

# 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 them with long-term support.

Since 1 January 2024, the adoption agency has approved 19 families as suitable to adopt and placed 26 children with 20 adoptive families.

Six of the 19 families were also dual approved through Triangle Project to provide early permanence placements.

Four of the 26 children placed through Adoption Focus since January were initially placed through Triangle Project. Their placements have subsequently converted to adoption. One further child continues to be placed on a fostering basis through Triangle Project.

The manager of the voluntary adoption agency has been in post since 1 June 2009. She is appropriately experienced and qualified.

The registered manager of the independent fostering agency has been in post since 11 September 2017. He is appropriately experienced and qualified.

**Inspection dates: 24 to 28 June 2024**

**Overall experiences 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 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.

**Dates of last inspection:** 25 to 29 October 2021

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

Achieving positive outcomes for children is at the heart of what this agency does. Adopters are praised for their hard work and commitment to ensuring children have loving and nurturing homes where they thrive. The agency respects the right to privacy and family life and often after adoption there is no further contact unless it is needed.

Information evenings for prospective adopters are welcoming, informative and person-centred. Most adopters said that it was the quick response to their first enquiry, and the information evening led by the manager, which made them choose this agency. Following feedback from adopters, managers have introduced an opportunity for one-to-one information sessions. This ensures that the information events are accessible to everyone.

Adopters find assessment positive because of skilled staff who support and guide them throughout the process. Staff sensitively work to support applicants to explore emotive subjects. Applicants are involved in planned observations to help demonstrate their ability to provide individualised care for children. This ensures that adopters are prepared and well equipped for the complexities of adoption.

Pre-adoption training by the linking and matching officer explores the process and experience of matching. This helps prospective adopters to understand processes as well as giving them the opportunity to develop a relationship with the matching officer. A forward-thinking approach by the matching officer means that the progress of applicants is tracked by reading assessments and panel minutes and meeting with adopters. Careful consideration and support is given to attending matching events and accessing the matching portal.

Adopters are sensitively supported to access information about children, especially when this contains upsetting information. Staff are skilled at guiding adopters in their consideration of different children and adopters say they feel supported by staff when there is disappointment.

Where there are successful matches, adopters and children are prepared through well-planned introductions and collaborative work with foster carers and other professionals.

Managers are involved in national conversations about the importance of children maintaining contact with their birth families. This is explored and continuously promoted through training, from the point of initial interest and after adoption.

Children are actively listened to and supported to share their thoughts and feelings. For example, life-story work harnesses children's individuality. Children engage in multiple sessions, where they can creatively contribute through their pictures and

art. This is then cleverly captured and beautifully presented in life-story books that children can keep forever. Adopters continue to promote life-story work.

Children make outstanding progress. They flourish in the care of their adoptive families, who enable them to have a wide range of experiences and new opportunities that enrich their lives. The agency educates and supports adopters on the importance of identity, through training and ongoing support. As a result, parents promote individuality and children develop a true sense of self.

Children's education is promoted. The agency commissions an education adviser who is available to staff and adopters for advice and support. A series of education podcasts have been developed and are accessible to everyone involved with this agency as well as other agencies and adopters nationally. These provide information and guidance for adopters on a child's education journey. Staff and adopters advocate strongly on behalf of their children, and this is reflected in meetings, discussions and decisions that are made in the best interests of children and their education.

Children's health needs are quickly identified and addressed. Adopters ensure that their children access specialist services when required. Staff are tenacious at chasing resources and any equipment needed to meet children's health needs. For one child, the agency made the decision to fund a specialist bed when there were delays in the local authority's decision-making. Staff are skilled in identifying and exploring potential additional needs. For example, observations of a child's behaviour by a member of staff helped with the child receiving a diagnosis. This enabled the agency to provide support to the child's adoptive parents and refer them for further services via adoption support funding.

Staff value the children's views and gather feedback from children on their experience of adoption. This is used to develop practice and support to children and prospective and new adopters. For example, staff worked with two children to produce a comic for children who are moving in with their new family. Children have also been involved in developing training for adopters to help them understand the child's experience of moving in with their adoptive family.

Adoption support is easily accessible and well promoted. Adopters receive a quick response from a highly trained and dedicated staff team who assess and meet the needs of adopters and children effectively. Progress is monitored against the support offered and, where appropriate, results in the agency providing training to external professionals, agencies and services supporting adopters and children.

