

TACT - The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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 (known as TACT) is a Charitable Independent Fostering Agency, the largest fostering charity in the country and a Company Limited by Guarantee. The agency is managed by a Board of Trustees with day to day management being undertaken by a Senior Management Team. Three Regional Managers are responsible for eight area-based offices: East Midlands, Birmingham, North West, Wales, Bristol, London, East London and Kent. The East Midlands office, located in Kettering, Northamptonshire was the subject of this inspection and is divided into two teams, the Fen area and the Shire area. There are 59 carer households and 70 young people placed with these foster carers. TACT provides a range of fostering placements: Short Term, Long Term, Emergency, Bridging and Mother and Baby.

Summary

This is an announced key inspection. It focuses on the 17 key Standards relevant to this fostering service. These include National Minimum Standards (NMS) relating to health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. The inspection also included consideration of NMS 2, 5 and 22 relating to the management of the agency and the support to foster carers. The inspection considered the progress made by the fostering service in meeting the two recommendations made at the last inspection. The inspection found that TACT provides an outstanding service to young people and their foster carers. The agency is well managed and policies, procedures and practice all ensure that the safety and well being of young people are the focus of the agency and its staff.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Two recommendations were made at the last inspection of the service in December 2006. The agency was recommended to obtain signed consent to medical treatment in respect of all young people placed. Whilst the agency's individual foster placement agreement does contain a section as to whether foster carers have consent to arrange routine medical care and there was evidence that the agency had tried to obtain written consent from all placing authorities, appropriate was not in place for all young people at the start of the placement. This recommendation therefore remains in place. In addition the agency were recommended to improve its monitoring of the completion of the matching forms to ensure that it is able to evidence the considerations, which have influenced decisions about the appropriateness of a placement match. The agency have in place excellent matching processes, which are now monitored carefully by managers, who sign off all placements, to ensure that young people are appropriately placed with foster carers who can meet their needs. Where there are shortfalls, actions are identified to address the shortfalls. In addition the TACT have split the social worker team into two teams, the Shires team and the Fen team, to ensure better support to foster carers.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people's health needs are being clearly identified and met by the agency. The agency ensures that information is gathered in relation to a young person's health prior to placement. This forms a sound basis for identifying the support young people will need in relation to health

and to identify the most appropriate foster carer to meet the need. However, as identified at previous inspections the agency does not always manage to obtain signed consent to medical treatment in respect of all young people placed with foster carers and this could result in a delay in young people getting medical treatment. The agency's individual foster placement agreement does contain a section as to whether foster carers have consent to arrange routine medical care and there was evidence that the agency had tried to obtain written consent from all placing authorities. Foster carers ensure that young people receive appropriate medical treatment and lead a healthy lifestyle. Young people are registered with local health professionals and are supported to access specialist services where this is identified as part of their care plan. There are good systems for recording young people's health. Foster carers record information regarding the administration of both prescribed and non-prescribed medication, accidents and illnesses in the young person's diary; this is then used to inform the young person's review. The agency maintains and monitors a record of this information. Young people's health is discussed as part of the regular supervision of foster carers and used to provide information for young people's reviews. Foster carers receive training in first aid and other relevant health related areas to enable them to meet young people's health needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Clear policies and procedures, which are understood by staff and foster carers help to ensure young people are kept safe. The agency operates sound practices in relation to recruitment and staff vetting, which ensure that all who work for the agency are suitable to do so and have the necessary qualifications and skills to undertake their roles. Comprehensive staff files are well-maintained to demonstrate the vetting, application and interview processes which candidates undertake. Records demonstrate that staff are subject to induction, probation and appraisal to ensure continued suitability to work with children in a fostering setting. The agency has clear policies regarding the need for risk assessments if a positive Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check is received in respect of staff or a foster carer; however, appropriate written risk assessments had not been completed in line with this policy. Managers confirmed that all positive checks were given careful consideration but no written risk assessments had been completed. Foster carers provide warm comfortable homes for young people placed with them. Foster carers' homes are checked for hazards as part of the process of approval and review. The carer's driving licences, MoT and insurance are checked at the time of the foster carer's annual review. All young people visited as part of the inspection state they feel safe and had their own bedroom to provide appropriate privacy. The agency seeks full information on young people who are referred for placement enabling them to identify the foster carer who can best meet their identified needs. A matching form, which includes a risk assessment, is completed by the duty officer, discussions take place with the supervising social worker for the proposed foster carer and any proposed match is agreed by the manager. Foster carers confirm that they receive all available information regarding a young person and that detailed discussions take place prior to a placement being made. Individual foster placement agreements are completed at the start of a placement to ensure that all information is shared with the foster carers to enable them to appropriately meet the needs of the young person. Where there are gaps in the foster carer's ability to meet the needs of a young person these are identified at the planning meeting and plans developed to ensure that all young people's needs are met. The agency undertakes a risk assessment in relation to the proposed placement in respect of the young people already in placement, to ensure that the risk of the disruption of current placements is minimised. Consequently, there are few placement break downs; this provides a high level of

