

# TACT East London

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Joanna Heller
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<b>Setting address</b>	Ground Floor Front Office, BUPA House, 42-48 High Road, LONDON, E18 2QL
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**Telephone number**

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**Registered person**

**Registered manager**

**Responsible individual**

**Date of last inspection**

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Mary Angela Elizabeth Hanson

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17/01/2008

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

TACT East London is an independent fostering agency that recruits, trains and supports foster carers in the Essex and London areas. The East London TACT office is part of a national network of TACT fostering services.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The agency is clearly child focused and ensures that children are offered excellent support and given the best opportunity to secure positive outcomes. The agency demonstrates a clear commitment to ensuring services which meet the individual needs of each child placed. Children become an integral part of the families they join. Carers and young people refer to extremely close bonds that have been built between them. Requirements have been set regarding file management and evidencing that full recruitment checks on panel members have been taken up.

A key strength of the agency is the excellent level of support provided to carers. Carers and the agency also offer outstanding commitment to ensuring positive healthcare and educational outcomes for children and young people.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The fostering agency was asked at the last inspection to ensure that copies of all statutory information, in particular personal education plans and copies of minutes of children's statutory reviews, are held. The agency experiences difficulties ensuring that placing authorities provide copies of essential paperwork and continues to chase these up.

At the last inspection the agency was also asked to ensure all carers undertake key training regularly. The agency now ensures that carers undertake core training periodically, in particular child protection and first aid.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children are healthy and live in healthy environments which meets their needs. Carers demonstrate a solid commitment to ensuring positive healthcare outcomes for children. Children and young people feel that their carers display real care and concern for their health and welfare. Placing authorities refer to care provided to an 'excellent standard' by carers who 'show an amazing capacity to respond to the

child's emotional and physical needs'. Carers ensure that children and young people have a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. Children receive the appropriate support from all medical professionals that they require. Where specialist support, such as counselling is required, the agency ensures that this is in place. The agency sources and funds some specialist outside support where it is felt that it will be of significant benefit to the child. Training is provided to carers in key areas such as promoting health, first aid and food and nutrition. When children and young people are first placed with foster carers they are promptly registered with a doctor, dentist and optician. Children receive education, guidance and support in respect of growing up, personal relationships, drugs and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. A selection of material is provided and carers are able to access support from the children's champion and leaving care workers if required.

Carers ensure medication is stored securely; ensuring children are safeguarded from accidental ingestion. Supervising social workers are fully aware of the health needs of each of the children placed. The agency has effective systems in place to monitor the overall health of children placed with the agency.

Foster homes are spacious and maintained appropriately, allowing children the opportunity to thrive. Children enjoy access to a wide range of activities appropriate to their age and development which help them grow and develop. Supervising social workers monitor the safety of the building during their monthly visits and carry out unannounced visits ensuring the foster homes remains appropriate and safe to meet the children's needs.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people's safety and welfare are at the centre of the service delivered by the fostering agency. Children feel safe with their carers and have developed strong attachments to the people whom they feel will protect them from harm. Young people say 'it feels like they really do care about me'. Children and young people highlight the difference their carers have made to their lives in making them feel loved, valued, safe and wanted.

Staff and foster carers have access to comprehensive and clear written guidance that address child protection and safeguarding issues. Carers have training which is regularly updated. This means that they are clear on what to do should they feel a child is at risk of harm, either physically or emotionally. Where incidents of a child protection nature occur the service effectively and consistently acts in accordance with agreed safeguarding protocols to ensure children and young people's safety remains paramount. Staff and foster carers proactively encourage young people to be concerned about their safety both within and external to the placement. Young people are given information to help them understand how to protect themselves and stay safe and have someone they can call if they feel unsafe. Children rarely go missing, and if they do, carers ensure on their return that they are supported. Carers follow the local missing from care guidelines. Some young people have made very

positive progress in this area and now going missing rarely when previously this was a frequent event. Young people report that this is because they feel safe where they are, can talk to carers. Young people also report that carers discuss with them the dangers they face when going missing and emphasise their concerns are because they care for the young people.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Relationships between the children and the foster carers are the bedrock of the high quality care provided. Children and young people consistently refer to the positive relationships they have developed with their carers. It is evident that carers have had a real effect in ensuring positive outcomes for young people and improving children's overall long term life chances. Young people refer to carers as providing stable homes where they know they are loved and cared for as one of the family. Young people report feeling a strong sense of self-worth and belonging within the foster household.

Young people interviewed consistently rated the agency and the carers as good to outstanding. Young people behave appropriately within the foster household as carers are able to enforce fair and consistent boundaries. Placing authorities refer to 'a real turnaround in behaviour since being with these carers'. The agency provides carers with support in developing behaviour management strategies for children and young people who challenge boundaries. Young people respect their carers and are able to talk through any issues that are worrying them. Foster homes are suitable and sufficiently spacious to give children what they need to relax and engage in age-appropriate activities. Children and young people are able to develop friendships with other children of the same age in line with experiences for children who are not looked after.

