



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Adolescent and Children`s Trust

**The Courtyard
303 Hither Green Lane
London
SE13 6TJ**

Lead Inspector
Bernard Burrell

Announced Inspection
11th September 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

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Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	The Adolescent and Children`s Trust
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Mary Elizabeth Griffith-Jones
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 1st November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) is an independent fostering agency. It is a limited company with charitable status. The charity was started over 10 years ago.

TACT is managed by a senior management team, which reports to a board of trustees. The current management team has been reorganised since the last inspection. The previous fostering manager is now the regional manager for London and Kent. The new manager, who has been with TACT for several years, has applied to the CSCI to be the registered manager. The Chief Executive is the designated decision maker for the agency. The finance and human resources services are centralised. Tact also operates as an adoption agency and has been inspected by the CSCI in this area.

The agency's main objectives according to its Statement of Purpose is to recruit, approve and support foster carers for the looked after children needing substitute family care. Tact currently provides planned and emergency placements for children and young people looked after by local authority children services, permanent foster placements, a supervised contact service and an outreach support service for carers, children and the young people using the service.

Tact's objective is also to ensure that people who come into contact with the fostered child and young people; work to promote their welfare and safeguards their interests. Tact's aim according to its Statement of Purpose is to continue working closely with the child and young person's family and the placing social services.

The agency's charges for its services to local social services placing authorities range from £669 to over £800 per week for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years.

The Hither Green office deals with the central administration business of the organisation and is the premises for the London (South East) branch of the operation. The proposed plan is to transfer the North London operation to the East London office. At the time of inspection, the south London branch had 00

placements and 00 approved foster care families.

Tact also has other branches located in England and Wales.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was conducted initially over five days at the agency's Hither Green office, plus follow enquiries to several foster carers and local authority placing social workers. The inspection process involved meetings, interviews and discussions with the agency senior managers, social work and other administrative staff, foster carers and the children and young people.

The inspector reviewed a number of carers' case files, case records of the children and young people, four staff files, the panel records plus minutes of the panel meetings, policy and administrative records, and the pre-inspection documents provided to the CSCI by TACT. The foster carers, children and young people also provided questionnaire feedback.

The findings of this inspection indicated that the agency continues to offer invaluable and supportive services to the children, young people and their foster carers. TACT has appropriate care management and monitoring systems in place to help ensure that the welfare and safety of the children and young people are promoted and safeguarded.

The agency continues to work cooperatively with its partner agencies, community groups and the CSCI. TACT has demonstrated a willingness to comply with regulatory requirements and recommendations in line with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and other legislative guidelines.

What the service does well:

The agency offers reliable and supportive services and advice to its foster carers and the fostered children and young people in the South East London region.

The agency makes good effort to help ensure that care reviews are carried out and appropriate records and documentation are kept to help verify and monitor the effectiveness of its work.

The agency's social work, administrative and other staff are professional, appropriately trained, possess good professional social care and administrative skills and experience. The social work staff continue to demonstrate sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They work well with and offer good support and advice to the foster carers, children and young people.

The agency makes good effort to involve the foster carers and staff in the work and development plans for the service. It also offers a good mix of training programmes that are designed to help enhance the foster carer's skills and professionalism.

TACT has demonstrated its willingness to put in place developmental plans designed to help enhance the quality of the service plus help achieve better outcomes for the fostered children and young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has made significant improvements in the organisation and management of its administrative records and the case files of foster carers, children and young people. Good effort has also been made to consolidate various areas of its business operations; including merging of the three separate panel meetings plus creating appropriate localised support services for foster carers.

The agency has made good progress to help improve its consultation, communication and relationship with staff, foster carers and the fostered children and young people.

TACT has made good efforts to expand the range of training and professional development opportunities available to staff and foster carers.

Good efforts have been made to develop the service with more emphasis and focus on the needs of the fostered children and young people. Good effort has also been made to help ensure that the needs of young people planning to move to independent living are appropriately assessed.

What they could do better:

The agency must ensure that relevant training is offered to all foster carers about understanding medication; including the appropriate administration, monitoring, recording and disposal of prescribed and homely medication used in foster care homes.

