

TACT Fostering - London and the South East

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

The Adolescent Care Trust (TACT) is a national fostering charity, with teams located across England, Scotland and Wales.

This fostering service provides short-term, long-term, emergency and parent and child foster homes. It also provides foster homes to disabled children, and foster families who allow siblings to remain together.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 52 children and 56 approved fostering households. The independent fostering agency registered in March 2003. The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2019.

In 2020, TACT became a wholly home-based organisation, with staff located in different parts of the country and no office base.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 December 2024

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

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

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: 31 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive high-quality care from foster carers with whom they develop close and enduring relationships. Foster carers provide children with stability, treating them as part of their family. This means that children experience a strong sense of belonging in foster care. One child said, 'As you get older, it [foster care] sets a plan for your life. There is always a step upwards and foster carers make sure you succeed in things like school.'

The fostering agency carefully considers the needs of children when looking at potential foster families. Children's transitions to foster homes involve effective and collaborative work between the fostering agency, children's social workers and foster carers. However, the fostering agency do not consistently record information regarding the needs of children who are of a different cultural, religious or ethnic background to their foster carers. This is a missed opportunity to identify resources early on, so that foster carers are better placed to help children settle.

Children make excellent progress from their starting points in foster care, whether this is in their social and emotional development or education. One child's social worker said that seeing their child now, it was hard to imagine that this was the same child who they had struggled to find a foster home for previously. The fostering agency has its own education service and children benefit from highly individualised educational packages of support for children who are in school or out of school. Consequently, children's opportunities to achieve success are significantly enhanced by foster carers and the fostering agency. The fostering agency recognises these achievements at an annual awards ceremony for children.

Children are exposed to a wealth of social and leisure activities by their foster carers and the fostering agency. Children's individual interests are supported through access to an 'aspiring interest' fund. A group of children spoken to talked of the positive experiences they had together on a recent residential trip that was organised by the fostering agency. Opportunities are made available to widen children's experiences, such as through trips to the opera and the royal ballet and watching women's international football. Children benefit from all of these opportunities, which help them to develop confidence in their abilities and in different social settings.

Children's opinions are valued and listened to by the fostering agency. The fostering agency has a dedicated participation and engagement officer, who organises regular social events for children. Children express their views about foster care at such events, with feedback to managers to help inform the development of the service. Children have access to independent advocacy services and use these to share any worries or concerns they may have.

A strong feature of this fostering agency is the promotion of staying put arrangements for older children and support in transitions to adulthood. Older children remain with their foster carers beyond 18 years of age to support them in transitions to independence or with access to higher education. The fostering service also offers support to care-experienced adults through its 'Connect' service. This innovative programme provides young adults with access to a supportive community as well as grants, practical support, information and guidance. The fostering agency understands the challenges that leaving care can bring for young adults, and offers lifelong support when and if needed.

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

Children say that they feel safe and protected from harm in their foster homes. All the children spoken to were able to identify a trusted adult who they could speak to if they had any worries or concerns. Managers and staff are proactive in safeguarding children. This includes regular and effective contact and planning with local authority social workers, health and education professionals and children's families.

Safety plans for children are effective and provide clear information on risks and what foster carers can do to reduce the potential for harm. Children going missing from foster homes, or serious concerns regarding child sexual or criminal exploitation are not features of this fostering agency. Nevertheless, staff and foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of children in foster care.

Children are spoken to by foster carers regarding online safety, safety in the community and healthy relationships. This helps children to develop an awareness of risks and make positive choices to ensure their own safety, or consult with trusted adults if unsure.

Children are helped by foster carers to manage their behaviour and feelings safely. The fostering agency promotes positive behaviour. Foster carers are offered training to help them manage children's behaviour, such as non-violent resistance and trauma-informed therapeutic parenting. Foster carers know children well and respond promptly to changes in their presentation. One member of staff said, 'In the [foster home] they are in tune with the child's needs. They have a toolbox when he is dysregulated.' Foster carers receive specific therapeutic intervention sessions to help them understand and respond more effectively to signs of distress from children.

Staff undertake annual health and safety checks, alongside unannounced visits, to ensure that children are safe in the home. Fostering staff see children alone during these visits.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An experienced and knowledgeable manager manages the fostering agency. The manager is effectively supported by a strong leadership and management team and

structure. Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and ambitious for children. They are influential in changing the lives of those in the care of the fostering agency. Leaders and managers monitor the quality of care provided and use feedback and research to drive continuous improvement in practice. The fostering agency has employed an agency decision-maker, who also has a key role in the innovation and policy development of the agency. This places the person in a pivotal position to observe practice first hand and influence policy in the fostering agency.

This is a learning and reflective fostering agency that is driven by leaders and managers who wish to innovate wherever possible so that children's needs are met effectively. For example, leaders and managers' collaboration with a voluntary agency informed the support offered to Black children, to better understand their unique experiences.

Trauma-informed practice underpins all activity that leaders and managers undertake. For example, leaders and managers have developed a framework for the delivery of health services to children in foster care. This means that assessments and interventions for children can take place at critical times, when it is needed, rather than waiting for the process of a referral to external agencies to be completed.

Education staff have provided trauma-informed training and consultation to teachers to help them understand the lived experiences of children in care. This has meant that education staff have successfully intervened in several cases where children were to be permanently excluded from school due to a lack of knowledge of the impact of trauma on children's responses in the school environment.

Leaders and managers understand how staff and foster carers can be affected by caring for and working with children who have experienced trauma. An extensive range of well-being initiatives, including breakfast mornings for foster carers and support sessions for staff, are provided.

Leaders, managers and staff collaborate effectively with local authorities to ensure that children's care plans are achieved. Managers and staff attend all significant meetings for children and will initiate meetings if needed. Leaders, managers and staff challenge agencies when their responses are not effective. For example, they highlighted the need for a child to receive an assessment to support a diagnosis of a developmental need.

Leaders and managers provide a high level of effective supervision and support to staff. The quality of supervision is good and reflective in nature. Managers support staff to think about their own professional development, and training needs are addressed. New staff have a thorough induction period, and appraisals are a meaningful opportunity to reflect on learning and support continuous professional development. Staff have access to professional development groups and reflective clinical practice group sessions. Staff report that an experienced and visible leadership and management team lead them well.

Foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved following a clear quality assurance process, which ensures that only appropriate adults can care for children in their homes. One newly approved foster carer wrote, 'The experience has been enlightening. The training was thorough and enabled me to make a decision based on integrity, as well as the understanding of the care and support needed for children in the care system.' The foster carer review process ensures that children continue to be cared for by suitably supported and trained foster carers.

The fostering agency has an experienced panel chair. There are a wide range of panel members with relevant skills and knowledge to make recommendations on suitability and the continued suitability of foster carers.

Foster carers receive regular supervision from fostering staff. Foster carers have access to a wide range of learning and develop opportunities. Foster carers spoken to were overwhelmingly complimentary of the training provided. Foster carers said that the greatest strength of the agency is the nature and level of support they receive from the team, which is said to be excellent. This helps them to cope with the additional demands of fostering on their family life.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that children's identity needs are identified and recorded at the linking stage with foster carers, with a clear action plan in respect of how that child's individual needs will be met. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 2.1)

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: SC034000

Registered provider: The Adolescent and Children's Trust

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

Responsible individual: Andrew Elvin

Registered manager: Christine McGillvary

Telephone number: 020 8695 8111

Email address: c.mcgillvary@tactcare.org.uk

Inspector

Colin Bent, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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