Young people are able to enjoy a wide range of activities both inside and outside of the foster home. Children and young people who display specific interests and talents, or have specific educational equipment requirements, are provided with the equipment and support to participate fully in their chosen activity. Children and young people are able to join in a range of activities periodically organised for both fostered and birth children in fostering households such as days out to theme parks. Particularly popular with older children and young people is the 'big weekender': this is an agency wide activity weekend for older young people supported by staff and managers throughout the agency. This has proved so popular that demands were made by younger children to run a similar event this year for the 8-12 age group. Carers are able to use the company's caravans. Young people are encouraged to attend after school activities such as dancing and sports clubs, as appropriate to their individual interests and aspirations.

The agency provides strong support to promote good educational outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people clearly benefit from the fostering service's efforts to promote their educational success. Children are

supported to do well in school and carers are aware of each child's individual educational progress and goals. Foster carers ensure children and young people have access to an array of play and learning materials to encourage appropriate development. The agency has effective systems for monitoring the educational outcomes of children. Foster carers demonstrate a commitment to independently providing educational learning and accessing extra tuition, local libraries and learning establishments. Children know that their carers will be there to watch their school plays, attend parents' evenings and cheer for them on sports day. Young people refer to carers who help them reach their goals and 'talk to me about my future and what I need to do'. Placing authorities refer to young people for whom foster care 'has been a real success story, enabling the child to think of further education and aspirations to go to university.'

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people are welcomed into foster carers' homes and embraced into the family. Young people are treated with the same care and respect as are the carers' birth children and are not made to feel different. Children and young people's feelings are taken into account on all aspects of their care. Children know that foster carers and the agency will support them in ensuring their voice is heard. An independent agency using care experienced assessors awarded the agency recognition as one which achieves all seven quality targets in ensuring that young people have meaningful participation in the organisation referring to a 'culture of inclusion and listening to children and young people within the agency'.

Children all have someone to talk to in the agency about things which are worrying them, such as children's champions and leaving care services who are the most well-known face of the agency to the children. In some cases independent advocates have been accessed to support children to articulate what they want, feel and need. Carers help children understand those occasions when what they want may not be able to happen, and why this is. Young people refer to their carers as people 'who always listen to me and they take note of my opinions'. The agency promotes young people's feedback on the agency as a whole, through national and local young people's forums. The agency does listen to the issues raised and is involving these forums in helping design new processes such as the leaving care and training young people to become active in staff recruitment and mentoring other young people.

Children are supported to develop a strong sense of self-esteem and emotional resilience. Carers sensitively support children through difficult experiences such as parental relationships, bereavement and disclosure. Carers gain support and guidance from their supervising workers to help children through these difficult times. Foster carers are clear about their role and responsibility in promoting contact between looked after children their families and significant others. Foster carers have access to clear written guidance and good training opportunities that explore issues of contact. Where necessary, the fostering service provides practical assistance, including funding and support, to ensure contact arrangements are keenly adhered

to. These arrangements are always consistent with local authority care planning and court orders relating to contact. Carers raise any issues of concern regarding contact with appropriate agencies.

Children are supported in collecting memory boxes and undertaking life story work. Children are actively involved in the local community in the same way any other child of the family is involved, and feel part of the carer's family.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency demonstrates a solid commitment to preparing young people for adulthood. Foster carers ensure that young people have savings in place as they prepare to leave placements, and access to any set up grants. The fostering service has a good track record of helping foster carers, if they so wish, negotiate placement continuation once the young person has reached aged 18 under the staying put policy. Young people therefore benefit from and appreciate the opportunity to be emotionally supported or continue living in households where they feel they are loved and with families which they belong to.

The agency invites all carers of children in the selected age range to attend training on providing support for young people at this crucial stage. Carers ensure that children develop their self-care skill base informally from the point they are welcomed into the foster home as would any responsible parent. Such development of skill becomes more formalised in line with the development of the pathway plan and transition plan and the training that carers undertake. The agency's leaving care support worker has a very visible role in supporting young people to develop a curriculum vitae, write supporting declarations for university or access apprenticeships. Young people are also supported to view semi-independence schemes to understand what options are open to them when leaving care. The agency has a detailed preparation for independence programme which covers in detail areas of knowledge young people may need. Young people are able to earn a total of £100 for attending this one week long programme. Young people comment very positively on both the content and the experience of attending this training. The agency actively supports young people in understanding their rights and responsibilities and how to negotiate the legal and benefits' systems. Such proactive input from the agency ensures young people have a much better chance when they move on, to continue to grow and develop into valued members of society.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency is clearly child focused and ensures that children are offered excellent support and given the best opportunity to secure positive outcomes. The people who operate and manage the service have many years of experience in the field of fostering.



