



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

**Premier House
209-211 Walsall Road
Birmingham
B42 1TX**

Lead Inspector
Lynda
Dale

Announced
27th, 28th, 29th & 30th June, 1st July & 4th July 2005

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

Reader Information

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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

Name of service The Adolescent and Children's Trust

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Birmingham,
B42 1TX.

Telephone number 0121 260 0518

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Email address birmingham@tactfostercare.org.uk

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) The Adolscent and Children's Trust

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Beverley Pickering

Type of registration Fostering Agency

No. of places registered (if applicable)

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places Fostering Agency

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. Mother and baby placements should only be made with carers specifically trained for the purpose.

Date of last inspection 18th August 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The TACT organisation is a charitable trust with 8 branches nationally. The organisation places a high emphasis on matching placements where there is an appropriate match of children and carers. The Birmingham branch of TACT provides a range of good quality foster placements for looked after children. The organisation has a culture of listening to children's views which are incorporated into their planning and decisions. The service provides support workers, who can assist with contact, transport and provide children and carers with any additional help they may require. The office premises are within easy reach of the city centre with good transport links and sufficient parking. The premises are accessible for persons with mobility problems.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was an announced inspection, which took place over 6 working days. There was one inspector who spoke with some children in placement and interviewed their foster carers, social workers, support staff, administrative staff, the Manager, Panel Chair and Quality Assurance Manager for TACT. The Inspector was given a guided tour of the service's premises and some foster carers' homes. In addition, the inspector randomly sampled files for welfare tracking and had access to the organisation's policies and procedures and other records. Information was also obtained from questionnaires sent to children in placement, their carers and placing social workers. The Inspector also observed a fostering panel.

The Inspector would like to take this opportunity to thank children, carers and staff for their warm welcome and kind assistance during the inspection.

What the service does well:

The service has a culture of listening to children's views and ensuring these are incorporated into the plans for the organisation.

Matching is also a key strength of the organisation, with thorough matching considerations given to every placement and a commitment on same race placements. The organisation demonstrates a clear willingness to decline placements if there are concerns regarding appropriate matching.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has responded well to previous inspection findings. They have ensured that placement agreements are now in place and the registers of children, carers and staff comply with regulations, in line with previous requirements.

The service has new premises, which are better suited to accommodating the growing needs of this service.

What they could do better:

The service needs to develop stronger working relationships with placing authorities to ensure all relevant documentation is provided to support care planning, health and education.

The Birmingham branch would benefit from more local autonomy to allow changes and improvements to be implemented more expediently.

The service would benefit from a system of more detailed risk assessments and enhanced safe caring policies for each foster home following placement.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

Overall the health needs of children in placement were being well met, although there is some room for improvement with health planning and recording.

EVIDENCE:

Interviews with carers confirmed all children had been registered with their local GP. The majority of children placed had received a Looked After Children's (LAC) medical or were awaiting this. Sampled files contained medical consent forms for children currently in placement. There were commendable examples of good practice by carers to ensure that the children's health needs were being met.

TACT's policies and procedures are controlled centrally to ensure consistency across the organisation. At present there is no consolidated policy or practical guidance for health planning. It was commendable to note that the manager of the Birmingham branch had recently introduced a system for carers to record health details and the administration of medication. However, this was a very recent development prior to the inspection and was not comprehensive. Children's files did not always contain a full record of their current health needs being addressed in placement with the support of carers. This could result in oversights or omissions in the event an urgent placement move. The manager reported that the organisation are in the process of developing additional policy and procedures for health, which is due to be implemented shortly.

Placing authorities had not always provided LAC paperwork or medical consents in a timely fashion. There was evidence that the service had made some efforts to chase these but this was not consistently frequent in all cases. In addition, sampled files did not all contain full details of immunisations received prior to placement, with Essential Information Records Part II being left blank by the placing authority. There was no evidence on file of the service having chased this information. One placing authority had indicated

they do not use LAC but had not furnished the agency with the information in an alternative format. Similar difficulties were mirrored with obtaining Personal Education Plans, birth certificates and copies of care orders as detailed later in the report. The service will need to implement a consistent strategy for chasing outstanding documentation and information.

Sampled files indicated that carers were noting injuries to children at the time of placement and any injuries sustained subsequently, for example in nursery or at school. However, the agency does not currently use body charts, which may enhance the system for carers when recording such injuries.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

The arrangements for the protection of children are of a good standard with only minor adjustments needed to ensure full safeguarding from all potential risks.

EVIDENCE:

TACT has very clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service, which ensure consistency across all branches. There are established lines of communication and sound financial procedures in place. All relevant information is available to purchasers of the service and prospective carers. There is clear guidance about conflicts of interest.

The foster homes inspected were homely and of a good standard and the service has in place a system of annual health and safety inspections. However, the service should consider revising the frequency of these when carers are in the process of undertaking home improvements and modifications, so that health and safety advice can be updated as needed. All carers were aware that they may be visited as part of the inspection and were very responsive to the process.

The service places a high priority on appropriate matching, which is evidenced by their willingness to decline inappropriate placements. This is enhanced by a commitment to same race placements.

