

# The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

**Unique reference number** SC056442  
**Inspection date** 14 March 2016  
**Inspector** Rachel Britten  
**Type of inspection** Full  
**Provision subtype**

---

**Setting address** Spooner House, 172 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6QG  
**Telephone number** 0121 580 2555  
**Email** s.batchelor@tactcare.org.uk  
**Registered person** The Adolescent And Children's Trust  
**Registered manager** Vacant post  
**Responsible individual** Andrew Elvin  
**Date of last inspection** 1 October 2012

---

© Crown copyright 2016

Website: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

## 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 registered agencies throughout England and Wales.

At the time of this inspection, the Birmingham branch of TACT supports 95 foster carers in 54 households. They are caring for 71 children and young people in short-, medium- and long-term placements. The agency caters for children and young people from birth to under 18 years in emergency, short- and long-term placements.

The volume of recruitment during the year 2015/2016 was nine carer households (14 carers). In 2014/2015 it was four carer households (seven carers).

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement, where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so that they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards, but these are not widespread or serious. All children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people, including those with complex health, emotional and learning needs, have those needs met well. Their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. A significant number live with their brothers and sisters. All children and young people enjoy warm, secure relationships with their carers and their fostering families. They live and thrive in safe and stable placements, a high proportion of which are long term. Far fewer placements break down than the national average. Of the 161 children placed at any point during 2014-15, there was only one sudden, unplanned ending, made at the request of the foster carer.

Recruitment and preparation of carers result in a range of skilled carers who can meet the diverse needs of children and young people. This is a key strength. For example, carers for children and young people with health needs have nursing and medical backgrounds. Many carers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are able to speak their home language. A number of children and young people are matched with carers who have the same religious and cultural background. This means that children and young people make very good progress and achieve well in all areas of their lives.

All carers speak highly of the assessment and preparation process. They say that their skills are recognised and developed through it. They feel that all staff get to know them well during initial training. This contributes to very good matching. The number of carers is growing again in 2015 and 2016 following a small contraction in the service over the previous two years.

Carers are part of the professional team and use their knowledge confidently to inform planning and decision making. Their success with, and commitment to children and young people mean that many placements move from short-term care arrangements to long-term and permanent ones. Children and young people feel part of the family and want to stay on and do well. Carers empower children and young people to say this in meetings about their care plans. Carers also make their own good contributions to care planning through written reports and participation in meetings.

The agency does well in obtaining the views of children and young people and enhancing their experiences. The children's resources worker is a particular asset here. Children and young people also benefit from regular national events, adventure holidays and participating in research undertaken by the organisation as a whole. Children's and young people's views are published and widely shared throughout the organisation and beyond. They therefore have a sense of belonging to an active organisation and feel that their views can really influence policy and practice.

The agency works effectively with local authorities. Placing authorities are impressed with the matching of children and young people to carers who can meet their needs on a long-term basis. Partnerships with local safeguarding authorities ensure that individual children and young people are protected. When concerns, allegations or complaints are made by partners, these are investigated properly in accordance with child protection procedures. Children and young people are safeguarded well despite two isolated lapses in proper use of vetting procedures.

Leadership of the agency has improved significantly over the last six months because a new, very competent manager is in post. Her application for registration was successfully submitted in March 2016. However, three different managers, temporary arrangements, promotions and demotions characterise the last three years. Concerns about managers' style and performance have resulted in complaints, oversights in practice and issues with staff morale. Staff and managers have whistle blown and taken out a grievance about terms and conditions and about agency practices.

The agency has ensured independent and internal investigation of complaints and

other issues as appropriate. Staff have remained professional with carers at all times and have not compromised their or carers' good-quality work with children, young people and other professionals. However, manager monitoring and review over the period is not effective enough. Managers have not identified all regulatory and recording shortfalls. Nevertheless, breaches of regulations are isolated occurrences. Children's and young people's welfare and safety have not been adversely affected. The retention of foster carers has not been adversely affected.

