

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) is an incorporated charity and Independent Fostering Agency. The head office is in London and there are eight branches throughout England and Wales.

At the time of this inspection, the Birmingham branch of TACT supports 63 foster carers and 92 children in short, medium and long-term placements. The agency caters for children from birth to under 18 years in emergency, short and long term placements.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The fostering agency is highly effective and well managed throughout. Managers and staff are committed to fostering. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency through rigorous monitoring and quality assurance processes. This is used to actively drive continuous improvements in outcomes for children and young people and in service provision.

The agency and wider organisation encourage a high level of participation with young people and foster carers in order to improve their service delivery. Young people significantly influence and contribute to the development of the service through regular participation groups and events. Foster carers also contribute to care planning and service delivery through numerous training events, conferences and surveys.

Children and young people are very well matched in stable placements. There are low instances of unplanned endings of placements. This is due to good matching and high quality support which is provided to sustain the placements. Children and young people report that they are happy and secure in their placements and are positive about the care they receive. Children and young people are making good progress in all aspects of their development and especially with regard to their health and

education.

Safeguarding practice and monitoring are well embedded in the fostering service. The agency has strong and systematic systems in place to ensure children and young people are kept safe. Comprehensive assessments of foster carers' skills are conducted and robust risk assessments are carried out. These ensure children and young people are kept safe and experience positive outcomes.

Equality and diversity is given a high priority within the agency. Children and young people, foster carers and staff's diverse needs are identified and met well.

As a result of this inspection there are two requirements. These relate to shortfalls in the timeliness of foster carers' reviews and to the foster care agreement. They do not affect the quality of care experienced by children and young people.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
27 (2011)	ensure the foster carer agreement covers all matters specified in Schedule 5 (Regulation 27 (5)(b))	31/10/2012
28 (2011)	ensure all foster carer reviews take place not more than a year after approval and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28(2))	31/10/2012

Recommendations

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

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children and young people receive a good level of individualised care that meets their social, emotional, psychological and physical needs. They are well supported and enabled to share their views wishes and feelings and influence the care they receive. They actively participate in the day-to-day decisions involving them and in decisions that influence their lives. For example, young people regularly participate in

their reviews and have been able to exercise choice regarding contact with birth families and in the school they wish to attend. A children's resource worker visits every child and young person prior to foster carers' reviews to gain their views. Young people are also encouraged to contribute to the running of the fostering service by attending national participation events where their views are gained and changes to the service has resulted. For instance, young people have recently become involved in redesigning the children's guide.

Children and young people are happy in their foster placements and are treated as part of the family. They make good progress to develop a positive self-view and make and sustain strong attachments with their carers. One young person complimented the agency stating, 'I am happy with my foster carers and you made the right decision when you considered me living with them.' Another felt, 'very happy and couldn't ask for a better foster family.' They rarely experience unplanned endings to their placements.

Children and young people's needs in relation to their ability, ethnicity and identity are also being well met. Children and young people are appropriately matched with foster carers who can meet these needs. For example carers' have enhanced children's sense of identity by taking children on holiday to other countries such as Jamaica and Pakistan. This ensures children and young people have a good knowledge and understanding of their religion and culture. Children and young people also have a good understanding of their background and identity through positive contact with family and friends.

Children and young people's health needs are well supported by their foster carers whose care and vigilance has resulted in good and excellent outcomes being achieved. They are supported to keep healthy and where appropriate take responsibility for their own health. They understand the importance of eating healthily and rarely engage in risk taking behaviours or activities such as smoking and drug or alcohol use. Children and young people regularly attend school and with support from foster carers are making good progress in their educational achievements. They participate in a range of community and leisure activities such as gymnastics and swimming which helps them to develop their self-esteem and confidence.

The agency also regularly involve looked after children and foster carers' own birth children in organised activities such as drumming workshops and social events which develop self-esteem and confidence.

Young people acquire the practical and life skills needed to successfully attain independence. The agency has developed good staying put arrangements for young people to help them develop skills they need to ensure a smooth transition into adulthood.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

The fostering agency recruits a culturally diverse range of carers who meet the needs of the children and young people placed. Recruitment plans target areas where recruitment needs are identified.

The preparation, assessment and matching of foster carers are good and lead to effective placements. The assessments of foster carers are comprehensive and analytical. They focus strongly on the needs of children and young people. Prospective foster carers are well prepared prior to becoming approved. The preparation and training of prospective foster carers enables them to have a good understanding of the complexities surrounding the fostering task. Clear matching is taking place with considered thinking of children's needs to carers' skills. This ensures well matched stable placements are made.

All foster carers are provided with good levels of information to help them care effectively for the children and young people placed with them. The foster care agreement, however, does not refer to the need for foster carers to comply with the agency's policy on behaviour management as required in legislation. This could compromise their knowledge and understanding of the expectations required of them.

The fostering panel is effective. It makes timely, child centred recommendations and is robust in its scrutiny of assessments and reviews. It is supported by sound administrative systems and is well constituted with a good range of appropriately qualified and experienced professionals. A high level of quality assurance function has been developed which ensure the quality of assessments are improved and maintained. All assessments and carers' first, fourth and seventh reviews are conducted by an independent reviewing officer prior to being considered by the fostering panel. A small number of foster carer reviews, however, have not been held within a 12-month period as required.

