

Adoption Services for Adults

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This adoption support agency, which is based in Buckinghamshire, is operated by an individual provider. It offers birth records counselling, and intermediary services to adopted adults and birth relatives of adopted adults.

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 outstanding adoption support agency has not been in operation for long, but is led by an exceptionally experienced and knowledgeable registered manager who is highly focused on ensuring that service users have positive outcomes. Feedback from service users confirms that this is indeed the case, even when the initial aim cannot be met and results in disappointment. In this situation service users still manage to feel positively about their experience of the agency, and this is due to the professionalism, compassion and understanding shown to them by the registered manager and by her associate researchers.

This is a safe agency with strong recruitment practice, and an excellent awareness of safeguarding issues. Associate researchers have recently begun to do intermediary work under the monitoring of the registered manager. However, they do not have formal written supervision sessions, which may limit their overall development.

Business practices in this agency are also very strong, and this results in a highly efficient and reflective service which communicates extremely well with service users. Their feedback is effectively used to further improve the service, and the manager's national profile means that she is very well placed to seek further improvements from developments and research in the sector.

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 a written record is kept by the agency detailing the time and date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff. Ensure the record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. This specifically relates to associates undertaking intermediary work. (NMS 24.5)

Outcomes for service users

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Service users of this agency are adults, and have usually given considerable thought to the outcomes they want to achieve. Sometimes they have not only given thought but also effort for example, conducting their own searches but seeking help at the intermediary stage. The agency is highly respectful of service user's definitions of what they want to achieve and this is clearly detailed on the agency's website and in the written material that service users receive. A service user said, 'I knew exactly what I wanted, but the service added detail and practicalities. Later they helped me refine what I wanted even more'.

Service users, even those who met with disappointment, consistently report that the service provided had a very positive impact on their lives. For example, service users who may not have received the outcome they hoped for, feel they understand themselves better and/or have closer relationships with existing relatives. A service user who did receive what they hoped for simply said, 'she has made my dream come true'.

Service users feel that the quality of services they receive is to a very high standard. A service user said, 'I am so happy I chose to use an adoption service and particularly yourself. It has made the entire experience much easier to handle'. Initially, service users state that they are impressed by the comprehensive website and reassured by the commitment to high quality standards. They find their initial scoping conversation with the registered manager very clear and helpful, and appreciate this being backed up by useful written information. One service user said, 'The way you explained the process, and provided very useful context helped manage my expectations so I appreciated the possible difficulties and disappointments before embarking on the process'.

Service users consistently report on receiving a 'highly professional service' summarised by one service user as, 'The service is excellent, fast and efficient'. Other service users refer to their confidence in the considerable professional knowledge and experience displayed by the registered manager. One service user said, 'The ability to interact with someone who was professional and knowledgeable' this immediately made me feel comfortable and able to positively move forward as I knew I was dealing with someone who could understand the position I was in.'

Quality of service

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

This agency offers a highly individualised service to a range of people touched by adoption. Characteristically, these are adopted adults or birth relatives searching for links but within those groups are people living abroad, people of various ages, states of health and in varying personal circumstances. This service is highly adept at tailoring the service offered to meet these various needs. For example, ill or disabled service users are visited in venues accessible to them or even in hospital if requested. One service user remarked, 'my special and additional needs were very well met'. The agency also makes good use of Skype which enables those based abroad to fully access the service.

Other service users may have a particular issue within their search which they wish to explore further, or want to receive additional support. In such situations for example, where the death of a sought after one has occurred, highly personalised solutions are implemented. For example, some service users may be supported to search for other family members and others may be advised about specialist counsellors.

Some service users may require a particularly tailored service because of other complexities. In these situations the manager has prepared an individualised resource list which reflects service users' specific needs, and/or referred service users to specialists such as legal advisors. Service users are highly positive about this bespoke service. One said, 'Because my service was so individually tailored, when she referred me for another piece of work I was able to trust that.'

In addition, the search focus also varies from looking for either birth parent, to looking for siblings and perhaps others connected to the story. Some service users want to make use of the agency's highly experienced and effective associate researchers, others want intermediary services and some want both, perhaps at different times. The service is very successful at meeting these varying needs. Service users praise the extensive flexibility of what is on offer summarised by one service user who said, 'I was able to take my time and go back when I was ready, all for one flat fee'.

Although the main focus of the work undertaken is clearly the service user who has approached the agency, significant contact can be made with the focus of the search. This can be invaluable for the service user as one commented, 'the negotiation that (the registered manager) undertook meant that the relationship didn't come to an immediate end'. The agency's intervention can also help a service user make more sense of a search outcome; 'She acted as a sounding board and didn't just take the side of the person paying the money'. These examples demonstrate the high esteem in which the registered manager of the agency is held by service users who for example, repeatedly refer to her, 'compassion and understanding' coupled with the highest professional competence.

The registered manager is very involved in the wider adoption field. She offers

training as part of the services she offers, and is an active contributor to national and regional adoption groups. This assists her in being aware of the latest research and publications, which she uses effectively to inform her practice and to recommend resources to service users.

She is often involved in consultations about adoption support issues, and in her role as member of an organisation's steering group she is sometimes asked to participate in devising practice guidance

Currently she is working with others on devising good practice in working with descendants of adopted adults. This will enable a new group of service users to have positive outcomes.

Safeguarding

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

This agency is an open and learning organisation that is explicit about wishing to learn from routine service user feedback including complaints. Although there have not been any complaints to date, the agency has a transparent complaints procedure which is routinely shared with service users and contains an element of independent scrutiny. This means that the agency is well-placed to learn from any complaints in the future, in line with its current practice of learning from routine feedback.

The registered manager has prepared a comprehensive safeguarding policy, detailing what the agency will do in the event of an allegation or safeguarding concern. This includes a section on historical abuse, which has particular relevance to this service. The safeguarding policy is regularly updated in line with revised government guidance, is appropriately shared with research associates, and has been actively considered by the local safeguarding children board. The manager works across local authority boundaries, and is very aware that access to safeguarding services may vary in each local authority. She has demonstrated her excellent safeguarding practice by tenaciously following up a safeguarding concern. In addition, in quite exceptional circumstances the agency has demonstrated that it will refuse to offer a service if it feels that someone may be put at risk. This provides an important safety net to protect all parties.

Recruitment practice for associates and volunteers are robust. They involve all appropriate checks and a thorough interview process. This helps to protect all those using the adoption support service.

Leadership and management

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

The registered manager has a combined business and social work background, as well as many years of senior experience in a renowned adoption support organisation. This combination of skills supports not only the delivery of high quality

professional services, but also highly effective business practice. This is demonstrated by the manager's thorough analysis of the agency's first year of business, and her appropriately ambitious aspirations for year two. It is also well reflected in the agency's informative and attractive website which includes the comprehensive Statement of Purpose, and the agency's suite of accessible and clear policies.

Delivering an excellent service to users is at the heart of this agency's practice, and feedback is routinely sought from service users. This has been overwhelmingly positive so far, and confirms that the direction and style of the agency is highly appropriate. One service user did comment unfavourably on the length of time it took to initiate some work, and the agency immediately responded to this by obtaining more assistance with the office-based work. This clearly demonstrates that the agency can listen and learn, and thereby improve outcomes for service users.

The agency works with highly experienced associate researchers and an office-based volunteer. The associate researchers have recently begun to do intermediary work with service users. They are both experienced in this work, and the registered manager monitors the work well and retains overall case responsibility. However, there is no formal supervision system in place, which limits overall analysis of individual performance. This minor shortfall does not have an adverse effect on the direct services offered to service users.

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.