## Areas for improvement

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards (NMS). The registered person must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that panel members are appointed including one or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair is absent (the vice chairs) (Regulation 23(4)(ii)).	29/04/2016
Ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in schedule 7 take place, the registered person must without delay notify the person or bodies indicated in column 2 of the table (Regulation 36(1)).	29/04/2016
Ensure that notice is given in writing to HMCI without delay if a person other than the registered person carries on or manages the fostering agency and if a person ceases to carry it on or manage it (Regulation 39(1)(a)and(b)).	29/04/2016
Ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation18(4)).	29/04/2016

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Extend the quality and reliability with which children and young people are given information about their foster carers before arrival (NMS 11.3)
- Ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the services policy for keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises) (NMS 26.2)
- Ensure that the panel chair checks that written minutes of panel meetings are

accurate and clearly cover all the key issues and views expressed and record the reasons for its recommendation (NMS 14.7)

- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way that is helpful to the child when they access their files now and in the future (NMS 26.6)
- Ensure that the service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in foster carer selection, and staff and panel recruitment. This includes Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Ensure that all personnel responsible are trained in, understand and operate these good practices (NMS 19.2)
- Ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegation, including details of how it was followed up and resolved, a record of actions taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file and a copy given to them as soon as the investigation is concluded (NMS 22.7)
- Ensure that all carers understand the policy on managing behaviour, including physical intervention (NMS 3.8)
- Ensure that manager monitoring of all records ensures compliance with the service's policies, identifies any concerns about specific incidents and identifies patterns and trends. Ensure that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2)
- Ensure that the service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months (NMS 25.7)
- Ensure that managers and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability (NMS 25.4).

## Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people of all ages are enjoying stable and appropriate placements. One young person said simply, 'It's great.' A significant number of them are placed with their brothers and sisters. They regularly see grown-up brothers and sisters who live independently, because their foster families live nearby and encourage this. Children and young people are settled and happy. They feel part of their fostering families and enjoy a wealth of hobbies and sports that broaden their horizons. For example, one young person has started horse riding. He loves this. Another young person has started singing lessons. Children and young people go on exciting holidays, including to other countries. They often enjoy events and short stays with their carers' wider family rather than going to respite at other carers' homes.

Children and young people receive good help to move to their carers. A few of them meet their carers and have a choice about where they go. Carers show children and young people photos of who is who, often including the wider family and all the pets. However, some children still say they did not know anything about where they were going, especially if it was in an emergency. Carer information is sometimes out of date and is not universally made available electronically to placing social workers to show children and young people before they arrive.

Children and young people feel secure because they have a good understanding of their plan. Most of them know that they can stay with their carers and this is where they call 'home'. One carer said, 'The boys are calling us mum and dad. I absolutely love them.' Children and young people are also comfortable with the relationships that they maintain with their birth families because carers, supervising social workers and placing social workers help them with this. They like to play out with their friends and neighbours just the same as foster carers' own children. Many of them feel even more secure because their plans are formalised as long-term fostering, special guardianship or adoption arrangements.

Children and young people feel secure within the fostering agency too. They enjoy the events and holidays provided by the organisation and they make a contribution to the country-wide research it conducts. Many children say that they like making new friends and trying new experiences this way. For example, one child said that the best thing about an adventure weekend was 'making new friends and having fun'. Another said that the best things were 'abseiling, caving, the climbing wall and go-karting'.

Children and young people are doing well in education, thanks to the stability and input of their carers in partnership with local schools and colleges. Children and young people enjoy good daily routines and help with their homework and learning. Some of them have made immense progress in learning English as their second language. Many young people are getting good GCSE results and are going on to further education. All children and young people are progressing well from their starting points and are now able to see a future for themselves. They talk about

wanting to be doctors, teachers and professional footballers.

