

# Placement Support

Placement Support Ltd  
60 Lordship Park, London N16 5UA  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this adoption support agency

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 agency aims to apply psychodynamic ways of thinking to all types of organisations and networks. The therapeutic interventions are grounded in psychoanalytic tradition and training and can be short- or long-term interventions. The agency is based in Hackney. However, work can be undertaken in a variety of areas, as the agency works in service users' homes or is able to hire appropriate therapeutic premises within the community.

The agency applies psychodynamic ways of thinking to organisations and networks of professionals working with children. It offers consultation to staff groups working in difficult situations with vulnerable service users. The aim is to promote more informed practice and understanding among carers and professionals about the emotional needs of children who are disturbed, traumatised or at risk. A key element to meeting children's needs is offering support to carers and professional networks.

The adoption support agency comprises the registered manager, who is also the responsible individual, and a therapist. The agency has a co-director, who is also the business manager, and a part-time administrator. It employs 15 therapists on a sessional basis. The agency works with a number of organisations, who commission a variety of work with them. At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing therapeutic support to 18 adoptive families.

**Inspection dates:** 16 to 17 January 2018

<b>Overall experience and progress of service users,</b> taking into account:	outstanding
How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	outstanding
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:** 20 February 2015

**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 provides high-quality therapeutic services.
- An excellent team of therapists, who are highly skilled, knowledgeable and extremely experienced in their work, can provide support where children live, or remotely via the use of technology.
- Outstanding outcomes are often achieved, which has enabled some families and children to stay together. When this has not been possible, the children and adults involved are supported to move forward sensitively and to maintain the best possible relationships.
- The agency places a high priority on keeping children safe. Therapists have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and they adopt a multi-agency approach to ensuring that children are helped and protected.
- Leaders and managers are inspirational, passionate and forward-thinking. Their monitoring is regular and robust and they are reflective in their approach to issues that arise, in order to improve practice. They work collaboratively so that adopters and children have positive outcomes.
- Leaders and managers have set up a unique online network of support and learning for professionals and therapists. This allows for thinking and training with others and a psychotherapy accreditation course for organisational therapists.
- Leaders, managers and staff are committed to improving the lives of children, adult service users and families. Staff are well supported by regular supervision and ongoing personal development.

The adoption support agency's area for development:

- Due to children's complex needs, the children's guide is not always given directly to them. The agency needs to think about how to make this document more accessible to children/parents/carers determined by their

age, understanding and assessment. The guide must include how children can access independent advocacy services.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure the children's guide to adoption support services is provided to the child by the adoption support agency who is providing adoption support. The guide is appropriate to the child's age and understanding and includes a summary of what the service sets out to do for children and is given to all children and/or their representatives. The children's guide also contains information on how a child can find out their rights, how they can contact their independent reviewing officer or social worker, the children's commissioner, Ofsted, if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate. (Adoption: national minimum standards, page 54, paragraph 18.6)

### **Inspection judgement**

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

Children and families using this agency receive an outstanding service. Therapists are exceptionally skilled and are often able to offer effective support and help when other services/agencies have not succeeded. The individualised care and support received are, in many cases, preventing families and/or education placements from breaking down. The support is helping parents/carers to understand and manage complex needs and behaviours. When breakdowns are unavoidable or have already occurred, children and families are helped to understand this and to manage and preserve relationships safely.

Children and families experience consistency in relationships with the therapists who offer help and support. The agency approach builds up trust and confidence in a variety of ways. For example, staff are responsive and accessible, providing help quickly through therapeutic assessments. They consider carefully how best to offer help and make excellent use of the internet and other technology to provide therapy. This helps to engage children who are reluctant to travel or who live further away, and also keeps costs down. Therapists collaborate with children's networks, helping them to improve relationships with teachers, parents, carers and siblings. One parent said, 'Both children have improved attachments. We seem to have cracked it. They feel safe and trust us.'

Outcomes for children, young people and families using this service are outstanding. There are many examples where therapy has helped to prevent placements from breaking down and helped to maintain a relationship between children and their parents/carers. Other areas of progress reported are lower levels of conflict in children and families, and changes to parent/carer perceptions. For example, one parent stated about therapy, 'He (the therapist) held us all together, it was an interesting process, we all were required to change.' Another young person, who was

close to a family breakdown, made new friends and gained a job during the period of therapy. If placements do break down, the children, parents and carers receive help to maintain relationships and to move forward with the least detrimental emotional effects.

Therapists say that their goals are to support placements. One therapist states, 'We help the network to look after children better.' Success is measured against the stability of placements, so the primary goal is for children to continue to be supported to live with their adopters/carers. Parents/carers and their networks receive support, which improves their ability to cope. This approach helps parents/carers and professional networks to understand that it is often parenting approaches that must change to meet such complex needs.

Commissioners give many positive examples about the work of this agency. They commented about how responsive the agency is: 'They chase us, they are persistent.' and 'They want to meet need and offer a rapid response.' Other professionals and families commented on how the support is 'excellent' and that interventions showed issues in families 'significantly reducing'. The agency is also described as 'answering queries quickly', 'being accessible' and 'progressive'. There is a timely offer of services to families and good networking with other professionals such as schools. One social worker said, 'They are mindful of diversity needs and considered this well in the assessment they completed.' There are many examples of the agency supporting educational needs and supporting school staff to think about therapeutic needs and understand behaviours arising from attachment and trauma in earlier childhood.

