

TACT East London

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Ground Floor Front Office, BUPA House, 42–48 High Road, London E18 2QL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The fostering service is part of The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT). The organisation is a national network of fostering and adoption services and is a registered charity. TACT East London is an independent fostering agency that undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of foster carers.

The service currently offers a range of placements. These include short- to long-term placements, respite, emergency, bridging and parent and child placements. The service also offers fostering placements to disabled children and children and young people seeking asylum.

The fostering service currently has 54 approved foster caring households with 60 children in placement.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 February 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 **requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 28 April 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- This service provides good-quality care and the outcomes for children are positive. Children thrive while living with their foster families.
- Children receive safe, personalised care that meets their needs.
- Children live healthy lifestyles and do well at school and college.
- Children are safe from harm, abuse and neglect.
- The fostering service maintains stable and successful foster care placements. Children develop a strong sense of security and belonging.
- The protection of children is central to the work of the fostering service. There are effective systems in place to ensure that children are safe.
- The work of the children's resource worker, in particular, promotes young people's personal safety, social interaction, increased self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Children have good opportunities to share their views and influence the development of the fostering service.
- Staff and foster carers receive excellent support, supervision and training.
- Foster carers are valued members of the team and contribute well to the planning and decision-making in relation to children's and young people's care planning.
- Managers, staff and foster carers work effectively with other professionals to ensure the protection of children and to promote their well-being.
- Monitoring systems are effective and provide managers with good oversight of the fostering service's operation.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The fostering service requires a larger pool of foster carers in order to meet the increasingly complex needs of children.
- Staff's use of the service's electronic recording system is inconsistent. This makes it difficult at times to locate key documents.
- Some foster carer assessments are not sufficiently detailed and analytical.
- Not all foster carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months as required.
- Some members of the fostering panel do not consistently attend panel training or have annual appraisals.
- The fostering service is yet to recruit an independent foster carer to the fostering panel.
- The working patterns of some staff members require review as these do not always meet well the needs of the service.

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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>(4) The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>(a) receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>In particular, that panel members attend panel training and have annual appraisals.</p>	01/06/2018

Recommendations

- The written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision (NMS 13.7). In particular, that staff complete foster carer assessments that are sufficiently detailed and analytical.
- Foster carers are trained in appropriate safe care practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused (NMS 4.6). In particular, foster carers receive support to help them understand the need to provide both a loving, nurturing environment in conjunction with appropriate safe care.
- Children's safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements (NMS 4.1). In particular, that staff and foster carers devise safe care policies and risk assessments that address risks posed by adults in parent and child placements.
- The employer is fair and competent, with sound employment practices and good support for all its staff and volunteers (NMS 24.1). In particular, that managers review the working patterns of some staff to ensure that staff working hours sufficiently meet the needs of the service.
- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (NMS 26.2). In particular, that staff make consistent use of the fostering service's electronic recording systems.
- The fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service (NMS 13.1).

- Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3).
- A written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision (NMS 24.6).
- The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for (NMS 14.8). In particular, that the fostering service recruits an independent foster carer to the panel.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from the fostering service's strong focus on promoting progress and providing positive experiences for children. As a result, their outcomes are very good.

Children receive personalised care that is tailored to meet their individual needs. Foster carers share sound relationships with those they care for and are fully committed to supporting them to meet their full potential. Similarly, children feel loved and well cared for by their foster carers. They have a very strong sense of security and belonging. A child told the inspector, 'They *are* my family. I love them.' In another example, minutes of the children looked after review said of a young woman who is profoundly disabled and is diagnosed blind, 'She became excited when she heard B's name. She took the phone and rubbed it over her face.'

Children live in secure, permanent placements. Many children have been matched with their foster carers in long-term placements. Some foster carers have obtained special guardianship orders. Other foster carers have adopted children placed with them. Care leavers, if it is in their best interest to do so, have the opportunity to stay living with their foster carers under staying put arrangements. Unplanned endings do not occur often.

Children benefit from the fostering service's careful placement negotiation and placement start. They have access to written and pictorial profiles of prospective families to help settle them into their new homes. Where placements are planned, introductions between young people and their prospective foster carers are sensitively coordinated. The children's resource worker visits children soon after they are placed with their foster carers. This is to provide key information about being in care and to answer children's questions. Staff routinely share information with children about making complaints. Managers investigate all complaints thoroughly and in accordance with the service's complaints procedure.

Children have good opportunities to share their views, wishes and opinions. The fostering service continues to develop strategies to help children influence the shape of the service. The fostering service facilitates events and fun days to obtain children's feedback. Staff distribute service questionnaires and invite children to be involved in a number of initiatives. This includes some children attending an All People's Parliamentary Group at the House of Commons to share their views of being in care.

