

# The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Christy Wannop / Jacqui Gosling
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	16 May 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

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) is an incorporated charity and Independent Fostering Agency. Tact was established in 1993 to provide an ethical service to children. The head office is in London and there are eight branches throughout England and Wales. The Birmingham branch of TACT currently has 33 fostering households and can potentially look after a maximum of 64 children in those households, although 37 were in placement at the time of the inspection. The service caters for children from birth to under 18 years in emergency, short and long term placements. TACT have a special arrangement with Birmingham local authority as a preferred provider. There is a Registered Manager, five fostering social workers and three administrative staff. The agency also sometimes uses sessional social workers to carry out assessments and direct support work. The agency operates an independent fostering panel. The office premises are near to the city centre and there are a range of rooms available for private discussions, meetings and staff to work and worship. The agency makes a room available for local authority to hold supervised contact visits. Foster carers receive between £322 and £406 per week per child.

### Summary

Inspection agencies are required to be inspected once every three years. This was an announced key inspection. It focused on the 17 key standards relevant to this agency. These include National Minimum Standards (NMS) relating to health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. At the last inspection the provider had been required to take action to make sure that the fostering panel was properly quorate and that professional supervision of foster carers was consistently delivered. The manager is experienced, capable and has practical systems to ensure practice is monitored and good practice promoted. The service is ethical, being of charitable status and not for profit. It is efficient and delivers a good quality foster care service.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### Improvements since the last inspection

The Registered Person has taken action to ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members and that all carers receive consistent supervision.

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes and safeguards children's physical and mental welfare. Children's health needs are generally met, and some carers have experience of supporting children with complex health needs. Carers receive basic training in promoting good health and children are encouraged to follow healthy lifestyles and said that their carers gave them support and advice and practical help to do exercise. There are good systems for recording child health and medication and each child has health plan that can follow them to their next placement. Children are usually helped to access the health services they need, though children's placement agreements do not have up to date information about arrangements for tasks and responsibilities for health care and not all carers have first aid training and this may have an impact on the health of children in placement. Carers provide greater written detail about children health

needs to evidence their competence at their review rather than to contribute to the looked after child (LAC) review.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

The manager of the service is skilled, qualified and experienced in fostering and in management. The service ensures that children live with carers who can provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment by carrying out regular health and safety assessments and training staff and carers to understand practical risk management. Children are placed with foster carers who can meet their needs. This is a small agency and staff have a good knowledge of the carers and what they can offer a prospective child in placement. There is a high demand for children to be placed in an emergency. At the time of placement, the agency carries out a risk assessment which includes matching the child's needs to those of the carers, however this is basic and does not include an assessment of the impact a placement may have on children already living in the home or the additional input needed to compensate for gaps in the match between child and carer. Children are protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation. Carers have initial training in child protection and managing behaviour. Safe caring guidelines are usually in place for each household but child specific guidelines are not sufficiently full to evidence what carers have to do to keep children safe and this has the potential for risk. Plans are not always signed or dated so it is not clear whether they have been updated following incidents of concern. Management systems are in place to collate information about safeguarding and this is part of the manager's routine monitoring. The Manager has referred concerns appropriately to Ofsted and the local authority, none of these has resulted in a section 47 investigation by the Local Safeguarding Board. New child protection guidance within the organisation, has not yet been issued to carers or fully implemented or adhered to in respect of management of the outcome of recent child protection allegations against carers. Social work staff have not yet been trained in TACT's new Safeguarding Procedures or in those of the Local Safeguarding Board. A social worker commented that the agency was supportive of the view of the local authority in keeping children safe. The social work staff and foster carers who work for the agency are suitable to work with children and young people, however not all office based staff who may have contact with or access to information about children have a satisfactory check with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and this has the potential to put children at risk. The fostering panel is well-organised, efficient and effective and made up of experienced, well qualified people who make good quality decisions about the approval of foster carers and provide a quality assurance function to ensure consistency and fairness. The foster carer register and minutes of panel are not clear that all carers who cease to foster with the agency, have had their approval terminated. This has the potential for confusion when carers, about whom there are concerns, resign before the panel has the opportunity to give notice of a termination and invite appeal.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Children and young people are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality. Carers and staff value children's individual backgrounds and personalities. Diversity training for carers and staff is promoted. Individual placement agreements and matching documents do not always evidence how carers will meet the needs of children where trans racial placements are made, but carers and social work staff described how they support individual

