

Chrysalis Associates

48 Wostenholm Road, Sheffield S7 1LL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

Chrysalis Associates is a company that was registered as an adoption support agency in 2008. The agency specialises in the assessment and treatment of developmental trauma and attachment difficulties. Its multidisciplinary therapeutic team offers services to adopted children or children looked after and their adoptive parents or carers. Families receive an individually designed service, tailored to their needs, which is drawn from a variety of therapeutic models. The agency has four directors and employs a staff team of 11 therapeutic staff, comprising clinical and counselling psychologists, occupational therapists, art therapist and social workers. At the time of this inspection, the agency was working with approximately 160 children and their families as well as a number of adult adoptees.

Inspection dates: 29 to 31 October 2019

Overall experience and progress of service users, 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: 5 July 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This adoption support agency is outstanding because:

- Managers are inspirational and lead by example.
- Safeguarding is at the forefront of the agency's work. Comprehensive procedures and staff training mean that issues are addressed quickly.
- Managers and staff demonstrate a commitment to providing high-quality services to children and their families.
- Parents and commissioners speak very highly of the service that they receive.
- Good-quality monitoring of children's progress helps to demonstrate the positive impact that the service is having on children's lives.
- Managers are at the forefront of adoption support research and disseminate this nationally.
- Staff are skilled in their individual area of expertise.

The adoption support agency's areas for development:

- Ensure that risk assessments contain additional detail to support a shared understanding of how to keep children and adults safe.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 4.1)

Specifically, ensure that children's risks assessments contain details of triggers and the strategies that can be implemented to minimise the risk.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

The quality of therapeutic support is exceptional. The registered manager and responsible individual are experts in their field. Their research informs practice, which they disseminate nationally and use as a basis for their practice.

Children and families feel welcomed from the start of their involvement with the agency. In fact, the agency 'goes above and beyond' to ensure that service users feel as comfortable as possible. They receive detailed information about the service, the therapy itself and the profile of the individual therapist who will be involved with them. Home visits have been conducted initially, in some instances, where the child's anxieties have necessitated this. This ensures that the service is accessible to all.

Initial assessments are of high quality and include input from adoptive parents and children's schools. This helps to determine the type of therapeutic intervention required. The service does not have a waiting list and intervention begins quickly, which families appreciate as they are often in crisis at the point of referral. Therapy is underpinned by clear agreements, outlining the practical arrangements and expectations as well as the intended outcomes. Adoptive parents receive a helpful information pack at the outset, including a copy of the children's guide to adoption support and details about how to make a complaint, in case they require this.

Good-quality records demonstrate the progress being made by those who use the agency. These are routinely shared with adopters and commissioning social workers so that everyone is kept up to date and are clear about any actions that need to be completed. These contain clear analysis and help to inform the detailed end-of-therapy reports.

All therapists are appropriately qualified and experienced. The therapeutic involvement usually consists of dyadic therapies, where a therapist works with a child and their parents together, along with therapeutic parenting sessions and a children's therapy group. The agency produces very detailed reports at the conclusion of therapy, demonstrating the difference that their input has made to those who use the agency, as well as making recommendations for the future. Ongoing therapy is subject to regular review and evaluation. This ensures that any therapeutic input is focused and meaningful.

Adoptive parents speak highly of the service. It has made a real difference to outcomes for children. One adoptive parent said: 'We would not have been able to carry on without the support from the agency.' Adopters say that, although their child may not have been 'magically fixed' by therapy, as parents, they feel more equipped to cope with the difficulties and have a better understanding of the underlying problems. Another adopter said: 'They are supportive, un-shockable, understanding

and human. They make me feel that I, as the parent, am important and they help me to help my child.' This enables parents to continue to provide therapeutic parenting, even when therapy has ceased, giving children the best chance of long-term success.

Staff understand the significance of schools in children's lives. They work alongside teaching staff to help them to understand the implications of attachment issues on children and suggest an alternative approach, which may be more effective. Therapists also help parents to approach problems in school proactively yet with sensitivity, helping to ensure the best outcomes. The agency has also worked with one local school to undertake therapy-based play with a group of pre-adoptive children, with some extremely positive outcomes. Their findings are being disseminated to other professionals and will help to inform future practice.

Adoptive parents and children are aware of their right to make a complaint if they are unhappy with the service that they receive from the agency. Managers also log and respond to informal grumbles that they become aware of yet are not subject to formal complaint. Clear records show that no problems are allowed to drift, and swift action is taken to deal with them, including feedback to the service user and changes to procedures, if need be. Managers take the learning from these incidents and take steps to improve the delivery of their service, if required.

