



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

TACT (The Adolescent and Children`s Trust)

**27 Station Road
Kettering
Northants
NN15 7HH**

Lead Inspector
Sharon Treadwell

Key Announced Inspection
13th December 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

Name of service	TACT (The Adolescent and Children`s Trust)
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Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	The Adolescent And Children`s Trust
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Barbara Taylor
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 24th October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (known as TACT) is a Charitable Independent Fostering Agency, the largest fostering charity in the country and a Company Limited by Guarantee. The agency is managed by a Board of Trustees with day to day management being undertaken by a Senior Management Team lead by the Chief Executive, Kevin Williams, who operates as the Agency Decision Maker.

Three Regional Managers are responsible for eight area-based offices: East Midlands, Birmingham, North West, Wales, Bristol, London, East London and Kent.

The East Midlands office, located in Kettering, Northamptonshire was the subject of this inspection. The Regional Manager with responsibility for the East Midlands, Birmingham and North West offices is Sonia Bolland. The Registered Manager of this office is Barbara Taylor who oversees the Fens Team. Belinda Clark, Area Manager in the Kettering Office oversees the Shires Team. There are 34 carer households and 39 children in placement in the Fens Area and 25 carer households and 33 children in placement in the Shires Area.

The agency employs a number of social work, administrative and support staff in the East Midlands office and has appropriate access to specialist resource staff.

TACT provides a range of fostering placements: Short Term, Long Term, Emergency, Bridging and Mother and Baby. Fees range from £669.20 to £835.93. This is a weekly rate, variable according to the age & needs of the child.

SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by one inspector with fieldwork taking three days.

For the purposes of this inspection three young people and the two foster carers with whom these young people were placed were tracked through the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with young people, foster carers, placing social workers and relevant agency staff, either in person or by telephone.

An additional carer's file and an additional young person's file were examined and an additional carer was contacted by telephone as a result of discussions with carers and staff and information supplied in questionnaires.

A Fostering Panel was observed on November 20th 2006 and the Panel Chair was interviewed by telephone during the inspection. The inspector additionally examined panel minutes relating to three previous panels.

At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 10 foster carers, 7 placing Social Workers and 13 young people, and the views contained in these have been reflected in the report.

Prior to the inspection the Registered Manager provided the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a range of written information about service operation.

No requirements have been identified during this inspection but 2 recommendations have been made.

What the service does well:

This agency has a strong child focus with an evidenced commitment to good outcomes for young people.

One carer commented: 'Their dedication to Looked After Children is paramount. What we don't achieve with TACT is unachievable'.

The staff team is a strong, professional team, benefiting from a high standard of administrative support. Relationships within the staff team were observed to be positive and professional with mutual respect for one another's roles and responsibilities. The inspector noted a strong and commendable dedication, throughout the team, to positive outcomes for young people.

Young people feel well cared for and valued: 'I feel happy and loved'; 'They hug us when we are tired and sad'.

The agency has a commendable range of systems for obtaining the views of young people and is able to demonstrate that their views are taken forward and acted upon.

Personnel files examined were in excellent order with a good, clear front sheet and evidenced a robust recruitment system.

Information for young people: The agency has produced an excellent Independent Living Skills pack called 'Next Steps', which young people are encouraged to work through with their carers to equip them to move successfully into adulthood; The Young People's Guide is attractively presented and contains excellent information about opportunities for participation, a clear description of what being fostered means and good information about advocacy and how to make a complaint. Young people have been involved in creating a DVD, which provides additional information in a visual format.

Carers are very well supported. A placing social worker commented: 'I find TACT staff always helpful and willing to assist with any problem or concern. Carers are well supported by link workers'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

A new carer recording system has been introduced this year, which is commended. Carers retain separate records relating to young people's health, education, contacts and activities as well as a running log of the placement. Young people will now have a comprehensive record of their placement with TACT.

New file structures have been introduced for carers' and young people's records. These are good, making files easily accessible and information easy to find.

The agency has clarified its policy regarding exemptions to the usual fostering limit.

Supervising Social worker records of contact with carers, including supervision and unannounced visits are much improved.

The agency has reviewed and amended the handbook for carers and staff. Amendments include clarification of the agency's expectation of carers where young people in placement are without a school place.

What they could do better:

Some young people's records do not contain a signed consent for medical treatment because this section of the Looked After Children (LAC) paperwork has not been completed.

