

TACT Fostering Yorkshire

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Innovation House, Coniston Court, PO Box 137, Blyth NE24 9FJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) is a charitable organisation which operates across England, Scotland and Wales. This agency, which is one of seven independent fostering agencies in England, moved to an entirely home-based service in October 2021. It provides short-term, long-term, emergency, and parent and child foster homes.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 47 approved fostering households and 57 children placed with its foster carers.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020. We last visited this setting on 12 March 2018 to carry out a full inspection. The report is published on our website.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 October 2021

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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of last inspection: 12 March 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are very happy and content with their foster families. The children's lives are enriched by a range of positive experiences that enhance their prospects and contribute to their progression.

The children feel a genuine sense of belonging through the high-quality individualised care provided by their foster carers. Children are treated as valued members of the family and they speak with fondness about their foster families. In discussion with the inspector, one child expressed their love for their foster carers and another child said: 'I am being looked after very well, thank you very much,' and 'I don't think anything could be better.'

Children benefit from strong, trusting and nurturing relationships with their foster carers. Foster carers act as positive advocates, and they empower the children to express their wishes and feelings. Similarly, the positive relationships that have been forged between the children and foster carers' birth children resemble sibling relationships.

The fostering agency promotes family values. Consequently, the children benefit from living in stable and secure foster homes for a sustained period. Furthermore, 59% of children live with at least one brother or sister, which promotes a sense of family unity and contributes to the children's overall well-being. Children do not normally experience respite care, which minimises any further disruption to their lives.

All children attend school regularly and their attendance exceeds national expectations, averaging at 95.66%. Foster carers, supervising social workers and educators work together to overcome barriers to children's learning. This partnership working contributes to the children's progress.

The agency's education lead has been highly effective in calling education providers to account when they fall short of their duties. They have been an excellent force for improving educational outcomes for children from their starting points. Consequently, the children are making good progress. Older children have achieved good GCSE grades, and a number are attending college, with plans to go to university and/or gain employment.

Children's health needs are promoted, and their health outcomes are good. The clinical psychologist is very well established within the agency and delivers training and advice to supervising social workers and foster carers. This enables foster carers to parent the children therapeutically, address specific matters and focus on ensuring the best possible care for the children.

Foster carers support the children to develop hobbies and participate in activities that they enjoy. Foster carers harness the children's talents, build their confidence and promote happy memories. For example, one child's passion for horses has become a family affair. While the children can participate in activities organised by the agency, not all of these activities meet the needs of older children.

Children are encouraged to develop independence skills and foster carers continue to invest in older children who are preparing to leave home. One older child said, 'The fact that they kept me constantly in the family and didn't throw me out,' which is testament to the foster carers' commitment to raise the children like their own.

The agency has foreseen the need for young people who are making the transition into independence to remain connected to their foster carers. As a result, the agency has developed a niche service that offers workshops, mentoring and life coaching to young people. Other relevant resources are also available to help young people to access further education and employment and connect them with like-minded peers.

Foster carers understand the importance of family and friend relationships. They facilitate children's time with family and friends accordingly.

New foster carers report receiving good support during and after the timely assessment process. However, not all recently approved foster carers have had the full guidance and support that they are entitled to. The issue was responded to by the manager during the inspection.

Existing foster carers praise the support from the agency highly. They feel valued and part of the team around the child. One foster carer referred to their supervising social worker as 'Child-focused, challenging, and totally committed. It is a pleasure to work with her.' Another foster carer said that without the high-quality support from the agency, they may not have survived caring for their children, who are now thriving. Another foster carer said: 'In a nutshell, I absolutely love it.'

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

Children are safeguarded by foster carers who understand their responsibility to keep children safe. Children have trusted adults in their lives who they can talk to about any worries. As a result, children feel settled and better protected.

The agency's supervising social workers have carried out remote visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have since resumed visiting the fostering households in person, including unannounced visits, which adds a further protective factor.

Children are protected by foster carers who receive safeguarding training. This includes training on child sexual exploitation and social media awareness, which keeps foster carers up to date and enables them to protect the children.

There are no known concerns regarding child exploitation and radicalisation. Foster carers have taken appropriate action on the few occasions when children have left

the home without authority. Incidents of going missing are followed up appropriately when children return, including return home interviews.

Foster carers understand the children's individual risks and they report any concerns that could expose children to harm. Foster carers work collaboratively with the agency and other professionals to ensure that children are better protected.

Risk management includes safe care plans, safety plans and health and safety risk assessments, which all contribute to ensuring the children's safety and welfare. Foster carers welcome the children's friends to stay overnight, which promotes positive family life. However, written risk assessments for overnight stays have not been completed to ensure that all eventualities are covered, and the risks are minimised.

