

About Children

About Children Limited

78 Appleby Road, Kendal LA9 6HF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

About Children is a private limited company. The adoption support agency provides therapeutic services to children, adopted young adults and their adoptive families. Its aim, as described in its statement of purpose, is to improve the lives, relationships and futures of children who have had multiple adverse experiences.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was working with eight adopted children. Six therapists and one administrator are employed by the agency. The agency also works with children who are not adopted, such as those in residential care, but this work was not considered as part of this inspection.

The agency is led by a skilled and experienced registered manager, who is also a practising therapist.

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 June 2023

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: 10 July 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Improving children's lives is at the heart of staff's practice. Good-quality initial assessments lead to children being offered individualised therapy which helps them to understand their previous traumatic childhood experiences. They are supported to build skills to move forward with their lives.

Children build strong and trusting relationships the staff. One member of staff, who is a therapist, is currently absent from work. Children with an established relationship with her have been supported to make the change to a new therapist in a sensitive and child-centred manner.

Children can access a range of therapeutic input, such as play, art and music therapy, from skilled and experienced practitioners. The service is well resourced. Children have access to toys, art supplies and musical instruments to help them to express themselves and engage with their therapist.

One child said that coming to see his therapist has helped him to manage his 'big feelings' and described feeling 'excited', 'happy' and 'peaceful' when he comes to therapy.

The agency is based in a residential area in what was formally a family home. A parent said that this has reduced her child's anxiety about accessing therapy and reduced the stigma of coming for support as it looks and feels like a visit to a family home.

During the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the agency offered children and families virtual therapeutic input. This ensured a continuous service for those families who chose to access this. Following the lifting of restrictions, staff quickly returned to face-to-face working with children.

Regular reviews are held with families and social workers. Children's and parents' views are requested and considered as part of this process. This ensures that progress is discussed and plans for therapy ending are clear, shared and agreed.

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

The agency has established a strong safeguarding culture that is reinforced by a wealth of professional expertise in the team. Staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.

There has been one safeguarding referral made to a local authority since the last inspection. Information was shared effectively to ensure that the child was safe, and the family received the additional support required. The registered manager is aware

that some records are not collated in a clear chronological order, which can make it more difficult to follow actions taken by staff. She is working to streamline and improve the electronic recording processes.

There have been no complaints from children, families or external professionals in the inspection period. Children and parents' guides explain the agency's complaints process clearly and in a child-focused way.

There are arrangements in place for external independent oversight should any complaints be made against the registered manager. This ensures that any concerns are dealt with openly and transparently.

Parents say that the therapists provide invaluable support to their children and to them as adoptive parents. Parents can work with a specialist parenting therapist. This support helps parents to care for their children therapeutically and have a better understanding of their child's past trauma and loss.

Child and parenting therapists work together effectively to consider the family as a whole. One parent said, 'We didn't know where to turn and we were in crisis. The help we are getting now has helped us so much as a family.'

Since the last inspection, all the therapists have been formally employed by the agency. The agency follows safer recruitment practices when recruiting staff. This contributes to the agency providing a safe therapeutic environment for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is also the responsible individual and director of the agency. She is a skilled and experienced therapist. The registered manager is highly regarded by the staff, children and families.

Since the last inspection, the registered manager has been working to strengthen her skills as a manager and employer. She is using the expertise of a specialist human resources firm to support her in developing the agency's employment practices.

The registered manager has a good understanding of her own, and the agency's, strengths and areas for development. She is working to establish more formal systems for her management oversight of all aspects of the agency's work to continue the progress the agency has made since the last inspection.

Staff say they value being employed by the agency, having previously worked on a self-employed basis. This has made a positive difference to their sense of belonging and commitment to the agency.

Staff have access to high-quality training and development opportunities. This helps them to maintain and further develop their professional skills and expertise.

Staff receive regular supervision of their practice from the registered manager, as well as additional external clinical supervision. This helps them to maintain high standards of therapeutic practice, which supports the experiences and progress of children and families.

Supervision records are brief and do not reflect the depth of discussions. Actions agreed during supervision sessions are not recorded on children's case records. As a result, there is no written evidence of agreed actions being carried forward into practice.

Staff receive an annual appraisal of their practice. This now includes peer reviews of each therapist. These appraisals are not yet taking into consideration the views of children or setting clear objectives. The recommendation made in relation to this at the last inspection is therefore repeated. All other recommendations from the last inspection have been met.

The statement of purpose outlines the aims and objectives of the agency. However, it has not been routinely updated in relation to staff changes and copies have not been sent to Ofsted, as required.

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>The registered person shall—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide;</p> <p>notify the registration authority of any such revision within 28 days of making the revision. (Regulation 6 (a)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that the statement of purpose contains correct information regarding staff working in the agency and that any updates are provided to Ofsted on completion.</p>	31 August 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the formal appraisal of staff considers the views of children the service is providing for. The appraisal process should include objective setting and the individuals’ learning and development needs. (‘Adoption: national minimum standards 2014’, 24.6)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a clear record of management decision-making on children’s records. (‘Adoption: national minimum standards 2014’, 25.2)

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: SC431970

Registered provider: About Children Limited

Registered provider address: 78 Appleby Road, Kendal LA9 6HF

Responsible individual: Lesley Ritchie

Registered manager: Lesley Ritchie

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Inspectors

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector
Aislinn Cooper, Social Care Inspector

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