

TACT Fostering - West Midlands

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

This fostering service is a part of The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT). The trust is a national charity that provides a number of registered fostering services across England, Scotland and Wales. This fostering service operates in the West Midlands. The agency moved to an entirely home-based service in March 2021.

This fostering agency offers a range of placements. These include emergency, short-term, bridging, long-term, short breaks, care for children with disabilities, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 'staying put' arrangements.

At the time of inspection, the fostering service had 35 approved fostering households, with 48 children living with its foster carers.

The independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted in May 2004. The manager registered with Ofsted in February 2018.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 July 2023

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: 13 August 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 make good progress from their starting points. This is because of the excellent care that they receive from their foster carers and the agency support network around them. Many of the children who live with their foster families have done so for many years. As a result, the children experience high levels of belonging and support that promote their welfare and emotional well-being.

A number of children have experienced several previous foster placements that have not been successful. For some, their current placement is the longest that they have remained with the same foster carer. The stability, attachment and longevity of placements are a clear strength of this fostering agency. Children benefit from the good-quality care that their foster carers provide. A child told the inspector, 'I feel listened to, and I can speak openly and honestly.'

Children arrive to their foster family homes in a planned and sensitive way. The agency provides children with relevant information before arrival to help to relieve any potential anxiety. Children receive guides that are also available in various languages when they speak English as an additional language.

When asked about their plans for the future, several children said that they plan to remain with their families 'forever'. The staff value children's views and opinions. They work hard to ensure that children's voices are heard. Children's feedback about their experiences is extremely positive. Complaints from children are rare.

The majority of children make good progress in their education and improve their academic attainment. Children who face barriers receive support from the agency's education team. The new post-16 support helps children with their further education, from career guidance to helping with arranging student accommodation for university. Children are proud to share their achievements with inspectors, such as attending university or being part of the youth parliament. Children in this agency have high aspirations for their future.

Children's achievements are celebrated. Each month, a child is named 'star of the month'. This could be for their attainment at school or for helping others who are in need. Monthly newsletters are sent out each month, providing information about the agency and achievements for children. This helps children to develop a positive self-view through recognition of their successes.

Children's healthcare needs are understood well by their foster carers, including children with complex health needs. Foster carers and agency staff develop good relationships with health professionals to promote good health.

Children enjoy a range of clubs and hobbies. The agency hosts a range of seasonal and regular events for the foster carer households that all the children, including birth children, can join. These are facilitated by the agency fostering support worker

supported by the whole fostering team. The events are well attended and enjoyed by all, and they help to promote a strong sense of community between the adults and children.

Children's cultural and identity needs are promoted. The diverse staff team and proactive foster carers support children of all faiths to attend religious gatherings and celebrations. As a result, children can explore their own views, and their religious and cultural needs are met.

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

Staff work hard to protect children from harm and abuse. Children feel safe with their foster families and share positive and loving relationships with them. Children identify their foster parents as adults they trust and can go to with any worries and concerns. Safer caring plans give foster carers information about children's strengths and vulnerabilities. Plans are updated quickly to reflect the changing needs of the children. Children's individualised plans guide the foster carers in what they need to do to care for the children safely.

Managers and supervising social workers demonstrate a good understanding of child protection. Managers are confident to challenge the practice of external agencies and advocate on behalf of the children and the foster carers to ensure that there are safe outcomes.

Agency staff ensure that prospective foster carers are provided with timely and relevant information following their initial enquiry. Those who go on to apply said that they felt well prepared by the application process and value the training that is provided. Panel members provide good scrutiny to ensure that prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to provide safe and caring homes for the children.

Safeguarding concerns, such as offending behaviour, gang affiliation, misuse of substances or alcohol, self-harm and going missing from home, do not feature often in this agency. When these do occur, staff and foster carers take prompt and appropriate action to help keep children safe. Staff and foster carers receive regular guidance and training in child protection. Children receive good advice, information and resources that help to keep them safe.

Staff and foster carers work effectively and in close partnership with safeguarding professionals. This is particularly the case when there are concerns for children's safety. In such cases, managers and staff are quick to request and then fully contribute to strategy and professionals' meetings. This is to review the effectiveness of children's safety plans and decide how best to keep children from harm.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers are rare. When these occur, managers' communication with safeguarding professionals is consistent and effective. Managers' standards-of-care investigations are thorough, with children's welfare and protection central to their enquiries. Children's positive behaviour is

promoted. The agency's family therapists inform children's behaviour management plans, and foster carers provide children with clear routines and boundaries. This consistent support helps children to safely manage their feelings and behaviour.

Unannounced home visits to foster carers' homes promote the children's safety and well-being. Any concerns are followed up and considered by managers. This ensures that children live in a safe environment.

A broad range of training is available for foster carers, alongside regular supervision visits to support them in meeting the needs of the children. However, several foster carers are outside the agency's own mandatory refresher time frames concerning first-aid, medication and safer caring training. This means that these foster carers may not have the most up-to-date information in providing safe care. Training remains to be an area of development for the agency to ensure that children receive skilled care from adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This agency benefits from an experienced and qualified registered manager. An equally child-focused deputy area manager supports with the effective running of the agency.

The agency is well resourced, and staffing levels meet the needs of children well. Managers and leaders have plans in place to further improve the range of support available to children. These plans include the introduction of smaller geographical support groups, therapeutic-led de-escalation training, therapeutic fostering assessments and plans to increase the agency's pool of foster carers.

Staff feel valued and well supported by their managers. Staff appreciate well-being days, and one social worker said to the inspector, 'Even the director checks in on us, which we appreciate.' Staff are committed to the children and foster carers who they support. This well-established team provides stability to children and their foster carers.

All foster carers have personal development plans. These support their learning and knowledge base to provide safe, effective and personalised care to children. A foster carer told the inspector, 'I feel very well supported. There is always someone there to talk to if I need them, and the children have great relationships with the agency team.'

The agency's fostering panel is effective. An experienced and passionate chairperson guides panel members. Decision-making is recorded well, and decisions are child-focused and realistic. Annual appraisals of foster carers are productive and thorough. This means that foster carers continue to provide informed, experienced and compassionate care to children.

The fostering agency works very effectively with other professionals. There is close partnership working with children's social workers, independent reviewing officers and others. This ensures that children's identified needs are very well met.

Managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and maintain its development. The registered manager completes a weekly and quarterly management review of the service for senior leaders. Children's progress trackers are incorporated into this to evaluate the progress of each child. This results in improved outcomes for children.

However, the monitoring of the electronic recording system does not highlight a number of shortfalls, including a child's file containing information of a different child, carers' development plans being incomplete and a lack of clarity about whether all carers have accessed documents. This is an area that requires improvement to develop the efficiency of the service.

During the inspection, managers were quick to address any areas of development highlighted. This shows that the leadership is effective and that leaders strive for improvement.

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, The 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 provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that mandatory training meets relevant guidance and that all foster carers complete their mandatory training within set timescales.</p>	<p>28 August 2023</p>

Recommendation

- The registered person should have a system in place to monitor record-keeping and take action when required. This specifically relates to ensuring that children's records that are uploaded onto the electronic recording system are correct. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.2)

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: SC056442

Registered provider: The Adolescent And Children's Trust

Registered provider address: 98 Station Road, Sidcup DA15 7BY

Responsible individual: Andrew Elvin

Registered manager: Michelle Patterson

Telephone number: 01215802555

Email address: M.Patterson@tactcare.org.uk

Inspectors

Kev Brammer, Social Care Inspector
Stacie Sharpe, 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 looked after children, 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 2023