The agency must ensure that all foster carers are offered the opportunity to have refresher training and understanding of food and hygiene matters; this must also include training modules in diet and nutrition. The supervising social workers should also ensure that this area of the children and young people's health is appropriately assessed, explored and reviewed during the foster care home visits.

The agency must ensure that the dietary and nutritional needs of any child or young person placed in foster care, takes into account, the ability of the foster carer to meet those needs appropriately and sensitively. This must also include the needs of children and young people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

The agency should also ensure that all young people preparing to leave care are offered training and advice in health care matters during the Life Skills training programme.

The agency must ensure that all medical assessment and reports for each fostered children and young people are up to date, available on file or electronically for inspection. This also means that the agency must ensure that greater effort is made to get all necessary reports or assessments from the agencies or professionals responsible.

The agency must ensure that all foster carers are offered refresher or new training on physical control and restraint of fostered children and young people. The training must also include modules in how best to try and promote the safety and physical wellbeing of fostered children and young people.

The agency must ensure that all foster carers are reminded to ensure that they document and report all incidents and accidents involving foster children and young people. This must also include ensuring the established 'no secret' rule and guidance is strictly complied with.

The agency must ensure that training in safe care is also offered to adult members and older young people who live in the homes of the fostered children and young people. Updated training in safe caring should also be offered to all carers.

Training must also be offered in restraint and control and this area must be adequately reviewed at each supervisory home visit and care review.

The agency should aim to develop more proactive plans to help ensure that diversity, equalities and differences are among the key training areas offered to foster carers. The inspector noted that training in diversity was offered to staff at the agency just before the closure of this inspection.

The agency must ensure that the required professional verification checks and training for each panel members are up to date and copies available on their files. The agency must also ensure that references and CRB checks for panel member are verified by the appropriate TACT personnel as satisfactory.

The agency must also ensure that there are full written records of each panel meeting. The minutes must also include the reasons for the panel's matching placements decisions and recommendations.

The agency must ensure that where foster carers are not working in full partnership with the agency or complying fully with the foster carer's agreement, such cases must be presented to the whole panel for review.

The agency must ensure that its matching process is more rigorous and that children and young people are placed in foster care homes that are more likely to meet their presenting and assessed care needs. There is also the need for cultural competency of carers where placements are made outside the children and young people's ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The agency should ensure that the TACT's complaints guidance and procedure for the children and young people is reviewed and updated. The guides should be written in communication styles that reflect the age groups and learning abilities of the children and young people.

The agency must ensure that all foster carers attend a minimum of training each year to help develop and update their skills and knowledge in fostering. Effort must also be made by the agency to assist and encourage carers to undertake the relevant NVQ foster training.

The agency should ensure that all foster carers are reminded about the importance of ensuring that individual recordings must be made for each child in placement, irrespective of situations where placements are sibling.

The agency must also ensure that further improvements are made in the administration of case records to help ensure that all required documentation are on file and up to date. This must include PEPS, Pathway Plans and medical health reports for both carers and fostered children and young people.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by TACT and reviewed by the inspector. It also includes analysis of the written and expressed views of carers, children, young people and various professionals.

The agency ensures foster carers are provided with relevant guidelines and information about how they should monitor, promote and safeguard the health and wellbeing of each child/young person.

There were good examples of effective and collaborative working partnerships between the agency, parents of the children, their carers plus various health and social care professionals.

EVIDENCE:

The TACT policy and procedural guidelines for the foster carers and supervising social workers dated July 2004, advised that when a child is placed with a foster carer, they should be provided with a written health record about the child's health, plus guidelines concerning agreement for the child to receive medical treatment.

The guidance also offers advice to carers about how to ensure that confidential information about the foster children/young people's health are protected and safeguarded. The inspector noted from the recorded reports, discussions with foster carers and social workers that foster carers are complying with the guidelines.