children. The positive attitude to diversity displayed by the service, supported by skills, training and positive recruitment, promotes the self-esteem of young people placed within the fostering service. Foster carers and fostering social workers help children to achieve educationally and develop socially. Carers maintain good information about educational progress and support young people to attain full potential. Carers commented that the agency responded with speed whenever educational issues arose. TACT has access to a range of advisors for childcare, medical, educational and legal advice. Children described how carers helped them with homework and revision.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Children and young people are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as described in initial plans made by the placing authority, though children may not always agree with these plans. There is not a reliable plan detailing current arrangements or tasks specifically required by carers. Where carers do not follow contact arrangements, the agency makes efforts to ensure that they update their knowledge and competence but has not evidenced that this has happened. One child described how carers had helped to have more contact with their family. Carers understand the importance of listening to the views of children, and social workers ensure that they meet regularly with foster children to seek their opinions. Children give their views to, and about, carers and are encouraged to have a voice. The organisation is committed to consultation and the manager encourages a child focus throughout the office and the work with families. Children said they were given choices and helped to think about their future, right and wrong. .

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and information for children is very good and they confirmed they knew it. Staff are organised in a way which delivers an efficient and effective foster care service. The management of the service is well-organised and there is a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. A social worker described this as pro-active. The manager ensures that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are implemented effectively. Carers said they felt well supported by individual social workers, though one raised concerns about differing amounts of information given to different carers and about the level of interest shown by the agency. Another wrote that any issues had been dealt with immediately and efficiently. Staff have professional supervision and there is on-going training. There are sufficient experienced and qualified staff and carers to meet the needs of the children and young people who are cared for, and the manager has a strategy for improving and developing the service. TACT has a national system for reviewing the quality of service in each branch. The service has a wide range of approved foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds; this reflects the local community, and enables young people's specific needs regarding their culture or ethnicity to be met. Children said they liked carers because they were kind and helpful but one had criticisms of the organisation's bureaucracy that stopped them from living an ordinary life. Foster carers understand what is expected of them, have foster care agreements, are supported by social work staff and have

access to guidance when they need it and are helped to develop their skills. Carers said that they were fully satisfied with support from the agency. The Manager has a system to monitor essential records in respect of complaints, accidents and allegations, staff, carers and children. It was not clear from records how actions arising from child protection concerns or identified following complaints about practice had been formally resolved in line with the agency's procedures, though staff and the manager were clear that issues had been addressed. Registers for carers and children do not consistently contain all the required information, such as legal status, dates of placement with carers, carer review or when changes have been made to approval category. Agency social workers do not always have up to date information about the children, for example, legal status, and essential looked after children documentation (LAC). There is evidence that the agency asks the placing authority for this information. Children's placement agreements are drawn up in the early days of each placement but are not updated and do not have the detail necessary to identify tasks and responsibilities of carers and this could mean that children's needs are not met. However, each child has an up to date record of the day to day work carried out by carers and the quality of carers recording about health, education and contact within the child's information file in the home is generally good. One carer commented negatively on the agency's focus on record keeping and excessive paperwork rather than the child and their life. Some carer and children's files contain sensitive personal information that does not refer to them, such as information about other children also in placement and detailed health and education records and safe care plans of children who have moved on. This has an impact on how this information is stored, passed on and accessed confidentially by children.

## 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
9	ensure that there is a consistent policy and procedure to safeguard children known to all staff and foster carers. Regulation 12	31 March 2008
15	obtain a satisfactory CRB check for all staff employed by the agency, with access to children or information about children. Regulation 20	31 March 2008

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that carers are given training on child health and hygiene issues and first aid. Standard 12.5
- provide social work staff with training in safeguarding children at a level appropriate to their roles and responsibilities. Standard 9

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- ensure that safe care assessment leads to guidelines that are specific to each child in placement and have sufficient detail about how the risks are to be managed and reduced. Standard 9.3
  - ensure that social workers make an assessment of the risks and impact that a child moving in or out of the foster home may have on children already in placement and of the additional input needed to compensate for gaps in the match between child and carer. Standard 8
  - ensure that in making decisions in respect of existing carers who resign, that the panel considers the procedure in Regulation 29 regarding the termination of approval, notice and appeal, and the foster carer file shows the reason for the termination. Standard 30
  - update placement agreements so that key tasks and responsibilities of carers are explicit; particularly for health, contact, education, cultural, language, and safeguarding needs of children as they change. Standard 24 & 25
  - ensure that outcomes and actions arising from complaints and concerns about carers or child protection issues are clearly evident from foster carer's supervision and review reports and from fostering panel minutes. Standard 21
  - ensure that the information kept on foster carer and children's files is accessible to those it relates to, can be passed on if the child moves to another placement, and is kept in compliance with legal requirements and the organisation's policy on case recording. Standard 24 & 25
  - ensure the Register of Foster Carers contains all information required by regulation 31, including dates of reviews and changes to approval category. Standard 25
  - ensure the Children's Register shows all information required by Schedule 2, including legal status and names and dates of each placement with foster carers. Standard 25



## 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.**