

TACT Peterborough

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT)
Peterborough City Council, Bayard Place, Broadway, Peterborough PE1 1FB
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) is a registered charity whose work encompasses fostering and adoption in England, Scotland and Wales. A board of trustees manages the charity.

On 1 April 2017, TACT was chosen to operate Peterborough's permanency services (including adoption and fostering services). TACT registered an independent fostering agency in order to operate the fostering service, which transferred from Peterborough City Council. This partnership is a ten-year contract with a possible ten-year extension. The contract covers a range of permanency services, including family group conferencing services, placement-matching services, support services for children returning to their families, post-adoption and special guardianship order (SGO) support and SGO carer assessments. Peterborough already has a well-developed fostering for adoption service established, which TACT Peterborough continues to develop.

The agency has 118 fostering households providing foster placements for 167 children. The agency provides a range of foster placements including mainstream, parent and child, fostering to adopt and respite care.

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 February 2018

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: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection: N/A

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is requires improvement to be good because:

- In one case, the staff and foster carer did not respond appropriately and in a timely way to a safeguarding concerns.
- Some children's identity needs are not considered and addressed well enough.
- There is at times a lack of challenge to other agencies who are working with the children.
- Some assessment reports on prospective foster carers contain a number of errors.
- Not all carers have had training in recognising and dealing with risks associated with child sexual exploitation and the use of the internet. This includes some carers who are looking after children who may be at risk.
- The staff do not assess significant areas of risk in some children's lives with a view to managing those risks.
- Some staff are not aware of whistle-blowing processes.
- The role of supervising social workers is not clearly defined so some are not routinely assessing the carer's performance to develop their competencies and skills.
- The managers and leaders are not effectively monitoring the supervising social worker role and their supervision of the foster carers in all cases.
- Not all of the foster carers have attained the training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers).

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- TACT has made significant improvements since taking over the service.
- The staff and foster carers have good relationships with the children and know them well.
- There is support for children who need to stay put in their foster placements after they reach 18 years of age.
- The staff and foster carers meet the children's health needs, including their mental and emotional health needs.
- There is an active children's participation group.
- The foster carers feel well supported by the agency.
- The therapeutic crisis work carried out by the agency supports placements, providing stability for the children.

- The leaders, managers, staff and foster carers have high aspirations for the service.
- The leaders and managers have made the training for the foster carers more accessible and appealing.

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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. Regulation 11(a)</p> <p>In particular, this relates to ensuring that safeguarding matters are identified and acted on in a timely way.</p>	31/03/2018
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 (events and notifications) takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))</p>	31/03/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. (National Minimum Standards 2.1)
- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National Minimum Standards 4.5)

In particular, this relates to ensuring that risks are identified and that there are clear plans informing foster carers and supervising social workers how the risks can be managed.

- Foster carers should take reasonable precautions in assessing the degree of risk, making informed judgements about when to allow a child or young person to take a particular risk or follow a particular course of action. They should be provided with training to ensure that they are able to assess risks appropriately, within the expectations of the fostering service and the responsible authority. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, paragraph 3.64)

In particular this relates to ensuring that all foster carers are aware of the risks, signs and issues associated with child sexual exploitation and the use of the internet.

- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a

foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision and is accurate. (National Minimum Standards 13.7)

- Ensure that there is a whistle-blowing policy which is made known to all staff, volunteers, foster carers and panel members. This makes it a clear duty for such people to report to an appropriate authority any circumstances within the fostering service which they consider likely to significantly harm the safety, rights or welfare of any child placed by the service. (National Minimum Standards 19.6)

In particular this relates to ensuring that all staff are aware of the policy.

- Ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). (National Minimum Standards 20.3)
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure 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. (National Minimum Standards 21.8)
- Ensure that a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (National Minimum Standards 24.5)
- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National Minimum Standards 25.2)

In particular this relates to the monitoring of the supervision of foster carers, learning from complaints and challenging other agencies where necessary.

Inspection judgements

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

TACT took over the fostering function of Peterborough City Council on 1 April 2017. Since that time, it has made significant improvements to the service, but is not yet providing consistently good outcomes for all children. There have also been shortfalls in how well children are helped and protected, and the effectiveness of leaders and managers. One foster carer said:

TACT is early days and I feel lots of hope and that it will go from strength to strength and our initial experience is very good. I can't complain about a single thing, this is a charity with a child-focused ethos.

This was typical of the sorts of comments made by carers, staff and other professionals. It reflects the progress that TACT continues to make.

