

Angus Council Adoption Services

Adoption Service

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Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
20 March 2024

Service provided by:
Angus Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000043

Service no:
CS2004080860

About the service

Angus Council Adoption Services is a local authority adoption agency. The service recruits and supports adoptive parents to provide families for children who cannot live within their birth family and require permanent care through adoption.

An inspection of the fostering service was also undertaken, and a separate report has been completed.

About the inspection

This was an announced (short notice) inspection which took place between 26 February and 20 March 2024. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- * spoke with three families using the service
- * spoke with 12 members of staff and management
- * spoke with two independent panel chairs and the agency decision maker
- * observed practice and daily life
- * reviewed documentation
- * reviewed survey responses from adoptive parents, panel members and staff members.

Key messages

- * Children and young people were thriving in loving adoptive families.
- * Families were well supported by staff, who were highly skilled, knowledgeable, and promoted a culture of learning and development.
- * High quality life story work, including sensitive work with birth parents, helped children and young people have a strong sense of belonging.
- * Robust matching processes, including well planned child appreciation days, led to strong and secure relationships within adoptive families.
- * Post adoption support was responsive, individualised and flexible. Adoptive families highly valued the support available.
- * The service had developed a range of strategies to improve permanence planning, which was helping to reduce delay in children moving to their adoptive family.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How well do we support people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in the care provided which supported positive outcomes for children and young people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Children and young people living within adoptive families experienced compassionate care. Relationships were based upon love, trust and fun. Adoptive families accepted and understood the individual needs of children and young people. Children and young people were clearly claimed within their adoptive families.

There were strong relationships between adoptive families and staff from the service. Support was highly valued, flexible and responsive. One family told us they, "Can't rate the support highly enough...it's the reason we kept going." Another family told us, "As an adoptive parent of 14 years I still feel supported. I think that speaks volumes about the service provided. I don't feel alone as an adopter." Families had great confidence in the lifelong nature of support from the service. We concluded that relationships with staff helped to ensure stability within adoptive families.

The service was committed to promoting children's rights, with adoptive parents and staff advocating for children and young people throughout various stages of the adoption journey. At a wider level, the local authority had carried out significant work to embed the Promise and care experienced children and young people were an important part of practice developments. This resulted in children and young people being empowered within their adoptive families, and by the service.

Children and young people were supported to maintain important relationships with birth family and previous carers. The service promoted brothers and sisters being placed together for adoption. When this had not been possible, creative ways were found to help ongoing relationships. Letterbox contact was effectively managed, and support was provided to ensure this was meaningful for all involved. Children and young people had a strong sense of belonging.

Children and young people living with their adoptive families were thriving and enjoying fulfilling and active lives. Children and young people were achieving well in education, with clear multi-agency support to promote attainment. Children's emotional and physical safety was supported by clear risk assessments and robust child protection procedures.

The service valued the importance of life story work for adopted children and young people. Life story books were created for all children and young people, which were of a consistently high standard. Well written later in life letters complemented these books. Life story book training was also delivered to prospective adopters, foster carers and staff from other parts of the local authority. The addition of family support workers in the team, who could dedicate time and commitment to this area of work, helped keep it an area of priority. We concluded that the service supported children and young people to develop a strong sense of identity.

The service was very good at working inclusively with birth parents as part of the adoption process. It was the norm, where possible, for adoptive parents to meet birth parents. Birth parents had been part of preparation groups for prospective adopters, and individualised and sensitive pieces of direct work had also been carried out. An open and respectful approach with birth families helped to promote birth parents' wellbeing and added to the richness of children's life story information.

Post-adoption support was well established and responsive. Adoption support groups were informative and resourceful. The Embrace group helped children within adoptive families to develop relationships with others who had experienced adoption. When there were challenges within adoptive families, support was delivered in a timely way and was suitably tailored. Mentoring by experienced adoptive parents helped families to develop coping strategies. Staff had capacity to offer high quality interventions to families. Many were part of national developments in the sector and were well informed through training and research. Learning was routinely passed on to adoptive families, which was appreciated by those we spoke to. Staff and adoptive parents also had access to Clinical Psychology sessions to support emotional regulation. Flexible, evidence-based support helped promote positive wellbeing within adoptive families.

Preparation for prospective adopters was comprehensive and updated regularly to reflect practice developments and ensure good practice. Adoptive families benefitted from access to a wide range of training and learning opportunities provided through the service and by external providers. Adoptive families remained connected with the service through regular emails and newsletters. Robust preparation and training promoted a therapeutic and trauma informed approach to parenting. This supported children and young people's emotional development.

Assessments of prospective adopters were comprehensive, analytical and were of a consistently high standard. Assessments clearly identified strengths and vulnerabilities. Prospective adoptive families were dual approved as adopters and foster carers, which supported the child's journey smoothly and swiftly. Despite there being a clear understanding of the regulations, it was found that these had not consistently been followed in all cases. Although there was no negative outcome identified as a result, this is an area which should be developed to ensure consistency and accountability and we will follow up on this process at the next inspection.

Matching processes were very strong within the service. Linking often involved more than one family, to ensure the best possible match. Well planned child appreciation days ensured robust sharing of information about a child's life. Coordinations followed good practice and were overseen by experienced and knowledgeable staff. Foster carers were provided with training to help them with the coordination process. These processes helped to ensure adoptive placements were well planned and supported.

How well is our care and support planned?

5 - Very Good

The grade of very good has been awarded to this key question as there were a number of positive outcomes identified for children and young people.

There was comprehensive assessment of need and risk for families as part of approval assessments, and possible future implications were made clear in these assessments and matching reports. Individualised risk assessments were also completed when children moved to their prospective adoptive family, ensuring a holistic approach to assessment and planning.

Multi-agency SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound) planning ensured a collaborative approach for children requiring adoption. Staff from the service were involved in statutory review processes and provided high-quality reports to contribute to assessment and planning. This had helped children and families get the right support at the right time from a range of services.

Permanence planning had improved since the last inspection. The service had developed a range of strategies and oversight systems in an effort to reduce drift and delay for children in need of adoption. Independent advocacy was promoted and had supported legal decisions during the permanence process. The integration of children's social workers within the permanence team helped develop a degree of expertise in this practice area. In addition to having case responsibility for some children requiring permanence, mentoring was also offered to locality social workers to help progress planning and ensured a high level of oversight of children who may require adoption. This helped identify prospective matches with adoptive parents at an early stage. The service was committed to helping children to feel secure within their adoptive families at the earliest opportunity.

Children's outcomes were supported by individualised adoption support planning. Adoption support plans were in place and addressed both the needs of children and adoptive parents. The service should however develop processes to ensure adoption support plans are also in place for children placed from other local authorities. A high level of support was offered to families which was timely and highly valued. Post adoption support was clearly set out in the handbook, and children's life story books invite children back to the service in the future should they need support. The service was committed to lifelong planning for adopted children, ensuring support was available when required.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families experience compassion, dignity and respect	5 - Very Good
1.2 Children, young people and adults get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children, young people and adults' health and wellbeing benefits from the care and support they experience	5 - Very Good
1.4 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families get the service that is right for them	5 - Very Good
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects the outcomes and wishes of children, young people and adults	5 - Very Good

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