Children and young people lead healthy lives and have a positive sense of identity. They eat well and are physically active, taking part in, for example, cycling, swimming and playing sports. When it is needed, they get good emotional, physical, psychological and therapeutic help. This is because carers know and prioritise their health. Children and young people can talk about their physical, sexual and emotional health because carers are approachable, well prepared and insightful. Carers also understand children's and young people's individual health needs arising from inherited and developmental problems. Carers often have specific training and professional expertise that add to their competence. Children and young people benefit from healthy daily routines and the best health because carers ensure that medication is administered correctly and that symptoms are monitored, checked and managed as well as possible.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency maintains a consistently good focus on the welfare and safety of children and young people. Staff successfully assess, train and support skilled foster carers. Carers can therefore provide stability in children's and young people's lives and have a positive impact on their experiences, progress and outcomes. One local authority placements commissioner said, 'They appear to only put forward carers that can meet the needs of the children we need to find placements for. We do not have any concerns about matching, and some of our placements commenced in 2007-2008, evidencing their ability to provide stable families.'

The agency recruits good-quality carers who meet children's and young people's diverse and complex needs well. For example, there are carers with professional backgrounds in social work, youth offending, health and education. Carers have a range of cultural and religious backgrounds too. They have good support networks, often where members of the same wider family or community also foster for the agency. These qualities, combined with good-quality training and support, ensure that carers are of good enough calibre to provide well for sibling groups of children and young people with complex needs. A local authority commissioner said, 'They are good at providing stable placements for sibling groups.'

The agency provides regular good-quality training, both on line and face to face. Carers say how helpful the initial carer training is. Those who have undertaken the Fostering Changes training say that this has been invaluable to them in understanding children's and young people's behaviour. Carers also say that professional psychology support sessions have proved most useful to help children and young people with emotional and psychological difficulties. Carer representatives and staff meet fairly regularly to air the views of carers and to ensure that the quality of support, supervision and training stays high. Carers are retained in the agency because they find the work rewarding and long lasting. Carers describe the agency as 'spot on'.



Supervising social workers and the children's resource worker provide unswerving support to carers. One carer said that they 'always go that one step more for the children'. Carers also say that the emergency duty service is reliable and effective because carers know all the supervising social workers who provide the service. The children's resource worker visits all children and young people at least annually and provides both support and activities for fostered children and young people and carers' own birth children. She also visits and spends quality time with children and young people when extra stresses or concerns are identified. As a result, carers are well supported to provide children and young people with high quality care, and they rarely choose to foster for another agency or local authority. However, carers have some widely differing understanding of the purpose of record keeping and how to use it to help children and young people. Carers also differ in their understanding of the behaviour management policy in relation to restraint or physical intervention. Supervising social workers have not picked up on these differences in understanding or taken steps to deal with them. Nevertheless, no adverse impact on children and young people has occurred and placements very rarely break down.

The fostering panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements through active engagement with the fostering agency. It promotes thorough assessments and picks up carers' areas of strength and potential weakness. For example, the panel picked up that an assessing social worker had not initiated new vetting checks on carers returning to the agency for re-approval and therefore deferred their recommendation. However, some panel minutes lack sufficient detail about the discussions held. In one instance, a recommendation to vary terms of a carer's approval was made with no record of the reasons for this. Furthermore, the minutes of that panel were not forwarded to the agency decision maker, and the carers did not receive a decision on the variation to their approval conditions. A breach of regulations has also occurred because the chair of the panel has not had a vice chair for many months. Nevertheless, the panel has at all times been quorate and these shortfalls have not adversely affected any children, young people or carers.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

Children and young people feel safe and are safe with their carers. One young person said, 'They have made me safe,' as he talked about how the agency, the local authority and his carer helped him and his sister in this country. Other young people feel safe from exploitation and abuse. This is because their carers consistently help and understand them and want to know what they are doing and who with. Instances of unsafe and risky behaviour like self-harm and going missing are rare. They are always responded to carefully and robustly, so that children and young people get the right help and understanding, primarily from their carers, but also from the agency and safeguarding services as appropriate.

