

# The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC047548
<b>Inspection date</b>	3 April 2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Sarah Oldham
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	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' (The Adolescent & Children's Trust) was first established in 1993 and became a charitable independent fostering agency. The Organisation is also a Limited Company, managed by a Board of Trustees, which delegates the day to day management to a Senior Management Team, comprising a Chief Executive, Head of Social Work and Business Manager. Regional Managers are responsible for eight area based offices and 11 Area Managers. 'Geographically', TACT operates within London areas, Wales, Bristol, East Midlands, Birmingham and Kent. This inspection was conducted at the Liverpool office. This office opened in 2003.

### Summary

This was an announced inspection of the service and covered all the key National Minimum Standards (NMS). The is a well managed agency which is supporting the carers well and providing good outcomes for the children and young children placed. The agency is staffed by dedicated, experienced and suitably qualified staff who have access to appropriate training and supervision. The quality of work undertaken by the staff team is good The agency has robust policies and procedures in place to ensure that the safety and well being of the children and young people is supported. The service is monitored and action plans and developmental work is ongoing to ensure that the agency continues to deliver a good service with positive outcomes for young people. Children and young people are consulted with on an ongoing basis, both formally and informally. Young people are also involved in the recruitment and selection of staff and further training is planned to enable young people to contribute to the 'skills to foster training' for prospective carers.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### Improvements since the last inspection

There is a comprehensive training system in place for staff. The number of training courses has increased to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to deliver a good service and to maintain their registration with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). The organisation identified that the weekend away for TACT foster children in the south of England may have been a reason for young people from the North West area not attending last year due to distance. To address this, the organisation has moved the activity weekend to the Midlands. A number of young people in the North West have indicated that they would like to attend this year. The appointment of a young person's participation officer, which young people were involved in the recruitment of, is further developing the involvement and consultation for young people.

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people are supported in relation to their health and developmental needs. The agency ensures that carers are provided with information regarding the health care needs of the children and young people placed. This includes all Looked After Children (LAC) documentation. Where the placing authority provides limited or insufficient information, this is requested by the agency in writing. Carers are aware of their role and responsibility to support the children and young people with health and developmental needs. This is discussed at the initial skills to foster training. All children and young people are registered with a doctor, dentist

and optician. Carers maintain clear records of health care checks and appointments. These records are viewed at supervision and records contain clear details about the current health care needs of the children and young people. Carers have access to appropriate training including paediatric first aid, child health and development, sexual health and drug and alcohol awareness. Additional information regarding health care matters and well being is provided on an individual basis or within support group meetings. Young people say that they feel well cared for and are provided with good information and support regarding maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has robust recruitment and selection procedures in place for the recruitment of staff and carers. An audit of staff files has been undertaken by Ofsted and comply with the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and NMS. Prospective foster carers have an initial assessment to ensure that they have a good understanding of the role and responsibilities of a foster carer. Following this an in depth assessment is undertaken by a qualified social worker using the British Adoption and Fostering Association (BAAF) Form F competency based assessment. Decisions about approval of carers is made by the agencies panel. The panel comprises of independent members who have knowledge and skills of the fostering process and the manager of the agency. Panel members are recruited in accordance with regulatory guidance. Panel minutes demonstrate a robust quality assurance function. Panel policies and procedures are in place to ensure that panels are only held if the panel is quorate. The process for placing children and young people is good and is in line with the matching policy which identifies the need for good matching. The matching process identifies all areas of need of the child and the skills and approval status of the carer. The agency has clear safeguarding policies in place and all staff and carers have received appropriate safeguarding training. This training is updated on a regular basis and records are maintained of when training was attended. Information about the local Safeguarding Board is made available to all staff and carers. The agency responds appropriately when any allegations to ensure that the young people are safeguarded. A complaints policy is in place. No complaints have been made in the past year. Children, young people and carers are aware of the complaints policy and how to make a complaint. This is detailed in the Statement of Purpose, the children's guide and the foster carers handbook. All carers have a safe care policy in place. The level of detail within safe care policies varies, therefore ,the agency are reviewing and updating carers safe care policies to ensure that all relevant information is contained within them. Health and safety checks are undertaken on a minimum of an annual basis or more often if there has been a change within the household.. Carers have announced and unannounced visits to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the young people in placement remains paramount. All carers responding to questionnaires say that they feel extremely well supported by the agency. Young people say that they feel safe, well cared for and happy.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agencies policies and procedures promote diversity and equality. The agency actively seeks to recruit carers that are able to meet the diverse range of need of the children and young people placed. The needs of the young person are central to the matching process. Training is provided to carers as part of the initial training as well as ongoing training. The agency demonstrates a clear commitment to the educational needs of the children and young people. Carers are given details of the educational needs of the young people at the commencement

