

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT)
TACT (Fostering) Bristol & South West, 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) was established in 1992. It is a national charity which provides nine registered fostering services in England, one in Wales and one in Scotland. TACT also provides adoption services from its administrative centre and head office in London. The charity is overseen by a board of trustees.

TACT's South West independent fostering agency was established in 2003. The South West agency 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, parent and child, and young people on remand. There are currently no remand or parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the South West office is supervising 39 approved fostering households, providing care for 53 children and young people. The South Coast office oversees six approved households, looking after six children.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 July 2017

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: 10 November 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- The agency provides an exceptionally high quality service to children and young people. They are kept safe and their individual outcomes are very good. Effective matching reduces placement breakdown and further trauma for the child or young person.
- Children and young people make excellent progress from their starting points. Their outcomes are better than those of children and young people receiving a similar service elsewhere. This helps them to prepare for their eventual independence and increases their life chances.
- Leaders and managers work exceptionally well together to instigate sustainable and innovative service improvement. Since the last inspection in November 2014, the service has developed a joint research programme with Bath University to help improve the outcomes for children and young people. The agency has moved to premises which are much easier for people to access. New service development is taking place in the south coast area. These initiatives have all had a positive impact on children, young people and foster carers.
- Foster carers receive an excellent service throughout their contact with the agency. This begins with their initial enquiry and progresses through recruitment, assessment, approval and then matching with a child or young person.
- All foster carers receive high quality therapeutic and social work support, beyond what would normally be expected. This, together with bespoke training, has a direct positive impact on the children and young people because it helps to sustain those who are struggling with their behaviour in their placements.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- A small number of staff recruitment files lacked recorded evidence of a full employment history. In one case, the gap in history was some years ago. In the other case, the agency had obtained a written full employment history for the member of staff, but it had not been filed correctly.
- The fostering service has four fostering households where foster carers have received good quality training, but have not yet achieved their training, support and development (TSD) standards. The registered manager had already identified this shortfall and has implemented a strategy to remedy the situation.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. In particular, ensure that full employment history is recorded on each recruitment file, with any gaps explained. (NMS 19.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The agency provides an exceptionally high quality service to children and young people. Foster carers receive excellent support, training and supervision. As a result, children and young people, many of whom have complex needs, make excellent progress from their starting points. Some have successfully obtained a place at university. For others, progress is about learning how to reconcile difficult life experiences. One young person said that her foster carer has supported her exceptionally well with her schooling. She states that she provides 'all the things that I need [...] She gives me time and loving'.

TACT has a specialist marketing and publicity team, responsible for presenting the agency's work to the wider public. Since the last inspection, the website has been updated and is now much more accessible. Centralised marketing and recruitment functions and improved use of technology have helped to increase enquiries to the agency by 300% since the system was changed.

Prospective foster carers' first contact is with the agency's administration team. They find the team welcoming and supportive. The fostering service has a very clear idea about the type of fostering family that is required, so an initial visit is arranged promptly. For those who decide to proceed with an application, the assessment process is efficient and thorough. The assessment reports are clear and evaluative.

Once approved, foster carers receive good quality information about children or young people who may come to live with them. The agency matches children and young people with foster carers who are most likely to meet their needs. One foster carer said, 'TACT always lets us know that we should only consider what we and the team feel is a good match. This gives us the best chance of a successful placement. Due to this, we were accepted for a fantastic match.'

Foster carers, some of whom have worked for other agencies, say that they are exceptionally well supported. The registered manager and staff have come out to support them in crisis situations. Many referred to the agency as 'going above and beyond' what might be expected.

One foster carer explained that the registered manager responded immediately when they were in crisis. The manager also visited a foster carer who was looking after a child who had severe mental health problems. The foster carer said that the manager 'gave up her entire Sunday [...] She came over and played with the children so that I could relax and do some household tasks.' The foster carer found this support invaluable.

All of the supervising social workers provide high-quality support. One foster carer said, 'Our supervising social worker is excellent.' Supervising social workers know that they are valued as professionals and are treated as part of the team around

their foster child.

Fostering families are able to access exceptionally high quality therapeutic support when required. One carer explained how she had received therapy for a sustained period, which helped her to support her foster child and avoid placement breakdown.