Foster carers require this consent to have been obtained in case they need to seek medical treatment for a young person in an emergency.

The agency should better monitor completion of matching forms to ensure that it is able to evidence the considerations, which have influenced decisions about the appropriateness of a placement match.

Completed forms should indicate any shortfalls and how these will be addressed.

Some of the agency's pro-forma recording tools should more clearly require the specific addressing of young people's needs around race, culture, disability and gender.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

Standard 12.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Importance is given to meeting young people's health needs, and positive changes to foster carer recording requirements ensure that a full record of health interventions is maintained during placement with TACT.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

During the last year foster carers have been provided with a loose-leaf folder record for each young person placed. The folder has a dedicated health section where carers are required to record any medical appointments or consultations with medical practitioners. Carers are additionally supplied with pro-forma medication administration records, which are completed in respect of both prescription and non-prescription medication issued to the young person. On one file tracked the inspector noted good advice given to a foster carer regarding medication for a child with a cold and sore throat. At the point of the foster carer's annual review they are required to complete a summary, in relation to each young person placed, detailing their input during the year in relation to health promotion.

Carers visited during this inspection demonstrated a good awareness of the young people's health needs and young people's access to appropriate interventions in respect of both physical and mental health was noted. One young person tracked was having appointments with a counsellor whilst another was undergoing investigation of hearing difficulties.

Young people confirmed that their carers looked after their health needs: 'We eat healthy food and get loads of exercise'; 'Yes, because I used to have too much fizzy drink and now I don't'.

Foster Carers are strongly encouraged to access training courses. First Aid training is one of TACT's Core Training Courses, which all carers complete within two years of approval and training on Drugs and Alcohol Abuse is regularly provided. The agency has a Looked After Children's Nurse on its Fostering Panel and uses her as a source of advice and information.

Young people aged twelve plus have recently been supplied with a copy of the Who Cares Trust booklet: 'Who cares about being healthy'. The booklet was viewed by the inspector and was noted to be an excellent resource with good information about healthy lifestyles, details of who to talk to about various health concerns and good detail about the role of the Looked After Children's Nurse.

Managers informed the inspector that health histories for young people, received at the point of placement, were often poor. This was evidenced in the case of one young person tracked, where the existence of a heart murmur had only recently been revealed, following the young person's annual health check. The agency does not automatically receive updates to the health plans of young people placed (from placing authorities) following the statutory annual health check. The inspector has suggested that a standard letter be sent to all current placing authorities detailing the need for both the agency and its carers to receive these annual updates.

It was noted during this inspection that three of the four young people's files examined did not contain a signed consent for medical treatment because this section of the Looked After Children (LAC) paperwork had not been completed. In the case of one of these young people the carer stated that she did have a copy but another carer did not. The inspector suggested to the managers that this requirement could be incorporated into the agency's Placement Agreement to avoid reliance on LAC paperwork.

Despite the agency's failure to fully meet this standard because of this shortfall, the inspector considers that outcomes for young people in respect of health are good.

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.

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

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The safety of the young people is given a high priority. Systems and processes are in place to promote and ensure this. The agency should better evidence its placement matching.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

There have been slight changes to the management structure at the Kettering office since the previous inspection. The previous Registered Manager, who was also Regional Manager for the East Midlands, Birmingham and the North West, has relinquished her role as Registered Manager to focus on her more strategic role as Regional Manager. She has also assumed the lead within the organisation for two of the Every Child Matters outcome areas: Staying safe and Being Healthy.

One of the two East Midlands Area Managers is now Registered Manager for this office. The management team are appropriately qualified and experienced.

Four personnel files were examined during the inspection, two relating to social work staff, one relating to a member of administrative staff and one relating to a member of the Fostering Panel, all of who had been appointed within the last year. The files were in excellent order with a good, clear front sheet and evidenced a robust recruitment system. All necessary checks were evidenced, including telephone checks on references. The agency is particularly commended on its practice of completing standard Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on administrative staff despite being advised by the CRB that this is not necessary. The agency is additionally commended on the retention of full records of the interview process and on the inclusion in personnel files of full evidence of all qualifications, including General social care Council registration numbers.

Managers confirmed that all carer households currently have a safe care policy in place. These policies were examined in relation to the carer households tracked. Currently the safe care policy is household specific but the agency has just produced a new format, which is child specific. This is a commendable development.

