

Families Empowered Limited

Unit 1C, The Gattinetts, Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt CO7 6QT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

This small private agency registered in March 2022 and provides adoption support services to children and families in the East of England. The therapeutic adoption support services are underpinned by specific models of practice.

The manager registered in March 2022. This is the first inspection the agency has received.

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 March 2023

Overall experience and progress of service users, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

The support provided by the agency makes a consistent and significant difference to children and their families. The agency provides adoptive families with bespoke packages of care and support. The agency provides emotional support, therapeutic parenting guidance and practical strategies for children and their families. This support helps them to better manage the day-to-day challenges of family life.

The therapeutic support offered by the agency increases children's and their parents' confidence and emotional resilience. Families said that the therapists are people who 'really care' about them. One parent said, 'The therapists are holding our hands to empower us. They have helped us see that it will get better and that there is light at the end of the tunnel.'

Therapeutic life-story work is well researched and based on published best practice models. Therapists go the extra mile to identify and contact significant people in the child's early life. On one occasion, this approach located a child's birth parent. This meant that the child was able to ask specific questions and gain reassurance. The child's birth parent is in letterbox contact with the child due to the agency search. The life-story books bring together all of the information gathered. The books are a celebration of the people who have loved the child, including early childminders and foster carers. These books are highly accessible and engaging. This excellent life-story work has helped children to develop a greater sense of identity and understanding of their personal story.

The therapists ensure that there is a playful and creative approach to their work with children. Therapists use sticky notes and games to help children identify what is important to help them feel safe and secure. In an analogy of a brick wall, blocks are used as bricks to represent children's lives with their birth parents, and gaps are filled to represent their current lives. This helps the children to feel settled and safe with their adoptive family.

Children's and families' views are central to the service provided. The therapists consistently provide children and families with inclusive, non-judgmental and highly effective support. The therapists are attuned to each child. They tailor sessions according to the children's moods, interests and stage of development. As a result, the children and families trust their therapists, feel safe and emotionally supported. One child said, 'I will miss her (the therapist) when my therapy comes to an end.'

The children and families highly value the wraparound support and care that they receive. They know that if they are struggling and call the agency, they will receive help and support. One parent said, 'They (the agency) are holding us as family, they are unbelievable and are always there. When we have been in our darkest hours, they have been the people that we have turned to.'

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

The therapists fully understand the risks for individual children and their families. Families turn to the agency when they are in crisis. They know that whatever the day, or time, someone from the agency will provide immediate help to make sure that the children and the families remain safe.

The therapists create a safe and trusting space that enables children and families are to openly talk about risks. One child said that the therapist 'knows how I struggle'. Another child said that having therapy was good because it felt as if a weight had been lifted. The children trust their therapists and share information with them, which has helped other supporting agencies to be aware of risks. This has helped to keep children and families safe.

When therapists are aware of safeguarding matters, or families who are struggling, they share this information with other agencies. This helps the children and families receive the additional specialist help and support that they need. The therapists provide emotional support to families when children are in risky situations. This helps the parents to have the resilience to support the child's emotions.

Therapists work with children and families to develop improved communication strategies. This has reduced family conflict and prevented family breakdowns. For example, one family, which had previously relied on the police for support during difficult times, has made no such calls in the past six months.

The agency provides therapeutic intervention group programmes for adoptive parents and families. These are designed to support parents, carers and guardians of children who experience attachment difficulties following trauma and abuse. The parents hugely value the high-quality intensive learning and support programme. They feel calmer because of an improved understanding of therapeutic parenting and have increased confidence in dealing with difficult situations. The families also develop informal support networks which extend beyond the support programme and provide long-term peer support.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The management of the agency is strong. The manager is experienced and qualified for the role. Senior managers lead by example and inspire the team. They demand high standards from the therapists they employ. Therapists, including senior managers, have a strong understanding of the challenges faced by adopted children and their families. This has ensured consistently high-quality therapeutic adoption support.

The manager ensures that staff who are of good character and have the suitable skills, knowledge and experience are recruited to work for the agency. Professional licences to practice are kept up to date.

The therapists enjoy working for the agency. They describe their work as 'stimulating', 'satisfying' and 'inclusive'. Therapists say that senior managers are interested in everyone and their well-being. The therapists have access to appropriate training and feel well supported by visible, skilled and experienced managers. Therapists and managers keep up to date with current research and practice developments in the field of adoption.

The agency is well respected by children and families, who feel exceptionally well supported. The agency works well with partner professionals, who describe it as their 'agency of choice'.

The provider maintains good oversight of the therapeutic services. Progress and work with children and families are kept under regular review. Outcome monitoring systems have recently been introduced. It is anticipated that this will provide a clearer measurable indication of the effectiveness of the therapeutic services provided.

The agency makes a real difference to adopted children and their families. Parents describe the agency as 'invaluable', 'life changing' and 'an absolute lifesaver'. The therapeutic work provided is contributing to secure, stable and nurturing family homes.

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: 2664647

Registered provider: Families Empowered Limited

Registered provider address: Unit 1C, The Gattinetts, Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt CO7 6QT

Responsible individual: Deborah Sharratt

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Inspector

Joanna Heller, Social Care Inspector

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