Children benefit from the fostering service's promotion of educational achievement. This has a positive impact on children, who make good academic and vocational progress. School attendance is high and children's educational success improves as placements progress. There are effective monitoring systems in place to chart educational issues and progress. The agency celebrates children's academic and general achievements. For example, the service hosts achievement awards to

encourage children's positive development.

Children enjoy a range of leisure and social activities that are of their choosing. Routinely, these include attendance at sports activities, holidays abroad, horse and bike racing, camping and, in one instance, a pilgrimage to Lourdes. The fostering agency distributes newsletters and arranges family events. Many children enjoy family holidays and celebrations with their foster families. This promotes their sense of belonging. The fostering service regularly facilitates activity programmes during school holidays. For example, this half term, children have been invited to attend a cinema trip.

Children lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers promptly register children with primary care services, and children have children looked after medical assessments completed annually and immunisations updated. Children have good access to any required specialist services. These include speech and language therapy, mental health support services and sexual health services. Staff encourage expectant young mothers to attend their antenatal appointments. Where children are disabled or have complex medical conditions, foster carers ensure that children receive appropriate healthcare services and treatment, such as physiotherapy. Arrangements for the administration of medication are safe.

Children are treated with dignity and respect. The fostering service ensures that children's identity needs are well met by foster carers and staff. The matching process is robust and effective. Staff pay good attention to the individual matching needs of children from the outset of placement negotiations and thereafter. The service is successful in matching children with foster carers who speak the same language as children and share the same religion and culture. Placement officers identify foster carers who have expertise in caring for disabled children, unaccompanied minors and young people who are mothers. This supports successful, long-term placements.

Children have good access to their brothers, sisters, other family members and friends when it is safe for them to do so. Staff and foster carers manage these arrangements carefully and there is a strong focus on the impact and best interests of children.

Children experience increased independence, learn how to do things for themselves and take responsibility for their actions. Selected older young people participate in the team's 'skills for life' programme. This promotes young people's independence and helps to prepare them for adulthood. They develop practical life skills such as budgeting, meal preparation and developing appropriate social skills. A social worker commenting on the progress that a profoundly disabled young person has made said, 'The carer tries hard to get [the young person] to be as independent as possible, but her self-care skills are limited due to her disability. They're working on getting her to participate in washing and drying herself.'

Prospective foster carers making enquiries with the fostering service feel valued and welcomed by the staff team. Foster carers appreciate that the agency is a charity. A foster carer commented, 'TACT is a charity. It has offices everywhere. Its charity

status is important. It's not just a business. They [staff] have morals. That was important to me.'

The assessment process is timely and sensitive to the needs of carers. However, not all foster care assessments are comprehensive and analytical. Some lack depth and fail to adequately identify the strengths and competencies that foster carers have or need to develop. This is an area requiring improvement.

The fostering service works very effectively with involved professionals. There is close partnership working with children's social workers to ensure that placements are in children's best interests. A local authority social worker commented, 'I am extremely satisfied with the care being given to [the young person] by her foster carers. They demonstrate warmth and affection towards [the young person] and she seems very settled and happy in the placement.' There is effective collaboration between staff of the fostering service, foster carers, health and educational professionals and external safeguarding professionals such as designated officers. This ensures that children receive well-coordinated care that meets their needs and helps to keep them safe.

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

The fostering service's protection of children and young people is robust and effective. The staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children are its priority.

Children benefit from the fostering service's clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. However, some foster carers require additional support to better understand issues of providing safe care and promoting a loving environment. Some foster carers demonstrate a lack of understanding of the impact of children's traumatic histories and the nature of care that they require from their foster carers.

Staff ensure that placement plans and risk assessments highlight known and anticipated risks. Managers and staff review and update key documents regularly to reflect children's changing needs and circumstances. This helps to keep children safe. However, the service does not devise safe care policies that address risks posed by parents in parent and child placements. This is to ensure that foster carers and the service are aware and address known or potential risks posed by parents and adults in placement.

Children receive clear information about making complaints and have good opportunities to speak with staff of the service in private. Staff routinely complete two unannounced visits annually to foster carers' homes. This is to further promote the safety of children.

Foster carers receive regular and consistent child protection training. Staff ensure that they routinely explore safeguarding issues in supervision sessions and in all other foster carer forums. Children respond positively to the clear boundaries set by their foster carers. These are appropriate and encourage children's good

behaviour. Where children's behaviour is poor or challenging, staff assist foster carers to develop strategies that address the offending behaviour.

There has been one incident of restraint of a child. This was managed appropriately to ensure the safety of the child and others present. Foster carers keep good records of all accidents and children's illnesses. Managers regularly review these incidents.

There have been a number of standard of care issues, complaints and one allegation against a foster carer in the last 12 months. Staff and managers work effectively with local authority personnel, including designated officers, the police, other professionals and family members. This is to ensure that action taken is effective in keeping children safe. The fostering service's internal investigations are robust and result in foster carers' cases being presented at the fostering panel. This is to confirm that they remain suitable to care for children.

