

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT)
303 Hither Green Lane, London SE13 6TJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering service is part of The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT). The trust is a national charity which provides nine registered fostering services in England, one in Wales and one in Scotland. It also provides adoption services. This fostering service operates in London and the South of England. It provides a range of placements for children and young people on a planned or emergency basis for short- and long-term duration, and for respite care. The service also offers mother and baby placements and foster care placements that allow siblings to remain together. At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 54 approved foster care households and 47 children and young people in placement.

Inspection dates: 24 to 30 October 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 27 May 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children and young people experience a good family life. They said that they feel safe, connected, supported and loved.
- Good fostering practices are embedded and have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people.
- High professional standards, extensive collective knowledge and altruistic attitudes contribute to the realisation of the trust's ambitious vision that has children at its centre.
- A culture of positive and nurturing relationships permeates the organisation at all levels.
- The fostering service has skilled, caring and resilient foster carers who come from a wide range of backgrounds and walks of life.
- Foster carers receive good-quality support, training and challenge from the fostering service.
- The fostering service provides children and young people with effective placements.
- Good matching promotes the stability of placements effectively. Placement breakdowns are rare.
- Foster carers provide individualised care of a high standard to children and young people.
- Foster carers know how to help children and young people to develop better safeguarding awareness and more constructive attitudes and behaviours.
- Staff and foster carers advocate well for children and young people.
- Children and young people have fun, try new things and develop their interests, talents and social skills.
- The arrangements for safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare are comprehensive and effective.
- The fostering panel is robust and highly effective in its role.
- The registered manager is highly experienced and has been successfully managing the service for over a decade.
- The senior management team is realistic in its self-evaluation and is taking appropriate actions to address the weaknesses that are included in this report.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development :

- Some aspects of monitoring of the whole service are weak. This includes monitoring children's and young people's education.
- Inconsistencies in record-keeping do not support robust monitoring.
- The practice around risk management plans is not always good.
- The quality of notifications to Ofsted is varied.
- Foster carers' annual reviews are not always completed on time.
- Some foster carers do not engage in learning and training.

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
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(2) In particular, the fostering service provider must— (a) implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16 (2))</p>	01/04/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>(2) A review must 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))</p>	01/04/2018
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for— (1)(a) monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>(2) The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>(3) The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1) (2) (3))</p>	01/04/2018

Recommendations

- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. (NMS 4.1) In particular, achieving consistency of good practice in relation to written risk management (individual children's safe care) plans.
- Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)
- The fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. (NMS 26.1). In particular, this relates to achieving consistency of how and where on the information system records are kept, so that records enable good monitoring.
- The registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do when a notifiable event arises at the weekend. (NMS 29.1) In particular, this relates to implementing an effective system for sending appropriate and good-quality notifications to Ofsted consistently.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Good fostering practices are embedded and have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people.

The fostering service has skilled, caring and resilient foster carers. They come from a wide range of backgrounds and walks of life. The good-quality support and training that they receive from the fostering service enables them to provide individualised care of a high standard to children and young people. This includes children and young people who have complex needs and have experienced trauma and multiple placement breakdowns. Careful matching of foster families with children makes a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the placements.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people are supported well and have a positive experience of a family life. Placement breakdowns are rare. Professionals outside the service highlight the stability of placements and foster carers' 'stickability' as its best characteristics. Some placements that were made on an emergency basis, or that were short-term initially, have over time turned into permanent placements.

Children and young people said that they feel safe, connected, supported and loved. Foster carers said that they look after foster children as if they were their own. Some foster children call their foster carers 'mum' and 'dad'.

Good matching, good care planning and positive initial interactions play a vital part in enabling children and young people to settle quickly in their placements. They then continue to form positive relationships with their carers. Unless it is an emergency, children and young people receive relevant information about the prospective foster family before moving in. Whenever possible, introductory visits are arranged so that all parties know what to expect before moving in. This gives children and young people a sense of control, choice and security.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people have their needs met and make good progress. Staff and foster carers advocate well for children and young people. For example, they work closely with the virtual school heads and teachers to ensure that children and young people receive good education, in particular when their placement move has resulted in the loss of a school place. In these situations, arrangements are made for home tuition until the child is enrolled at an appropriate school.

The fostering service ensures that children receive good support to be healthy and develop healthy lifestyles. The service's own psychotherapist is available to provide advice and additional support to foster carers around enhancing the emotional well-being of children and young people. The psychotherapist is a specialist in attachment and trauma.

Children and young people lead active lives. They have fun, try new things and develop their interests, talents and social skills. The children's resource worker runs an activity programme that includes a range of different activities for children and young people. This includes painting, skills for life, and discussions about democracy. A young person talked very positively about a four-day trip to an activities centre in the Lake District. The activities included some exciting and adrenalin-fuelled experiences, such as canoeing, sailing, zip-wire and gliding. The young person said that the best thing about the trip was that she developed a friendship with another young person.

Children and young people talk highly about their foster families and appreciate the fostering service. One young person said about the supervising social worker: 'If I'd had a social worker like that, I would have stayed out of trouble.'