The training, support and guidance that is provided by the agency helps foster carers to manage children's behaviours safely. This is leading to children developing the ability to regulate their behaviours in more socially acceptable ways. One supervising social worker described a foster carer as 'managing the children beautifully' in relation to their behaviour management skills.

The agency manages allegations against foster carers responsibly. The agency cooperates with safeguarding agencies, such as the designated officer and social care services, and notifies Ofsted. This ensures that safe working together practices are followed. It also keeps the relevant authorities up to date and seeks to ensure that the concerns are investigated so that unsuitable adults do not care for children.

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

Over the past year, and notwithstanding the pandemic, the agency has undergone some personnel changes. The registered manager left the agency in April 2021. A qualified and experienced manager was appointed in May 2021 and his application to register with Ofsted has been submitted.

The closure of the agency's regional office follows the move by the organisation to an entirely home-based service. Aspects of the agency's work, such as prospective foster carer assessments, are being managed centrally. The savings made by closing the offices are injected into the service improvements, which reinforces the organisation's commitment to children.

The agency has a very child-centred approach that is characterised by strong family values and high expectations for children, who are thriving in the care of loving foster families. The manager has plans to develop the service and shows capacity to improve. However, this is not fully embedded yet and will take time to manifest.

Matching between foster carers and children has helped children to make good progress. However, in one fostering household, there are no clear written matching considerations and no information to demonstrate how the children's identity,

cultural and linguistic needs are to be met by the foster carers. Over time, this lack of information has contributed to the children losing touch with parts of their heritage, such as their first language.

Recruitment practices ensure that staff and panel members are recruited safely. The references for foster care applicants are sought to ensure that children are cared for and protected by safe adults. However, it is acknowledged that in one case that more action should have been taken to secure a reference for an applicant.

Not all new foster carers have completed required training within the first 12 months of approval. This has the potential to hinder their professional development.

Foster carers are aware of the out-of-hours service offered by the agency, but they have not always used it when needed. There is a lack of clarity around the times that foster carers use this service when an issue arises. This has the potential to hinder the agency's response to risk or concerns when they arise out of office hours.

Staff are committed to the foster carers and the children. They have formed strong relationships with fostering families and include the whole household. The supervising social work staff feel valued and supported by managers. A supervising social worker said: '[Name of the agency] is the best agency I have worked for and the one I am most proud to be associated with.' The staff are supervised regularly, and the foster carers and children are discussed during the meetings. However, supervision records do not consistently provide clarity to show how pertinent issues raised by staff have been responded to. This makes it unclear how matters arising during supervision have been resolved.

The agency's fostering panel is established and experienced. It works effectively to ensure that children are placed with suitable foster carers. The panel offers constructive feedback to the agency. The panel minutes report on the panel proceedings, but information regarding a child's ethnicity and an exploration of a placement breakdown with relatively new foster carers are not articulated clearly.

An escalation policy has not been implemented by the agency to obtain care planning documents in a timely manner. This means that some foster carers may not have all the information they need about the children they care for.

Safeguarding notifications have not always been sent to Ofsted without delay. This inhibits the regulator from monitoring the agency's safeguarding practices.

The requirement made at the last inspection has not been met. It relates to the monitoring systems that do not inform how the opinions of children, foster carers and professionals are used to shape service delivery. Consequently, the requirement is repeated.

Out of the three recommendations made at the last inspection, one has been addressed, namely the following up of health and safety checks. The recommendation about risk assessments has been repeated and the

recommendation regarding the management of the service has been escalated to a requirement.

Despite some of the shortfalls, the children have thrived. Professionals report good working relationships and communication with the agency, and they also speak highly about the children’s progress.

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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child’s religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11(b)(ii))	30 November 2021
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(3)) This requirement is repeated.	30 November 2021
The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1)(b)). Specifically, ensure that foster carers report any concerns about children’s welfare promptly; implement a formal escalation policy to ensure that children’s care planning documents are received without undue delay; and maintain consistently clear and accurate panel minutes.	30 November 2021

<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 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>	<p>30 November 2021</p>

Recommendations

- The registered provider must ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. Specifically, ensure that risks for children are identified and assessed so as to provide clear guidance on how to manage and reduce the risks when concerns are raised about the welfare of children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 4.5)
- The registered provider must ensure that prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe, caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 15.2)
- The registered person must take action to address any issues of concern that they identify, or which are raised with them. Specifically, maintain consistently clear supervision records and maintain an accurate management oversight of newly approved foster carers who need to complete the requisite qualification within 12 months of approval to ensure that no foster carer is missed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.8)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC448336

Registered provider: The Adolescent And Children's Trust

Registered provider address: 303 The Courtyard, Hither Green Lane, London SE13 6TJ

Responsible individual: Andrew Elvin

Registered manager: Post vacant

Telephone number: 0113 2401999

Email address: R.Leech@tactcare.org.uk

Inspectors

Jacqueline Malcolm, Social Care Inspector

Debra Boldy, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021