The staff and carers treat the children as individuals and this is reflected in their records. This is a step towards ensuring that the children's needs are identified and met. This is happening in many cases, but not consistently. For example, while some children have their identity needs met well, for others the way that staff consider their cultural needs is limited and discussions with the foster carers are not sufficiently in-depth or considered. This means that some children do not have full opportunities to explore, share and celebrate their backgrounds.

The foster carers have good relationships with the children, as do the agency staff. They know the children well, which helps them to provide the children with appropriate care and stability. Some children are able to stay with their foster carers after they reach 18 years of age. The agency has been proactive in overcoming barriers that may have prevented some children from having this benefit. Consequently, these children have additional stability and support. This helps them to prepare for independence and increases their chances of success in further education. One child who is due to stay with his foster carer beyond his 18th birthday is engaged on a mechanics course, goes to army cadets and has a part-time job. These are all important elements of growing up and becoming independent. He is more likely to continue with and succeed in them because of the ongoing support after he reaches 18. However, another child requires a Pathway plan to help plan his move to independence. It is the responsibility of the local authority to initiate this, but the agency has not chased it to try and ensure that the plan will be developed in a timely way.

In general, the children take part in a wide range of activities in much the same way as children who live with their families. This helps them to develop social skills and enjoy their childhood. The staff and foster carers meet the children's health needs. This includes making sure that routine dental, eye and health checks take place, as well as making certain that children access specialist help to meet specific health needs, including mental and emotional health. This helps to ensure that the children

develop appropriately, and come to terms with previous difficult experiences. The agency has developed a relationship with the virtual school, which is helping to ensure that the children can receive an appropriate education that meets their needs and helps them towards educational achievements and success in their later lives.

The children have opportunities to express their views through an active child participation group, conversations with the supervising social workers who visit the foster carers and the feedback they provide for the foster carers' annual reviews. The children take part in the participation group enthusiastically, and are involved in planning events and developing information for children who become looked after by TACT foster carers. Involvement such as this helps the children to feel valued, and allows them to pass on their experience and develop their self-esteem. It also allows the service to use the experience of children to make improvements. The children and their well-being are central to the work of the agency and the foster carers.

The foster carers demonstrate a real recognition of how much things have improved since TACT has taken over. They describe professional and supportive relationships with the agency, and feel that they are treated as part of the team around the child. This helps to build effective and consistent care of the children, and helps to make the foster carers feel valued and more able to cope with challenges that may otherwise result in placement breakdowns. Several foster carers described how therapeutic crisis work provided by TACT has helped them to manage when things have become difficult. This means that the children have more stable placements in which they can grow and make progress.

TACT has taken on the foster carers from Peterborough City Council, and is also recruiting new people to take on the role. Prospective carers feel welcomed. One new foster carer described the agency as helpful, open and approachable. There are detailed and evaluative assessments to help with making decisions on the suitability of potential and transferring foster carers. However, some of the assessments which go to the foster panel contain numerous errors in details such as people's names and ethnicities. While this does not hamper decisions on suitability, it does not show suitable respect for the applicants as individuals.

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

All carers have had Prevent training to help them identify whether the children are at risk of radicalisation. Some of the carers have also had training to help them identify and keep children safe from the risks associated with child sexual exploitation and the internet, but other carers who are looking after children with these risks have not had the training to help them understand and reduce the risks. In general, foster carers feel confident about dealing with safeguarding concerns. However, a foster carer and a supervising social worker did not respond appropriately and in a timely way to a safeguarding concern. This meant that action was not taken quickly to assess the risk and take any necessary steps to protect the child concerned. The managers' monitoring had failed to identify this. Once safeguarding issues are brought to the attention of the agency's managers, they take appropriate action,

including close liaison with the designated safeguarding officer and involvement in any investigations. When foster carers have allegations made against them, the agency provides them with independent support and where there may be a delay in the arranged support, finds a more appropriate alternative.

The foster carers' safe care plans are amended for individual children who are living with them. This helps to ensure that the plans are relevant, but in some cases they do not cover specific, known risks. There are no other plans or risk assessments which adequately cover these risks and help the staff and foster carers to minimise the risks to the children. Consequently, there is not a strong and consistent way of assessing the risks for the children and reducing them. Foster carers said they knew how to pass on concerns about their colleagues or other professionals, but not all of the agency staff were clear about this. Having an effective whistle-blowing process, and ensuring that staff and carers know about it, provides a key safeguard for the children who use the service. The foster carers are aware of the importance of supporting the children to take age-appropriate risks and learn from their mistakes while they have the support and oversight of their foster carers. This helps children to learn about how to keep themselves safe and to develop coping skills.

