

# TACT East London

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Karen Malcolm
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<b>Registered manager</b>	Mary Angela Elizabeth Hanson
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Mary Elizabeth Griffith-Jones
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	08/12/2011



## Service information

### Brief description of the service

TACT East London is an independent fostering agency that recruits, trains and supports foster carers in the Essex, Hertfordshire some part of Kent and some London areas. The East London TACT office is part of a national network of TACT fostering services. At the point of this inspection 60 fostering households were approved, with 67 children and young people in placement. The agency provides support to child and parents placements, short, medium and long-term care for children and young people.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good.**

Children and young people's individual needs, welfare and safety are promoted. The agency supports children and young people to live and thrive in safe and stable placements, such as supporting foster carers who wish to do so to apply for special guardianship orders therefore enabling security and positive relationships.

Prospective foster carers assessments are completed in a timely way and the whole process results in a range of skilled foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people. The proportion of filled foster placements and recruitment has increased over the last three years to be more in line with national comparators. Foster carers are a part of the team working with the child and

are required to use their knowledge and experience of individual children and young people to inform planning and decision making.

The views and experiences of children, young people and foster carers influence the agency's development and strategic thinking such as the agency has reviewed the 'children's survey' and a new monitoring strategy has been implemented which is headed by children and young people.

There is a clear leadership of the agency which is visible and effective. Leaders and managers are described by foster carers, children and young people as accessible. They use consultation and effective monitoring systems to identify areas where the agency may need to improve. As a result, positive change is promoted. The agency is clearly child focused and ensures that children and young people are offered sound support and are given the best opportunity to secure positive outcomes.

The agency demonstrates clear commitments to ensuring services are met for each child placed. Children and young people remain an integral part of the families they join. Foster carers, children and young people have close bonds that have been built between them.

Requirements have been set regarding, training on safe handling of medication and physical intervention. Additional to this the health and safety risk assessments are to be reviewed when there are any change to a fostering household.

## **Areas for improvement**

### **Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement (NMS3.8)
- ensure foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children (in relation to health and safety risk assessment being updated)(NMS 4.2)
- ensure foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication. Prescribed medication is only given to the child for whom it was prescribed, and in accordance with the prescription. Children who wish to, and who can safely keep and take their own medication, do so. (NMS 6.10)

### **Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good.**

Children and young people flourish from living in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health needs are comprehensively promoted and met. A placing social worker commented that the carers, 'provide a good level of physical and emotional support'. Foster carers are knowledgeable about the children and young people's health needs and are clear on any responsibilities and decisions that are delegated to them.

Good matching of children and young people and their carers helps to ensure that their individual needs are promptly met, with particular emphasis on their cultural and diversity needs. Where not all areas of a child's cultural match can be made, other aspects of the individual needs are met and supported through careful planning and support. Therefore, children and young people are able to be part of the foster family, without feeling different.

Children and young people are cared for and their care plan is understood by all. Children and young people live in stable placements and are safe and feel at ease living with foster carers who meet their needs. They have developed secure primary attachments some leading to positive outcomes and Special Guardianship Orders being applied for to ensure stability is maintained for the child or children.

Young people have a wide range of opportunities and support to enable them to achieve the best outcomes. Some young people remain with their carers once they have reached the age of 18 years. This has opened up opportunities for young people who are able to pursue their further education with the support of a family nearby and who knows their needs.

Brothers and sisters are supported to keep in touch and or live together where it is in their best interests of each of them. Children and young people benefit from being placed together with their siblings whenever this is possible, maintaining a sense of family and continuity for them. In circumstances when this is not appropriate, foster carers and agency staff pro-actively support contact in the best interests of each child and young person.

Young people build good, trusting relationships with their foster carers; some say, 'It's their family and I call my carer 'Mum'.' Children and young people express clearly that they like their carers and want to live with them. They acknowledge that even where they have differences, they know that their foster carers are acting in their best interests.

