

Placement Support

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector	Marian Denny
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Date of last inspection	17/11/2011

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Service information

Brief description of the service

The agency works with children, their adopters, carers and the networks of professionals working with looked after children, including children placed for adoption and those in adoptive placements. The therapy provided is grounded in the psychoanalytic tradition and may be undertaken on short or long term basis. The agency is based in Hackney; work though can be undertaken in a variety of areas as the agency is able to hire appropriate therapeutic premises.

The agency applies psychodynamic ways of thinking to organisations and networks of professionals working with children. The aim is to promote more informed practice and understanding amongst carers and professionals about the emotional needs of children who are disturbed, traumatised or at risk; support to carers and the professional networks are seen as key to meeting the needs of the children.

The adoption support agency comprises of the Registered Manager, who is also the responsible individual and a therapist. The agency has a part-time administrator and employs four other therapists on a sessional basis. The agency has a number of agencies who commission a variety of work with them. At the time of the inspection the agency was providing therapeutic support to 5 adoptive families.

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 **outstanding**.

This is an excellent adoption support agency providing a high quality therapeutic service, which is delivered by an extremely experienced, skilful and knowledgeable team of therapists. As a result, outstanding outcomes are achieved, which has enabled some families and children to stay together. In situations where this cannot be achieved, adults and children are very effectively supported and helped to move forward in their lives with the least detrimental emotional effects. Generally, the work undertaken by this agency is highly complex and usually undertaken when other professionals have worked with the adoptive families but the outcomes achieved

have not been very positive.

The agency's work is very child-focused and carried out with great skill in a very sensitive, non-judgemental manner. Prior to meeting with those using the service, the therapists undertake considerable preparatory work with all the professionals working with the family. This ensures there is a shared understanding of the family and the child's difficulties amongst the professional network. Good, effective partnership working is clearly evident and this cohesive approach in their work, results in the best possible outcomes being achieved for adopters and their children.

All families and commissioners spoken to during the inspection, as well as those who have responded to Ofsted's surveys, were extremely complimentary about the agency. They commented about 'The professionalism' of those working in the agency, 'Its promptness and effectiveness of service' and they clearly hold this service in high regard. They were unable to identify anything that they could improve upon.

All those working in the agency have a good understanding of safe working practices as well as a sound knowledge of how to respond to any safeguarding allegations or concerns. There is also a robust approach to the recruitment and selection of staff, which ensures only those suitable to work with the service users are employed by this agency.

Six monthly reports are completed regarding the agency's progress and delivery of the service. The Directors' effective monitoring and evaluation systems ensure they have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They also elicit feedback from service users. The information obtained from all these resources informs the plan for the agency's future development.

Since this agency was registered with Ofsted, both the manager and her team have sustained a very high quality of practice that has greatly benefitted all those using the service.

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Outcomes for the children, young people and families using this service are outstanding. Information received about the service its impact on the family was extremely positive and highly complementary. One professional said, 'The agency's practice is excellent. It has an exemplary impact on the people using the service and in fact all those involved in the service, including other agencies and organisations.'

Those using the service said, 'They were always listened to' and 'The therapist had an excellent understanding of their situation and difficulties.' This sensitive and supportive approach helped people to engage with the service. The agency also ensures it works very much in partnership with those using the service. They are therefore wholly involved in planning the delivery of the therapeutic support and are

very clear about the desired outcomes. They are also constantly involved in reviewing the service. Consequently, it is always tailored to meet their individual needs. All these factors result in the service provided being highly effective and ensures they get the best outcomes possible from the work.

Service users express a high level of satisfaction with the service. Some of the comments made by those using the agency include: 'They have been really helpful in enabling us to talk about our feelings regarding our son and they have been really supportive.' 'They have been enormously helpful.' 'The work undertaken by our therapist has been an enormous benefit to our family.' 'I cannot fault the service received.' The impact of the service is such that some families are kept together as a result of the very high quality support. For example, one family, said, 'The work undertaken has really helped us understand and has equipped us to cope with my child's past life. Everything is now going really well.' Another said, 'We still have our placement nine years down the line. I would like to thank (name of therapist) for her invaluable contributions in helping our placement be successful.'

A number of stakeholders also commented on the exceptional outcomes of this agency. Some of these comments were, 'They were extremely lucky to have support from this agency. They really helped them to understand him.' 'Those receiving the service found it a really positive and helpful experience and as a result his placement has been maintained.' Others said, 'I doubt whether the placement would have held without the support,' and 'she was integral to keeping the placement going.'

