

TACT Fostering South West

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Bristol BS16 2QQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) is a charity that provides registered fostering services in England, Wales and Scotland. The charity is overseen by a board of trustees.

TACT Fostering South West provides a fostering service in Bristol, Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, Wiltshire, North Somerset, Somerset and Swindon.

Foster carers look after children aged between birth and 17 years, who may be from placing authorities all over the country. Some young adults over the age of 18 remain with their foster carers while preparing for independence or an adult care placement.

The service offers short-term, long-term, respite and emergency care. The service can accommodate children with disabilities, groups of brothers and sisters, unaccompanied asylum seekers, and parents and children.

At the time of this inspection, the South West office was supervising 42 approved fostering households, providing care for 52 children and young people.

The registered manager has been in post since 2003.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 June 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people , taking into account	outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency

contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 24 July 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Outcomes for children are consistently outstanding in all areas. Children who spoke to the inspector said that they had made great progress since living with their foster families. Children's progress is regularly recorded and reviewed. When children's progress is of concern, targeted support is provided at an early stage. This helps children to recognise their potential and understand that support is available when they need it.

Children build trusting and loving relationships with carers. Carers are skilled in helping children develop family-like bonds that enable them to recognise healthy relationships and trusting adults.

The agency has a multi-agency approach to promoting exceptional educational outcomes for children. Leaders and managers ensure that the most appropriate school places are available to children. When children start school, support plans are devised that reflect their individual needs. Reluctant learners return to full-time education promptly. Managers work with schools when they are not meeting the needs of children. The agency offers and delivers training that develops awareness of trauma-informed practices that support children's emotional well-being. This helps schools respond in the most effective ways, enabling children to fully participate in education.

The agency has recently run a pilot scheme that provides a mentor for children experiencing challenging transitions in their education. This includes choosing GCSE options, taking exams or preparing for work experience. Mentors support children's mental health and build their confidence during these difficult times. They work alongside a therapist and foster carers, providing a holistic approach. One child was offered employment after successfully attending work experience.

The agency supports the mental health and well-being of children through extensive and high-quality psychological therapy. This provision is accessed by children, carers and staff. All staff monitor the changing emotional needs of children, particularly those experiencing challenges. When additional resources are required, they are deployed swiftly to ensure children are supported at an early stage. Family support workers provide valuable targeted assistance.

Children's health needs are consistently met. Carers ensure that children have access to local universal services and when these resources are not available managers source private provisions. Children with complex health needs receive very good levels of care.

The agency underpins every aspect of their care for children with trauma-informed practice. Carers are skilled in understanding children's behaviour. They know how to respond to children in ways that promote their self-esteem and resilience. This ethos

is led from the top. During the inspection, the inspector saw this practice in all areas of care.

Carers recognise that children's relationships with their family are important to them. The agency positively supports family time and goes above and beyond to ensure that children continue to see the people who are important to them. Managers provide therapy for a child's parent to help rebuild their relationship. When contact is not meeting a child's needs, supervising social workers raise this with the local authority to ensure that plans continue to promote children's well-being.

Children's relationships with their brothers and sisters are prioritised. When large sibling groups cannot live together, foster carers work together to ensure that children spend quality time with one another and have positive family experiences.

Adults regularly seek and listen to the views of children. The agency organises a range of activities that encourage children to participate in improving the agency. Children know how to make a complaint. Complaints are responded to effectively.

Children are well supported when they move into or on from a foster home. There is a coordinated approach that ensures children are prepared and know who they are going to live with. One child told the inspector, 'I was given a sheet about them, it had their photo on it, and things that they liked and where they lived. Then we got to spend the day with them and then some sleepovers and a weekend with them. This really helped me.' There are very few unplanned endings for children.

The agency has developed wonderful welcome packs for children that are tailored to their needs. These include well-known children's books in the child's first language, soft toys that support children in sharing their worries, photo frames to hold family pictures and recipe books with food from the children's country of origin. This supports children's emotional well-being and identity. There is an individual approach that considers the trauma a child may have experienced, and their likes, dislikes and culture.