The inspection findings indicated that most of the case files for the fostered children/young people had detail and up to date medical information recorded. However, for a few others, there was minimal information recorded to make an informed judgement. In addition, in a few cases, the medical information for both carers and fostered children/young people needed updating.

The inspector noted that there was recorded evidence of the specialist medical, psychiatric and other relevant health support services for several children and young people. The recordings on the case files also showed evidence of cooperative working and consultation between the agency, psychiatric and other medical professionals on behalf of the children/young people.

However, in a few cases, there was insufficient evidence to verify the current nature of support, particularly psychiatric support services, or how effective and beneficial these were. There is need for the agency to bring this area of the children/young people's care needs into its performance review and outcome work.

The recorded evidence reviewed by the inspector showed that health care issues for the children are discussed during the supervisory home visits and LAC reviews. However, in one of the cases reviewed by the inspector, several key medical information was either missing or overdue for a young person diagnosed with a life threatening illness. These included immunisation vaccinations, dental check and keeping medical appointments. The local authority statutory medical check was also overdue since February 2006.

The inspector received written and verbal feedback from several carers who reported that they are satisfied with the health care support and advice offered to them by the agency staff. The inspector noted that foster carers receive initial training in some health care matters during the Skills To Foster training. However, additional work is needed to help ensure that areas such as mental health and specific medical conditions affecting some children, are incorporated in the training programmes for foster carers.

The inspector advised the agency manager that training should be provided to the carers in area such as understanding and managing medication in the home. The agency should also ensure that there are clearer guidelines about medication issues in the foster carers guide.

In addition, the inspector noted there are plans to include a module in health care matters in the Life Skills training programme for those young people preparing to leave care. This should include sexual health, drugs, smoking, food and hygiene and other key health care matters.

In one of the cases reviewed by the inspector, it was noted that a fostered young person of Muslim background reported concern that the foster carer had taken him to a Christian Harvest festival where non-Halal food and alcohol were been served. The agency must ensure that matters related to the ethnic, cultural and religious dietary and nutritional needs of children are taken into account when placements are made.

In another example, the inspector noted that the recorded information for a sibling group showed that recent medical appointments were carried out. However, there was no information about this young person's current dietary and nutritional status. A letter was also sent by the agency to the foster carer on 4 September 2006 requesting updates on the health status of both siblings.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30.

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of the carers, children, young people and various professionals.

The agency is managed by people with relevant professional training, skills and experience.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the agency ensures careful attention is paid to the suitability of the carers it recruits to look after the children and young people.

Appropriate guidelines, procedures and monitoring systems are in place to help ensure the protection of the children and young people. However, there is need for a review of the panel's decision-making procedures, plus review of all foster carers who have not had any placements for more than six months.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was fully satisfied that the people carrying on and managing the service possess a combined wealth of professional experience, knowledge and skills in child care matters. The current fostering manager has many years professional experience working in children services. A group of senior

managers who have sound and well-proven skills and understanding of their roles and responsibilities support her.

The supervising social work staff are well experienced with relevant professional training and are able to provide the quality of care and support needed by the fostered children and young people.

The manager explained that the process involved in recruiting and selecting foster carers is designed to help ensure that only carers matching the selection criteria of TACT are employed. The inspector was satisfied that the recruitment process is systematic and in line with TACT's policy and guideline (Appendix 25).

Each potential foster carer is assessed on the core competencies during the Skills To Foster training. The trainer completes individual competency assessment for each. This is then passed to the workers completing the Form F applications to help make further judgement on the applicant's competency attainment.

The agency has a shortage of foster carers from White ethnic background to meet the needs of children of similar backgrounds. The agency carried out a foster carer recruitment campaign in March 2006, but only two foster carers were considered suitable and selected. The agency recruits potential foster carers through various sources, including direct advertising in various media publication and public outreach work.

The agency had documented tracking system to help ensure that relevant checks are made and verified. These included references from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), local authorities, medical and people or employers who know the applicants well to provide informed comments about their suitability to be foster carers.

