

The Adoption Consultancy 360 Ltd

West Grange, Clyst Heath, Exeter EX2 7EY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

This independent adoption support agency is operated by a private limited company. It provides psychological services for adopted children and adoptive families. The agency also offers a wide range of specialist training and supervision services for adoptive parents, carers and professionals working in the field of adoption and permanence.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was working with 99 adoptive families, plus an additional nine families who have attended therapeutic training courses in the last 12 months. The agency commissions therapy through 13 therapists, who work on a self-employed basis.

Inspection dates: 30 April to 2 May 2019

Overall experience and progress of service users, taking into account: outstanding

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

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: 7 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency is outstanding because:

- The agency's leaders, managers and staff have provided outstandingly high-quality therapeutic interventions for children and families over a sustained period of time. Parents and children report excellent progress.
- The agency carries out exceptionally rigorous assessments. The wide range of therapies available and the therapists' skills and flexibility in adapting their work to meet the children's changing needs are a real strength.
- The agency's therapists receive excellent clinical supervision from professionals who are highly qualified in their fields. In addition, the registered manager and senior therapists within the agency provide scrutiny and challenge through individual and group supervision. This encourages exceptionally high standards of creative practice and professional development.
- The agency is well led, well managed and responsive to feedback. Children and families are consulted after every therapy session, and their views help to inform the direction of the work. The agency's leaders and managers also have an effective structure in place to consult with children and families outside the therapeutic process. This helps to guide service development.
- Leaders and managers make extensive use of research material to inform their practice. They work with internationally recognised specialists in attachment theory and with academic institutions working in the field of trauma-related sensory integration. Recent work with a child and the staff team in a local secure children's home is exciting and highly innovative.

The adoption support agency's areas for development:

- Ensure that, prior to appointment, candidates for staff recruitment have provided a full employment history, including months as well as years. This will reduce the risk of unsuitable staff appointments.
- The agency's two directors are currently the only board members. They have not, to date, prepared reports to the board under NMS 25. Reporting under this standard would help leaders and managers to track progress.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the agency can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in the recruitment of staff. (NMS 21.2)

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

Parents and children are extremely positive about the service. They say that children's behaviour, stability, happiness and relationships have improved in response to therapeutic work, sometimes exceeding all expectations.

Families feel welcomed, nurtured and valued by the service. They appreciate the warm, friendly and attractively decorated surroundings. Family members commented on the good 'match' between therapists and family members, the excellent communication and the exceptional support from the agency to help to secure and retain adoption support funding.

The agency carries out thorough and accurate assessments of need. They agree a plan of intervention with the family and other professionals, including school staff. By including all relevant parties in the assessment process, the agency ensures that there is a holistic approach to each family.

There has been an increase in the number and range of therapists since the last inspection. The team includes occupational therapists, clinical psychologists, art and play therapists and social workers. This provides parents and children with greater choice and flexibility to enable them to receive the help that they need. A parent said, 'They are excellent at listening to and being empathetic to us individually. They are very experienced and have good links to other services that may support us.'

There are many examples where the agency has helped families and schools to have realistic expectations and respond to children in a therapeutic way. The agency's flexible, well-researched therapeutic interventions reduce the risk of family breakdown and improve educational outcomes.

One family member commented, 'The agency has provided a lifeline for our family... without all the support given, I'm not sure where this family would be now.' Helping children to remain in their adoptive families and in school has an enormously positive effect on their life chances, because they are more confident, resilient and better prepared for the future. A young person said, 'It helped me to learn new techniques to cope with my anxiety.'

The service has well-equipped, safe and attractively decorated premises which are partially accessible to adults and children who have disabilities. Therapy rooms are attractively decorated and provide a relaxing environment for all ages.

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

The agency keeps children safe and acts swiftly in response to any safeguarding matters. Staff and managers are well trained in safeguarding and are clear about the

action to be taken if there are any concerns about a child or adult at risk of harm.

The agency has not received any complaints. There is a clear, accessible procedure for responding to any that may arise in future. This helps to make sure that adults and children know how they may raise any concerns.

The agency's leaders and managers have an excellent understanding of how children's previous experiences of trauma and abuse affect their behaviour. Their empathic support and excellent training courses help to keep children safe from harm. Adoptive families say that the 'Safety first' course is exceptionally well taught and that it has made a significant difference to their parenting styles.

At the start of the inspection, an audit system for staff recruitment checks was in place but had not been fully implemented. Leaders and managers had not followed up potential gaps in employment history. This was remedied during the inspection.

Some important information held by the agency had not been updated, for example professional contact details for designated officers. This was also remedied during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency's leaders and managers are experienced and highly qualified professionals. They have a clear vision for the service, including plans to diversify future work to avoid excessive reliance on the adoption support fund. This helps to ensure that the agency remains financially viable and able to continue vital work with children and families, who regard the service as a lifeline.

Detailed case records maintain a clear account of each session and can be used for planning the next intervention. Therapists adapt their reporting style to make this accessible to adult and child family members, as well as professionals. The agency also has a children's guide in various formats to suit varying communication needs.

The agency has a secure system for keeping records, including backing up computer data off-site. The agency has an effective business continuity plan in place to enable families to continue to receive a service in the event of a mishap involving the premises.

Leaders and managers have collected extensive literature on many aspects of therapeutic work with children and families. They make extensive use of research material to inform their practice. They work with internationally recognised specialists in attachment theory and with academic institutions working in the field of trauma-related sensory integration. The agency's intending registered manager trains other professionals around the country and overseas in sensory attachment intervention. A published author, she is part of the sensory attachment integration training team linked to a project undertaken by the University of Roehampton.

The responsible individual, who is also the current registered manager, is highly qualified and respected. She is very active in the consortium of adoption support agencies. The registered manager shares her own personal experience and the agency's practice to help the wider adoption community.

The agency is implementing highly innovative, research-based practice. For example, occupational therapy work in a local secure children's home has made a significant difference to an adopted young person who had unmet sensory needs. For example, the therapist has worked collaboratively with the home's psychologist to set up a sensory room for the children. She has also carried out sensory integration profiles with the staff team. This has led to improvements in the child and the staff's environments, so that they feel safe, nurtured and valued. This helps the staff to carry out their challenging roles in caring for some of the most vulnerable children.

Therapists are well qualified and highly trained, and receive extensive clinical, professional and group supervision. This ensures that therapists engage in reflective practice and maintain the development requirements of their professions.

The agency works closely and effectively with partnership agencies that value their knowledge and expertise highly. For example, the agency has a positive working relationship with Adopt South West, a regional adoption agency. The adoption support agency is valued for its flexible and responsive service, which offers considerable choice to adoptive families.

Information about this inspection

During this inspection, inspectors looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children, young people and adults. They watched how professional staff work with children, young people, adults and each other and discussed the effectiveness of the help provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people, adults and their families. In addition, inspectors have tried to understand what the adoption support agency knows about how well it is performing and what difference it is making for the children, young people and adults whom it is trying to help.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, using the 'Social care common inspection framework', 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

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Inspector(s)

Heather Chaplin, social care inspector



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