stability for young people. Young people's welfare is safeguarded through the child protection procedures operated by the agency. These have been reviewed since the last inspection. Foster carers and staff demonstrate understanding of the procedures. They are supported in this by clear guidance within the agency's documents, training in child protection and during supervision. TACT ensures that foster carers receive all appropriate information regarding the young person who is to be placed with them to ensure that they can appropriately care for the young person. Comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken for all placements of young people. Foster carers also develop a household safe caring plan, and the agency complete behaviour management plans as part of each young person's individual foster placement agreement, so that young people are kept safe. Safe care plans and risk assessments are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they remain appropriate. However, safe care plans are not being signed by the placing social worker, this may result in important information being overlooked. The fostering panel considers new assessments of foster carers and all annual reviews. The panel was not observed as part of the inspection; however, minutes of the last three panels were examined as well as those on foster carer's files pertaining to their approval and review. These documents confirm that the panel are robust in their decision making in respect of an applicant's suitability. The panel is properly constituted and has recently recruited a young person who has had experience of foster care. The panel also includes a wide range of experienced practitioners, who are able to contribute effectively to panel discussions. The agency ensures that CRB checks and references are undertaken in respect of all members in addition to a formal interview to ensure they fully understand the importance of the fostering panel and their role in approving foster carers. Panel members are provided with regular training in respect of relevant issues. The Fostering Panel meetings are held on the first floor, so that it is accessible to all parties.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency is aware of the importance of equality and respecting diversity. It has clear policies regarding valuing diversity, which are understood by staff and foster carers. Training is provided in these areas to ensure that they are sensitive to young people's needs. The agency obtains all relevant information regarding a young person's needs to enable an appropriate match to be sought so that the foster carer can meet the specific needs of the young person's culture or ethnicity. Where it is not possible to find a perfect match, provision is put in place to support foster carers in meeting the needs of the young people. Foster carers and the agency place a high priority on supporting young people's education and support is given to young people to pursue leisure activities to enhance their self-esteem. Young people placed with the agency have achieved good outcomes in education. The expectations of foster carers in respect of a young person's education is clearly identified in the foster placement agreement and records demonstrate that foster carers attend school meetings, encourage young people with their homework and ensure good attendance at school. The agency support foster carers in this area by discussing a young person's education during supervision, provide training for carers and offer additional support if a young person is excluded from school. Where a young person wishes to pursue a hobby or interest the agency, in discussion with the placing authority, ensure there is appropriate support for the young person to pursue this interest.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are encouraged to maintain and develop contact with family and friends, where this has been deemed appropriate by the placing authority. Contact arrangements are considered as part of the matching process, additionally details of contact arrangements and a risk assessment in relation to contact are considered as part of the young person's foster placement agreement. Most foster carers assist in facilitating contact for young people placed with them, with some foster carers managing very complex arrangements. Foster carers maintain well structured records for young people including information relating to contact arrangements and visits. Contact arrangements are discussed on a regular basis as part of the foster carer's supervision and the agency provide training to foster carers regarding the importance of contact and their role in it. The agency actively seeks the views of young people, foster carers, local authority social workers and birth children of foster carers. The views of foster and birth children are sought for the foster carers' reviews. Children and young people spoken to and those who returned questionnaires indicated that their opinions and views are listened to and acted upon. TACT has established a Youth Parliament and have appointed a Young People's Participation Officer who will implement the Youth Parliament. Each social work team has appointed a Children's Champion who works with young people to ensure that their views are heard and that they influence practice. Examples of how young people have changed practice are the design and presentation of the Children's Guide, the range of activity days on offer during school holidays and more structured activities between young people who are placed with foster carers and the carer's own children. Young people are aware how to make a complaint and are provided with information as to who to contact and what support is available to them, this information is included in the Children's Guide. In addition to the provision of the Children's Guide the agency provides young people with a postcard, which includes the address of Ofsted to enable young people to contact the inspectorate if they have any concerns about their care. The agency's complaints procedure operates in accordance with procedures and offers timely and considered responses to complaints. The agency monitors the nature and outcome of the complaints on a regular basis. There have been four complaints made in respect of the agency in the past year, none of these complaints have been upheld.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