The findings of this inspection showed that TACT has relevant policy and procedural guidelines that covers safe caring practices plus the promotion of safe and positive environment for the children and young people. There were examples of the Foster Carers' Agreement on the case files examined by the inspector. In addition, each foster carer has been given a copy of the agency's Child Protection Procedure guidelines. This issue is also covered in the Skills to Foster training.

In addition, each carer is given a copy of the fire safety and prevention guidelines. Letters were also sent to carers about how to ensure they comply with the new car seat restraint safety measures for children that came into law in September 2006.

The inspection findings indicated that the agency should ensure that family members or other adults other than the foster carers living at the foster care homes, are offered training and guidance in child protection and safe caring

matters. This must also include guidance to carers about the agency's expectations on choice of babysitters.

The inspector examined the case files for 8 children, young people and their foster carers. In the overwhelming majority of cases, there was recorded evidence to verify that the foster carers are ensuring good safe caring practices are being followed. The recorded evidence reviewed plus the inspector's discussions with social workers and senior managers, provided satisfactory proof that appropriate monitoring is carried out. These included, announced and unannounced home visits, telephone calls to carers and the fostered children plus the Looked After Children (LAC) reviews.

The recorded evidence on each foster carers case file examined by the inspector, showed that mandatory training in safe care and child protection is offered to carers in the Skills To Foster introductory training programme. A few carers have had updated training in this area because of issues arising from child protection concerns and developments in the placements.

The data information provided by the agency showed that since the last inspection, 4 allegations have been made against four carers. Three resulted in child protection investigations and were not substantiated. One was still outstanding at the time of this inspection.

One other child protection investigation involving allegations of physical restraint/bruising in a foster care home was also completed prior to the start of this inspection. The outcome was that no further action was considered necessary. However, the supervising social worker who manages the case informed the inspector that a number of recommendations were made at the strategy meeting. These were considered necessary to help enhance the future protection of the young person and improved the practice of the carers.

The recorded notes for the carer's case files plus discussion with the supervising social worker, indicated that other significant issues have also taken place in this foster care home, but they have not always been reported fully or on time to the agency by the carers. The inspector advised the manager and social worker that because there were other unresolved and recurring issues involving the foster carers in this case; the matter should be brought back to the panel for a full review. The manager stated this was part of the forward action plan being considered by the agency.

In a separate reported incident involving another foster carer, the fostered child reported to a therapist that when his foster carer 'smacks' him it was 'hard'. This suggested the smacking could have taken place more than once.

The inspector advised the agency's manager and supervising social worker that the foster carers should have a review of their care practices plus relevant training in physical restraint must be provided to all carers. This should be in

addition to the agency's child protection procedures and guidance given to each carer during the Skills To Foster training.

The agency should also ensure that its complaints procedure and guidelines for the fostered children and young people are reviewed and updated, taking into account- the different age group, communication and understanding abilities of the children and young people.

The inspector noted that staff at the agency have been given training and supervisory support in child protection matters. In addition, the agency has a Schedule 7 Reporting and monitoring form for foster carers to record events, accidents and incidents in the foster care homes.

The agency has appropriate guidelines relating to its panel structure and operation. The inspector examined the case files for 6 panel members. The findings showed the dates when CRB and other references were applied for. The recorded evidence plus discussion with the manager indicated that two panel members were sent suspension notice because they fail to submit their renewal CRB forms. Each panel member had signed the confidentiality record.

Of the 6 panel members, 4 had recorded evidence of training undertaken in November 2004 and two had no information about training. Three panel member files had no information or documentary verification of their educational, professional qualification or experience.

The inspector also reviewed the minutes of two panel meetings. The evidence seen indicated that appropriate discussions and assessments of each case were carried out. However, the panel must ensure that the written records of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations are recorded in full. This must also include the reasons for approvals plus the expected outcomes expected for each child/young person being placed.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13,

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of the carers, children, young people and various professionals.

Although the agency is making effort to promote diversity in its staffing and business operations, more proactive work is needed to offer training to foster carers in diversity and differences.