Adoption support is having a positive impact for the families receiving the service. The agency is always looking at ways to develop. They use training and research to inform their practice and make changes accordingly, to ensure that children get the best care from well-informed, well-supported parents. A lifelong promise to families ensures that the agency is available for support and adopters repeatedly said support is in place until they are ready for it to end.

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

Managers understand their safeguarding responsibilities and have systems in place that enable them to provide strong oversight. This ensures that any emerging concerns are quickly identified and reported to statutory agencies, prioritising children's safety. Where appropriate, managers and staff challenge the practice of external agencies and advocate on behalf of the children and adopters to ensure safe outcomes.

Managers appropriately implement auditing and review procedures after all disruptions and safeguarding concerns. The agency has a disruption and safeguarding group. This group has recently undertaken a review of all disruptions from 2021-2023. Patterns and areas for learning have been identified and these have been disseminated through practice-sharing training with staff and panel members. This enhances practice, informs processes and further promotes the safety of children and adopters.

There is a comprehensive range of safeguarding training for prospective adopters, adopters, panel members and staff. There are also annual safeguarding events for staff and panel members that focus on new research and practice learning. Children are involved in developing resources around safeguarding matters. For example, one child has worked with staff to update e-safety training for adopters.

Managers and staff are proactive in sharing their knowledge and delivering training to other professionals. For example, a manager recently delivered training to medical professionals to support their understanding of the impact of their work on the adoption process.

The agency holds the licence, along with one other voluntary adoption agency, to a safe parenting programme. This is primarily for adopters and is designed to raise confidence in parenting, offer new strategies and provide connections with other adoptive parents. Agency managers have recently been involved in developing the programme to cover teenage years, focusing on the different challenges adolescence brings to adopted children and how best to support them. This programme is delivered to and accessed by all adopters in the agency. It is also shared by adoption support with schools supporting children who have been adopted. The agency has recently secured additional funding and this has enabled them to extend the access to this programme to other regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies nationally.

The panel and agency decision-maker process ensures safeguarding children is a priority. For example, a legal view is gained on each individual adopter assessment. This is shared with panel members and recorded in panel minutes. This legal opinion also informs practice in the agency, ensuring that changes in society inform the adoption process. For example, a decision has been made to take up additional references for those pre-approval adopters who have previously house-shared to further inform the assessment process.

There are effective systems that support the recruitment of adopters, staff and panel members. Procedures are regularly reviewed and developed. There is clear management oversight of recruitment, which helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The board, managers and staff team create a culture of high aspiration and positivity and have high expectations of the service they provide to adopters and children. They generate creative ideas to sustain high quality care for children.

The manager is child-focused, enthusiastic and highly skilled. She is instrumental in promoting change and development in the adoption world, sitting on committees and liaising with bodies such as the Department for Education.

The senior management team is innovative and proactive in reviewing the services provided by the agency. There is good use of internal and external audits to support service development. These systems inform a strong development plan, which is regularly reviewed. This means that managers are aware of emerging patterns and trends and are well placed to respond to them. For example, resources have increased in recognition of the growing demand for support for adoptive families as their children get older and as the number of families for whom the agency has a responsibility is steadily growing.

Consultations and meetings with staff, adopters, children and partners support the agency's continual development. Feedback from adopters and adopter committees has resulted in amendments to the preparation and training of adopters and twilight training sessions have been introduced.

The staff team is highly motivated. This is because their managers role model high expectations of child-centred work. The staff speak passionately about the work they do and describe feeling very valued. They receive regular and meaningful supervision, which considers their welfare, workload, aims and objectives, health and safety, training and development. They value the opportunity that managers give them to develop their roles, undertake additional specialist training and become professionally qualified.

The investment in the development of staff is excellent Staff are well qualified in their field and managers are supportive of individual development opportunities. For example, two unqualified staff are being funded and supported to complete social work apprenticeship training and a social work student from a local university is currently on placement with the agency.

One staff member said, 'Since being at the agency, I have felt valued as a social worker but also as a team member. My team have been nothing but supportive and welcoming since I joined. We work well together as a team, and any one of our team is willing to offer support on hand. It's a really amazing team to be part of.'

Another staff member said, 'My colleagues impress me on a daily basis, and I feel privileged to work with such a fantastic team of dedicated individuals who all bring with them skills and experience.'

