

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC050500
Inspection date	13 August 2007
Inspector	Paul Clark
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	30 October 2006

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

TACT is a national registered charity whose service is overseen by a Board of Trustees, a Chief Executive and a Head of Social Work. Its administrative and business Head Quarters is based in London and it has eight independently registered area offices located in Wales, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, Kettering, Kent, East London and Hither Green. The eight offices make up three regions. Each region has an Area Manager. One Area Manager covers the Bristol and Wales region. The Bristol office has an experienced and professionally qualified Registered Manager, two full time Supervising Social Workers, a part time Resource Worker a full time Senior Administration Officer and a part time Administrative Assistant. The Bristol office currently has twenty approved foster care households accommodating eighteen young people. The office also offers mother and baby placements. The Bristol office is situated in prestigious waterside premises in the centre of Bristol. The offices are spacious and well furnished with sufficient toilet and kitchen facilities.

Summary

The agency provides a good level of service and its managers and staff are competent and appropriately qualified.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency now ensures that all financial arrangements relating to a young person are agreed at the beginning of the placement.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people are registered with a GP and dentist within seven days of placement. They are registered with an optician if they are known to have sight problems. However, routine dental and eyesight checks are carried within appropriate frequencies and are commented on at the young person's 'Looked After Children's' (LAC) reviews. Placing authorities arrange for an initial medical to be conducted at the time of placement and another for each annual review. Birth parents are always invited to attend LAC reviews unless there are limiting circumstances, and are sent copies of the review findings by the placing authority. The agency can access the services of the LAC Nurse and of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMHS) via the social worker from the placing authority. A LAC 'Essential Information' record is in place for each young person. These are completed by the social worker from the placing authority. Not all of these records were full and complete and there is not a system currently in place which records that the agency have written to the placing authorities to remind them of their duty in this regard. Foster carers maintain a child health record which is kept with the young persons case file when leaving placement. There is not currently a personal, individualised and user-friendly health record of accidents and illnesses, inoculations, allergies etc which can be kept by the young person. Foster carers undergo the 'Skills to Foster' course as part of their initial training and assessment. This provides advice and information on healthy diet and eating and supervising social workers check foster carers understanding of this at supervision sessions. The food choices of the young person are discussed with them at the time of their initial

placement meeting and these are written into their placement plan. Foster carers have to undergo a first aid training course within their first year of approval and update this training every three years. Accidents occurring to young people are not recorded in a designated Accident Book but recorded by foster carers on 'Incident Sheets' which are also used to record other events, for example, a child going missing. The agency will not place a child under three years of age, or a child with an asthmatic condition in a home where foster carers smoke. In all cases the agency policy is that foster carers must not smoke in the home or in front of young people. Several of the foster carers were seen to be smokers and in one case was seen to be smoking in their home. In another case, it was discovered at the foster panel approval stage that a foster carer was a smoker. The agency provides training for foster carers on dealing with drug and alcohol misuse. The agency has good links with the Barnardos 'Base' Project which gives advice to young people on sexual health and contraception. They also contract the services of a private agency who provide a range of psychological, therapeutic services for young people.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has clearly written policies on child protection, bullying, complaints and action to be taken by foster carers in the event of a child going missing, these are included in the Foster Carers Handbook. Supervising social workers and foster carers receive training in these areas. A copy of the local authority 'Safeguarding Children' document is in place. An appropriate system for the recording of complaints received is in place. Staff and foster carer recruitment and vetting systems are in place that ensure young people are kept safe. However, the inspectors noted that the agency had been advised by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) that a discrepancy had arisen in the record of one foster carer and that there had been a delay in the agency taking action to establish the facts about this. The agency conducts an appropriate health and safety check of foster carers households at the time of recruitment and annually thereafter. The agency checks that staff and foster carers driving licences are current and that they are notified of any driving offences. There is an annual check that cars used to transport young people have insurance cover and that MOTs are in place. The agency ensures that foster carers have a out of hours contact number that will provide them with help and support. The Foster Panel is chaired by an experienced and professional person. The panel membership is balanced in gender and ethnic composition. There are members with medical and educational expertise and there is one member who has personal experience of having been fostered. The panel matches well young people with appropriate carers and sets out the distinct conditions of placement. For example, the age and number of young people that can be accommodated at the time of approval. TACT provides supervised contact between young people and their birth families where necessary and these are conducted at a number of safe and appropriate locations.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency have purchased an education software package called 'Learn Direct' which all foster care households can access via their home computers. This can be used to support young people with their studies. The agency ensures that all foster care households have a computer. There is an agency policy on safe use of the internet. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are in place for all young people placed. The construction of these are the responsibility of the placing authority. Although the agency will chase the placing authority when these are not in place, there is no system in place to record that they have done so. There is evidence on young peoples