Foster carers are well trained and supported to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people they care for. They receive a high level of induction, mandatory and developmental training including the Childcare Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training standards in foster care. Where complex health needs require specialist care, foster carers are given specific training prior to placement. This ensures the health needs of children are always fully met. For example foster carers' have undergone training in tube feeding, gastronomy buttons and in the management of viral illnesses and cancer. The agency also gives high priority to the on-going development of foster carers. They have recently introduced new evidenced based training for carers to develop their skills and knowledge. Foster carers receive regular and good quality supervision and have commented that they receive, 'excellent support' from their supervising social workers and feel 'part of a team.'

The agency is very strong in encouraging participation with foster carers and with young people. Participation events are regularly organised where carers' and young people can share their views to improve practice and quality of care. They are

actively involved in planning and their views are highly regarded by the fostering service. Foster carers feel very strongly that they work in partnership, sharing responsibility with staff and other key professionals. The agency has a foster carer representative who attends four foster carer representative meetings with senior management nationally to share views and raise any areas of concern expressed by foster carers.

The agency has also recently organised a conference locally, for foster carers to attend with staff. This focused on attachment and trauma and included outside speakers, trainers and complimentary therapists. One trainer who attended the conference felt the agency was 'ground breaking in their recognition of their work with carers.'

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The agency and wider organisation has strong and systematic systems in place to ensure children and young people are kept safe. The organisation has established a safeguarding and child protection committee to provide a clear focus and lead in this area of work and to ensure that relevant practice and policy issues are discussed and addressed. This means they are able to learn from any safeguarding issues and ensure practice is developed and improved.

The agency has low instances of children and young people going missing. Where this has occurred the majority were missing for less than 24 hours. Allegations are handled carefully and promptly. Managers and staff liaise closely with all relevant professionals and share information appropriately.

There is a strong focus on safeguarding throughout the recruitment, assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers. The agency has devised safeguarding competences for foster carers which are refreshed every two years. This ensures that managers and staff are fully aware of the level of safeguarding knowledge each foster carer possesses and are able to target extra training or support where needed.

The agency adopts a very thorough matching process, incorporating robust risk assessments, which ensures that young people's safety is highly prioritised from the commencement of their placement. A detailed and comprehensive risk assessment is completed on every child prior to placement. This helps identify the impact of any behaviours and action required to minimise their risk.

Children and young people say that they feel safe with their foster families and know how to complain. They feel their foster carers support them to feel safe from bullying and abuse and feel confident that carers know how to respond to any events where they may experience bullying. All foster carers are alert to the potential impact of new technologies and social media. Safe caring policies reflect how household practices specifically promote the safety of the young people accommodated. Each

time a new child is placed in the foster home the policy is updated to reflect their specific needs.

Staff and foster carers receive regular and comprehensive training in safeguarding. Local authority safeguarding board training is available to all staff and carers as well as the agency's safeguarding training. This ensures that all those working with children and young people are fully conversant with their areas own safeguarding procedures to ensure children are protected swiftly and without delay.

Local authority commissioners and social workers feel that the agency is 'proactive in their responses and I am happy with their level of safeguarding and commitment for young people.'

Recruitment and vetting of staff is thorough and helps ensure safety of children and young people. Unannounced visits are taking place regularly and dependant on the level of risk, occur several times a year.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **outstanding**.

This is a very well managed fostering agency. There is a high level of robust strategic management and quality assurance monitoring throughout the organisation which is highly effective and ensures an excellent delivery of care. This is evaluative and is used to actively drive continuous improvements in outcomes for children and young people and in service provision. The agency knows the areas of strength and areas for improvement. The Statement of Purpose and children's guides are clear and accessible to all ages. This ensures everyone is clear about the aims and objectives of the service.

Since the last inspection in 2007 the agency has grown in numbers of staff and foster carers. All of the previous requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been met. The Registered Manager and staff team are all qualified and highly experienced. The level of staff retention within the agency is extremely good. Complaints are dealt with promptly and appropriately. In the last 12 months there have been two complaints, both of which have not been upheld.

Managers at all levels demonstrate clear vision and ambition for the children and young people who are fostered. They seek continuous improvement in the outcomes they achieve and in the quality of service provision. They have developed a consultation action plan to provide a clear framework for children young people and carers' participation.

Young people significantly influence and contribute to the development of the service. For example, they are actively involved in participation days organised by the agency locally and nationally. They have developed a DVD version of the children's guide and through the young people's champion group have made significant changes to service delivery. Young people have become involved in the youth

parliament and in the recruitment and training of prospective foster carers.

Staff and foster cares feel highly valued and speak highly of the agency. One staff member commented that the agency, 'has been a breath of fresh air for me' another stated, 'we are a big family I enjoy working here.' The engagement of staff and fosters carers is integral to care planning and service delivery through numerous training events, conferences and surveys. They are enthusiastic and committed to their role. Both staff and carers' are well supported and kept up-to-date with relevant and extensive training programmes. Supervising social workers and managers regularly discuss recent research and how this can inform their practice.

The wider organisation has commissioned several research papers and championed ideas to improve the understanding and support for issues facing looked after children. This is used to inform aspects of the agency's service delivery and training. For example, the organisation is working in partnership with a university to commission research into attachment, the findings of which are fed into training programmes with foster carers and conferences. The organisation has also commissioned a research study into the links between looked after children and offending behaviour. The findings of this research have been discussed with staff and carers developing their awareness of this issue and the measures which can be put in place to reduce this behaviour. The organisation has created a specialist team that provides services and advice for those working with children who are affected by pre-natal alcohol. Foster carers from the agency are able to access this team for support and up-to-date advice. Through this research and development, the agency is constantly improving its practice and the quality of care provided to children and young people. One external professional commented that she regarded the organisation as a 'pathfinder in this country.'

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.