

# The Adolescent and Children's Trust

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT)  
Spooner House, 172 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6QG  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

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 48 carer households caring for 65 children and young people. The agency caters for children and young people from birth to under 18 years.

**Inspection dates:** 10 to 14 July 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 14 March 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection.** None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- A few children and young people have experienced unplanned placement endings.
- Some placements have ended due to allegations about carers not being able to cope with children's and young people's complex needs.
- Not all children and young people get sufficient support to minimise the risk of them going missing from care.
- Some investigations into foster carers who are subject to allegations take too long to be reviewed.
- Seven foster carer households have resigned from the fostering service.
- The fostering service and foster carers do not always work effectively with local authorities in making and reviewing plans for children.
- A number of carers have not completed therapeutic fostering training or specific training to help them meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.
- Some carers have experienced more than one change in supervising social work staff, compromising the frequency and effectiveness of their support.
- Some foster carers' reviews are not completed in a timely manner and some do not take into account the views of children and young people.
- Some foster carers' reviews do not show how carers receive advice and training which is translated into beneficial care practice.
- Managers have not implemented improvements that they know are necessary to ensure that carers have good skills to meet the needs of children and young people with complex emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.
- Managers do not always find out children's previous addresses before placement, or the address that they are going to after placement.
- Managers have not consistently provided staff with good, regular support to help improve carers and to support complex placements.
- The updated version of the statement of purpose has not been sent to Ofsted.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- The majority of children and young people live in stable foster placements and enjoy good outcomes.
- Some carer households demonstrate specific skills to help children and young people with complex health needs.
- Many children and young people receive good help with their learning and continue to make good educational progress.
- A few young people stay put and some young people continue to receive good

help and support from their former carers while living independently.

- A good number of children and young people participate in regional and national activities organised by the service. Children and young people enjoy these events.
- Managers are aware of the need to upskill carers in therapeutic care and will roll this out to supervising social workers from September 2017.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must notify the Chief Inspector of any revision in the statement of purpose and children's guide within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (b))	31/08/2017
The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent 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))	31/08/2017
Provide a record in the form of a register showing in respect of each child placed with foster parents, the child's address prior to the placement and the child's address on leaving the placement. (Regulation 22, schedule 2 (1)(d) and (e))	31/08/2017

### Recommendations

- Ensure that foster carers provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour. (NMS 3.2)
- Ensure that foster carers receive support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour, and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour. (NMS 3.7)
- Ensure that the care and support provided to children minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the child go missing. (NMS 5.1)
- Ensure that support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. (NMS 20.8)
- Ensure that the fostering service and foster carer contribute effectively to each child's placement plan review and statutory review of the child's care plan. (NMS 31.7)
- Ensure that, as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. (NMS 22.8)
- Ensure that all reviews of carers' approval include an appraisal of performance

against clear and consistent standards set by the agency, and consideration of training and development needs, which are documented in the review report. The foster carer's personal development plan is reviewed and the effectiveness of training and development received is evaluated. Reviews take into account the views of each child currently placed with the foster carer. (NMS 20.6)

- Ensure that areas of concern, or needs for additional support, that are identified between carers' reviews, are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. (NMS 13.9)
- Improve the quality of foster carer supervision, so that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. (NMS 21.8)
- Ensure that immediate action is taken to address concerns and issues raised by manager monitoring. (NMS 25.2)
- Improve the regularity and extent of staff's access to support and advice. (NMS 24.4)
- Ensure that each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering service's fostering staff. (NMS 23.10)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

Most children and young people live in stable placements. A child recently said, 'We always have fun and we are cared for and loved by them like they were our real parents. They treat us fairly and like princesses. They call me a good egg.' However, the agency has not made sufficient progress in helping a few children and young people who have trauma-related attachment, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The agency has not provided foster carers with the training that they need in order to provide effective therapeutic care. As a result, these children and young people have not settled or made progress. Their carers have not been able to cope with them and placements have ended. In a number of instances, carers have resigned from fostering. Nevertheless, a number of children and young people with complex health needs are thriving with their foster carers. They feel part of the family and their quality of daily life is being enhanced.

