

TACT Fostering – North East

The Adolescent and Children's Trust
Unit 11, Vance Business Park, Gateshead NE11 9NE
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

TACT Fostering – North East Limited is an independent fostering agency and part of a larger organisation providing fostering and adoption services across the United Kingdom. It recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide care to children who have a wide range of needs, aged between 0 and 17 years. At the time of this inspection visit, in addition to the manager, the agency had a staff team comprising two supervising social workers, a placements officer and an administrator. The agency currently has 10 fostering households providing placements for up to 29 children. At the time of the inspection visit, there were 12 children placed with foster carers. This was the first inspection of this agency.

Inspection dates: 13 to 21 June 2018

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**

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- It has strong, thorough assessment and preparation processes that ensure that approved foster carers are suitable and well equipped to care for children.
- It provides foster carers with very high levels of support, supervision, guidance and management. This enables carers to provide nurturing and stable homes for children.
- It provides foster carers with good training that is highly relevant to their needs and those of the children placed with them.
- It provides fostered children with very good support through its supervising social workers. They get to know children well and advocate strongly on their behalf to ensure that they receive the services they need.
- Children's safety is well assured by the agency's rigorous practices.
- Children are happy in placement and make very good progress while in their foster placements. This improves their quality of life and opportunities.
- The agency's management is highly visible and effective at both strategic and operational levels. Monitoring of practice is robust and the agency has clear future plans that are based on a sound knowledge of its strengths and areas for development.
- The agency works effectively with placing local authorities and partner agencies. It challenges its own practice and that of other agencies positively with a focus on improving outcomes for children.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Panel minutes record the answers given by applicants to the questions put to them by panel while it is considering their application. However, there is little recorded analysis of the responses and whether panel was satisfied that these assisted its deliberations. As such, they do not provide the decision maker with as much information as they should do.

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

Recommendation

- Ensure that minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members. Specifically, ensure that minutes record the panel's evaluation of the answers given by applicants and foster carers to the questions it puts to them. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.7)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The work of this agency is of very good quality and is child focused. It is rigorous in its practice and this helps children to make progress that significantly enhances their quality of life.

The agency's arrangements to recruit, assess and prepare prospective foster carers are good. Assessments are thorough, addressing the applicants' suitability, attitudes and competencies to foster. The work carried out with applicants helps them to understand the role they will be doing and the challenges this will bring. One foster carer said of the process, 'I learned a lot about myself and about parenting.' Preparation training for foster carers is good. Newly approved carers described it as challenging but positive in terms of their development and said that by the time they were approved they felt 'ready' to foster.

Robust assessment and preparation are followed up with high levels of support, supervision, guidance and training for foster carers. There is a strong focus on promoting positive outcomes for children that runs through these support arrangements. Training is targeted specifically towards the foster carers for whom it is relevant, based on their needs or those of the child in placement. Unannounced visits to foster carers take place at times based on families' circumstances and needs. Supervision of foster carers is thorough, regular and with a child focus. This helps to guide and direct the care children receive, to ensure that positive outcomes are being achieved. Out-of-hours support is of a high standard and very responsive. For example, one carer who had needed support outside of office hours said that the worker arrived at their house 'within 30 minutes' and remained until the situation was resolved.

The agency focuses on children's needs when considering making a placement. It works hard with placing authority social workers to ensure that full information about children is given to the agency. Matching is carried out carefully and placements only offered after there has been a careful consideration of children's needs and how they will be met. Careful introductions take place, where these are possible, and close additional support is provided to children and foster carers when placements are new. The agency's social workers continue to work closely with both foster carers and children throughout the placement. This means that they know the children and their needs well. High levels of practical and emotional support are provided to children by the agency. As well as the support provided from supervising social workers, the agency has secured the services of a psychologist who is able to work with carers and directly with children if needed.

The agency's social workers and support workers work well with placing authority social workers. The agency advocates strongly on children's behalf and challenges partner agencies appropriately to ensure that they receive the services they need. This is appreciated by professional at partner agencies, who spoke highly of their good relationship with this fostering agency.

The agency's high-quality work enables foster carers to provide nurturing and stable homes for children that meet their needs and promote their emotional stability and development. Children are happy in their foster placements and make very good progress. For some children, the support provided has led to a transformation in their quality of life and emotional state of mind.

The agency places a high priority on supporting and promoting children's education. All the children fostered by the agency are in full-time education, and it works hard to help them succeed in this environment. Foster carers show a commitment to helping children achieve, and the agency monitors attendance and achievement closely to ensure that children are provided with the correct support to help them learn.

Children have their health needs met. The agency ensures that they are registered with all primary health services and that any treatment required is provided. It supports foster carers to advocate for any specialist services required and works well with placing authorities to help ensure that children receive any support they need.