Another foster carer said, 'I could not have coped in the longer term without therapy. X has been an amazing therapist. She helped me to change the way I saw things [...] The placement has survived because of her.'

The agency also offers complementary therapies. One foster carer explained, 'The agency is experimenting with aromatherapy diffusers. I have one in my house now.' She went on to say, 'TACT do some lovely things for us all.'

The service celebrates and values diversity in all respects. Foster carers reflect the multi-cultural community. The agency has recruited foster carers who reflect a range of nationalities, ethnicities, religious beliefs and sexual identities. One foster carer came to Great Britain from Guyana as a 10-year-old child. She became a foster carer for TACT as a young woman with invaluable life experience. The agency took the children and young people on an overseas holiday last year, but were concerned that not all of them could participate because some did not have travel documents. This year, TACT has responded to this by taking the children and young people on holiday within Great Britain. This makes the holiday more inclusive.

Several foster carers remarked on their desire to make the child or young person feel part of the family. They want them to join in with all of their activities. They often refer to the group of foster carers as an 'extended family'. This helps to make respite care arrangements natural for the children and young people.

Children and young people enjoy healthy lifestyles and take part in a wide range of interesting activities. One young person, on their first visit to respite carers, chose the family activities for the day. This helped her to feel relaxed in places that were familiar to her, but new to the rest of the family. Other young people enjoy going horse riding and on a wide variety of TACT outings.

Children and young people receive excellent support to attend education. When there have been difficulties in school, foster carers have helped children and young people to find alternative educational provision. This helps to make sure that children and young people who are looked after are not disadvantaged in education.

Children and young people are exceptionally well supported to achieve good mental health. They have immediate access to individually tailored therapeutic services when required. The agency's therapist trains foster carers in relationship-based parenting. The agency uses attachment, trauma and secure-base models of therapy. Staff and foster carers receive training in therapeutic parenting. This helps to ensure that they are all working in a similar way, and that the children and young people receive a consistent therapeutic approach.

Children and young people can express their views freely. They speak with their foster carers' social workers and complete surveys. They and their carers take part in research projects to inform future practice.

The fostering service supports young people who have reached the age of 18 very well. Some remain with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements. Young people who need to move into adult care receive very good quality support. Many of the children and young people live outside their placing authority area. The fostering service promotes positive relationships with families and supports good quality contact.

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

Safeguarding practice is good. The agency manages child protection issues well. There have been very few allegations since the last inspection. Most concerns were not substantiated. When investigations recommend improvements to practice, the agency acts swiftly to address this.

The staff and foster carers are very well aware of risks to children and young people. They have enough written information to manage these risks effectively. Rigorous risk assessments are carried out on the home environment, pets and activities. These are reviewed and updated as circumstances change.

Foster carers encourage children and young people to undertake new challenging activities. One young person has embarked on the National Citizenship Scheme. The foster carer explained that the young person was 'very scared to go, but she did go'. He was certain that she would find the course very beneficial.

The agency works well with carers and other agencies to reduce the risks to children and young people who go missing. Several incidents involved young people who went missing for a short period of time. The frequency and duration of missing incidents has declined since the last inspection. A small number of individuals account for most of the incidents.

Foster carers establish very clear boundaries for children and young people. They receive training in de-escalation techniques and safe handling. Foster carers understand how to manage challenging behaviours through a therapeutic parenting approach. They also receive good training in how to protect children and young people from online abuse and cyber-crime.

A very small number of young people were, for a short period, considered to be at risk from radicalisation. TACT has responded proportionately, ensuring that the young people's needs are paramount. These young people are now making very good progress in their placements.

Recruitment and selection of staff, panel members and foster carers is well managed. Therapists and social workers are well qualified and are registered with the relevant professional body. Foster carer assessments are thorough and well

documented. The agency recruits staff and panel members safely. Files are well ordered. Two staff files had minor deficits. One sessional social worker had a short gap in their employment history, dating back some years. Another employee's employment history was not on file. A recommendation has been made.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The service is outstanding because leaders and managers work together to implement sustainable and intelligent service improvements. They are ambitious and aspirational. They lead by example to achieve the highest standards of care. This helps to ensure that the service achieves its stated aims and objectives.

The agency has an effective statement of purpose which reflects its ethos well. The website provides the public with good quality, accurate information. Children's guides are available in a variety of formats to suit different young people's needs.