Parent/carers provide excellent feedback. For example, one parent said, 'I definitely could not have coped without their support, I wanted to shut the door and run.' Another parent said, 'They helped us get our heads around the behaviours. They have been fantastic, not fazed by anything, and put behaviours into a real-life context.' Parents/carers also talked about the positive outcomes arising from interventions by the agency. Example comments include: 'regular attacks and outbursts stopped'; 'now co-operates and involved'; 'now attends clubs, Beavers, football and play centre'; 'system in school induced better behaviours'; 'stopped trashing classroom'; 'more predictable'; 'was motionless, now interactive and chatterbox'; and 'improved attachments'. None was able to identify anything that the agency could improve upon.

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

The agency approach to safeguarding is excellent and ensures that children and vulnerable adults stay as safe as possible. Safeguarding is at the centre of practice and all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities to protect children and families. There are clear policies and procedures in place, that give clear guidance to staff about what to do in the event of an allegation or child protection matter. These policies have been submitted to City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board and

all staff have signed to say that they have read and understood them.

Excellent risk assessments using a 'team around the child' approach are completed on children and families prior to work commencing. These assessments are comprehensive and well written, and identify risks and plans for work to be undertaken. Collaborative working is flexible and thoughtful. This process includes meeting and thinking with the professionals as well as with the child and their parents/carers. Referral and assessment information is then thoroughly analysed and discussed with the registered manager, therapist and 'team around the child', to ensure that everyone has a full understanding of needs and potential risks. This helps to keep staff, children, parents and carers safe. One commissioner feels that children and young people are safer due to the interventions that they receive from this agency.

Leaders and managers think about staff safety, as they are often working in families' homes or within the community. The solution is to place a team around the child, which includes work with parents/carers and ensures the safety of practitioners.

Throughout all interventions with children and families, staff receive close supervision. They write and keep detailed process records that are regularly reviewed with the registered manager. The agency maintains excellent close liaison with social workers throughout their interventions. The leaders and managers undertake safeguarding training and the therapists all complete training via their own registration systems. The response to risks presented by children is excellent, and this is evidenced by assessments and detailed records of interventions. Thoughtful work was evident in key areas of risk such as child sexual exploitation, radicalisation issues, internet safety and self-injurious behaviours.

The agency employs safe recruitment practices. Leaders and managers verify references and ensure that all basic checks are completed before new staff start work. This all helps to ensure that unsuitable adults do not work at the agency or have unsupervised contact with children and vulnerable adults. Leaders and managers also ensure that practitioners hold appropriate public liability insurance while they are working for the agency.

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

Leaders and managers are passionate about the service that they provide. They continuously strive to develop innovative ideas about how to work with support groups and practitioners associated with helping parents/carers to support children in adoptive or foster care. New ways of working through facilitating group meetings have increased participation in groups. In addition, therapists offer surgery/consultation sessions that use their experience and expertise to support children in permanent placements. One commissioner said, 'Since commissioning group work with carers, we have improved our placement stability; this is showing in our data.'

Work with stakeholders is strong. Leaders and managers have presented at launch

groups for adoption in one local authority. Another commissioner said, 'They have no waiting lists, there is a good distribution of work and match with therapists.' Commissioners say that they use the agency assessment to make applications to the adoption support fund and have had 100% positive responses as a result. The same commissioner talked about the registered manager as providing 'excellent assessments. She understands the underneath, knows which questions to ask and puts in interventions that work.'

The agency also offers surgeries and consultation to organisations, which help social workers as well. They are described as feeling 'enabled to go and do some of the work themselves'.

The agency maintains excellent relationships, built up over many years, which support collaborative working. It has excellent approaches to working and thinking about things differently. Many of the children whom they support have highly complex needs. The agency approach means that they are able to give support on different levels, through consultancy, groups and individual therapy.

The agency has good succession planning in place. It has grown rapidly since the last inspection in February 2015, largely due to the formation and development of the adoption support fund and a wider choice for service users and commissioners. The leaders and managers intend to retire and have a clear plan for the transition and continuation of the service.

The agency is meeting its statement of aims and purpose, which was last updated in 2015. This will require further updating when succession planning comes to fruition and changes occur.

The agency is a learning organisation. The registered manager has set up a learning forum website on the internet, where professionals can think, share and learn together. The agency is working with academics to establish a network of support and learning that supports psychotherapy accreditation for organisational therapists.

Staff are offered excellent support. The registered manager is always accessible to them. They are offered continuing professional development (CPD), sometimes as clinical supervision. All therapists are registered with their own professional network, which requires CPD to be signed off by a senior psychotherapist every year. This involves a significant amount of learning, thinking and mentoring. Staff say that they feel autonomous and retain their own identity, but also feel protected and supported by leaders and managers.

The agency has comprehensive quality assurance processes to support improvement. All service users are asked for feedback; this is reflected on and used to improve provision. Leaders and managers complete regular, six monthly reviews of the service that they provide and take into account areas of strength and areas for development.

There is a children's guide available. The agency does not automatically give this to

all children and young people using the service as it is not always appropriate to do so. It is recommended that this document is made more accessible by sharing it with parents/carers and ensuring that it is on the agency website. Updates to the children's guide must include details of the Office of the Children's Commissioner and of advocacy services for children and young people.

Leaders and managers are passionate about therapy and social work and they have continuously sustained a very high quality of practice, which is greatly benefiting everyone who uses the service.

## **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 differences 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**

**Unique reference number:** SC369714

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### **Inspector**

Christine Kennet, social care inspector



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