The agency works well to ensure that children and young people are provided with opportunities and supported to do their best. Children and young people are enabled to make good educational progress, in relation to their starting points and abilities. There is strong multi-agency support between schools, the agency and placing authorities which enables realistic planning with each child or young person to tailor educational opportunities to meet their individual needs. Foster carers and staff diligently advocate on behalf of children and young people. Foster carers have high

expectations for children and young people to succeed and actively work with them to help them to learn and to maximise their potential.

The health needs of children and young people are promoted and well met through close communication between health services, carers and agency staff. Health needs of children and young people are promptly identified and children and young people are provided with suitable information to make informed choices. Risk-taking behaviours that add to the vulnerability of children or young people are addressed together with other professionals. When necessary, appropriate referrals are made to external agencies, including child and adolescent mental health services. This ensures children and young people's needs are effectively assessed, enabling them to receive the right support.

Children and young people are actively involved in day-to-day decisions affecting their lives. Foster carers and supervising social workers are readily available to provide help, advice and guidance which the children and young people value and say helps them to reach informed choices. The agency employs a children's resource worker who undertakes direct work with children and young people, obtaining their views and supporting them to influence how the agency is run and managed. The outcome of two projects produced a DVD about how children and young people would like to be interviewed and the outcome of this was face to face.

## **Quality of service**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

All those involved with the fostering service are generally very satisfied with the service they receive. For example, they agreed that the management team is strong and that communication between the fostering service and other professionals involved in the care of the child is good. This has strengthened the service's ability to meet the wide range of children and young people's needs.

The fostering agency recruits a range of foster carers who are able to meet the needs of looked after children. The preparation and assessment of foster carers focus on the needs of children and young people, therefore enabling carers to develop an in-depth understanding of how to meet children and young people's needs. The fostering agency is aware of the current demand for placements for looked after children. The current need is for skilled carers to support and accommodate sibling groups, remand and child and parent placements. TACT's national recruitment campaign is geared towards the need of the looked after child being accommodated. The agency has been successful in recruiting new carer households and exceeding their yearly recruitment target.

Foster carers are trained and supported to provide positive care. There is a clear framework of training and development and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. However, this has not been managed consistently by the agency, for instance medication and physical intervention training is not provided to all carers as a

statutory requirement. Also, where specific training is required to assist a carer to meet the needs of a child they are caring for or are expected to care for, this is not consistently sought or managed effectively. The service is aware of this shortfall and part of the agency's strategy to address this is by introducing added incentives such as on-line training for those carers who are unable to attend training. These changes have been welcomed by foster carers.

Additional to the statutory training programme foster carers raved about the 'Fostering Changes' 12 week course, which foster carers who had undertaken the course said it was a time for true reflection on their practice. This course is being rolled out to all carers as part of TACTs learning and development opportunity.

The panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements through active engagement with the fostering agency. They carry out a quality assurance function that has led to improvements in assessments of prospective foster carers' suitability to foster. The panel is well-established with an independent chair. The panel membership includes people with a good range of skills and relative experience, such as one person who has care experience. All members of the panel are encouraged to contribute their views and opinions. The fostering panel has access to medical expertise and legal advice, as required. The decision-maker makes considered decisions that take into account all the information available to them. Therefore, safe, fair and appropriate recommendations are made by the panel.

Children and young people's needs are assessed and understood. Each child and young person has a care package. Additional support is provided or arranged by the fostering service to enhance the stability of placements, particularly for those children and young people with complex needs. Social workers stated that 'There have been several ups and downs where the young person had either wanted to drop out of their course or move placement. However, the foster carer has worked with the social worker. The plan is for the young person to finish their A levels in the placement with support from the foster carer and the education professional'. Therefore, children and young people receive a service that they know and which suits their need to maintain placement stability.

Approved foster carers are integral members of the professional working team. Their opinions and views are taken into account and acted upon. Social workers stated that foster carers' reports are usually praised highly in care proceedings for the child. Therefore, foster carers and their family's commitment and hard work are not only recognised by the fostering service but by other professionals; they value this.

