

TACT East London

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Unique reference number | SC063688 |
| Inspection date | 17 January 2008 |
| Inspector | Joanna Moore |
| Type of Inspection | Key |

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| Date of last inspection | 29 January 2007 |

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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 East London is one of nine TACT offices across three regions. As a whole the organisation provides a national fostering and adoption service. Tact East London is a registered Independent Fostering Agency. The organisation is a registered charity.

Summary

This was an announced inspection of the service carried out as part of the annual inspection program. The agency works hard to provide an outstanding level of support to its carers and the young people they care for. Carers and young people all speak very highly of the agency.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The manager and some supervising social workers left the agency in late 2006. The agency has come through an unsettled period and the new manager and staff have had an opportunity to bring their individual skills to the service. Carers report that they continue to be well supported. The actions required at the last inspection have been met. The agency has now ensured that the panel is fully operational and that annual reviews are carried out as required. The agency is supporting carers to develop individual safe care guidelines. Records of carers training are clearly held. Unannounced visits to carers now take place at least twice a year.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Each child is well supported in relation to their health and developmental needs. Carers maintain records of health checks including dental and optical checks and ensure that their vaccinations are up to date. Young children have their development monitored by the health visitor. The health needs of each child are reviewed at each carer's supervision visits. Where insufficient health information is supplied by the placing authority the agency follows this up in writing. A referral is made to specialist support such as the Children's mental health team where this is thought appropriate. Carers say that they are given as much information as is possible at the time of the young person's placement. Reviews are held as per statutory timescales but the agency does not hold a copy of the minutes of each child's' review. Health promotion is discussed in carers meetings and young people confirm that carers support them in making healthy lifestyle choices. Young people say they feel well cared for and are provided with sufficient healthy food ' good food, yummy!'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has robust recruitment systems in place which prevent unsuitable people gaining employment as staff within the agency or being recruited as carers. Recruitment practices meet regulatory requirements and national minimum standards. Carers before being approved are assessed in detail using a recognised competency based assessment. The assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker who has undertaken the in house TACT 'Form F' training. A matching policy is in place which underpins the needs for good matching. As part of the matching

process a risk assessment is undertaken and this looks at all areas of need including racial and cultural origin, religious needs and the skills and approval category of carer. The panel process is clearly explained to carers and they are supported through the process by their supervising social worker. The agency provides prospective carers with information about the panel and how it works. Panel members undergo a clear recruitment process in line with regulatory guidance. The panel meeting minutes demonstrate that the panel has systems in place for when the panel chair is unavailable and that meetings are only held when the panel is quorate. The agency benefits from the panel having access to medical and legal advice. Where specialist advisors are used or are panel members, the agency is able to demonstrate that the professional qualifications have on all occasions been verified. Panel members are embarking on a system of appraisal which will include looking at panel members training needs for 2008. The panel is clear that its role includes quality checking prospective carers form F assessments of carers and raises any issues with the carers and/ or supervising social workers. The agency has clear safeguarding policies in place which are known to staff and carers. Where allegations are made these are appropriately notified and young people safeguarded. All carers receive safeguarding training, however, for some this has not taken place within the past three years. The agency maintains clear records of accidents, missing from care and other significant events. Policies on restraint are known to carers. A complaints policy is in place. No complaints have been made in the past year. Young people and foster carers are aware of how to and to whom they can make a complaint. Carers have begun to develop a set of safe care guidelines for their home which will be made available to young people. The safety of the carer's house is regularly discussed in supervision meetings and a full check carried out for each annual review. The agency carries out unannounced checks to each carer at least twice a year. Carers and young people's feedback indicates no concerns in relation to bullying. TACT however is arranging training for all staff and carers on bullying in the near future. Young people, have with the support of the children's worker, been involved in a national bullying survey. Young people discuss issues of keeping safe and bullying in their discussion groups. Carers say that they feel confident that they are able to safeguard young people. Carers feel supported by the agency and will contact the agency with any concerns. Young people say they feel safe and well cared for. ' I feel very well cared for because I feel part of the family'...' I am very happy with the way I am cared for.'