Good effort continues to be being made to address the educational needs of the children and young people. However more effective multi-agency approach is needed; including the effective involvement of all foster carers to help ensure better educational outcomes for the children and young people are achieved.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has appropriate policy and practice guidelines in place relating to issues of diversity and differences. The policy and guidelines covered key areas, including recruitment and management procedures within the agency, impact of matching and placements on the fostered children and young people, plus dealing with emerging sexuality and disability.

The policy also states that `if foster carers feel they would benefit from help and support in these areas, they should discuss with their supervising social workers who will discuss and arrange training for the foster carers.

The inspector advised the manager that the agency will need to develop more proactive plans to help ensure that diversity, equalities and differences are among the key training areas offered to foster carers. The inspector noted that training in diversity was offered to staff at the agency just before the closure of this inspection.

The agency offers each foster carer a copy of its Family Policy Agreement outlining the expectations between each foster carer and the children and young people being fostered. A copy of this agreement was not on all the files reviewed by the inspector. The agency pre-inspection report to the CSCI stated that the carers 'actively support school placements, attend parent teachers' meetings and open evenings. The carers who met with the inspector confirmed this to be the case. There was also recorded evidence on some case files verifying attendance by carers at these meetings.

However, the Family Policy Agreement does not mention about education and homework or the educational expectation from each carer. The agreement should outline the input each carer is expected to make and contribute to the education needs of each child/young person in their care.

The inspector reviewed the education reports for 4 children and young people. The findings showed that the foster carer review form covered all areas of the children and young people education work. The section completed by the carers had information about the children/young people school attendance records, PEP reports, educational achievements, special education needs, challenging behaviour issues, the types of support been offered by the carers plus dates of school meetings attended.

In one of the 4 reports reviewed by the inspector, there was information about a request made for a laptop computer by one of the children. The report indicated that an assessment of need and expected benefit was completed. However, the PEP report on file was dated 06/04. This needed to be updated.

The PEP report for another young person was completed in March 2006. There was however no information on the file to indicate if the foster carer had completed the review/education form. In addition, the recorded information stated that this young person needed improvements in spelling, comprehension and reading. However, there was no recorded evidence of the young person's educational attainment.

For another young person, the recorded information stated he had started college about a week prior to this inspection. The young person was supported by his carer to attend a local community education and learning centre to help develop his English Language skill and preparation for mainstream college. The carer informed the inspector that the young person is now attending college.

In another example, the foster carer completed her review about the child's educational performance in September 2005. The carer recorded that she was helping the child with schoolwork and emotional issues. The carer also recorded that she attended several meetings at the child's school, including the PEP review and school medical assessment.

The inspector also noted that the case recordings had evidence of another young person's end of year school report dated July 2006. This also included a psychological and education report from the local placing authority. The foster carer review and education report for this young person was also completed in February 2005 but was now due for updating. The inspector noted that this young person attended a school homework club. The carer also stated that 'she works and help him with his schoolwork.'

The agency has also recognised that it needs to offer relevant training in education matters to all foster carers; plus continue to work with carers to help set the higher expectations for the children and young people. The agency also recognises that it needs to offer support to carers in understanding and developing their knowledge and skills in computer and IT.

The agency has provided extra tuition to children and young people who are reportedly in need of this service and are willing to accept it. In addition, the agency provides the carers with public information materials, including educational updates from the DFES.

The inspector noted from interview with the agency's Children Resources Worker that support is also provided to the fostered children/young people in several ways, including helping them to access appropriate educational support and other supportive services.

The Performance Indicators Report 2006 given to the inspector by the agency showed that 81.1% of the looked after children had a PEP report and 13.5% did not. Similarly, 35.1% of the looked after children received extra educational support in and out of school, 48.6% did not and 13.5 % did not need it. In addition, 86.5% were reportedly 'progressing satisfactorily' at school and 5.4% were not. For those who were not progressing satisfactorily, the key reasons related to either emotional problems or lack of interest.

In addition, the number of children across different age group who were expected to achieve certain educational level was less than encouraging.