Many carers do not benefit from sufficient challenge and help from their supervising social workers. As a result, some carers have not developed their skills to make a difference to children and young people's complex emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Many fostering households have experienced changes of supervising social workers, as well as some reduction in the regularity and effectiveness of support. Some unannounced visits have not taken place for over a year and some annual reviews of the quality of foster care have been late. For example, a report regarding a carer who resigned and whose placement broke down stated, 'Problems of feeling unsupported were compounded because supervision was not as frequent as it should have been and they had a change in supervising social worker.' Despite this, most carers feel confident and able to provide children and young people with good-quality, individualised support. They are pleased with the support and training that they receive. One carer said, 'My supervising social worker is on maternity leave, but I got [named supervisor], who I asked for and I have had my visits and my unannounced visit and my annual review on time. I did the "fostering changes" training a few years ago now and I have three children in placement.'

Supervising social workers' records do not provide carers with enough guidance, advice and challenge about how to promote positive relationships with individual children and young people and how to promote their progress. Foster carer review reports also contain too little analysis of how well carers are applying techniques, understanding, ideas and skills into their fostering, and what difference this is making to children and young people's outcomes. Supervising social workers also have concerns that a few carers want to maximise the number of placements that they have without demonstrating commitment to continuously learning and using support so that they achieve a high standard of care.

Children and young people's views about their placements are gathered by the agency's children's resource worker ahead of carers' annual reviews. However, supervising social workers do not clearly link children's views to an analysis of the

impact of care. Nevertheless, many children and young people are making good long-term progress and feel supported by their carers and by the agency. One teenager said, 'It's still alright. I'm 17 next month and we are going abroad on holiday for three weeks. Yes, they are giving me enough attention and yes, the other foster boy is still here.' A number of children and young people enjoy the regional and national activities organised by the children's support worker. They develop self-confidence and help to advocate for all 'looked after' children and young people. One child, who has been in his placement for four years, said, 'I go on holidays in the [agency] caravan, too. [Carers] make me feel a lot better when I am thinking about things. I can talk to them and it is a weight off my shoulders.'

A strength of many placements is that children and young people are helped to stay at their own school or college, even when they have moved outside their home authority. Carers have a good understanding of the importance of education and work well with teachers to ensure that school is a safe and productive place for each child and young person. A few young people stay put with their carers while they move into adulthood. Some carers continue to provide help and support to young people after they have left. However, the moves of children and young people who have complex emotional and/or behavioural difficulties are less well managed. Carers are not always prepared to provide a positive send-off.

The agency does not routinely obtain information about children and young people's previous and new addresses after a move. Staff and carers are not always proactive about establishing and maintaining contact with children and young people when this would be helpful to them.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Overall, the majority of children and young people feel secure in their placements and they respond to the consistent routines and boundaries that their carers provide. One carer said, 'The training about the teenage brain helped provide strategies to manage challenges and allows us ways to give young people a way to resolve problems without escalating situations.' However, since the last inspection, a few carers have not understood or managed the risks of children and young people and this has resulted in a few placement breakdowns. Carers did not ensure that this small group of children and young people stayed safe from risks such as self-harm, child sexual exploitation, drug misuse, criminal activity and going missing. Some carers felt that their own children were at risk from fostered children and young people's behaviour. One carer said, 'When I ask for help, I am at the end of my tether and need to be prioritised. We had a placement breakdown due to a bad situation not being well managed.'

Supervising social workers do not ensure that all carers get the right training at the time that they need it. This affects carers' abilities to meet the needs of children and young people they are caring for. For example, carers who need training about child sexual exploitation, going missing, self-harm, drug misuse and positive behaviour management, do not always get this training until after placements have ended. Some carers, therefore, do not understand what they should do when a child goes missing, or how to help children and young people who self-harm or

misuse drugs.

A number of carers have not completed training in therapeutic care practice. This means that they do not understand what children and young people are trying to communicate through their risky or difficult behaviour. Carers, therefore, lack the skills to empathise with children and young people and are unsure how to get through to them. Managers say, 'The last few years have seen a reduction in the provision of fostering changes training and therapeutic support groups.' However, a few carers have benefited from training in therapeutic care practice. One such carer said, 'Instead of consequences, it is time-in. I am looking for what they are trying to tell me through the behaviour that they show.'