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Carers and the organisation demonstrate deep commitment to the educational opportunities for children. Young people's education is monitored regularly by the supervising social workers. Carers secure the best school placements for children, attend their parents' evenings and assist children. Where issues arise at school the carer liaises with the school. Some carers have arranged private tutoring. The children's worker provides one to one teaching to young people excluded from school or will support a child in the classroom to maintain the placement. The agency does not have on file a copy of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) for every child. Where children have not had a (PEP) devised the agency has followed this up with the placing Authority. Young people's achievements are celebrated in the TACT newsletter. Carers say TACT 'are constantly monitoring the progress of the young person'. Young people say their carers actively support and promote their education. Comments from young people include 'my carers help me', 'my carer always advises me in my education but I decided against following some of the advice' and ' my carer tells me about the importance of education and how that can help me towards living a better life. I am also doing very good at school as I had four awards last year and hope

to achieve more this year.' Young people benefit from a wide range of out of school activities such as dance classes, ice skating and swimming. Trips have been arranged such as those to Margate, Thorpe park, the pantomime and the Zoo. Young people also enjoy trips with their school and church groups. TACT organised a residential weekend for young people which was gravely enjoyed. Young people's comments on activities and trips included ' I enjoyed the day trips to Thorpe Park and Margate seaside last year, it was fantastic trip.' and 'I want TACT to organise things like the big weekend for younger kids.' Carers show genuine caring and empathy towards the children placed. The foster families have built up strong trusting relationships. The agency ensures that carers are aware of cultural diversity through training and support groups. Children are carefully placed to ensure cultural, linguistic and religious needs are met. In each supervising visit the continuing appropriateness of the placement is reviewed. Carers say, ' TACT has a good understanding of all cultures and are willing to find out or help.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency demonstrates a clear commitment to supporting family contact arrangements as guided by the placing authority. The agency has a contact centre which can be used for supervised contact sessions. Carers are aware of the importance of contact and take the children to meet with their parents or the parents visit the child at the carer's home. Young people are made aware of the services and how to complain in the useful young persons guide. Young people were involved in developing the guide which is easily accessible and attractive. It is provided in written and DVD formats. The agency has excellent innovative schemes in place to involve young people in the day to day decisions of the agency. The agency has a children's worker whose remit is to develop methods of consultation for young people. Young people are offered the opportunity to undertake paid participation training. Having undertaken this, the young people are then able to take part as a paid trainer in training prospective carers. Young people are able to undertake other key roles including being a member on the board. The young peoples group is consulted on key policy changes. In order to widen the net of consultation, the agency uses the five organised activity trips per year to seek young peoples views. A residential activity weekend open to young people over the age of 12 is held once a year. The outdoor activities such as climbing are mixed with workshops laid on to discuss TACT and obtain young people's views. The approach however is not in the style of formal workshops but in ways which engage with the young people such as the 'big brother experience' where the chairman of the board was subjected to questioning in the style of a big brother housemate. This weekend was a great success with young people, carers, and staff alike. Young people commented they were disappointed that they were too young to go. In response the agency is looking at developing a similar smaller event for younger ones. Carers feel that the agency is committed to consulting with young people. Carers say 'they are always laying on activities and asking the children what they think' and 'The young people have always been involved in the decisions about how the fostering service is run. They have regular meetings.' Young people say that the agency is good at consulting with them. Young people also say that their carers involve them in day to day decisions and planning for the future, 'my carer always listens to me and I can speak to her at anytime. I can ask her anything that I don't understand and she always explains it to me.' TACT encourages the young people to take part in community and parliamentary consultation activities outside of the agency. The young persons worker has supported young people in attending parliamentary discussion groups on 'young people in care', therefore, influencing national policy.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Carers benefit from regular payments of allowances significantly above national guidance. A system of bonuses is in place which carers are able to achieve based on attendance at training, achieving an NVQ, passing their annual review, organising a family holiday and long service awards. Young people benefit from a regular savings scheme in preparation for when they leave care. Each carer saves ten pounds per week per child into a bank account which is intended to stay with the child until they leave care. Young people are assisted in developing self help skills informally by their carers. Having reached 14 the young people and their carers are provided with a helpful manual 'next steps, a guide to leaving care'. This manual examines employment rights, leaving care rights, health matters, benefits, budgeting, legal matters and includes a directory of useful numbers. The manual has a section which guides carers on how to support the young person. Young people benefit from the opportunity to attend a six week 'skills for life' course run by TACT. The course covers key areas of preparing for independent living. This course is well received by carers and young people. Attendance is voluntary but young people receive £160 if they complete the whole course. Young people are able to gain direct support from the children's worker in any issues to do with leaving care or preparing for adulthood for example assistance with University applications. Young people say ' people talk to me about my future and are giving me good advice'.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency is well managed and clear lines of accountability exist. Staff are effectively supported through the approachable open door management style and have a manageable caseload. The agency demonstrates a clear commitment to providing staff with training and keeping them up to date on changes in national and organisational progress. Practice meetings are held regularly to ensure consistency and as an opportunity to discuss changes in practice. An appraisal system is in place to monitor staff performance and identify training needs. Staff supervision systems are in place, however, not all staff have received sufficiently regular supervision. All agency staff demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting carers and safeguarding young people. Different parts of the organisation communicate effectively with others. TACT is accredited with investors in people. The office itself is well equipped for the purpose of running a fostering agency. Financial matters are managed centrally. Statutory records held within the office are appropriately maintained and securely stored. Staff and carers feel that TACT is a good organisation to work for and that the East Ham office is well managed. Placing authorities feel that the agency communicates well with the placing authority and other agencies. The acting manager of the agency is suitably qualified and experienced and is required to submit an application for registration to Ofsted. Clear systems are in place for monitoring the quality of the service provided. The review carried out in 2007 in line with regulation 42 is development and a copy, once the document is completed is to be sent to Ofsted. Tact is developing a system to track the improvements in the five outcome areas for children, in the period that they are with TACT carers. Young people are made aware of the services and how to complain in the useful young persons guide as well as through the children's worker. Young people were involved in developing the young person's guide which is easily accessible and attractive. It is provided in written and DVD formats. Staff and carers have access to key policies through the handbooks provided to them. Carers are very well supported by all staff within the agency. Carers are able to attend regular support groups in their local area. The support groups are well attended and