The agency has indicated that it plans for the future include implementation of a tool (Softbox) to provide improved data collection on educational outcomes and the completion of PEPs for the fostered children and young people. It also plans to develop more out of school programmes with tuition and children resources worker input. In addition the agency plans to help ensure no carers take holidays in school terms.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10, 11

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of the carers, children, young people and various professionals.

The fostering service has appropriate arrangements and support systems in place that help to promote safe contacts between the children, young people and their birth parents, siblings and other relatives. The agency actively seeks the views of the children, its carers, stakeholders and other partners about its services.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has clear policy and procedural guidelines about contacts, including guidance for foster carers about how contacts between the children and young people's families and social relationships should be managed and monitored. Foster carers are also expected to record all contacts made, including any information about family and social relationships issues involving the children and young people.

The manager of the agency informed the inspector that contacts are always planned, supported and carried out in the best interest of the children and young people. The inspector noted that contacts sometimes take place at the agency's SE London office where a large room is used for this purpose. There is also a crèche attached to the meeting room. It is appropriately equipped with toys, learning equipment and other facilities.

Reports received by the inspector, plus interviews with social workers and foster carers indicated that some children experience unsettling periods and

traumas following contacts with families. One carer reported that the fostered child sometimes have problems with settling down and sleeping following contact with his mother.

The inspector discussed the issue of post-contact emotional behaviour and problems with the fostering manager and advised that more support- including relevant training relating to separation and lost- should be offered to foster carers to help them deal with these issues.

There were recordings in foster carers' review reports about contacts made and any issues or problems developed and how they were managed. The agency also has a new permanency service that includes provision of supervised contact to help ensure this is facilitated.

The feedback received from foster carers indicated that the agency works closely with them to help cultivate the appropriate relationships with the birth parents and the relatives of the children and young people. The inspector attended a foster carer's meeting where carers were updated about proposed plans in the agency's operation. The meeting was also used to seek the views and input of the carers on a key issue such as plans for announced and unannounced home visits by the supervising social workers.

The inspector had discussions with the carers and all reported they felt part of the TACT organisation and that their views and concerns were listened to. The inspector noted there were recorded evidence of regular meetings, consultation and communication exchanges between the agency staff and external professionals. In addition, there were recorded information about meetings held with various social services, local schools and education authorities involving the children and young people.

The inspector also noted that the views of the children and young people are actively sought by the agency. This was also confirmed by most of the children and young people who communicated with the inspector. The agency encourages the children and young people to share their views and concerns through various methods. These included updating of the children interactive guide on CD, activity days and contributions to the newsletter.

Several children and young people also informed the inspector that the agency's social work staff have sought their views and opinions about their experiences in the foster care homes, their educational work, social and leisure activities and interests.

The children who communicated with the inspector also reported that their foster carers sometimes asked for their opinions and ideas. Some stated that they are asked about the choice of food they would like, if they needed help with homework, type of décor they wanted in their bedrooms, preferences in clothing and where they would like to go on holiday.

The inspector noted that for some children and young people, the supervising social workers do ask for their views and opinions on their experiences in foster care. However, some of the reports reviewed by the inspector had no information to indicate discussions had taken place between the social workers and the fostered children. One social worker explained that this is often because some of the children and young people reportedly refused to speak with them or they were not available during the home visits.

The inspector was of the view that TACT's complaints guidance and procedure for the children and young people needed reviewing and updating. The guides should be written in communication styles that reflect the age groups and learning abilities of the children and young people.

The agency has recognised that it needs to make improvements in the following key things to help improve the outcomes for the children and young people. It will need to implement the Softbox system to help ensure a wider range of information on the fostered children and young people are recorded. It will also need to set clearer local targets for children and their carers in practical and leisure tasks such as swimming. Furthermore, it will also need to ensure more children and young people are involved in local community activities such as youth clubs.

The agency will also need to be more proactive with some local authorities whos' compliance with legislative requirements such as production of PEPs and Pathway Plans are poor. It should also ensure that the Life Skills training programme for young people preparing to leave care, fully utilise local resources to help improve the options available.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

14, 29

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of the carers, children, young people and various professionals.

The agency and foster carers are making good effort by providing relevant information to the young people preparing to leave care.