A qualified, experienced registered manager leads the service. She has been in post for over 14 years. The manager is an excellent role model for staff and foster carers. She is highly knowledgeable about all of the foster carers, children and young people.

The office administration team supports the service very well. Led by the office manager, the administration team is friendly and approachable. Foster carers said that when they have to phone in a crisis, all the staff in the office know the individual children and young people. The fact that they do not have to explain everything from the beginning makes a crisis situation much easier to deal with.

The staff, as well as the foster carers, enjoy working for TACT. The agency welcomes new staff from diverse backgrounds. They receive a thorough induction, tailored to their individual needs. Staff at all levels are very positive about the high levels of support they receive. They have regular supervision and appraisals, as well as access to therapeutic consultation.

TACT has developed sustainably since the last inspection to help ensure that growth does not exceed the agency's resources. Senior managers support the registered manager very well and encourage her to explore new ideas which have helped to improve the service for children and young people. Strategic decisions are made without delay. Senior leaders are knowledgeable about each individual branch of the fostering service. This improves the service to children, young people and foster carers. The provider is a well-established national charity and is financially viable. The board of trustees ensures that managers and staff have the resources that they need.

Foster carers and staff have access to very good quality training to suit all levels and needs. They have access to in-depth courses on relationship-based fostering with traumatised children. The psychotherapist who trains them has specialist skills in trauma and attachment. The extensive list of training includes caring for asylum-seeking children and cultural diversity. Other courses focus on helping children with

learning disabilities to understand the process of growing up.

The agency organises bespoke training for foster carers. Some training has related to helping children and young people with specific health issues, such as Type 1 diabetes. One foster carer said, 'Training is superb, we are listened to. We can suggest courses if we want them.'

The service runs courses that lead to completion of the training, support and development standards. A small number of foster carers have not achieved the standards within one year of approval. The registered manager is well aware of this and has strategies to remedy the situation. These include discussing any foster carers who have not completed the award in a timely manner with the fostering panel. The carers are receiving support specific to their learning styles, their first language and support needs. This in itself demonstrates the agency's commitment to ensuring consistently high standards of care.

The administrative and social work staff have regular, inclusive team meetings. The agenda includes anti-discriminatory practice and a professional practice discussion. The service currently has two social work vacancies, but recruitment is under way.

The registered manager has overseen two changes of premises since the last inspection. Each new office has been better suited to the children and foster carers' needs. The current offices provide very comfortable, spacious and well-designed facilities.

The manager monitors the service exceptionally well. She scrutinises the staff's work and challenges any shortfalls in practice. Staff say that the manager's style is empowering and helps them to learn.

The registered manager is highly creative in her work to improve the service further. The agency works with Bath University to explore ways in which the service could be improved. Collaborative research helps to determine the extent to which children and young people's needs are met.

One project found that young asylum seekers required more services. As a result, the registered manager has introduced a telephone interpreting service. This helps the foster carers and young people to communicate. There are plans to increase the young people's access to English language courses. The registered manager is also planning to set up cookery classes. The aim is to help young men from cultures where they are not encouraged to cook to learn important life skills. This shows that research findings inform the agency's practice.

The agency set up the asylum-seekers' group in October 2015. This group enjoys a range of activities that help to reduce isolation for the young people. The young asylum seekers have also helped with some of the agency's research with the university. They were given cameras so that they could photograph daily events. The photographs will be exhibited in an effort to increase public understanding of young people from other cultures.

The agency maintains excellent professional relationships with other agencies. The agency advocates strongly for children and young people who are subject to delays in care planning.

The agency uses a secure database system for recording. The records are secure on a 'cloud' system to ensure that data is not lost.

The registered manager and her staff submit safeguarding notifications to Ofsted when required. These have always been appropriate and are well recorded.

The fostering service operates a safe and effective panel. Each individual panel meeting is kept relatively small to create a welcoming atmosphere for carers. Foster carers who have recently experienced the panel are positive about its conduct and efficiency.

The fostering panel is very well supported by an excellent administrator. She plans the meetings and circulates documents electronically. Minutes are clear and very well set out, and detail why decisions have been made. The agency decision-maker responds promptly to recommendations to avoid unnecessary delay.

The previous requirement and recommendation about panel members' recruitment files, training records and appraisals has been fully met.

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: SC050500

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