TACT is organised and managed in a way that young people's needs are central to the work undertaken by the agency. The agency has a clear Statement of Purpose, which was updated in January 2008 to reflect recent changes in the agency, and a carers' handbook provides information to foster carers and parents. The Children's Guide is attractively presented and contains excellent information about opportunities for participation, a clear description of what being fostered means and good information about advocacy and how to make a complaint. Young people have been involved in creating a DVD, which provides additional information in a visual format. There is a strong management structure within the fostering service, with all managers being suitably qualified and experienced. Managers regularly monitor the service, where gaps are identified appropriate action is taken to rectify matters. The action is signed off by the manager once required action has been taken. TACT also has a national system for reviewing the quality of service in each branch. Managers provide positive guidance and support for staff within the service, with monthly supervision, regular team meetings and annual 360 degree appraisals. All staff commented that they have good access to training courses to ensure

that their practice remains up-to-date. The service has a good level of efficient administrative support. The agency seeks to recruit a range of foster carers from different backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures to reflect the local community. They have recently actively recruited a number of foster carers and have recognised the need for additional staff to assess and support these foster carers. The assessments of prospective foster carers examined by the inspector were of a high standard and considered in a robust manner the competencies of each applicant to meet the needs of young people likely to be placed. Area managers have in place systems to ensure that assessments coming before panel are complete and sufficiently comprehensive. TACT has a clear strategy for supporting foster carers and carers commented positively about the support they received from the service. The agency has adequate numbers of suitably qualified staff to ensure that foster carers are well supported and are, in turn, able to support the children and young people placed with them. Foster carers are clear about the agency's expectation of them and of the support they will receive from the agency, as this is identified in the Foster Care Agreement. Foster carers receive regular supervision, are reviewed annually and provided with a wide range of training opportunities. Occasional unannounced visits are undertaken at least annually. Foster carer's and young people's files were well organised and accurately reflected the work undertaken by the agency and its foster carers. All information both within the office and foster carer's homes is stored securely. The agency maintains registers of foster carers and young people, however, these are not fully compliant with the regulations but the agency does record all required information but in different formats.

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
25	maintain a young person's register, which includes all required information. Regulation 22 (1)	4 June 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 provided with clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment (NMS 12.3)
- amend the safe caring document so that it is clear that the guidelines are cleared with the child's social worker (NMS 9.3)
- develop further the agency's recruitment and selection procedures, with reference to carrying out written risk assessments, for example where a person has a positive CRB and where there are gaps in the applicant's career history. (NMS 15.2)

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.