

Family Futures CIC

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7–9 Northampton Grove, London N1 2PL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

Family Futures is a not-for-profit community-interest company registered in February 2013. The agency provides specialised assessment and treatment for children with a history of early trauma who are fostered, adopted, placed in special guardianship placements or living with their birth families. The agency also recruits, prepares and assesses prospective adopters, primarily for harder-to-place children (i-adopt). At the time of this inspection, there were 16 approved i-adopt families with children, 14 of whom were also receiving adoption support services. Two further i-adopt families were undergoing assessment at stage 2, and two families who had applied did not progress beyond stage 1 of the process. A further 47 families were receiving adoption support services. The agency also operates a training and consultancy service.

Inspection dates: 30 July to 3 August 2018

Overall experiences 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 voluntary adoption agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the voluntary adoption agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children, young people and adults.

Date of previous inspection: 26 September 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This voluntary adoption agency is outstanding because:

- Inspirational leadership and management drive this agency to excel in offering therapeutic services for children with highly complex needs who are fostered, adopted, placed in special guardianship placements or living with their birth families.
- The agency is a nationally recognised centre of excellence for therapeutic adoption and adoption support services which address the damage caused by early developmental trauma. The agency has developed its own highly effective therapeutic model over many years, which has been externally evaluated.
- There is a high commitment to innovation and research. Published authors disseminate practice through conferences, training and consultancy work.
- The preparation and assessment of prospective adopters are therapeutic and thorough. Adopters feel well prepared for the task of adoptive parenting. Children benefit from adopters who understand the impact of early developmental trauma.
- Children are at the centre of everything that the agency does, and the young people's forum helps them to express their thoughts and share their experiences.
- The agency places a high priority on keeping children safe. Risk is considered at every step of the process, and staff work collaboratively to ensure that children are helped and protected.
- The staff team is exceptional. Staff are well qualified, experienced, consistent and committed to improving children's lives.
- Leaders and managers are passionate about their service. They are proactive and forward-thinking to ensure the continuity of services. Regular monitoring and audit serve to improve practice and support better outcomes for children.

The voluntary adoption agency's areas for development:

- Ensure that the adoption panel meets on a more regular basis to ensure the ability of panel members to work together, improve knowledge and practice and provide a gatekeeping and feedback service for the agency.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure the adoption panel meets at least one day every month to consider cases before it unless it is an adoption panel of a small voluntary agency, when it meets at least every six weeks to consider the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt a looked after child or the termination of approval of a prospective adopter. (Adoption national minimum standards, page 50, paragraph 17.3)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: outstanding

The agency is highly effective and continues to provide a high-quality service. Children and their families receive holistic care of exceptional quality, which results in excellent experiences, outcomes and progress. The agency has an in-depth understanding of children with complex needs, and specialises in providing therapies for them.

Children and their families make exceptional progress from their starting points. Given the complexity of the needs presented, the agency is a strong catalyst for achieving, enabling and promoting stability of placements. For example, one parent said, 'It would have been very hard to manage without the agency.' Another parent felt that the placement (of the child) would have ended had it not been for the expert therapeutic input that they received.

The preliminary results of the agency's current research demonstrate the outstanding effectiveness and impact of the service on children's lives.

The multidisciplinary approach by the agency is highly effective in supporting children's complex needs. Careful assessments form the basis of individual treatment plans, which support children to attend, enjoy and engage in therapy. Children are helped to manage trauma and difficult experiences through fun and play.

Children are always held at the centre of practice by this agency. They are regularly asked for their feedback. There is a postbox for ideas and/or concerns raised by children. The young people's forum has created an anti-bullying animation runs on a social media platform, and this provides an excellent representation of young people's views. The agency has devised an easily understandable 'brain game' to support children to understand the complex functions of the brain and how trauma can impact on their behaviour.

Sensory integration and body work underpin the effectiveness of the therapies that are used. Observations showed that therapists are guided by children and listen to their spoken and non-verbal language. For example, a therapist will often be working with a child while the child is playing in the gym or involved in some form of physical exercise. Sensory integration and body work frequently take place before attempting to engage children in therapy. They are then used in breaks and during sessions. This ensures that children benefit from every session that they attend.

The agency provides a fantastic environment in a beautiful setting, with excellent resources. All the rooms are child friendly and serve different purposes. The agency is well equipped with a variety of therapeutic tools, such as toys, arts and crafts, dressing-up clothes, sand trays, soft-play areas and two-way mirrors, and a gymnasium. This child-friendly environment enables children to settle and engage in therapy.