Staff use a bespoke model of assessment and a supporting toolkit that are informed by recognised therapeutic models. Managers play an integral part in maintaining, reviewing and developing this tool with other partner adoption agencies. This ensures that the toolkit takes account of learning from sector reviews and developments.

Partnership working is exceptional. Feedback from social workers and adopters is wholly positive. Strengths include flexibility, responsiveness and communication. Adopters cannot praise staff enough. One adopter said, 'I don't know where the agency pluck their social workers from. They are like unicorns, both rare and brilliant.' Another said, 'Without fail, everybody at the agency who we have been involved with, from pre-adoption training to now, have been friendly, supportive, professional, knowledgeable and keen to help or provide information whenever needed.'

The recruitment of adopters and marketing strategies are regularly reviewed, actively involving children, adopters and staff. For example, the agency's website is currently being re-developed, involving a series of consultations with children, staff and adopters. These sessions are looking at adopters' experiences and what language might work best to attract new interest.

The panel chair is skilled and experienced and works closely with the agency in developing panel and wider practice. The number of applicants coming through is increasing, which requires more panels to be convened. This is managed effectively, to ensure that applications are presented in a timely way. The administrative support of panel is excellent. Quality assurance is rigorous and effective. Applicants are asked at panel why they have chosen the agency. Their experience of training and the assessment are used to inform practice and change elsewhere in the agency, for example, information events and preparation training.

Managers continue to develop and disseminate practice across the agency and nationally. They have launched a new information-sharing platform for their adopters and are in the process of embedding it before making it available to a national audience. They have also made a series of podcasts called Education in Focus and Adoption in Focus. These are available on their platform as well as other podcast sites.

### **The effectiveness of early permanence arrangements**

The registered manager of the independent fostering agency is highly skilled, experienced and passionate about early permanence and promotes the positive impact and outcomes for children.

Early permanence is integral to the agency and both the adoption and fostering managers share the same passion and work closely together. This is recognised by the staff team, who say that creativity and dedication are encouraged, nurtured and guided by the trustees and managers, who constantly set an excellent example with their dedication, approachability, enthusiasm and focus on the needs of adopters and their children.

The registered manager is instrumental in promoting the importance of early permanence nationally and works closely with other agencies. For example, an early permanence guide has been created for regional adoption agencies and local authorities to help them understand the potential benefits of the service.

The registered manager and staff achieve permanency for children through recruiting and assessing a suitable and diverse range of families to meet the individual needs of children. Early permanence is promoted from the initial contact with prospective adopters and revisited throughout stage one and two of the assessment process. The agency holds an additional information evening for those applicants who show an interest in early permanence. As a result, the number of households considering early permanence has increased.

Social workers carry out comprehensive assessments that provide considered analysis of applicants' strengths and vulnerabilities. Research-informed practice supports social workers to make clear conclusions and recommendations. Robust assessments ensure that the panel and the agency decision-maker can make informed recommendations and decisions.

The panel chair and panel members provide considered independent scrutiny of the agency and contribute to the development of the agency's practice. The agency decision-maker makes reasoned decisions, with comprehensive qualifying determinations.

Managers and staff give excellent attention to the matching process. They work in close partnership with the early permanence carers and professionals to ensure that they can meet the needs of the children and promote their safety and welfare before they move into their foster home.

Early permanence carers receive regular supervision. They have increased visits when children are initially placed. This includes unannounced visits twice a year. Feedback from early permanence carers (and now adopters) is highly positive and reflects dedicated support from staff who are highly knowledgeable and understand the competing demands of the fostering and adoption regulations. They are also sensitive to the potential complexities of early permanence.

Children who are placed under early permanence arrangements develop healthy and secure attachments and trusted relationships. This is because children are often placed straight from birth and remain with their approved carers through to adoption.



The priority of the agency is to continue to increase adopter recruitment to include adopters also willing to provide early permanence placements, and to maximise the opportunities presented through regional adoption and local authority partnerships.

## **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**

**Unique reference number:** SC394569

**Registered provider:** Family Society

**Registered provider address:** Mccarthy Denning, Suite 102, 70 Mark Lane,  
London EC3R 7NQ

**Responsible individual:** Benjamin James

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## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** 1258436

**Registered provider:** Family Society

**Registered provider address:** Mccarthy Denning, Suite 102, 70 Mark Lane,  
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**Responsible individual:** Benjamin James

**Registered manager:** Howard Parker

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## **Inspectors**

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Regulatory Inspector  
Stacie Sharpe, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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