The service has in place a range of policies and procedures to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect. These include written safe care policies for each foster home. However, the range of issues covered in these were more akin to house rules, rather than defining the practical safe care measures which would be applied to each placement. The agency is carrying out risk assessments for each placement at the time of referral. Given that information at the point of referral can be limited, the service should consider reviewing these as additional information becomes available about each child, in conjunction with the safe care guidelines.

The organisation has clear recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff. All staff interviewed had relevant qualifications, training and experience for their role. Sampled staff files contained evidence of CRB checks and references, which had been followed up with telephone enquiries.

The panel is in the process of change with a recently appointed chair. There is a clear improvement agenda and the chair has already made recommendations, which include a system of annual appraisals for panel members. The panel membership complies with the regulations and has representatives from health and education. Sampled records provided evidence that appropriate CRB and reference checks had been made on panel members. Records would also benefit from the inclusion of full details on how panel members were selected to ensure a comprehensive audit trail.

It was positive to note the panel has access to a legal advisor who provides legal advice prior to all panels and attends one in three. The service is ensuring the views of fostered children are reflected by the inclusion of a panel member who was formerly fostered. The panel observed was seen to follow the procedures regarding decision-making and reflect on quality assurance issues. However, one Form F assessment was lacking in sufficient detail to make a decision and necessitated lengthy and sensitive questioning of the prospective carers by the Panel. In future the Panel should consider the merits of deferring a decision on recommendation until the Form F assessor obtains all essential information.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7 &13

The service ensures that all children have access to education and excels at promoting diversity.

EVIDENCE:

All young people seen through the welfare tracking process had education placements including nursery placements, mainstream schools and specialist provision. These placements were being well supported by carers and the children were clearly being given the opportunity to participate in education and achieve their potential.

As with health planning, the service had experienced delays in obtaining Personal Education Plans from placing authorities and some files did not contain these. Although the agency had made some efforts to chase these, this was not prompt or frequent in all cases. Systems will need to be strengthened to ensure all relevant documentation is obtained on placement of children or as soon as possible thereafter.

The service clearly demonstrates a commitment to valuing diversity that exceeds the national minimum standard. The agency makes a serious to commitment to same race placements by matching children very closely. If there is no clear match the agency is reluctant to place unless the placing authority unable to find a closer match. In addition, throughout the year all religious and cultural festivals are celebrated to promote understanding and mutual respect with all their foster cares and children. The agency is creative in the way it uses a range of local media to advertise for carers, to ensure they

reach a broad range of groups reflecting the diverse background of the local community.

The agency is did not have any carers approved for short-term breaks at the time of the inspection.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10 &11

The service ensures that all young people are given opportunity to make a positive contribution and maintain contact with their families wherever appropriate.

EVIDENCE:

The service promotes contact by supporting the contact arrangements of placing authorities. Foster carers are suitably trained as part of their pre-approval training and ensure that children maintain regular contact with their families where this is part of their care plan. It is not the agency's policy for carers to undertake supervised contact, which is normally done by the placing authority. However, the agency can make arrangements for support workers to do this, if requested. The service has allocated a room at their new premises to facilitate supervised contact undertaken by placing authorities. This is comfortably furnished and well supplied with toys and other resources to ensure that contact is a pleasant occasion.

The service consults young people well. There are a range of ways children are encouraged to give their opinions about the service, including surveys and reviews. Most notably, the organisation arranges national Children's Participation Days where children are encouraged to meet with other foster children and give their views. The inspector was advised that the next participation day was due to take place on the 9th July, where there would be a 'Big Brother' style tent for children and young people to give their opinions on the service.

Another commendable development since the last inspection is that the organisation has appointed a national children's champion for the organisation and there is also a regional children's champion at each of the branches.

Questionnaires returned to the Commission completed by children indicated that some children they did not always feel fully consulted by their carers but this was often in relation to contact where there were legal issues preventing this. Overall the service performs very well in respect of consultation.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 14, 29

The service is good at promoting the economic well being of the children placed.

EVIDENCE:

Of the cases sampled for welfare tracking, only one young person in placement was preparing for adulthood and was being given support and advice consistent with his individual circumstances. No other young people seen were ready to prepare for independence.

The organisation has a clear structure of payments for carers, with full guidance on how this is broken down. Carers are encouraged to help children open bank accounts to enable them to start their own savings. Some carers had experienced some difficulty with this when birth certificates had not been received from placing authorities. Sampled files contained some evidence of the service having chased these, although not frequently or consistently. The service needs to ensure a more robust system of chasing birth certificates, along with other paperwork identified elsewhere in the report, when this is not provided on placement.

Carers interviewed reported that allowances are usually paid promptly and on time.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares 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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 & 28

Overall the service is well managed with clear working structures and good leadership. However, some improvement is needed to strengthen working partnerships with placing authorities.

