St. Andrew's Children's Society Adoption Service
Adoption Service

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Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
30 January 2025

Service provided by:
St. Andrew's Children's Society

Service provider number:
SP2003003803

Service no:
CS2004080788

About the service

St Andrew's Children's Society Adoption Service recruits and supports adoptive parents to provide a family for children from birth and beyond who cannot live within their birth families. The service provides post adoption support to people who are affected by adoption. The service is based in Leith in Edinburgh and has an office in Aberdeen. The service is managed by a Chief Executive Officer and a team of managers. The service is a charitable organisation that is run by a board of trustees.

St Andrew's Children's Society also operates a fostering service from the same premises. The services were inspected at the same time and a separate report is available for each of the services.

As the findings of this inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, inspectors cannot assure the quality of experience for every service user.

About the inspection

This was a short notice announced inspection which took place between 7 January 2025 and 30 January 2025. 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 eight caregiving families, and met with two children
- spoke with 10 members of staff and management
- spoke with four external professionals
- spoke to the independent panel chair, agency decision maker, and board members
- attended a support group and a panel
- reviewed documentation
- reviewed survey responses from 39 caregivers, 10 external professionals, 10 members of staff and one young person.

During our inspection year 2024-2025 we are inspecting against a focus area which looks at how regulated services use legislation and guidance to promote children's right to continuing care and how children and young people are being helped to understand what their right to continuing care means for them. Any requirements or areas for improvement will be highlighted in this report.

Key messages

- Adoptive parents were well supported by experienced, skilled and knowledgeable staff.
- Support was individualised, flexible, and there when people needed it.
- An empathetic and proactive approach to working with birth families helped ensure family time contributed positively to people's experiences.
- Staff were trained to provide therapeutic life story work, and this work contributed to children and young people having a clear sense of identity.
- Concurrency planning reduced the number of moves for young children and helped to achieve permanence in a quick timeframe.
- The plan to introduce adoption support profiles will help to evaluate the impact of support offered to families.

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 aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Children developed loving relationships within adoptive families. Adoptive parents were well supported by staff from the service and felt respected and listened to. One adoptive parent told us, "The service is quick to respond to queries and we have never felt alone...Cannot recommend and praise this service enough". Support groups and planned events provided an informal way for families to connect to each other, and with staff. Adoptive parents valued feeling part of a community, one adoptive parent told us, "We are delighted to be a part of the family that is St Andrew's Society". Adoptive families had a high level of confidence in their support, which helped them throughout their adoption journey.

Children were accepted and valued within adoptive families, where their individual needs were met.

Adoptive parents and St Andrew's staff were strong advocates for children and worked collaboratively with other agencies to ensure children's rights were promoted. The service should review terminology used in their policies and procedures to ensure it reflects messages from The Promise.

Adoptive parents supported children to have meaningful relationships with important people in their lives. Birth families were highly respected and adoptive parents were well prepared to value and express empathy towards them. The concurrency project meant that for many prospective adoptive parents, they were working alongside birth parents and promoting family time. Brothers and sisters were living together where possible, and there were examples where St Andrew's and adoptive parents challenged decisions to separate brothers and sisters, where this did not appear to be in the children's best interests. The service enabled children, young people and adults to develop a strong sense of family identity.

Children were well connected to the communities they lived in through attending various clubs and activities. These helped to develop friendships and a sense of belonging. Educational outcomes were very good, with adoptive parents and staff from the service working closely with schools to ensure the correct supports were in place. Transitions were also highly supported, with 'Settling to Learn' training helping adoptive parents approach these periods with confidence. Children and young people were achieving well due to the support they received.

Children and young people were kept emotionally and physically safe within their adoptive families. Support groups included inputs on topics such as internet safety, to help families to respond to risks. The service recognised the need to review their protection procedures including reporting expectations to ensure a higher level of oversight on the protection of children and young people.

There was a good level of engagement in ongoing learning and development opportunities for adoptive parents, including support groups, events and training. A new online training platform will further enhance this.

The staff team were very experienced and had a high level of training and expertise to deliver evidence-based interventions. There was a strong sense of relational and trauma informed practice within interactions, training and culture. The agency had a strong commitment to delivering therapeutic care, with staff and caregivers trained in the Safebase programme, and staff trained in Theraplay and therapeutic life story work. Life story work was well promoted, with both caregivers and staff being well equipped to support children when they needed it. Therapeutic interventions helped to build resilience within adoptive families.

Post adoption support was flexible and individualised. The service was both responsive to crises, and also acted in a preventative way to help address any arising issues. For many people support was enduring, one adoptive parent told us, "The reassurance of ongoing support was the reason we chose St Andrews and although we haven't needed any support since our littles ones have moved in, we know they are there if/ when we need them". Support extended to adopted adults when they required help with transitions or to explore birth family history. Interventions helped to provide stability and strengthen relationships.

Adoptive parents were comprehensively assessed to ensure they had the capacity to meet the needs of children in their care. The process of approval for prospective adoptive parents was streamlined, and reports were detailed and analytical. Some improvements are required in the review process for prospective adoptive parents who are fostering (see report for the fostering service).

The service advocated strongly for children in relation to permanence planning, which was positively promoted within the concurrency project. The service worked well with others in relation to matching

decisions and were child centred in their approach. The service should develop their own internal processes to mitigate against potential poor practice from placing local authorities in relation to disruptions and transitions. This will ensure accountability for the service.

There had been a number of adoption disruptions experienced by the service in recent years. There had been some team reflections and learning taken from these significant events, however it would be helpful for the service to consider a more detailed analysis of the circumstances around each disruption to ensure as much learning as possible can be taken.

How well is our care and support planned? 5 - Very Good

An evaluation of very good was awarded to this key question as major strengths were identified which resulted in positive outcomes for children and their adoptive families.

Staff from the service were an integral part of the multi-agency team around children. We received very positive feedback from placing social workers about the contributions made by staff towards children's planning. The supervising social workers and adoptive parents were strong advocates for children and young people to ensure their voices were represented in their care planning.

The service offered a wide variety of post adoption support interventions. Families were central to planning, and a creative and individualised approach was used to plan post adoption support. Consistency in staffing, and well-established relationships meant that there was strong knowledge about the individual needs of families. The service kept in touch with families throughout their adoption journey, and this helped families have confidence in their support.

Assessments of families provided a good level of oversight of the needs and risks within adoptive households. Families had adoption support plans, which were created by the placing authority at the time a child moved to their adoptive family. These documents were not always SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic or Time-bound) or reflective of current family circumstances. The service had recognised a need to develop their own plans to more comprehensively review and evaluate the effectiveness of planned support. Adoption Support Profiles were being created for all families and were to be reviewed at specific points during the adoption journey. We look forward to hearing about the impact of these profiles at our next inspection.

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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