The new format includes a comprehensive risk assessment and had been completed in relation to one of the young people tracked. The managers confirmed their intention that this format will now be completed in relation to all new and existing placements.

Prior to this being done the inspector has suggested that there is consideration given to including questions, which specifically address potential needs around culture, race, gender or disability. The managers should also make sure that guidelines to staff regarding the use of the new pro-forma detail the expected frequency for review of the safe care policy.

Each carer household has an annual Health and Safety inspection as part of the annual review process and all carer households tracked had a fire escape plan in place.

Every carer is provided with a copy of the Fostering Network 'Safer Caring' booklet and 'Safe Care' is one of the core training courses for foster carers.

Carers are provided with very clear guidelines in respect of acceptable and non-permissible sanctions. The agency is commended on the introduction of body charts to be completed by carers to accompany incident forms. One of the files tracked contained a very good Behaviour Management Agreement, signed by carers and supervising and placing social workers and detailing trigger factors and strategies for managing specific complex behaviours being exhibited by a young person in placement.

Information relating to concerns, complaints and allegations is collated and monitored by the Area Managers of the two teams. Information is appropriately retained and closely scrutinised.

Key Rings designed by the 'Who Cares' trust have been sent out to young people. The key rings hold a selection of cards giving a variety of bullying scenarios and advice on how to manage them. They are an excellent way of raising young people's awareness.

The agency has reviewed and developed its Child Protection Policy in line with 'Working Together to Safeguard Children guidelines.

All the young people's files examined during this inspection contained good evidence of the young people's individual specific needs and carers' files contained clear indication of their experience and skills in terms of competencies demonstrated within the initial assessment and subsequently in annual reviews.

The Duty Social Worker takes referrals for placement, and discussions are held with the Area Team Manager about potential placement options. A matching form/risk assessment is subsequently completed evidencing the matching of the young person to a particular foster placement. Currently this pro-forma is not being robustly used.

In the cases tracked during this inspection it was impossible to determine from the completed matching forms, how young people's identified needs had been matched to carers' strengths. Generally, in the section asking for carer's skills appropriate to this placement, the entry read: 'These are experienced carers'. Significant, crucial information relating to the needs of the young people being placed was not included on the form, for example, that a young person had a learning disability, that a young person had Dyspraxia, that a young person stole frequently from her previous carer and that this had been instrumental in the placement breakdown and that a young person had aggressive tendencies and was inclined to abscond.

The incomplete nature of information currently recorded on the matching form makes it difficult for the agency to evidence that it is matching placements appropriately. However managers and staff told the inspector that a high priority was given to matching young people appropriately to placements and both foster carers and placing social workers praised the agency's commitment to matching: 'A good matching process. The agency responds well to fully meet a child's needs'; 'D's care is superb. I am very pleased with this placement match'; 'All relevant information received on all three children was excellent, with time given for introductions and days out before the placement began'.

The agency should better monitor completion of the matching forms to ensure that it is able to evidence the considerations, which have influenced decisions about the appropriateness of a placement match. Completed forms should indicate any shortfalls and how these will be addressed.

A Fostering Panel was observed as part of this inspection and the minutes of three previous panels were examined by the inspector. The Panel Chair was interviewed by telephone.

There have been some recent changes to the panel constitution with three members leaving the panel and new members appointed, one of who is a foster carer for another agency. A change to the Panel Vice Chair is imminent. The panel observed was noted to be quorate and to make applicants welcome and relaxed without compromising formality.

The Panel Chair confirmed that the panel members had received training on the Adoption Act and on Special Guardianship Orders. She also confirmed that the panel received regular updates on agency operation, monitored the quality of assessments and maintained its independent overview of agency practices.

Some issues regarding panel operation and constitution within TACT have been the subject of discussion between TACT senior managers, the Commission for Social Care Inspection Provider Relationship Manager and the Commission's Fostering Lead. Agreements reached are in the process of implementation and have therefore not been specifically highlighted within this report.

The inspector has suggested that the agency gives some consideration to the room currently used for meetings of the Fostering Panel. The premises, which serves as the office for TACT East Midlands, has four storeys. Only the ground and first floor have disabled access. Currently the Fostering Panel meets on the third floor. Managers assured the inspector that if an applicant with a disability were attending for approval or review the panel would relocate to the ground floor but the current situation has concerning implications for panel membership. The agency needs to carefully consider its position with regard to current legislation.

