

Joanna North Associates

Inspection report for adoption support agency

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Inspector Paul Clark
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Joanna North Associates Ltd registered as an adoption support agency in 2006. Joanna North is the director and sole clinician.

The agency provides adoption counselling and psychotherapy, therapeutic services for adopted children, support to help ensure that relationships between adoptive parents and children continue, assistance and independent meeting management when disruption has occurred, and intermediary services for adults wishing to contact relatives. Birth records counselling is not provided.

Joanna North Associates also provides assistance to adoption agencies to prepare and train prospective adopters. The agency carries out a variety of other child-focused services which fall outside the remit of this inspection, such as reporting and expert witness services to the courts.

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

Requires improvement: 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 adoption support agency is outstanding because it has been highly effective in providing positive outcomes for adoptive families. It is continuously successful in supporting and keeping adoptive families together when they have been in danger of breaking down.

Initial assessments of adoptive family needs are comprehensively undertaken. From these assessments, plans are put in place which clearly outline the expected outcomes of the support intervention. Adoptive families are consulted about their expectations of the service and these views are included in the adoption support plans. This means that families have a real say in what the support service intervention is expected to achieve.

Families are routinely consulted about the overall service provision of the agency, both verbally and by periodic questionnaire survey. Their views have resulted in positive action being taken by the agency. This has included assisting families with access to the agency premises. The agency regularly reviews its service provision and these reviews identify areas of service development. These have been acted upon, such as the provider extending their knowledge of working with children with autism by undertaking high level training.

The provider is continuously involved in adoption practice research and has published numerous authoritative studies in this area of work. The knowledge of the provider and the quality of the published work is highly regarded as innovative by partnership agencies, which use this research to inform their own practice. One social worker commented "My own agency draws upon the knowledge of Dr North who has shared her research findings with our team and which we now use in some degree to direct our practice."

No recommendations or requirements have been made as a result of this inspection.

Experience and progress of, and outcomes for, service users

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**

Outcomes for adopted children and adoptive families are outstanding. Families are referred to this agency, or self-refer, when there is a concern that support is necessary to keep adoptive families from breaking down. The agency conducts thorough initial assessments in consultation with adopted children and their adoptive parents. These assessments clearly outline the areas where families need support and how these needs are to be met. Placing agencies include these assessments in their adoption support plans. These provide adoptive families with a clear understanding of the adoption support agency objectives.

Placing agencies report that this adoption support agency has a high level of success in maintaining adoptive families. This support can be both short and long term. One placing authority social worker commented that the agency was, "An extremely valuable service which sustains this adoptive family." Another said, "A very positive input that has maintained this adoptive family and without which it would surely have broken down." This view is shared by adoptive families themselves. One adopter stated, "The adoption support is the reason we did not disintegrate as a family. We don't think we could have coped without the support in the first 2-3 years and as importantly, the ongoing support. We are so grateful for all of the support that we have had, the benefits for our family are beyond words." This indicates that placing authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and adoptive families themselves have a very positive experience of the service provided, and take the view that the work of the agency exceeds reasonable expectations. This positive view of the service has been sustained over a significant period of time. One placing authority social worker commented, "We have worked with this agency over many years and we value highly the work she has done in sustaining many adoptive families. Her research findings and practice advice has [sic] also been invaluable to our adoption team." This is indicative of an outstanding service.

The provider has also been actively involved with partnership agencies and has supported children's educational progress by working closely with schools. Adopters have commented, "She has gone into school to liaise with my son's teacher and observed him in the classroom. The advice she has given has really helped him and the way he now functions in school." Undertaking direct work with schools exceeds reasonable expectations of an adoption support agency and this again is indicative of an outstanding service.

Quality of service provision

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The quality of the service provision is outstanding. The premises used are designed to be, and are, extremely child and family focussed. Careful attention has been paid to the environment in which the support sessions are held. High quality, child focussed décor and furnishings, and the abundance of child play resources available

together make this setting an attractive and safe place for children, young people and families to engage in highly sensitive work. Adoptive parents report that the provider takes time to identify and make available toys which individual children particularly enjoy. This helps to provide a welcoming service where children and families feel comfortable. The agency has arranged and made available an area which is accessible to children or families who have mobility access needs.