Foster carers give good quality support and encouragement to children and young people and are proud of their achievements. Foster carers maintain close contact with schools and attend all meetings associated with the individual child's educational needs; they advocate on behalf of the child.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people stated that they feel and are safe. The agency provides appropriate support and independent advice for children and young people. This is enhanced by the good and effective joint working. Therefore, children and young people feel listened to and know who they can go to if they are unhappy about any aspect of their care.

Children and young people are protected by sound safeguarding practices and there are no incidents of bullying reported. Foster carers understand what they can do if a child is being bullied or is the bully. Children and young people spoken to state that bullying rarely occurs but they know to whom they can talk to if they have any concerns.

Foster carers understand the potential impact of abuse on children and young people. They are fully aware of the procedures to follow to protect them and the training they attend enhances this. There are effective arrangements in place to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded, that their welfare is promoted and is central to the agency. These include good systems for checking the suitability of foster carers and staff. The service has good links with the various placing authorities. Foster carers who may have been subject to allegations or where there are standard of care concerns have their reviews considered by the fostering panel.

Children and young people rarely go missing from their foster placements. The few who do are protected by effective partnership arrangements between the local police, social work teams and other agencies. The service helps prevent children and young people from running away and becoming missing from care. Children and young people who are absent from the foster home without consent, but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known, are also protected in line with the fostering service's written procedure. The agency is aware that the number of missing episodes within the period of 2013- 2014 has increased, however, the strategies in place to minimise the risk and safeguard the child are reviewed regularly.

Children and young people's safety is enhanced through sound recruitment procedures. The outcomes of recruitment and selection procedures are clearly evidenced. The quality of staff files examined was consistent with the safer recruitment procedures. There are very clear guidelines in place for ensuring that only qualified staff undertake the assessment and approval of prospective foster carers. The supervision of unqualified staff is effective and well managed and they are seen as part of the whole fostering team.

Care and placement plans ensure that foster carers have the information they need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children in their care. A range of risk assessments are undertaken to ensure that all possible areas of concern for children and carers are considered.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **good.**

The service is effectively managed and staffed by people who have relevant qualifications, experience and knowledge. There are efficient administration systems. The management team monitors the delivery of the service and reviews the fostering agency quarterly and annually. The results of this review are used to drive improvements in the service.

The management team understand many of the strengths and weaknesses of the fostering service. There is a comprehensive Statement of Purpose in place which is reviewed annually. The children's guide is a package of various leaflets and gifts that inform children and young people about fostering, what services they can expect and how they can complain. This was devised by the children and young people. Children and young people spoken to said they were given a package of information on their first day in care.

Leaders and management team have good effective working relationships with placing local authorities, with social workers in particular. Feedback from social workers were very positive on all aspect of care being provided by the foster carers.

The management team have a clear and robust overview of the agency locally and nationally. There are regular corporate meetings held on matters of safeguarding, trends and patterns within each agency and the recruitment of foster carers. This information feeds into the Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015 for the Trust working within the vision and core values of the Trust in relation to aspiration, passionate, engaged, fair equitable and beyond profit. The main objective of the Trust is to maintain stability of placements and the progress children make.

The point in time surveys received by Ofsted in 2013 had positive responses about the service overall. The surveys undertaken by the agency were also positive. The main comments were that the staff including the managers were very flexible, so much so, they undertook unannounced supervisor visits to foster carers at various times of the day and night which impressed a number of carers.

Children and young people have influenced and contributed to the development of the fostering agency, mainly through the children's champion meetings. Written feedback from children and young people about their placements contributes to their foster carer's review. Children and young people's achievements are also recognised by the agency through a celebration awards ceremony, weekend fun holiday away days and group meetings.

Effective action has been taken in relation to the requirements and recommendations made at the previous inspection. Three requirements and two recommendations were made relating to panel members recruitment information, children guide re-complaint information, exemptions, children's files and statutory documentation reviewed effectively. Therefore, the fostering agency demonstrates a capacity for continuing improvement and ensuring that the outcomes for children and young

people are sustained.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.