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

Prospective adopters receive excellent, bespoke assistance that prepares them to understand developmental trauma, its causes and how children respond. Prospective adopters are immersed in child-focused therapies and activities as part of their preparation. This helps them to understand how support will be offered to children, post-adoption. Some prospective adopters reported feeling outside of their comfort zone yet acknowledged that this helped them to expand their level of experience. All prospective adopters attend two-day training on 'The Great Behaviour Breakdown' during preparation and then again once children are placed with them.

Prospective adopters receive outstanding support and guidance from dedicated workers throughout the adoption process. This enables them to build strong and trusting relationships that allow real honesty and genuine dialogue to take place. Adopters and prospective adopters told inspectors that they never felt judged, which enabled them to share their concerns and difficulties and helped to develop more effective working relationships and more stable placements.

Prospective adopters said that the agency's approach to providing them with information via informal meetings, telephone discussions, home visits and information evenings was good. They appreciated and welcomed this flexible approach, and felt that it enabled them to ask questions and to explore issues in more depth. Assessments are undertaken at a pace to suit prospective adopters. Prospective adopters are also educated and learn about the impact of attachment styles, and how these can present in children's behaviours and responses. They reported finding the assessments non-intrusive, and they felt valued and that they were not being judged.

The agency keeps itself up to date with thematic safeguarding issues. Neuro-physiological psychotherapy specifically considers risk-taking behaviours which may present in children placed for adoption. The agency integrates risk assessment into all its processes and involvement with children. This approach is transparent to parents, professionals and children.

The agency has clear and up-to-date safeguarding policies, which are regularly revised to incorporate changing legislation and information. Leaders, managers and staff handle children's disclosures sensitively, and information is shared with appropriate agencies immediately. The agency consistently promotes children's welfare as integral to the whole process. Guidance for staff alerts them to all of the thematic aspects of safeguarding and vulnerabilities for children. Assessments and treatment include advice and advocacy in several key areas, such as sensory, educational, therapeutic and safeguarding.

The agency incorporates its own proactive and creative safeguarding into assessments and treatments. Assessments and treatments have a clear safeguarding focus. The agency uses its own model of assessment and intervention. The model is steeped in risk assessment and safeguarding, and its effectiveness is evidenced through research and the evaluation of practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are exemplary, and are excellent practice leaders who are highly passionate about the work that they do. They work alongside less-experienced staff to model and teach their skills. They have exceptionally high standards, and there are comprehensive structures in place to ensure that these standards are achieved and maintained. They have high aspirations for children, staff, the organisation and adoptive families.

Leaders and managers provide care of exceptional quality that is holistic and inclusive of staff and service users alike. This includes ensuring that freshly prepared food and drinks are easily available at all times, and encouraging self-care such as yoga, mindfulness and other sensory activities.

Leaders and managers are directing innovation and the development of integrated approaches to therapy and care in the adoption field. They conduct and publish research to understand the outcomes and evaluate the impact of their practice. They disseminate their knowledge through training programmes, conferences and treatments. They have developed excellent relationships with placing authorities, schools, other voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

The agency is highly regarded in the field of adoption. Staff report feeling honoured to work for such a prestigious and outstanding agency.

Leaders and managers know the agency's strengths and weaknesses well. They take a comprehensive approach to auditing, monitoring and evaluating their work. This includes commissioning a yearly audit by an outside practitioner to evaluate the services provided. They then use this report to plan the services for the coming year as a management team.

Leaders and managers gather and collate feedback from everyone who uses their services, both during and after assessment or treatment. Any suggestions are taken seriously, and there is a clear and ambitious development plan for the agency.

The agency has rigorous financial processes, and negotiates complex contractual arrangements to ensure that children receive the care that they need. They support local authority planning and applications to the adoption support fund to ensure that children receive the therapy appropriate to meet their needs.

Succession planning is well thought through and supports the future of the agency. This is a community-interest company which self-invests for the treatment and care of children with highly complex needs.

Leaders and managers provide excellent staff care, supervision, appraisal, personal development opportunities and training. Induction is thorough and supports staff to understand the organisation's values and ethos. All staff who spoke to inspectors expressed great satisfaction with the working environment and felt highly valued.

The promotion of diversity and equality is integrated into all aspects of the service. Leaders and managers are acutely aware of the future diversity required for children awaiting permanence and are actively seeking to promote recruitment in a number of creative ways.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have 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 help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families, and adult service users. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the voluntary adoption agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children, young people and adults whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

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