

After Adoption Yorkshire

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector	Sue Winson
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Adults and children

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Registered manager	Freda Atherton
Responsible individual	Paula Newson-Smith
Date of last inspection	28/10/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

After Adoption Yorkshire is a voluntary agency which provides information, support and advice to anyone affected by adoption. Adopted adults and children, birth relatives and adoptive families access the support services. The agency provides an advice line, counselling, therapy, individual support, support groups, mediation and intermediary services and a search facility, amounting to more than 1000 pieces of work in a year. Seventeen permanent staff, three sessional workers and 28 volunteers provide these services, under the management of a team manager and CEO. Their provision of training and seminars is not the subject of this inspection.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This specialist agency provides good quality service to a range of service users, which are tailored to individual need and delivered in a sensitive manner. Positive outcomes are achieved due to the experience, skills and commitment of the staff group.

Service users commented very positively about the services they received and valued the skills of the staff, their professional approach and sensitivity. Those using the agency are welcomed without prejudice. The agency is committed to ensuring that the welfare of service users and others, who have been affected by adoption, are effectively safeguarded and promoted.

The lifelong implications of adoption are clearly understood and are reflected in practice. Good outcomes, and effective support, for the majority of service users are underpinned by assessments of need. The work is highly individualised and flexible. Intended outcomes are clear and agreed with service users who are consulted throughout and empowered to manage the pace of progress towards their aims.

The agency is well managed, and the whole staff group share the drive to improve, and are committed to the best outcomes in the interests of service users. The

business and finances of the agency are well monitored, as is practice.

The agency has recently increased the involvement of service users in service planning and development. There remains further work to be done. Information to service users has not yet been adapted to reflect changes in information required by commissioners. A recommendation has been made in respect of the limited range of staff training.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that there is a good learning and development programme which equips staff and volunteers with the skills required to meet the needs of children and service users, and keeps them up-to-date with professional, legal and practice developments. (NMS 23.1)

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Service users receive high quality support and assistance to achieve positive outcomes. Services are tailored to their individual and highly diverse needs. The agency and staff were described as 'fantastic', 'knowledgeable and professional', 'caring' and service users said they were welcomed and not judged. Outcomes for service users are consistently good, taking into account their starting points, aspirations and expectations.

Service users define the services they receive, are listened to and asked for their views. Those tracing records and looking to meet relatives are informed of the potential outcomes, are consulted throughout the process and said they felt they were in control of the speed of progress. In addition, they are regularly and promptly kept informed of progress, or difficulties in finding information.

Birth parents receive a service they value as independent from the local authorities. They are clear about what the agency can, and cannot do, and commented on the open communication with them. They valued the support and said they could ring any time to speak to their worker. They also value opportunities to attend groups and speak with others in similar positions.

Adoptive families receive intensive therapeutic support which has sometimes enabled them to remain together as a family. Adoptive parents are assisted to increase their parenting skills and understanding of their children's needs. Children receive individual work which helps them understand their past and present situations, including life story work.

Some service users have found the experience so positive that they have moved to becoming involved with the agency as volunteers, or in speaking at groups.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

The staff are highly focussed on the individual and changing needs of service users. The extensive knowledge and experience of the staff has a positive impact on relationships and outcomes for service users. They are sensitive, flexible and persistent in working to reach the desired outcomes, which results in high levels of service user satisfaction, in respect of all the services received. The open ethos of the agency, which is welcoming and accepting of service users, means that staff are able to talk with them where their expectations initially exceed reality.

Good quality assessments of need are undertaken and shared with service users, who are fully involved in defining aims and desired outcomes. Services are delivered promptly where this is in the control of the agency. The staff communicate with people to help them understand any delays, due to commissioning arrangements, and give them regular updates. The agency works well with commissioning local authorities and, where appropriate, advocate for service users' needs for further support.

The agency links with other agencies and professionals and refers people on to sources of advice where they cannot provide a service. Work in partnership with range of professionals, for example, schools and other therapists, take place where this is in the interest of service users.

Safeguarding

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Robust staff and volunteer recruitment protects children and adults who use the service. Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information and contact is facilitated where it is appropriate and safe to do so. As part of the process, the identity of service users is routinely checked and recorded.

Allegations and disclosures are handled promptly in the best interests of children and adults involved. There is effective communication with child protection agencies. Staff training and awareness serves to protect and safeguard people using the services. Service users are advised of complaints process, and the small numbers of complaints received have been appropriately handled and complainants have been advised of the outcomes.

Risk assessments are carried out on outreach venues which are used to meet service users to provide them with in convenient locations; this enables them to meet in a less formal environment. The main office has regular checks, and is well maintained,

to ensure all are safe. Records are kept securely to maintain confidentiality.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the adoption support agency are **good**.

Leaders and managers are appropriately qualified and skilled, and effectively manage the diverse and geographically spread staff group. The vacant team manager post has not had a negative effect on the work of the agency, as senior staff have taken on extra responsibilities, including some staff supervision. The full-time staff, sessional staff and volunteers are ably supported by highly effective administrative staff, who are clear about their roles and responsibilities and who are valued as team members. The electronic recording system is seen as an improvement and useful to the work of staff and managers.

The strong staff group is well led, supervised and supported. They work together as a dedicated team, and are valued by service users who commented on their commitment and expertise. While they have training opportunities, the range of courses available do not fully reflect the range of specialist work undertaken, or the on-going changes in adoption practice.

The board of trustees actively oversee practice and development. There are a range of members, including ex-service users and those with direct experience of adoption. They assist the CEO in effective business planning, and financial monitoring. The CEO monitors the effectiveness of the agency and is continually engaged with commissioners. Good links exist with local authority adoption teams. The agency has robust monitoring systems, which allows them to feedback information to commissioners on a regular basis.

The agency's Statement of Purpose and children's guide are appropriate and contain all the required information. The policy summary leaflet, which is given to all service users, contains brief details about confidentiality, child protection and vulnerable adults policies and the complaints procedures. However, some of the information on confidentiality has not yet been updated to reflect the changing requirements of the commissioning local authorities.

The agency has been effective in improving returns on feedback from service users, to allow analysis which is more informative to contribute to improvement and development of the agency. This is at an early stage and remains a work in progress.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of adoption support agencies.