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.

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

Standards 7 & 13.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The Fostering Service supports its carers well in their active encouragement of children to develop to their full potential.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Diversity training is provided to both staff and carers and diversity issues are a standard item on the agenda for carer and staff supervision and for Team Meetings.

Currently the agency has only five BME carers but also has only four BME young people placed. Managers confirmed that the geographical location served by this office resulted in the majority of placement requests being for white, British children.

The agency has one foster carer household, which has provided particularly successful placements to a number of asylum seeking young people. The inspector examined one of these placements and noted the pro-active and rapid work done to obtain an appropriate educational placement and support to pursue culturally appropriate interests.

The managers told the inspector of work done to obtain a quick, culturally appropriate, alternative placement for a young asylum seeker, when it was

discovered that he had inadvertently been placed alongside another young person where there was conflict between the two minority ethnic groups.

There is evidence of a good racial, cultural and gender mix within the staff team and discussions with managers and staff indicated a strong focus on ensuring that placements offered were equipped to meet the diverse needs of young people placed. One carer commented: 'In our experience children are found a placement with the matching covering many subjects such as religion and cultural background to fully meet the children's needs'. Another carer said 'Training is given to carers on equality and diversity. This training is shared with our children helping them to understand the many different traditions and cultures and how not to be offensive'.

The inspector did however highlight to managers that some of the agency's pro-forma recording tools, for example the matching form and the new safe care policy, should more clearly require the specific addressing of young people's needs around race, culture, disability and gender.

Placing social workers commented positively on the agency's capacity to meet young people's diverse needs: 'Special advice given to carers re ethnicity issues in this case was very important'; 'The two placements I work with have complex special educational needs and learning disabilities and the carers meet the children's needs to a very high standard'.

Foster carers retain a separate Education log detailing meetings attended and young people's achievements. They additionally submit a report at the time of their annual review detailing their involvement with the education of each young person in their care.

In the files tracked carers were noted to have good involvement with schools and young people were evidenced to have made good progress whilst in placement. All young people's files contained Personal Education Plans, or evidence that they were in process, and, where applicable evidence of reviewing of Statements of Special Educational Needs.

The agency employs an Education Consultant, on a sessional basis, who can provide advice to staff and carers and is available to attend educational meetings if requested to do so.

The handbook for staff and carers has been updated this year to better clarify the agency's expectation of carers where young people are without a school place. All carers are additionally supplied with a copy of the government guidance on the Education of Looked After Children.

Carers and young people are able to access the 'Guardian Direct' software package, which provides curriculum advice and access to coursework information.

Young people made positive comments about their educational support: 'I am only eleven years old and I feel very happy about what grades I am getting',

and carers felt that they received good support from the agency in promoting educational achievement: 'The link worker attends PEP meetings and school reviews and any other meetings the school might hold'. Placing social workers also commented on support provided: 'The foster carers and the agency ensure this child does well academically'.

Young people tracked during the inspection were seen to be supported to access a wide range of activities, with two young people demonstrating excellent trampolining skills to the inspector during a visit. One carer said 'The children have so many activities, guides, swimming, drama, dance, cycling and now they've started kick boxing and karate'.

One young person tracked during this inspection was travelling long distances to school daily (2.5 hours return journey). Whilst there were clear reasons for the initial decision to maintain continuity of education, this short-term placement had continued for more than twelve months and the young person was becoming increasingly unhappy about the journey. The Supervising Social Worker has supported the carer and young person to raise the issue in a recent Looked After Children Review but the agency has been advised to convey its concern to the placing authority, who are currently seeking a suitable alternative placement closer to the school, re-affirming the unacceptability of such a long daily journey for a young child.

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.

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

Standards 10 & 11.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The agency has a commendable range of systems for obtaining the views of young people and is able to demonstrate that their views are taken forward and acted upon.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Policy and procedural guidance clearly detail the agency's expectation that carers will promote and facilitate young people's contact with family and friends. One young person said: 'My carer always helps me sort out contact'. The Young People's Guide provides good information for young people about their rights in relation to contact and information about whom they should speak to if they are not happy.

The carers tracked were noted to be supporting young people in placement with, sometimes difficult, contact arrangements and to be helping them to represent their wishes and worries to other professionals.

This agency evidences a commendable commitment to seeking the views of young people. All young people in placement are seen regularly, on their own and with carers, by the Supervising Social Worker. The views expressed by young people are recorded on a pro-forma recording tool and these are retained on carer's and young people's files.