A key to the success of this agency is the fact that they work very hard to engage and work in partnership with all those who are involved with the child. For example, the child's parents, their teachers and other professionals, such as the placing social workers, health professionals and the children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). They also do their utmost to ensure everyone obtains a clear understanding about the issues for the child. This child focussed approach to their work ensures professionals are able to relate and work with the child and gain a real understanding of their past and current needs and to formulate the best way to work with them. Similarly, parents are also helped to understand this and are assisted and supported to adapt their parenting style to best meet their child's needs. This collaborative working leads to significant improvements in the child or young person's sense of security. It also strengthens their family relationships and increases their confidence, enabling them to achieve educationally, socially and to generally improve their life chances.

Quality of service

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

The quality of the service provision is exceptional. The work that this agency takes on is usually amongst the most complex. Generally, other professionals have worked to achieve positive outcomes for the children but have been unsuccessful.

The agency places a great emphasis on the importance preparatory work with the

professionals involved with the adoptive family, prior to work commencing with the family. This is to ensure all those involved with the family gain a shared understanding about the situation and are able to work collaboratively and in partnership with each other. This organisational and team approach to the work facilitates successful outcomes being achieved for the whole family.

Those working in this agency are extremely knowledgeable, skilful and have a wealth of experience in this work. They all demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues pertinent to supporting adoptive families, particularly attachment issues. They are able to draw on their considerable therapeutic skills and develop individualised support packages to meet the needs of the family. They are also supported to access a range of specialised training opportunities to enhance their skills. The agency is also keen to embrace research and new models of working. As a result, they provide a service of exceptionally high quality.

The emphasis of the agency's work is to enable adoptive parents to understand the needs of their child and teach them techniques to parent in a therapeutic manner. This ensures that children continue to benefit from a therapeutic approach when they are at home and enables them to develop healthy attachments to their adoptive parents. Adoptive parents also become more confident in their parenting skills. One adoptive parent commented, 'The work undertaken has been an enormous benefit to our family. It was carried out in a sensitive, non-judgemental manner and shifted the dynamics in our family. Things are going really well now thanks to Placement Support. I could not recommend the agency highly enough.' Another said, 'The therapist explored our feelings extremely well. She was reliable, attentive, and very supportive and provided an excellent service.' Another said, 'We were extremely lucky to have the support from the therapist, as she really helped us to understand him and as a result he is still with us.' One social worker also said, 'I found her views incredibly helpful. I learnt a lot and have used some of the knowledge gained about sibling contact in another case.'

Services are delivered in a timely fashion. Adoptive families often experience delay in the agreement of funding from local authorities and so appreciate that they are able to access support quickly from the agency once this is agreed. An initial assessment determines the length and type of therapeutic intervention felt to be the most appropriate. This is tailored to the support needs of the individual family. Support packages are also subject to review to ensure that they are on track to meet the desired outcomes. At the conclusion of the intervention an evaluation is conducted, which involves the service user and commissioner if appropriate, in order to assess the effectiveness of the support. This ensures the therapeutic approach remains focused on positive outcomes.

The agency works effectively with those commissioning its services. Written contracts are in place and feedback is provided to commissioners routinely, so they are aware of the current situation. One commissioner said, 'The agency is extremely professional, very child focused, accommodating and communication is excellent. We work very much as a team with this agency and we obtain a lot of information about a child's current and future needs. This is a great help to us in planning for the child.'

Safeguarding

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

This adoption support agency provides a very safe service. Safeguarding is at the centre of this agency's practice for all who use the service. There are clear policies and procedures in place which underpins the agency's work. For example, the agency has a safeguarding policy that sets out the procedures the manager and staff should follow in the event of an allegation or child protection concern. These have been submitted to the local children's safeguarding board. The provider works across several local authorities and all those working for the agency are fully aware of how to access other local authorities' procedures should there be a need to.

Before they commence their work, both the manager and therapists ensure there are clear expectations about health and safety issues and about managing behaviour during therapeutic sessions. This leads to a clear understanding about expectations between all parties.

The manager and the therapists are all registered with the appropriate professional bodies and have had the necessary recruitment checks to ensure they are suitable to work with those using the service. Both the manager and the therapists have a wealth of experience in working with adopters, adoptees, children and young people. They have an excellent understanding of how to protect them and keep them safe from harm. However, at the time of the inspection, there were no current allegations, nor had any historical allegations been made.