The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are useful documents which guide young people, their parents and placing authorities as to the services the agency is able to provide. The children's guide is available in age-appropriate child-friendly formats, however, these do not clearly detail the right of children and young people to complain to Ofsted. Also available is a DVD titled 'Chloe's journey' which was made by young people. The DVD is designed to give young people a better understanding and help them make sense of being in care.

The agency ensures a good selection of carers is available to meet the needs of the local community. The agency has a robust panel process which ensures assessment of the suitability of carers is thoroughly explored. The panel benefits from a wide variety of experience and expertise. Exemptions granted by the agency have not on all occasions been taken back to panel. Decisions are clearly documented, reached in a timely manner and effectively shared with carers. The agency, however, fails to fully evidence the recruitment checks which have been undertaken to ensure panel members suitability. For example, copies of references, identity checks and validation of professional qualifications are not held on file. Records of all panel members having had Criminal Records Bureau checks undertaken are held on file.

Referral and matching processes are sound, ensuring that children are suitably matched to carers who can effectively meet their needs. Issues such as disability, culture, age, religion and language are all carefully thought through. Supervising social workers at the agency get to know the children in placement well and effectively monitor the progress of each of the children during their regular visits. Carers keep the agency informed of what has happened through regular reports. The agency ensures that carers deliver high quality child-focused care to each of the children and young people in line with any placement plan and individual fostering agreement in place. However, not all young people placed have such documentation on file. The agency is moving towards a paperless filing system. This is causing some difficulties with accessing information and means that record keeping in carers and children's files does not always fully evidence the work that the agency undertakes.

Carers benefit from a wealth of training which equips them for the role they are to perform. The agency, following on from the 'Skills to Foster' initial training, identifies areas of core training which all carers should complete. This core training includes areas such as safe care, safeguarding, working with abuse, behaviour management, child development, attachment theory, first aid, record keeping, information sharing and equality and diversity. The agency has clear systems in place for monitoring attendance at training and expects carers to complete the core training. Where carers fail to do this the agency is proactively reviewing how it will address this. The agency has been imaginative in supporting carers to engage with the training, such as exploring online training. Carers are able to benefit from a wide variety of additional training to develop their skills and awareness. The vast majority of carers have completed or are undertaking their Children's Workforce Development Council support and development for foster care. Carers comment that training is strength of the agency.

Carers comment that a key strength of the organisation is the care and support it gives to carers, enabling them to provide such an excellent service to the children who are placed with them. Carers benefit from regular support groups and supervising social workers whose regular visits have clear purpose. Foster carers consistently refer to their supervising workers as the person they can lean on and ask for support at any time, day or night. The agency has practical support systems such as behavioural support, access to therapy, and attending health and educational meetings.

The vast majority of young people, carers and placing authorities graded the agency as good to excellent.

Children and young people are effectively safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment in the agency whether as carers or staff, through robust vetting practices. The agency follows best recruitment practice and ensures that no individuals are employed by the organisation until full checks on their suitability are complete. The agency acts appropriately to safeguard children and young people in the event of any child protection allegation and has robust processes for keeping agencies informed of any event affecting the welfare of the child.

Staff enjoy working for an organisation which respects them and values them. Staff are very well supported with the opportunity for regular case discussion and support. Staff benefit from a wide selection of opportunities for professional development. The agency has very low staff turnover rates with a number of staff having worked at the agency for many years. Staff say they enjoy working for a national agency that is child focussed and which feels small and intimate.

This is a well-financed agency which ensures that there are sufficient funds to underpin all of the work it undertakes. Effective systems are in place to monitor key information, such as outcomes for children. The agency also has clear and effective monitoring systems in relation to complaints, child protection and other significant events. Quality assurance systems are robust and aid the organisation in identifying ways to continuously improve. Practice within the organisation is reflective allowing staff to identify areas for personal growth.

Carers and staff refer to a manager who leads by example and who will offer practical help in times of crisis. This is a well-managed agency which effectively demonstrates a clear commitment to securing the best outcomes for children through valuing and supporting staff and carers.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Statutory Requirements**

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

<b>Reg</b>	<b>Statutory Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
20 (2011)	evidence that the recruitment of panel members is robust in line with schedule 1 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 20)	24/02/2012
28 (2011)	ensure any changes to foster carers terms of approval are referred to panel for consideration. In particular; exemptions issued under schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 (Regulation 28(5))	20/01/2012
3 (2011)	ensure the children’s guide clearly includes the right of the child to report complaints and concerns to Ofsted. (Regulation 3 (3))	24/02/2012

**Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure records are maintained in a way which will be helpful to the child access their files now or in the future. In particular ensure information evidences the support given and is easily accessible (NMS 26.6)
- ensure copies of all statutory documentation, such as, assessments of need and minutes of reviews are obtained. (NMS 26.8)