Both young people in placement and carers' own children are given a questionnaire to complete at the time of the carer's annual review and the Regional Manager and the Fostering Panel carefully consider these.

TACT operates a 'Children's Champions' group, which provides opportunities for a representative group of young people to meet with senior management. Regular larger scale consultation is undertaken. This year there was a Halloween event for local children, which included fostered and birth children as well as a residential participation weekend for all young people fostered with TACT nationally. A report of the activity/participation weekend, which was held at the Black Mountain Activity Centre in Brecon indicates that young people found the experience very positive.

The agency has this year introduced a separate newsletter for young people entitled 'inTACT' and, within its carers' newsletter, gives details of young people's birthdays and of their specific individual achievements. The agency regularly sends out information to support young people in achieving the five outcomes, most recently sending out the 'Who Cares' Trust booklet on health as well as a set of cards produced by the trust on tackling bullying. All young people fostered with TACT receive editions of the 'Who Cares' magazine.

The agency has developed a series of 'Standards for the Active Involvement of Children and Young People'. There are twenty-one standards written from the young people's perspective, each with a corresponding organisational standard to facilitate its achievement. The standards are around the knowledge, skills, information and support, which young people need to succeed.

The agency additionally compiles annual Child Performance Indicator statistics based on information from individual questionnaires completed by Supervising Social Workers in relation to each young person in placement. The statistics gathered reflect the agency's performance against the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Managers confirmed during this inspection that the agency's placement stability rate was especially good.

Young people, in their questionnaires said that they were well consulted by their carers and by the agency: 'I'm always listening to others and I'm always listened to'; 'They guide me well all the way'. Carers confirmed that they were encouraged to respect young people's views: 'They support us to deliver the best of care to our Looked After child and teach us to listen to him and his views. Although only four he knows what he does and doesn't want'; 'Children are always encouraged to attend LAC reviews and to participate fully in events that the fostering service holds for them'.

Placing social workers were very positive about carer and agency input in this area and its positive impact on young people's placements: 'The high level of support to foster carers and regularity of agency contact means that placements are stable and secure'.

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):

Standards 14 & 21.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The agency has developed an excellent programme to prepare young people for independent living.

Carer allowances are clearly detailed and include a good incentive scheme.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has produced an excellent Independent Living Skills pack called 'Next Steps'. There is a folder for young people aged 14 plus, which contains a range of information on health issues, employment and further education, benefits, rights and responsibilities and day to day living issues as well as a host of useful contact numbers. The programme additionally includes a manual for carers, which requires them to complete checklists to evidence the young person's development of a range of core skills necessary for independent living.

None of the young people tracked during this inspection were taking part in this programme, as all were too young, although one young person asked about preparing for independence told the inspector: 'I am eleven and we are just beginning to talk about it'.

The agency has been judged to meet this standard although its capacity to exceed it was recognised, had the inspector been able to observe the practical implementation of this excellent programme.

The handbook for carers and staff provides clear detail regarding carer payments and tax and insurance liabilities. There is full detail in the Foster Carer Agreement of the breakdown of the fostering allowance and good clarity in the handbook about additional payments, including amounts and qualifying conditions. Carers are financially rewarded for obtaining an NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) and are paid a loyalty bonus at the time of their annual review. Carers said payments were made in a 'professional and timely manner'.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24 &25.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

The managers provide clear leadership and a good level of support to staff and foster carers to enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities. There is a commendable focus on positive outcomes for young people.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a very good, clear Statement of Purpose, which provides full detail of staffing at the Kettering Office and of the constitution and function of the panel. There is also good information regarding organisational constitution and aims and objectives. A separate document provides full information to purchasers of services.

The Young People's Guide is attractively presented and contains excellent information about opportunities for participation, a clear description of what being fostered means and good information about advocacy and how to make a complaint. Young people have been involved in creating a DVD, which provides additional information in a visual format.

Young people are supplied, within the guide, with pro-forma contact forms should they have any queries or suggestions. This is an excellent idea.

TACT has a dedicated Quality Assurance and Development Manager to monitor service delivery and quality and to ensure consistency of operation across the various offices.

Changes to the management structure within the Kettering Office have given the two Area managers (one of whom is the Registered Manager) increased responsibility for day-to-day operational management. Lines of accountability are clear. A good working relationship is evidenced between them and they evidence confidence and competence with clarity about their Regional Manager's role.