The agency's working practices in this respect are well thought out and robust. All those working for the agency make it very clear that safeguarding issues cannot remain confidential and those spoken with totally recognise this. Safeguarding is a regular agenda matter in supervision and is always considered and reviewed in the report to the Directors of the agency.

The children and young people who are referred to the service have all experienced trauma, abuse and neglect, prior to placement with their adoptive families. All those working for the agency demonstrate an excellent understanding about how children and young people's early adverse experiences have impacted on their emotional well-being and behaviour. They also understand the impact this has had on the adults in the family. This understanding is fundamental to the agency's work. Families are helped to understand this during the agency's therapeutic intervention and as a result, are very clear about the reasons their children and young people behave as they do. This helps them be more empathetic and therapeutic in their parenting styles. Staff in the agency are also always mindful of the well-being of the adults. For example, if they feel their mental health is a risk, they ensure the adult accesses appropriate help and support. The agency also ensures the professionals involved with the family understand the issues and actively work in partnership with them. Success of this work is shown in the excellent outcomes achieved and the

considerably improved relationships achieved within the family.

Leadership and management

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

The work of the agency is under constant review and evaluation, as the manager is very eager to do the best she can for all those who use the agency's service. It is evident that service users feel totally involved in the planning and delivery of their service. They are also routinely asked about the service during their therapeutic sessions and the service provided is subsequently changed according to their needs. Formal feedback is also requested and any information obtained is used to inform agency practice and service delivery.

The manager and the therapists have excellent relationships with partner organisations such as local authorities, educational settings and where relevant CAMHS. This is clearly illustrated by some of the comments made, for example, 'The agency is very approachable, flexible and provides a prompt service.' 'They worked very hard with us and I cannot fault the service'. 'They communicate extremely well with us so ensuring we are always kept up-to-date regarding the family's situation.' 'The team is very good; they are very supportive to the family'. 'They really work well with us it is like a team around the family'. This excellent communication ensures all agencies work together for the benefit of the families, children and young people. This is clearly illustrated by a comment made by a family, 'The service provided was excellent and they really helped us.'

The manager and therapists working for this agency ensure that they all keep up-to-date with current adoption legislation and practice through regular reading, training and the latest research in the field. They also ensure that they are up-to-date with current professional knowledge and practice in their specific therapeutic field of work. The manager receives regular external clinical supervision which is undertaken by a very well-qualified and experienced supervisor in psychoanalytical psychotherapy. Similarly, she also ensures all the therapists working in the agency receive supervision. Those spoken with feel well supported by the manager and the director of the agency, who acknowledge the difficulties and stress that their work entails. The manager and the therapists all have membership of their relevant professional registration bodies and attend relevant training events. They also purchase and read numerous books and other relevant adoption resources.

All the people working in this agency have a wealth of experience in this work. They are also extremely skilled at supporting all those they work with often through some very distressing and disruptive times. They do this, at all times, skilfully and in an empathetic and non-judgemental way. It is clear they really care for the people they work with and do their utmost to help them. All those working in the agency are held in very high regard by the people they work with. These excellent working relationships ensure that people engage well with them and as a result high quality work is undertaken.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose that underpins the work of the agency and is available to all interested parties. There is also an informative website that interested parties can access. The website also details what work the agency carries out. This means that there is clear information for people with an interest in the service.

The agency, due to the diverse nature of the work, provides information that is individual to need and ensures that people using the service are fully involved in the delivery of the work to be undertaken. The agency takes the time and energy to ensure that people fully understand the aims and objectives of the agency's work. This open and transparent approach shows a high level of respect to all using the service. It also means that people using the service are clear about the aims and objectives of the service, how their individual needs will be met and they feel that their views are valued. The agency keeps appropriate records, which are stored in a confidential and secure manner.

People spoken to were aware of how they could make a complaint but none had felt the need to do so. In fact the agency has not received any complaints about the services provided. This is because everyone working in this agency is always mindful about ensuring people receive a very high quality, flexible service.

Twice a year, a report is prepared for the directors, about the agency's progress and delivery of the service. This enables them to have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and to plan future developments of the agency. Feedback from service users is also requested to help inform the development of the agency. Financial reports confirm that the agency continues to be financially viable.

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.