As previously stated, the agency completes an initial period of assessment with adoptive families. After consultation with children and adoptive parents, a clear plan of support is constructed and shared with the referring local authority. This plan then becomes part of the local authority's wider adoption support plan. Local authority commissioning officers report a high degree of satisfaction with the service. One commented, "An effective service which achieves desired outcomes for children and their parents. Work commissioned is actioned promptly; is cost effective, and communication with the commissioning service is prompt, respectful, efficient and helpful." This again is indicative of an outstanding service provision.

The sole provider is a professionally qualified psychotherapist with a doctorate in adoption support. The provider is continuously researching areas of adoption support work and how it can be improved, and has published numerous authoritative works about adoption. Agencies that the provider works with value highly the experience and knowledge that the provider brings to this area of work. One voluntary adoption agency social worker commented, "My own agency draws upon the expertise of Dr North who has shared her research findings with our team and which we now use, in some degree to direct our practice."

Additionally, the provider continues to update her skills and expertise by being trained in working with autistic children, and the dangers of social networking and safeguarding children. This demonstrates a commitment to continuous professional development by updating her knowledge and understanding of adoption issues directly relevant to the service provided.

Safeguarding children, young people, adults and families

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**

The provider is outstanding at keeping children and young people safe, and in protecting vulnerable adults. This is achieved by regular review of the agency's child protection and vulnerable adults' policies, its complaint's policy, and the inclusion in the agency key documents of its commitment to the safeguarding of children. Policies and documents clearly state the agency's safeguarding obligations and protocols for working with service users. This continuous review of key policies and documents demonstrates that the agency puts safeguarding at the centre of all its activities.

The provider regularly updates her own Disclosure and Barring Scheme clearance, and that of her partner, who has a business support role within the agency. Staff files are well organised and contain all of the required documentation about the

vetting of staff. This helps to keep children safe from contact with unsuitable people. Confidential information is kept securely in lockable cabinets and information held electronically is appropriately safeguarded.

The provider regularly updates her knowledge and understanding of safeguarding children procedures by personally undertaking training in this area of work, and by liaison with the safeguarding officers of the local authority. As stated, she also undertakes further training, including identifying the dangers of social media as it relates to the safeguarding of adopted children.

The provider receives monthly clinical supervision from a registered supervisor of psychotherapists. The provider has a national reputation for the quality of their research into adoption support, much of which is innovative and informs both their own safeguarding practice and that of the partnership agencies with whom they work. This has included the publication 'How to Think about Caring for a Child with Difficult Behaviour', Watershed Publications (2009)

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Adoption support work is a significant proportion of the provider's counselling and psychotherapy work. The sole provider of this adoption support agency demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting adoptive families and adults affected by adoption. For example, regular written and insightful review of the quality of service is undertaken in order to identify areas of service development. These are based upon consultation with children and adoptive families, partnership agencies, and the agency's responses to governmental changes, such as the implementation of the Adoption Support Fund and the Adoption Passport. The agency has a clear procedure and protocol for dealing with complaints, although no complaints have been received since the previous inspection.

The statement of purpose, children's guide, and guide for adults using the service are clearly written, comprehensive, and regularly reviewed. The aims and objectives of the service are clearly spelt out for those individuals and authorities using the service. Clearly defined service aims ensure that people using the service will have an up to date knowledge of the agency's service provision. All confidential records are securely stored. Case records are clearly written and up to date.

The provider has many years' experience of adoption work which includes working with children with complex behavioural difficulties. The provider is appropriately qualified, registered with the relevant professional bodies and maintains their professional standards. The provider demonstrates a commitment to continually updating their knowledge and understanding of the central issues of adoption work by undertaking regular training and participating in ongoing research in this area. This ensures that children and families using the service receive support from a competent professional.

The regular review of service provision conducted by the provider, and the continuous development of the service demonstrates that she strives to give a high quality support to adoptive families. The provider's audit records indicate financial viability and appropriate business insurance cover is in place.

The provider demonstrates a clear awareness of the regulations and national minimum standards relating to adoption support agencies. There are no recommendations relating to the last inspection and none have been made as a result of this inspection.

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.