way of communicating trauma. In addition, therapists are skilled at equipping parents with strategies to manage their child's behaviour. This has had a positive impact on some family relationships. One parent said, 'Recently, we've done an escape room together. The thought of being locked in the same house with our child, never mind one tiny unknown room completing puzzles, was impossible 12 months ago. Our lives have changed.'

Risks are identified and managed at the outset of the support offered to families. Risk assessments are formulated with service users and professionals. These documents set out expectations and agreements. Clear and consistent boundaries contribute to a feeling of well-being and security for children and adult service users.

Safe recruitment practices are in place. Staff recruitment procedures are comprehensive and rigorous, so that only suitable people gain employment with the agency.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers have a longstanding ambition to ensure that children and adult services are at the centre of their work within the agency. There is a shared sense of purpose from all the staff and expert knowledge of how to achieve very positive outcomes for adopted children and adult service users. As a result, the agency has succeeded in becoming a centre of excellence that provides high-quality adoption support.

The agency has a high skilled staff team with considerable experience, knowledge and skill. Staff have excellent arrangements in place for training and supervision. Supervision is regular, informative, reflective and supports staff's practice. This allows staff to feel safe in their practice. The staff team members work well together and support one another. An excellent administrative team is in place to help the whole service to run smoothly. All staff gave positive feedback about their experiences of working for the agency, and hold a shared responsibility to keep the focus on improving the outcomes for children and adult service users.

There are challenges in terms of securing funding. But despite these challenges, the agency has been successful in securing significant amounts of funding, allowing their groups to continue. This is testament to the high-quality work undertaken, which is recognised by funding bodies.

The agency has effective monitoring systems in place. Performance data is monitored through a robust quality assurance framework and audit process. Monthly audits are completed by managers, leading to greater oversight of the quality of practice. The management team completes 10 audits per month. This audit system ensures that the agency's high standards are maintained.

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have been laying strong foundations for equality, diversity and inclusion issues to be embedded in the organisation. Staff benefited from specialist training by an equality and diversity trainer with a lived experience of the issues.

There is a strong learning culture and an appetite for innovation to ensure that the agency continues to meet the needs of children requiring adoption and permanency. The agency has co-produced a handbook with a European university for teaching staff. This offers the opportunity to share knowledge and research. This means that the agency's practice is current and evidenced-based, and makes use of the latest research. This book is a resource designed to help staff to develop a better understanding of children who are adopted, fostered or joined their families via alternative care.

All service users report positive experiences of working with the agency. They know how to complain. Complaints are taken seriously and used as an opportunity to improve practice. Managers and staff work in collaboration with other professionals. Communication between the agency and social care professionals, including social workers and commissioners, is extremely good. The agency is held in high regard, due to their expertise. One commissioner commented, 'This agency is known throughout Yorkshire and Humber local authorities to be an adoption support agency that offers reliable, innovative and well-managed services, which meet the varied needs of the people involved with and affected by adoption.'

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

Recommendations: none

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: SC066981

Registered provider: PAC-UK

Registered provider address: Hollyshaw Lane, 2 Hollyshaw Lane, Leeds
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Responsible individual: David Holmes

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Inspectors

Evelyn Chafota, Social Care Inspector
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