of the placement and involved with supporting education. Where issues arise at school, carers liaise with the school to ensure the best outcome for the young person. Education is discussed at the monthly supervision with carers and any issues or difficulties are addressed. Young people say that carers support them with their educational needs. The agency does not have personal education plans (Peps) for all young people. However, they request them in writing from the placing authority. Young people say that their carers actively support them with their education. Leisure and recreational activities are promoted and supported by carers. Many of the young people pursue a number of activities and interests including football, rugby, cubs, guides etc. A number of young people responded to questionnaires and all were very positive about the activities they participate in. The agency also arranges a number of leisure and recreational activities throughout the year. The most recent one was held in March and included tee shirt designing. Young people who attended this activity enjoyed it and were planning future activities for the next few months. The TACT national organisation has a weekend away once a year where young people supported by TACT are able to meet and engage in activities. Young people supported from the Liverpool office did not attend last year although invited to. It was felt that one of the reasons for this was the distance to travel, the weekend was held in the south of England. This year to accommodate travel for all young people the venue has moved to the Birmingham area. A number of young people have requested to go to this weekend away. The organisation is also discussing holding a smaller event for the young children to participate in.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a clear commitment in supporting and facilitating family contact for children in accordance with the individual placement plan for the young person. Information and training is provided to carers, about the importance of contact at the initial skills to foster training and a specific training programme on dealing with and promoting contact forms part of the training plan. Carers demonstrate a commitment to supporting and facilitating contact. The agency consults and involves young people in a number of ways. This includes involving young people in the recruitment and selection process, the update of the children and young persons guide, statutory reviews and foster carer reviews. The agency has a young person's participation officer who is further developing ways to involve young people in all forms of consultation.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Carers receive regular payments of allowances that are above the national guidance. A system of additional payments is in place for carers to achieve which is based on attendance at in house training, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 and subject to passing their annual review. The service has a children and young persons saving scheme policy in place. All carers save ten pounds per week for each child in a bank account which is for the young person when they leave care. Carers support young people to prepare for independence. TACT has a specific manual for carers and young people detailing employment rights, leaving care rights, benefits, budgeting, and health care matters. This manual is provided to young people when they reach the age of 1 and carers also receive a copy. Young people also benefit from being able to attend a six week 'skills for life' course. This course covers all aspects of independent living. Young people say that they are regularly consulted about their future by carers and staff from the agency.

## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose outlines the aims and objectives of the service. The service is well managed and clear lines of accountability are in place. The manager of the service has extensive relevant social care experience and appropriate qualification. Staff working for the service also have the necessary skills, qualifications and experience to ensure that the service provided is effective and ensures good outcomes for young people. There is also a comprehensive children's guide that has been developed in consultation with young people. Staff are supported and supervised well. The manager is always available and the office operates an 'open door' policy. Carers and young people also say that the manager of the service is available to provide support and liaises with them on a regular basis. Staff carers and young people say that they are kept informed of current issues by the manager. Staff are encouraged and supported to attend up to date training and there is a comprehensive training plan in place for staff and carers. Training is continually evaluated and developed to deliver a high standard of training to ensure that children and young people are provided with a high standard of support and care. Carers also have regular support meetings. All files are stored securely and audited on a regular basis by the manager. The auditing format has recently changed and some files contained both. It was unclear which was the current audit format. There is a clear system in place for the senior supervising social worker to deputise in the absence of the manager. The agency works in partnership with other professionals and key people to provide ongoing support to children and young people. Systems are in place to monitor the quality of the service in accordance with Regulation 42 of the Fostering Regulations 2002. A review has been undertaken and a copy of this was available for inspection. The office is situated in a former converted warehouse and although the office has appropriate equipment there is a lack of space as the service continues to develop and grow. To accommodate this there are plans for the office to be relocated to accommodation that will be better placed to meet the needs of the service.

## 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
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### 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 (NMS 13.3)
- ensure that individual Safe care policies contain all relevant information (NMS 9.3)
- ensure that there is a clear system in place for the auditing of records. (NMS 25.3)

## 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.**