

The Apple Tree Centre

Registered provider: The Apple Tree Centre (south Yorkshire) Ltd

27 Brocco Bank, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S11 8RQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

The Apple Tree Centre is a therapeutic service for adoptive parents and their children. In the last 12 months, the agency provided 18 adoption support packages to children, young people and their families.

The adoption support agency provides bespoke therapy services offering play therapy, filial therapy, art psychotherapy, dramatherapy, music therapy, integrative psychotherapy, speech language and communication therapy, person centred counselling, therapeutic parenting support and systemic family therapy.

The adoption support agency was registered with Ofsted on 30 April 2020. This is the same date that the responsible individual and manager, who are co-directors of the company, were deemed fit by Ofsted to take on their roles. Both also provide therapeutic adoption support. They employ self-employed associate therapists, with eight of these therapists currently offering adoption support. There is one full-time centre manager who oversees the day-to-day running of the service.

The responsible individual has a post-graduate diploma in Non-directive Play Therapy, awarded by the University of York. The manager holds an MA in Non-directive Play Therapy, also awarded by the University of York. They are both full members of the British Association of Play Therapists, accredited by the Professional Standards Authority.

The Apple Tree Centre also offers other therapeutic work that is not adoption support. This work is not the subject of this inspection.

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 July 2022

Overall experience and progress of service users , taking into account	good
How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding

The adoption support agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: not previously inspected

Overall judgement at last inspection: none

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None, as this is the agency's first inspection since registration.

Inspection judgement

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

The agency provides timely, individualised support to adopted children and their families. The managers complete good-quality initial assessments to inform the focus of therapy, thus ensuring the most appropriate therapy and agreement of work. Families and professionals speak of the managers' flexibility to make sure that the children are at the heart of the decisions made and work undertaken.

The therapeutic work with children and adults makes a positive difference to their lives. This includes improvements in their confidence and self-worth, and children become less anxious and are better at managing change. The children are supported to manage difficult emotions through developing coping strategies. This leads to improved emotional resilience. One young adult said, 'There is a loving, nurturing energy at the Centre and it is a safe, secure place. Since coming here, I am more confident, and I am better with managing change and different routines.'

The adoption support work keeps adoptive families together by helping parents to understand and manage the needs of their adopted children. This is through the regular discussions and therapeutic parenting work available. Families report significant improvements in their family life as they gain an understanding of the impact of their children's early childhood experiences. One family member said, 'The therapists are brilliant at understanding the child and at helping parents understand. They have made a massive difference.'

The regular evaluation meetings give all those involved an understanding of the therapeutic work with children. The sharing of information provides a detailed analysis of the impact to the child, and informs decision-making about further work. The agency also engages with the staff in children's schools. This enables teaching staff to gain a better understanding of the children and their needs. This leads to a coordinated response at home and school to support the children's education.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been excellent, which included adapting to online sessions, or walking therapy with children and their families. Planned therapeutic sessions continued during lockdown, which ensured a continuity of service throughout a difficult period.

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

Safeguarding is a priority in this agency's practice. There has only been one reportable safeguarding concern since registration, with the managers acting swiftly to notify the necessary professionals.

There is good information-sharing between the managers and therapists, particularly if a child makes a concerning comment, or acts out a scenario in play. This ensures that managers closely monitor and have oversight of the work of therapists so that

any disclosures made by the children are passed to safeguarding professionals. A social work commissioner spoke positively about the safeguarding ethos of the agency. This helps to keep children and their families safe.

Children are told about therapeutic boundaries during the sessions, which helps to create safety and protection as the child learns what to expect from the therapist. Children also know about the limits and definition of confidentiality and what would need to be reported, such as a safeguarding concern. This makes sure that the professional boundaries are established in a way that is understood by children.

Children and young people who use the service feel safe to manage some difficult information or issues. The good relationships that they have with the therapists, and the child-centred pace of work, help to achieve this. Parents report that their children enjoy coming to the Centre, and one parent described the therapists as being, 'Incredibly safe, calm and professional. I could relax and didn't have to worry as there were clear professional boundaries.'

The work that the therapists undertake helps children and young people to become safer. In some cases, this has led to a reduction in self-harming or aggressive behaviour.

Safer recruitment practices are followed. This makes sure that therapists are suitable and have the qualifications and experience to carry out their roles. There is a robust interview process to ensure that the prospective therapist has the same ethos and values that the agency wants to promote.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The two full-time therapists, who are the responsible individual and registered manager, are passionate, dedicated and very child-focused. The managers and therapists are highly skilled, experienced and well trained. Research-informed practice is interwoven into the support provided. The children and families benefit from having access to an eclectic mix of different therapies, such as art, play, music and drama.

The managers are influential in their field and provide training and advice to others. This offers the opportunity to share knowledge and research and means that the agency's practice is current, evidenced and based on the latest research.

There has been a period of rapid and significant growth, and the agency has retained its quality of service. The managers recognise the importance of adoption support work to ensure children remain with their families, so this takes priority over other work provided by the agency. This means that children and families benefit from a prompt and timely service.

The managers and therapists maintain regular clinical supervision. Likewise, the therapists' annual appraisals make sure that training and membership with the registered body is kept up to date.

The therapists feel well supported and receive casework and line management supervision. Advice and support is always available, for example through a regular peer support/supervision group for therapists. One therapist said, 'There is a wonderful team, and management works hard to encourage peer support as well as providing direct support themselves. There are clear policies and guidelines to follow, and therapists are also supported and encouraged to develop their own skills and practice so that we can respond to the needs of children and families.'

All staff, adult service users, parents and professionals spoke positively about the work of the adoption support agency. One professional said, 'Their approachability is their strength, together with the quality of their interventions. They manage to calm the most worried of parents and make a positive and life-changing effect on the children they work with.'

The managers have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the agency. To improve the service, the recommendations raised at the registration visit have been followed. The managers have implemented monitoring systems, but there is no management footprint to show that records have been reviewed.

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

Recommendations

The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the agency to ensure compliance with the agency's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014 25.2)

In particular, ensure that there is a management footprint on records to demonstrate that these have been reviewed.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 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: 2570461

Registered provider: The Apple Tree Centre (south Yorkshire) Ltd

Registered provider address: 27 Brocco Bank, Sheffield S11 8RQ

Responsible individual: Mrs Rose Dymond

Registered manager: Ms Jennifer Reid

Telephone number: 01142665546

Inspectors

Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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