Young people approaching adulthood have access to tailored resources that support their move to independence. The agency provides ongoing personal assistance and financial packages to young people who live independently.

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

The agency has effective safeguarding practices. When allegations are made, these are investigated thoroughly. When an incident was not reported in a timely manner, the subsequent investigation highlighted that this was not good practice and learning was taken from it. There has not been a repeat of delayed reporting.

Safer care plans are robust documents that detail the specific needs of the child. They are completed in a timely way to ensure that pertinent information is available. Matching documents are of a very high standard. The needs of children, including

those already living in the home, are considered carefully. Risks are clearly assessed. The skills and knowledge of carers to manage children's needs effectively are robustly assessed. Good management oversight leads to additional training that further supports the stability of the placement.

When children go missing, foster carers follow clear procedures and plans to keep children safe and return them home swiftly. Records are clear and external agencies are kept informed. When plans are not working for individual children, there is a multi-disciplinary approach to find strategies that work for them.

Physical restraint is rarely used. All incidents of physical intervention are guiding holds to help children keep safe or calm. Reviews of incidents are robust and learning flows from this oversight.

The agency produces high-quality risk assessments. These are detailed documents that fully explore the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. They provide clear and useful strategies for all adults working with the child. These assessments ensure that carers have the skills and expertise to keep children safe.

Children receive exceptional support to manage their feelings and make sense of their past trauma. This underpins the therapeutic ethos of the agency. Foster carers are trained in advanced therapeutic responses that support children to develop healthy behaviours.

Carers use effective behaviour management strategies throughout the agency. Children learn that adults can keep them safe and meet their needs within consistent boundaries. Children progress because carers are skilled in understanding the specific responses that work for them.

The agency has developed safe practices for parent and child placements. Supervising social workers understand risks well and concerns are immediately discussed with the local authority. Plans are reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to keep children safe. Foster carers are skilled in managing the needs of children while supporting parents to learn new skills and demonstrate competencies.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The service has outstanding leaders and managers who set high expectations for adults and children. They constantly drive improvements and develop innovative projects that lead to improved outcomes for children. Children receive outstanding care, due to the conscientious oversight and drive of leaders and managers.

The agency is supported by a skilled and knowledgeable administration team. They ensure that foster carers remain connected and informed. Foster carers told the inspector that administrators always go above and beyond to help them resolve issues. They are responsible for producing detailed and useful minutes and quarterly reports. This assists the agency in recognising positive improvements and areas for development.

The agency has thorough and safe recruitment practices. Assessments of prospective foster carers are detailed and of good quality. There is a competent and skilled panel that examines and questions the suitability of carers in a fair yet robust way. They are confident in challenging and querying potential concerns. This ensures that only the most suitable carers are recruited by the agency. Foster carers told the inspector that they found the recruitment process was welcoming and professional and they were always kept informed of progress.

Recruitment of staff is thorough. Shortfalls identified during the previous inspection have been rectified.

Leaders and managers have excellent oversight of the care children receive. They fully understand the individual needs of children. When shortfalls are identified, they are resolved in a timely way. Feedback from children, staff and carers is carefully considered and feeds into development plans.

The quality of training available to foster carers and supervising social workers is a strength of the agency. Training is of high quality and is varied. Carers have opportunities to attend training outside usual work hours so that working carers can take part. There are robust strategies in place to support and encourage reluctant learners. This includes one-to-one support and targeted workshops.

All members of the team receive regular, very good-quality supervision and yearly reviews. Supervision is reflective and focuses on practice. This ensures that all members of the team can consistently support the needs of carers and children.

Staff report that they feel fully supported by managers. Members of the team who spoke to the inspector said that they felt valued in their role. They considered that they had access to opportunities that they had not experienced in previous employment. The agency provides exceptional resources for staff to ensure that their emotional well-being and a healthy work-life balance are promoted.

Leaders and managers have positive relationships with other agencies. These are built on good communication and respectful challenge. Local authority social workers told the inspector that the agency always focuses on the best interests of children and achieving outstanding outcomes for them.

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: SC050500

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Inspector

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

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