Between July and September, the agency reviewed four placement breakdowns and said, 'These were all due to carers being unable to continue to cope with very challenging behaviours.' When placements are in difficulty, supervising social workers do not always call for planning meetings and reviews with placing authorities, or ensure that children and young people are central to this. Supervising social workers do not always ensure that safe care plans are up to date and helpful to carers. In addition, they do not always proactively facilitate independent return interviews for young people who have been missing. The service has one children's resource worker. She has insufficient capacity to input all the necessary individual support to fostered and birth children and young people, which is required in order to stabilise complex placements.

Since the last inspection, some children and young people have moved suddenly due to allegations that they made about their carers. Agency staff share child protection concerns promptly with their lead safeguarding partners, but a few of their own investigations into carers' behaviour management practice were not handled quickly enough. Most carers who have experienced allegations have resigned. Some carers who continue to foster still have not received all the training, advice and challenge that is required to improve their care practice. For example, a carer has not received baseline positive behaviour management training, or the training in 'psychodynamic approaches to understanding behaviour and attachment issues'.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The agency has had four different managers since the last inspection. The manager who was registered with Ofsted left a few months after registration. Two interim managers then oversaw the operation of the agency, but were not registered with Ofsted. In January 2017, a permanent manager came into post, who recently registered with Ofsted. Some continuity is provided by the continuing presence of the previous interim manager, who is presently covering the maternity leave of the agency's deputy manager. However, the organisation's senior leaders report difficulties in appointing a new manager, extended use of agency staff, maternity leave, and issues with team dynamics. Most children and young people do not know the manager and many of them are unfamiliar with their carers' supervising social worker.

Managers have not consistently provided the right supportive environment for staff



through effective supervision, practice meetings, and high-quality training. This has affected supervising social workers' morale, motivation and, on occasions, the regularity and effectiveness of their work with carers and children. A number of staff have left or been on extended leave. Temporary supervising social workers have been used to cover gaps. Some staff say that work volumes limit the quality of support that they can provide to carers and children. Staff and the agency's panel members do not meet together to discuss and train on issues of mutual concern, such as assessment, support and review of carers.

The senior leadership team in the wider organisation has identified that too many placement breakdowns result from gaps in the skills of carers. The team expresses ambitious vision to better meet the needs of all children and young people, including those with complex emotional difficulties and unsafe behaviour. The senior leadership said, 'We need more advanced training specific to attachment-related behaviours and working with teenagers. Carers need more advanced training, a more robust package of therapeutic support, and more children resource worker hours to deliver crisis intervention work.' The programme to upskill carers in therapeutic care practice through their supervising social workers starts in September 2017.

The senior leadership team and agency managers have addressed most of the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection. For example, they have updated most carers' household profiles, using photos to help children and young people to see what their foster home will be like. The children's resource worker is gradually working round each household to encourage them to ensure that each child and young person is helped to collect memorabilia and be involved in their placement plans and records. These actions help ensure that children and young people are prioritised by the agency. However, managers still do not monitor all records effectively enough to identify shortfalls in the quality of support to carers. In addition, managers are not ensuring that Ofsted are sent the agency's statement of purpose when this is updated.

The senior leadership team and agency manager are alert to the number of placement breakdowns and carers' resignations that have occurred since the last inspection. They have sourced better-quality training courses for carers and now encourage carers to use support group and training venues in other regions where this is easier for them. In the autumn of 2016, staff and some carers benefitted from a joint training day about child sexual exploitation. They met three survivors from a high-profile sexual abuse scandal. However, despite identifying a need 12 months ago, leaders and managers have not yet delivered therapeutic training, or re-established good-quality, all-round support to carers. As a result, a few children and young people have not made good progress in all areas of their development.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children

and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC056442

**Registered provider:** The Adolescent And Children's Trust (TACT)

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## **Inspector**

Rachel Britten, social care inspector

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