files that shows that the agency resource worker has supported young people with their educational studies when they have been excluded from school. The young people receive age related pocket money consistent with that given by their placing authority. An initial clothing allowance of £150 is given. There are appropriate additional allowances for birthdays, Christmas and holidays. The arrangements for the provision of mobile phones is subject to discussion and agreement between young people, foster carers and the social worker from the placing authority.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency does not currently arrange periodic support groups for fostered young people or for groups of foster carers birth children. The agency does not currently provide an information newsletter for these groups or for foster carers. However, the Registered Manager stated that the agency were about to appoint a national Participation Officer who will undertake this function in addition to organising a range of collaborative and consultancy services for young people. Also, the agency has one identified member of staff in each of its regions who serves as a 'Children's Champion'. Their function is to consult with young people and to seek their opinions on the service provided. This group has recently organised an adventure weekend which young people told the inspectors that they really enjoyed. A full information pack is provided for each young person using the service. This contains contact details of all relevant people and agencies. The agency will arrange and undertake supervised contact between young people and their birth parents where appropriate in a range of suitable venues. Young people and their birth parents are always invited to attend Looked After Children's (LAC) reviews and a copy of the review findings is always sent to them. Young people's opinion of the standard of care provided is always sought at review meetings. Independent advocates to support young people can be accessed via their placing authorities.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

As previously stated, age related pocket money scales are consistent with those given by the placing authorities and are agreed at the initial placement meeting and paid from the foster carers allowance. There is an initial clothing allowance paid by the agency and children consulted felt that they have a fair amount of choice over their clothing provision. There was evidence seen in case files that the agency attempts to prepare young people for independent living and Pathway Plans are in place for most of the young people nearing the end of formal statutory schooling. However, some gaps were noted and although the Registered Manager said that the placing authorities were reminded of their duty in this regard there was no record that this had been done. Foster carers ensure that all young people open savings accounts.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A clear and comprehensive Statement of Purpose is in place. A Young Person's Guide provides them with a range of relevant information and is written in a user-friendly format. The Foster Carer's Handbook contains all necessary documentation and advice on policies and procedures. All of these documents are periodically reviewed and updated. A Certificate of Public Liability Insurance is displayed. A corporate business plan for 2007/2008 was seen. An internal audit was carried out by the organisations business manager within the past year and an external audit has also been carried out. All of these matters suggest that the agency is mindful of

ensuring its financial viability. There is an internal system of monitoring the service as required by Schedule 7 of the Care Standards Act and this is conducted by the Regional Manager on a monthly basis and a report sent to the Registered Manager who produces an action plan in response. Appropriate systems of staff recruitment and appointment are in place. CRB checks are updated every three years. Job descriptions identify all areas of individual staff responsibility. All staff are required to have an annual Personal Development Plan in place which identifies their training needs. A training programme for staff and foster carers was seen to contain all key skills areas to enable staff to carry out their professional and caring responsibilities. Newly recruited foster carers undertake the Skills to Foster course as part of their initial training and as part of the approval process. The agency pays for foster carers to be members of the Fostering Network. Foster carers do not have to undertake a professional qualification such as NVQ Level 3 in Child Care. Appropriate levels of foster carer supervision is carried out by supervising social workers. Foster Carers have a support group meeting every two months. There is an out of hours support system for foster carers.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
6	investigate CRB discrepancies as a matter of urgency. (Regulation 11a)	30 September 2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that placing authorities are reminded of their duty to provide the agency with a full and complete LAC health record for each young person placed and that a record is kept when authorities have been reminded of this.
- produce a personal, individualised and user-friendly health record of accidents and illnesses, inoculations, allergies etc which can be kept by the young person.
- record all accidents occurring to young people in a designated 'Accident Book'.
- foster carers should be asked whether they are smokers at the assessment stage, and if so this should be recorded and made known to the foster panel. Those foster carers who smoke must be reminded of the agency policy forbidding smoking in the home or in front of young people. The agency must be more proactive in helping those foster carers who smoke to give up.
- ensure that placing authorities are reminded of their duty to provide young people with Personal Education Plans and that a record is kept of this reminder.
- arrange support groups for fostered young people and for foster carer's birth children.
- produce newsletters for foster carers, their birth children and fostered young people which provide them opportunities to be consulted about any changes proposed by the agency.

- ensure that placing authorities are reminded of their duty to provide young people with Pathway Plans and that a record is kept of this reminder.
- encourage foster carers to undertake NVQ Level 3 in Child Care.

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.