The fostering service supports young people's transition to adulthood well. Young people are prepared well for independent living and the world of work. The young people who stayed with their foster families after their 18th birthday have benefited from formal 'staying put' arrangements. Foster carers spoken with by the inspector said that their home is always open to each young person whom they fostered. One foster carer explained: 'They are members of our family.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

This is a safe fostering service. The children and young people who spoke to the inspector said they felt safe. Good safeguarding practices are integral to all its aspects. A culture of transparency underpins careful examination, reflective attitudes and open discussions about any aspects of the service. The fostering service encourages continued vigilance, professional challenge and thinking foremost about the child. The staff and foster carers spoke highly about the impact of training on their awareness of risks, for example a recent session titled 'Think the unthinkable', about recognising signs of possible abuse.

The arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are comprehensive and effective. The fostering service's robust safeguarding starts with a thorough recruitment of staff and foster carers. It continues through reviews of staff and foster carers' practices and behaviours, which are followed up if necessary. For example, the fostering service referred one social worker to the Health and Care Professionals Council on the basis of information that a foster carer shared with the service

The fostering service has close links with the local authorities and their designated safeguarding officers. Any allegations against foster carers or concerns about the quality of their standard of care practices are thoroughly explored within an effective multi-agency framework.

A highly effective fostering panel is in place. Its members contribute to ensuring that the assessments of prospective carers, and reviews of the approved foster carers, focus on their abilities to maintain a safe environment for children and young people. Through regular announced and unannounced visits, that include talking

with children and young people, supervising social workers ensure that the foster carers' practices remain safe.

Risk management is effective within this fostering service. Completing detailed risk assessments plays a significant part in the service's successful matching process. The fostering service works closely with other professionals to obtain relevant information, agree clear safeguarding strategies from the beginning and keep them under review. For example, the service liaised with experts to develop and implement a comprehensive intervention plan to safeguard a child who was trafficked into this country from Vietnam.

However, supervising social workers do not always complete a safe care plan for each child who has high risks in a timely manner. This shortfall has not led to any observable negative impact on the effectiveness of safeguarding children and young people. When separate plans were not completed, the information about the safeguarding strategies was available in different documents on the case records. However, the information was fragmented. This made it more difficult to see a full picture.

Foster carers have a good understanding of children and young people's vulnerabilities to risks to their safety and welfare. This includes a wide range of risks, including any online risks. Foster carers know how to help children and young people to develop better safeguarding awareness, attitudes and behaviours. For example, a child who used to go missing and spend time with unchecked people has stopped running away. Instead of placing herself at significant risk of child sexual exploitation and harm, she has engaged very well with her foster family and developed a safer lifestyle.

Foster carers' behaviour management practices are effective in promoting children's and young people's more constructive behaviours. Foster carers provide firm boundaries and emotional warmth. They are non-judgemental and able to see and understand children and young people beyond their challenging behaviours. Foster carers are able to form trusting relationships with children and young people, including those who have deeply rooted attachment issues. As a result, children and young people's behaviour has improved over time, and sometimes rapidly. For example, the young people who came to the service with a history of criminal behaviours have not re-offended.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The organisation's charitable status is an important aspect of this service. It is a powerful motivating factor for people who work in it. The message that the trust is there for no other reason than to improve children's lives unites leaders, managers and staff at all levels of the organisation. High professional standards and extensive collective knowledge contribute to the realisation of the trust's ambitious vision that has children at its centre.

Leaders and managers of different services meet on a national level to share their

knowledge and review and enhance the systems and practices that are in place. Representatives of foster carers and children and young people attend national events to contribute their views on how the service can be developed further. Engaging adults and children and valuing differing perspectives are a strong feature of the trust.

The senior management team is realistic in its self-evaluation. The decision maker for the fostering service challenges appropriately when the practices do not meet the national minimum standards. For example, when the foster carers' annual reviews are overdue or carers do not attend training and fail to achieve expected learning outcomes.

Leaders, managers and staff take appropriate actions to address any areas that need improving. The recent initiatives focused on developing further the monitoring reports that are shared with the trustees on a quarterly basis. The monitoring systems are being reviewed to ensure that they capture accurately all relevant information, for example measuring children and young people's school attendance and educational progress or monitoring of complaints. However, consistently good practices have not been achieved in some aspects of record-keeping and the quality of notifications that are sent to Ofsted.

The registered manager is highly experienced in this role. She joined the service 15 years ago and has been successfully managing it for 11 years. The stability of management was particularly important at a time when there were many changes on the team of supervising social workers. The registered manager managed those and other changes effectively. Transition plans minimised any potential negative impact on the foster carers.

Foster carers spoke very positively about the support that they receive from their supervising social workers and the fostering service as a whole. They said that they can always rely on supervising social workers and the registered manager for excellent advice, support and help. One foster carer described how, after discussing a challenging situation with the supervising social worker, she felt that she 'could handle anything'.

A culture of positive and nurturing relationships permeates the organisation at all levels. Children, young people and adults feel valued. One foster carer explained that because the service looked after them very well, foster carers were able to look after children and young people well. The staff spoke positively about the support that they receive from the management and their colleagues. Regular formal supervision, reviews of performance and good training opportunities underpin the staff members' high levels of job satisfaction and continued development of professional competencies. Team meetings and staff well-being days contribute to their feeling of being supported well.

The placing authorities hold the fostering service in high regard. At a recent local authority monitoring visit, a commissioner found that the service surpassed by far all the performance targets that they looked at. The social workers told the inspector that this service was good, that the foster carers were impressive and that the

children and young people made really good progress.

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 differences 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 whom 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: SC034000

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Inspector

Seka Graovac, social care inspector



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