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

The agency has a strong focus on safeguarding, which has been strengthened over recent months. The agency has a designated safeguarding lead who is passionate about her responsibilities. There is a clear, recently revised safeguarding policy that all staff are familiar with. This has been agreed by local safeguarding bodies, and staff have all received updated safeguarding training.

The therapists ensure that service users are fully aware of the therapists' duty to share information of a safeguarding nature with other professionals. Staff refer promptly to other safeguarding bodies if concerns do arise. They work constructively with families, alerting them to the need to make a referral and working alongside them to ensure that the situation does not recur. Comprehensive records are kept of the referrals made so that the manager is easily able to monitor and review these.

The referring social workers are very positive about the safeguarding ethos of the agency. Ongoing support from the agency has enabled some families to remain together while investigations have taken place.

Staff have received recent training on the topics of internet safety, county lines and radicalisation. They are alert to the vulnerability of adopted children to these risks. When therapists became increasingly concerned about the radicalised views of one

service user, a referral was made and advice sought. Therapy continued for this young person, who is now making good progress and no longer expressing such ideation.

Therapists carry out risk assessments at the beginning of their work with a family. These are informed by information from the referring social workers, the schools and the families themselves. They contain details of known risks and any incidents of concern. Although staff can talk in detail about the triggers and the strategies that they use to minimise risk, such detail is not currently contained in the sole risk-assessment document. This would ensure that there is a shared understanding among staff about how to manage the risk most effectively.

Staff recruitment processes are robust. This ensures that the necessary checks are undertaken to satisfy managers that those employed are suitable to work with vulnerable children and their families. There are clear procedures for referral to the local authority designated officer, should managers have any concerns post-employment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is one of four directors of the agency. There has been a change in roles since the last inspection, with the current manager being registered by Ofsted in August 2019. She is a consultant clinical psychologist, registered with the Health and Care Professions Council, and she has a suitable management qualification. She regularly presents her research on attachment and adoption at regional and national conferences and events. Together with that of the responsible individual, a fellow director, her inspirational leadership benefits the agency. They are passionate about improving the outcomes of children who have suffered early trauma, and they lead by example. Their dedication and passion permeate throughout the team of staff, who display a similar dedication to their work.

This is a listening agency that seeks regular feedback on the difference that it is making. Regular consultations with parents, children and those commissioning their service ensure that the staff continue to meet demand and can deal swiftly with any issues that arise. Feedback is evaluated, and an action plan devised to make any necessary change. A summary of their findings and proposed action is also fed back to service users, for example some concerns about the suitability of an office base that is used for therapy have resulted in endeavours to identify a new location.

Positive comments made by children in their recent consultation include:

- 'They help me feel better when I am upset.'
- 'It helps me at home and at school.'
- 'It's fun.'

Monitoring systems are strong and effective. They ensure that the agency continues to meet demand and provide a high-quality service. Feedback from families has also meant that more locations are now used for therapy, saving families from travelling some considerable distance on a weekly basis.

The agency is slightly smaller than it was at the time of last inspection three years ago, as it has responded to changes in funding arrangements for adoption support through the adoption support fund. Managers continually review and evaluate the need for the service, alongside any changes planned to the adoption sector nationally, and respond accordingly. The service is flexible and responsive.

Managers have exceptionally positive relationships with the commissioners of their service. Communication and commitment are a strength of the agency. One professional said: 'Chrysalis' work does not just start and finish with assessment and therapeutic sessions. They work holistically with families and they find ways to assist professionals to understand the families they work with in a more nuanced way. This creates a positive impact long after the work with Chrysalis has finished.'

Managers demonstrate a commitment to staff support and training. Staff speak highly of the training opportunities available to them. Managers recognise the stressful work that their staff do, so they provide them with both a nurturing environment to work in and frequent, high-quality supervision. Staff appreciate this. Annual performance appraisal also ensures that development needs are identified, and any performance issues are swiftly addressed.

The agency has a clear and well-written statement of purpose which explains the ethos of the agency. In addition, there is a range of additional information leaflets for commissioners, adoptive parents and children, both ensuring that they know what to expect from the agency and reducing their anxieties.

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

Unique reference number: SC387711

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Inspectors

Mandy Williams: social care inspector

Jacqueline Malcolm: social care inspector



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