EVIDENCE:

The service has in place a statement of purpose and accompanying children's guide that should cover information about the agency and all the work that it does. The statement of purpose is an amended version of the centralised model for TACT and does not detail all facilities and services offered by the Birmingham branch. The statement of purpose will need to be reviewed to reflect the full range of services offered by the Birmingham branch. The organisation should consider allowing more local autonomy by devolving responsibility for updating the statement of purpose to a local level. This would reduce the potential for delay with routine updates e.g. to reflect staffing changes and complaints.

The manager of the service has relevant skills and experience and is shortly due to complete the diploma in management studies. During the inspection the manager was observed exercising effective leadership for staff and carers. The manager has a clear job description setting out duties and responsibilities. The service has no deputy manager, so the regional manager provides cover in the absence of the manager. On the whole this arrangement works well, although there have been some minor implications for the frequency of formal staff supervision in the absence of the manager.

The service has sound structures in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service and ensuring quality performance. The manager of the service reports to the regional manager, to whom the Responsible Individual has devolved a range of monitoring duties. The manager has recently introduced a system of monitoring medication and medical treatment to ensure the service complies with the regulation in this respect.

There are sufficient numbers of staff for the current workload levels and these are organised effectively and efficiently. The service has adequate administrative support, one of whom has particular relevant experience in the area of fostering. The service has a five-day duty system to respond to enquiries from prospective carers and placing authorities.

The service has a sound recruitment strategy for carers. The service uses creative approaches to attracting carers from diverse backgrounds including advertising in a range of local and religious publications.

Pre-approval carer training includes elements of safe care and incorporates input from existing carers. In addition, carers are required to attend at least 3 training sessions per annum but are offered more as part of the service's ample annual training programme, which includes first aid and child protection. Carers are subject to annual reviews. There is out-of-hours support service available to carers. Carers also receive formal supervision every 3 weeks, or more frequently if required. The organisation has a whistle blowing policy.

All new staff are provided with an induction programme and are subject to annual appraisals. Social work staff are involved in delivering carer training and the training reflects the policies of the organisation. Staff interviewed reported that the key strengths of the team were good staff morale and support.

The case records for children are maintained electronically and accordingly were well presented. As mentioned earlier in the report, sampled files did not all contain information relevant to care planning, health, education and legal status, due to the placing authority's failure to provide these. The service had in the majority of cases chased this information on at least one occasion but this was not always frequent enough in relation to the length of placement. The service must take steps to strengthen working partnerships with placing authorities to ensure all relevant information is provided to enable effective care planning and all health and education needs are addressed. This includes LAC paperwork, Personal Education Plans, health information, birth certificates and care orders where applicable.

Administrative records are well maintained and on the whole securely stored. However, some improvements to the circulation, storage and return of panel papers are required to ensure confidentiality is maintained at all times. The service also needs to ensure that carers are provided with a secure method of storage for confidential information relating to children in placement.

The service has recently moved premises to accommodate their expanding needs. The new premises are pleasant and suitable for the purpose. They are accessible to persons with mobility problems with meeting facilities on the ground floor. There are robust administrative systems and appropriate security systems.

The service is financially viable and records provided evidenced that the organisation provides appropriate budgets, which are being well managed. The organisation has appropriate contingencies in the event of financial difficulties. There is a centralised system within the organisation for monitoring budgets, which are overseen by the responsible individual.

The organisation publishes its charges for each of its services and these are made available to prospective purchasers on request.

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	3
6	3
8	4
9	2
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	3
31	X

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	X
29	X

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

NO

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.	CH12	15(1)	The service should ensure all outstanding health issues are recorded on children's files.	30.10.05
2.	CH9	11(a)	Safe care policies for each foster home should specify the practical safe care measures to be applied to each placement and reviewed along with risk-assessments as more information becomes available about each child.	30.10.05
3.	CH1	3(1)(b)	The statement of purpose should be reviewed to reflect the full range of services offered by the Birmingham branch.	30.10.05
4.	CH24	40(5)(d) & 11(a)	The service should strengthen working partnerships with placing authorities to ensure all relevant information is provided to enable effective care planning and all health and education needs are addressed. This includes fully completed LAC paperwork (or suitable alternative), Personal Education Plans, health information, copy care orders (where applicable) and birth certificates.	31.08.05
5.	CH25	23(2)(b)	The service should review the process for circulation, storage and return of panel papers to ensure confidentiality is	31.08.05

			maintained at all times. The service also needs to ensure that carers are provided with a secure method of storage for confidential information relating to children in placement.	
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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.	12	The service should consider introducing body charts to record all injuries to children.
2.	12	The service would benefit from comprehensive policy and procedure for health planning to ensure there appropriate health promotion for all children.
3.	30	Records would also benefit from the inclusion of full details on how panel members were selected to ensure a comprehensive audit trail.
4.	30	The Panel should consider the merits of deferring decisions on recommendation until all essential information is obtained by the Form F assessor.
5.	6	The service should consider revising the frequency of health and safety checks to carers' homes when in the process undertaking home improvements, so that health and safety advice can be revised as necessary
6.	1	The organisation should consider allowing more local autonomy by devolving responsibility for updating the statement of purpose to a local level to reduce the potential for delay.

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