Social workers know children well and spend time with them seeking their views. The agency provides a range of events over the year for children and their foster carers, so they have opportunity to get to know each other and the agency staff team. Nationally, the organisation that operates the agency has a children's forum and other consultation systems in place. The current small size and geographic spread of the agency has limited opportunities for children's group participation to date. However, the agency has plans to develop participative roles for children as the agency grows, and a new children's development worker is planned. The agency makes sure that children's views are sought and considered for their own reviews and those of their foster carers.

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

Children's safety is well assured by the agency's rigorous practice across all areas of its work.

The agency's effective arrangements for considering matches and making placements ensure that they are appropriate to keep children safe. Careful work takes place to identify any risks faced by children and plans are put in place to reduce these. The agency works hard to agree children's risk assessments and safe caring plans with their local authority social workers, and robust monitoring ensures that these are updated as required.

The high levels of support provided to foster carers and the children placed with them means that supervising social workers have regular contact with fostered children. This provides good oversight of placements and gives children someone to speak to outside the foster home should they have any concerns.

The agency's training programme is comprehensive and targeted to meet the needs

of individual foster carers and children. All carers undertake training in safeguarding matters including first aid, child protection, safer caring and working with children who may have been sexually abused. Where children may be at additional risk, such as a risk of child sexual exploitation for example, the agency ensures that the child's carers are provided with this training as soon as possible. Foster carers are also provided with training in attachment issues, and support is available from the agency's psychologist. This helps to ensure that foster carers are equipped to deal with children's behaviour in a way that meets children's needs and promotes their safety.

Since the agency's registration in July 2017, no children have gone missing or been absent from their foster home without authority. This demonstrates that effective, positive relationships are established with children. The agency has suitable procedures in place should this eventuality occur in the future.

Where children are at potential risk of child sexual exploitation, the agency takes positive and proactive action to ensure that appropriate support is provided. The agency works effectively with local authorities in such matters and challenges agencies in a positive and professional manner to ensure that children's safety and well-being are promoted.

The agency's arrangements for foster carers and its own recording are effective. Monitoring is rigorous and ensures that significant events for the children, including the occurrence of any critical incidents, are recorded and analysed so that appropriate action can be taken, and notifications made. This allows managers to identify any matters of concern or patterns and trends and to take appropriate action.

The agency's recruitment practice for staff and panel members as well as foster carers is robust and thorough. This helps to ensure that people working with children are suitable to do so.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This is a well-managed agency that is characterised by visible and effective leadership and management at both strategic and operational levels.

The agency's leaders and manager focus on providing good outcomes for children. In doing so, the agency constantly examines its own practice and that of partner agencies, challenging services positively and professionally where necessary.

The agency's panel has experienced changes of panel chair and vice chair in its first year of operation, which has led to some inconsistencies in panel processes. Nevertheless, panel fulfilled its role appropriately, giving consideration to the cases presented to it and providing a quality assurance feedback to the agency. The panel's membership is now stable, with an experienced chair in place to guide its development. Minutes of panel minutes are generally of good quality. However, there is no recorded evaluation of applicants' or foster carers' answers to questions put to them by panel and their impact on panel's thinking in the minutes. This

means that the decision maker is deprived of information about whether panel considered that the answers clarified matters sufficiently or were appropriate in addressing its concerns. Decision making is effective, with the agency decision maker being thorough in his consideration of cases and making well-evidenced decisions regarding the approval of foster carers. Effective communication takes place, in situations in which the decision maker defers a decision, to ensure that learning points are shared with the panel.

The agency's staff team has the necessary experience and skills to provide a good service to children. Team members are committed to the agency and are well trained and supported to carry out their roles. The agency experienced some inconsistency in social work staffing in the months after it was first registered, which caused delay to some foster carers' assessments. This has been resolved and the team is settled and working effectively. Social workers have caseloads that allow them to provide good support to their foster carers and children. The agency's staffing levels are kept under review with new appointments being made proactively as the agency grows, to ensure that work continues to be undertaken effectively.

The agency provides its foster carers with relevant training. Social workers use knowledge gained in foster carer supervision, and information about potential placements, to ensure that carers receive the training that is relevant to them. It has worked closely and supportively with its foster carers to help them complete the work required by the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers. This means that foster carers are well equipped to care for the children they have in placement.

The agency uses an electronic recording system effectively. Foster carers and staff complete their recording using this system, which ensures that records are securely retained. Children's records allow their progress and the outcomes being achieved for them to be assessed and evaluated. Records across the agency are of good quality and allow effective monitoring by the manager. The management of day-to-day practice is effective. Monitoring is robust and ensures that high standards of work with children and their carers are maintained.

Quality assurance processes in the agency are thorough. It supplies very detailed quarterly reports to senior managers in the organisation who, in turn, maintain close management oversight of the agency. The agency has clear plans for its continued growth and development. These are proactive and ensure that the agency has the necessary resources in place as it develops. For example, an additional social work post has been created so that the agency is ready for its anticipated further growth.

The agency makes sure that it notifies placing local authorities about all key events happening to their children. It notifies Ofsted and liaises effectively to ensure that notifications are appropriate and updated as required.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: 1257293

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