Children and young people receive good help to protect themselves in their friendships and social contacts, including on-line activities like social networking. Carers receive training about this and impose realistic boundaries within a context of

nurturing, caring relationships with children and young people. Carers make themselves very available to children and young people. They make trusting relationships with them so that children and young people confide in them and listen to their guidance and help. Carers are aware of and sensitive to past, present, potential and actual abuse in children's and young people's lives.

The safe relationships between carers and children and young people are supported well by the agency. The agency provides training on child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and safeguarding procedures. Supervising social workers, the children's resource worker, and the organisation help children and young people to learn about managing anger and about bullying and abuse. They work alongside the placing social worker and visit children to talk with them about things that have gone wrong. They make use of activity days and weekends away to teach safe and appropriate ways of behaving. One child said after an activity weekend, 'I was proud when I got along with everyone because on all my other different trips I always used to fight.'

Carers and the agency take the right action when they receive complaints, allegations or disclosures. For example, they advocated for children when concerns about their carer came to light and ensured that this was referred to safeguarding authorities for investigation. They ensure that safety measures are taken and lessons learnt if children's and young people's whereabouts are disclosed in error to unsafe adults. They make sure that children and young people are moved only as a last resort and if it is necessary to safeguard them. However, carers do not receive written summaries of any allegations made against them. They therefore cannot produce anything after the event to show the outcome of the investigation. In addition, two isolated mistakes in safe practice have occurred since the last inspection. A carer's relative was regularly babysitting without having been DBS checked. In another instance, a child's file was brought to the office but then disappeared and was never found. Neither instance resulted in harm to any child.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The leadership and management of the service has not been consistently effective since the last inspection. The registered manager in 2012 was seconded to other projects within the organisation for longer than originally thought. The deputy manager was placed in interim charge for many months and was subsequently registered with Ofsted as the manager in July 2014. However, she failed to be appointed by the organisation when the post of manager was advertised in the summer of 2014. There had been complaints from carers and staff about her style of communication, support and supervision.

An external person was recruited to manage the service in Autumn 2014, but he did not complete probation, never applied for registration with Ofsted, and left having made whistle-blowing concerns in March 2015. He did not complete all quarterly monitoring reports during his time as manager. Carers and staff did not have confidence in his management abilities.

The individual who was registered manager in 2012 then returned to assist the service and help the new manager who was appointed in the summer of 2015. Ofsted was not informed of all these changes and did not know that the person who had been assigned the registered manager role until December 2015 was not, in fact, managing the service for much of that time. This regulatory breach has not adversely affected children, young people, carers or working relationships with placing authorities. The organisation has continued to ensure that the views of children and young people, parents, foster carers and stakeholders are heard and inform the organisation. However, poor leadership and management has shaken the confidence and morale of agency staff.

The new manager has applied to Ofsted for registration. She has the confidence and support of all the staff in the agency. Many carers, children and young people have met her and also have confidence in her leadership. She has re-established clear lines of accountability so that staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. She has established regular and effective supervision and appraisal that provide staff with both support and appropriate challenge.

However, manager monitoring activity is still not robust enough to uncover gaps in practice or effectively identify trends and patterns in children and young people's behaviour and progress. The manager gets data about numbers of incidents and outcomes for children and young people. However, she does not always interpret it, check the original records for the detail of practice, or come to conclusions about where and how the service can improve. For example, manager monitoring of accidents and missing incidents involving children and young people who may be at risk of exploitation has not identified all the events that should be notified to Ofsted. Although carers and staff have responded well to each incident, manager monitoring does not serve to identify effectively what works well or where the service needs to improve. Similarly, the new manager did not identify that a complaint record was missing or the error in panel procedures. These shortfalls were only discovered through the inspection process.

Overall, despite significant leadership and management issues in the period since the last inspection, children and young people have continued to be provided with good-quality care and opportunities to have fun and engage with others. Their day-to-day care has been supported well throughout, and their outcomes continue to be good. Internal annual review of the service, including feedback from all sources, confirms this.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and to support services to improve.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.