All social work staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The staff team is a strong, professional team, benefiting from a high standard of administrative support. Relationships within the staff team were observed to be positive and professional with mutual respect for one another's roles and responsibilities. The inspector noted a strong and commendable dedication, throughout the team, to positive outcomes for young people. The approach was commendably child-centred.

Currently there is one social work vacancy, with another post coming vacant in April 2007. The managers confirmed that recruitment to both these posts was already in process.

TACT is prepared to invest in its staff. A bursary was awarded to a student social worker at this office last year to facilitate completion of a degree course. She is now a fully qualified, full time member of the staff team.

Staff confirmed that both formal and informal support was good, with regular recorded supervision sessions, personal development plans in place and appropriate access to training opportunities.

A written report recently completed by one placing authority as part of its contract monitoring process evidences full satisfaction with the services provided by TACT.

Carer recruitment processes are clear and detailed and the Form F assessments examined were completed to a good standard with robust reference to carer competencies. The managers confirmed that all social work staff completing assessments had received training. The carer annual review system is commendably comprehensive, again with excellent reference to carer competencies.

The 'Foster Carer and Supervising Social Worker Standards and Practice Guide' is comprehensive and contains a range of policy and procedural guidelines and advice. The manual has recently been reviewed and updated and at the time of this inspection was being dispatched to carers.

Carer support was identified by both foster carers and placing social workers as a real strength of this agency: 'Our link worker is excellent. She gives good advice and if she doesn't know she will find out'; 'There is always someone there on the end of the phone to help and support'; 'Friendly, professional staff and lots of training, well tailored to our needs'; 'Support to foster carers is excellent-attending meetings with carers and general advice and availability is very good'.

Several placing social workers particularly commented on how good their working relationship was with TACT: 'The Supervising Social Workers that I have worked with are experienced, approachable, articulate and able to produce concise, written reports and work to a very high standard'; 'The TACT service is very good. Their relationship with ourselves is also good'.

A TACT survey of carers' views about service provision in June/July this year evidenced a high level of satisfaction.

Foster carers receive regular and frequent supervision to a standard agenda and records of both supervision and day-to-day contact were good. There is good agency support for respite with carers being encouraged to identify back-up carers. Since the previous inspection the agency has undertaken to put back up carers through the assessment process and this is currently in process for all existing back-up carers.

A range of training opportunities is provided and the Foster Carer Agreement details a commitment to attend a minimum of three courses each year.

Training is an issue because of the large geographical area covered by the agency. Previously training was all held at the Kettering Office but this year a number of courses have been held at other venues. This has been valued by some carers. Managers confirmed that negotiations were taking place with TACT senior management currently for increases to the training budget to facilitate more widespread training. Managers also confirmed that, where young people in placement had very specific needs, training had been provided to carers in their home on a one-to one basis.

There are clear arrangements for out of hours contact with the social work staff from the Kettering Office operating a duty rota. A TACT Manager is also always on call.

New file structures have been introduced for carers' and young people's records. These are good, making files easily accessible and information easy to find. Files are regularly audited by managers who comment on the standard of recording as well as on anything missing from the records.

All Looked After Children paperwork was on all the young people's files examined during the inspection, though one carer visited was not in possession of this. The agency has been reminded to ensure that carers are provided with copies of all relevant paperwork.

Some staff expressed concern about the level of duplication in terms of pro-forma recording and managers agreed to review pro-forma currently in use to consider whether this was the case.

A new carer recording system has been introduced this year, which is commended. Carers are now supplied with a loose-leaf folder, in respect of each child in placement, with separate sections to record information about health, education, contact and activities as well as a requirement to retain a running placement log. The carers visited were retaining these records well. One carer commented that although her initial response was 'Oh my God, this is awful', she now found the new system 'great' because 'it cross references so well and you can always find the information you are looking for'.

Young people will now have a comprehensive record of their placement with TACT.

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	2
9	3
15	4
30	3

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	4

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

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

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

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	FS8	The agency should better monitor completion of the matching forms to ensure that it is able to evidence the considerations, which have influenced decisions about the appropriateness of a placement match. Completed forms should indicate any shortfalls and how these will be addressed.
2	FS12	The agency should obtain signed consent to medical treatment in respect of all young people placed.

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