The foster carers take appropriate action if children go missing, including notifying the police and looking for the child. This helps to protect children when they are missing from care. The good relationships that the children have with their carers also provide a safeguard for them, as they help the children to be able to talk about any concerns or risks.

TACT supports the foster carers to manage the children's behaviour effectively. The foster carers feel well supported, including out of normal office hours, which helps them and gives them confidence to deal with challenges and any issues with the children's behaviour. One foster carer said that she had had a difficult year, and that it had been her supervising social worker who had helped her through it. She described the help she received from the supervising social worker, including them directing her to a particular book and the crisis intervention work provided through the agency, as 'a godsend'. She said that as a result of this she has helped the foster child to manage their behaviour and there has not been a repeat of some very challenging behaviour. This has helped to maintain the placement and provide the child concerned with stability, as well as helping them to manage their behaviour more effectively. Other foster carers gave similar examples. One said:

I had a big incident and I rang the supervising social worker, and within two weeks the support was in place including crisis intervention. TACT gets thing moving.

The supervising social workers do provide a good level of support for the foster carers. However, in some cases they are not providing the degree of oversight and questioning that their role requires. This lack of professional curiosity has meant that some issues have not been identified or addressed.

A child made a complaint about his previous foster carer. This was investigated and responded to in a very child-centred way, and was upheld. However, some of the

issues could have been identified by the supervising social worker before the complaint was made, and were not. For example, the foster carer had had closed circuit television (CCTV) in the communal areas of their home for some time, but the supervising social worker had not identified this. Leaders and managers are clear that using CCTV in areas where the children live is inappropriate, but several weeks after the outcome of the complaint it has still not been discussed with the foster carer. This has jeopardised the children's privacy. Leaders and managers have not been monitoring supervising social workers' supervision of the foster carers to ensure that they have been providing the right balance of support and oversight that will help the carers to feel supported and also to help them think about how they look after the children and ensure the consistent high standards to which the agency and the foster carers aspire.

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

The agency has a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. She is supported by her line manager and consultant social workers who lead teams of supervising social workers. They have high aspirations for the service and have begun to make notable improvements. They have employed additional staff so that they can significantly reduce supervising social workers' caseloads, giving them space to help implement the improvements and provide improving outcomes for the children. The leaders and the manager have had to prioritise their areas of work and so some areas, such as monitoring of supervising social workers' records, have not yet been fully implemented and have not identified some of the shortfalls highlighted in this report. In general, though, the leaders and managers do know what they need and want to address. The registered manager only began to send Ofsted notifications of significant events in October 2017. However, a serious complaint was made about a foster carer in December 2017 and upheld, but the registered manager did not make Ofsted aware of this. This has not allowed Ofsted as the regulator to maintain an awareness of the significant events in the agency.

Leaders and managers have made training for foster carers more accessible and appealing. They have changed the start and end times, making it easier to attend around school runs, and moved the training venue to a pleasant location. They have considered training as part of the transfer assessments of foster carers and provide reminders about it. Some foster carers spoke about the improvements in training. They have attended training on areas such as foetal alcohol syndrome, adolescent mental health and mindfulness. However, as stated above, some carers have not done some specific training which would help them provide better care and safeguards for the children. Not all foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval. Before TACT took over the service, there had not been a clear expectation that all foster carers should complete this, but there is now. Having a better trained complement of foster carers will help the service to provide better care for the children, but the lack of this training does currently limit this. The leaders and managers prioritise the needs of the children who use the service. Some foster carers spoke of a very child-centred approach which has found solutions to issues that threatened to restrict some

children's progress and outcomes. They described a management structure where all managers, even at a senior level, are approachable and available to help them in their role of caring for the children. They feel cared about and listened to. One foster carer said: 'TACT are honest; we might have disagreements, but they listen.' Other foster carers made comments such as:

- 'I think this is 100% better.'
- 'We are being put in a good place.'
- 'TACT has changed [supervision]; it's more in depth and we are asked for records of everything and there is more a more professional approach.'
- '[The Executive Director of Children's Services] is very visible and approachable; [he] shows passion and child focus.'
- 'I have nothing negative to say since TACT took over, in fact the very opposite.'

The agency staff are also very positive about the improvements and direction of travel of the service. Staff feel well supported through supervision, training and appraisal. They are pleased with the transition to TACT and recognise that a number of improvements have been made. Some other professionals also commented on the improvements that they have seen. The local authority designated safeguarding officer spoke of the improvements in the duty system and the virtual school head spoke about the high quality of training for foster carers on children's education.

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: 1254257

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