speakers such as the local police are invited. Carers are able to call on the 24 hour support and guidance that the agency provides. Carers are given opportunities to attend relevant international events on behalf of TACT and are encouraged to share what they have learnt at support groups. A wide variety of training is offered to carers. However, there is a need to ensure that all carers undertake regular updates of basic training. These are some of the things carers say: 'TACT provides me with 24 hours a day and 365 days a year support. I find it useful especially when I am at the hours of my desperation.' 'TACT provides me with a highly qualified and experienced social worker on a permanent basis.' ' In my opinion TACT is doing the maximum at all levels'. 'TACT has been my rock, always there to pick me up when I am low and when I need professional help. I feel secure knowing that I am not alone and that help is always at hand.' 'In my opinion TACT is one of the best service providers, they cover every angle of the child's needs and supervising the carers to make sure that the children are being well looked after. They have very caring and professional staff always on hand to give support.' 'they are doing a very good job' ' my agency is very supportive they provide training, advice and support.' 'TACT is a very good agency and as a carer I have nothing to complain about them. I would rather praise them as the managers and staff are all very supportive'. 'TACT is a very good agency to foster for and I am happy to be one of their carers. TACT has the interests of looked after children at heart and will do their best to support both their carers and the children who are at the centre point here.'

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 |
|----------|---|------------------|
| 2 | ensure an application for registration of the manager is submitted (regulation 6) | 29 February 2008 |

Recommendations

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

- ensure a copy of each child's personal education plan is held (NMS13)
- ensure that all staff receive regular supervision (NMS 20)
- ensure a copy is held of each child's review. (NMS12)
- ensure all carers undertake key training regularly particularly child protection and first aid (NMS 23)

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.