Payments are made to carers in line with contractual agreements and timescale and are above national recommended pay scale guidelines for foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has produced a guidance entitled –Next Steps- a guide for young people leaving care. The guide is quite detail and has information covering the key areas that young people preparing to leave care would need to be aware of. The guide is in three sections, the first part is written for the young people, the second section for the carers and the third section covers the rights of young people preparing to leave care.

The documented information reviewed by the inspector at the agency, showed examples of discussions between carers, the fostered young people, the supervising and local authority social workers and other relevant professionals about leaving care issues.

The carers' annual review recordings also has a section dealing with the preparation for leaving care as part of the competencies of caring. Foster carers who met with the inspector gave a few examples of how they work and help the young adults to develop essential independent living skills such as financial savings.

The inspector noted that most foster carers are compliant with the requirements for spending and savings for each child/young person in their care. The inspector was informed by social workers at the agency that the issue of saving for children and young people is sometimes problematic with a few carers. The inspector also noted from one of the cases reviewed that spending and savings was a major issue of disagreement between a supervising social worker and the foster carer.

The data from the Performance Indicator 2006 produced by TACT showed that of the young people who are aged 15 years plus, only 4 had a Pathway Plan for their future and 8 did not. The data also showed that 18 young people had some kinds of monetary saving plan and 17 did not.

The agency has recognised that it needs to do more work with the carers, young people and the local authority social workers to help develop more consistency in Pathway Planning and individual monetary savings. The agency already provides each carer with guidelines about the financial matters relating to each foster child/young person. This also includes information about pocket money, savings, budgeting and monitoring practices.

In addition to the allowance for each foster placements, the agency also make available additional money for birthdays, religious or other festivals, holidays, respite care and special care needs and disturbance allowance. The agency also offers other financial assistance and rewards to carers that cover their training needs, loss of salary plus long service award payments. The payments also cover expenses for the children and young people's initial food and clothing needs, furniture allowance, health care and therapy costs,

Management

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)
- 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)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

4, 5, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24,25

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of the carers, children, young people and various professionals.

The agency is managed well with clear lines of accountability. It has a culture of cooperative working with its partner agencies, provides good support to its carers and carry out adequate monitoring of the services offered to the

fostered children and young people. More effort is needed to ensure all foster carers received updated training in key areas, including the NVQ courses. Some administrative case records should be updated and maintained better.

EVIDENCE:

The daily management of the fostering service is the main responsibility of the current manager. At the time of this inspection, she was waiting for an appointment date to have her fit manager interview with the CSCI. The manager is well supported by a team of social workers, administrative and senior management staff. The inspector was satisfied that the agency's operation and services is adequately monitored with appropriate quality review systems and procedures in place.

There is a formal arrangement between the agency and each carer about the nature and level of support they can expect to receive. The recorded evidence reviewed by the inspector verified that the agency works with and support carers through monitoring of the placements, carry out planned and unplanned home visits and provide a range of training and skills development opportunities.

The carers confirmed in writing and verbally to the inspector that they are very satisfied with the level, consistency and reliability of the support offered by the agency workers. Action has been taken since the last inspection to provide carers in North London with more reliable and consistent support through the East London branch of TACT.

One carer commented, "they are very understanding about ensuring the needs of the children' are looked after." Another carer stated that: " they keep in regular contact with us and are always ready to listen and support us in various ways. They are a very child focus service."

The agency has been consistent and partially successfully in ensuring enough interest is generated from carers in the functioning of the foster carers' group. The agency has also recognised that more work and effort is still needed in this area to help ensure that the foster carers groups become more effective, better supported and attended by carers.

The carers informed the inspector that they received a range of training relevant to their roles and responsibilities. The training programme provided by the manager confirmed this to be the case. However, take up is often low and the agency will need to ensure improvement is made in this area. Training in certain key areas such as mental health, separation, attachment and loss, understanding the court system and process, plus diversity and differences should be taken up by all carers.

The agency will also need to ensure that all respite carers attend the minimum of training each year to help develop, update their skills and understanding as foster carers. Effort should continue to be made by the agency to assist all carers and other staff to undertake the relevant NVQ training. The agency recognised that it must provide necessary training and support to help foster carers develop their knowledge and understanding of IT use and technology.

The inspector examined the case records for several children/young people and their carers. The findings indicated these were mostly adequately organised and maintained. However, a few reviews were outstanding and essential reports such as PEP and Pathway plans were missing or not completed in a few cases. In addition, photographic identification was missing from the case files of a few carers and foster children.

The agency's financial records, systems, procedures and viability were not inspected during this inspection.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	4
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	2
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	N/A

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	3
29	4

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	x
2	4
4	3
5	3
16	x
17	3
18	x
19	x
20	x
21	3
22	3
23	2
24	3
25	2
26	x
27	x
28	x
32	N/A

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS15 FS30	20, 25, 27.	<p>The agency must ensure that the required professional verification checks and training for each panel members are up to date and copies available on their files.</p> <p>The agency must also ensure that there are full written records of each panel meeting. The minutes must also include the reasons for the panel's matching placements decisions and recommendations.</p> <p>The agency must ensure that where foster carers are not working in full partnership with the agency or complying fully with the foster carer's agreement, such cases must be presented to the whole panel for review.</p> <p>(Previous timescale of 31.05.05 and 30/02/06 not met, but action to comply had started).</p>	30/11/06
2.	FS12	15,17	The agency must ensure that relevant training in medication	30/11/06

			<p>matters are offered to all foster carers. This should include modules about understanding medication plus the appropriate administration, monitoring, recording and disposal of prescribed and homely medication.</p> <p>The supervising social workers must also ensure that this area of the children and young people's health is consistently assessed, explored and reviewed during the foster care home visits.</p> <p>The agency must ensure that the dietary and nutritional needs of any child or young person placed in foster care, take into account, the ability of the foster carers to meet those needs appropriately and sensitively.</p> <p>This must also include the needs of children and young people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.</p>	
3.	FS8	34	The agency must ensure that its matching process is more rigorous and that children and young people are placed in foster care homes that are more likely to meet their presenting and assessed care needs. There is also the need for the cultural competency of carers to be fully assessed where placements are made outside the children and young people's ethnic and cultural backgrounds.	30/11/06
4.	FS9 FS12	12,13,	The agency must ensure that all foster carers are offered refresher or new training on physical control and restraint of fostered children and young people. The training must also	30/11/06

			<p>include modules in how best to try and promote the safety and physical wellbeing of fostered children and young people.</p> <p>The agency must ensure that all foster carers are reminded to ensure that they document and report all incidents and accidents involving foster children and young people. This must also include ensuring the established 'no secret' rule and guidance is strictly complied with.</p> <p>The agency must ensure that training in safe care is also offered to adult members and older young people who live in the homes of the fostered children and young people. Updated training in safe caring should also be offered to all carers.</p>	
5.	FS23	17	<p>The agency must ensure that all foster carers attend a minimum of training each year to help develop and update their skills and knowledge in fostering. Effort must also be made by the agency to assist and encourage carers to undertake the relevant NVQ foster training.</p>	30/11/06
6.	FS25	30	<p>The agency should ensure that all foster carers are reminded about the importance of ensuring that individual recordings must be made for each child in placement, irrespective of situations where placements are sibling.</p> <p>The agency must also ensure that further improvements are made in the administration of case records to help ensure that all required documentation are</p>	30/11/06

			on file and up to date. This must include PEPS, Pathway Plans and medical health reports for both carers and foster children and young people.	

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS7	The agency should continue to develop more proactive plans to help ensure that diversity, equalities and differences are among the key training areas offered to foster carers.
2.	FS14	The agency should also ensure that all young people preparing to leave care are offered training and advice in health care matters during the Life Skills training programme.
3.	FS11	The agency should ensure that the TACT's complaints guidance and procedure for the children and young people is reviewed and updated. The guides should be written in communication styles that reflect the age groups and learning abilities of the children and young people.

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