Managers and leaders effectively monitor, have good oversight and reflect and report on all safeguarding incidents. This is particularly the case for when children are missing. Foster carers and staff take prompt, effective action to promote the protection of children and their safe return in each instance.

Fostering service staff routinely attend and contribute to local authority strategy and professionals' meetings. This is to help monitor and reduce incidents of going missing and the risk of child sexual exploitation. The children's resource worker regularly completes return home interviews to obtain key information from children when they are missing. The post holder also offers six-weekly sessions to young people to address their risk-taking behaviour. The sessions focus on issues around child sexual exploitation, positive relationship building and the promotion of personal safety. The programme is highly effective in encouraging young people to reflect on their behaviour and take responsibility for their actions.

The fostering service has sound systems in place for the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the service. These processes are comprehensive and confirm that staff and members of the central list are suitable to work with vulnerable children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The leadership and management of the fostering service are satisfactory. Leaders of the service are ambitious for change and some aspects of the fostering service's leadership and management are strong. The service has ambitious, strategic plans in place to improve practice further and to set the future direction and expansion of the fostering service. For example, managers understand the need to increase its current pool of approved foster carers. This is in order to provide placements to those based in inner London, sibling groups and children who have complex and challenging needs.

The service is financially sound and well resourced to meet the needs of foster

carers and children. However, current staff working hours and patterns require review. This is to ensure that staff are able to accomplish set tasks within their agreed working hours. Staff comments and supervision records indicate that some staff find their current working patterns challenging in meeting the demands of the service.

Staff maintain case records well. Generally, documentation reflects children's lives and the work undertaken with them. However, there is inconsistent use of the fostering service's electronic recording systems. This sometimes results in the misfiling of information, making key documents difficult to locate, while other documents are not uploaded or are missing. This is an area that requires improvement in order to improve the efficiency of the service.

The fostering service's statement of purpose is comprehensive and kept up to date. It describes well the service's aims and objectives. The two children's guides provide children with creative and clear information in age-appropriate language.

The manager is newly registered with Ofsted. She is appropriately qualified, highly skilled and experienced to manage the service efficiently and with positive effect. The staff team and other managers are enthusiastic about new developments already taking shape as a result of the manager's appointment. A member of staff said of the new registered manager, 'The manager is good at explaining processes, like tracking outcomes. There's a focus on compliance. She's really good.'

Foster carers also have high praise for leaders of the fostering service. A foster carer told the inspector, 'The organisation is orderly. The service that managers provide is good. Our work is respected by TACT. It appreciates what we do and supports us.' Another foster carer said, 'Managers will step in if there's an issue, sometimes before you even realise there is an issue.' A member of the staff team commented, 'Senior managers come to team meetings and so are very visible. I feel listened to.'

The support and training of foster carers are excellent. Overwhelmingly, foster carers indicate that support and training from the agency are outstanding and that these are clear strengths of the service. A foster carer said, 'They always provide training and you can request training too. It's pitched well, so that we all learn. You can use e-learning if you can't come in.' However, not all foster carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards within the 12-month timeframe following their initial approval.

Staff maintain good communication and regularly visit foster carers and children at their homes. A foster carer stated, 'Support is very good. Staff provide extra support when you need it, especially when there's madness going on in the local authority. You get 24/7 support here. It's really good.' A child confirmed to the inspector that he knew who his foster carer's supervising social worker was and that he met her 'quite often'. Foster carers have access to peer support groups and 'coffee mornings'. The service supports foster carer representatives who ensure that managers and leaders are aware of the views and opinions of foster carers.

The staff team is appropriately qualified and committed to providing good support to

children, young people and their fostering families. One staff member commented, 'I love connecting with young people, seeing them transform to being less challenging. I like building relationships and having them open up to me. I'm able to work with them to help find out what's *really* bugging them.'

Staff receive excellent support through effective and consistent training and supervision. However, managers failed to produce records of all staff supervision sessions. This is contrary to the service's own supervision policies and the fostering services' national minimum standards. Staff training opportunities are very good. Managers complete staff appraisals annually as required. However, this is not the case for the appraisals of some panel members, as gaps were noted. Additionally, not all panel members consistently attend panel training as required.

The fostering service has extensive, effective monitoring systems in place for most aspects of the service's operation. These include, for example, the tracking of children's progress and outcomes, the review and revision of key policies and procedures and the review and evaluation of child protection issues. Managers notify Ofsted of all key events as specified in the regulations.

Managers complete quarterly overview reports for the organisation's senior managers and produce quality of care reports as required. Leaders and managers have good insight into the quality of the operation and functioning of the fostering service. There are action plans in place to help resolve identified shortfalls.

The fostering service has relevant fostering panel policies and procedures in place. Members of the central list participate in an induction and have access to all agency training. The fostering service ensures that the vetting of panel members is robust, ensuring that they are suitable to participate in the process. Panel meetings are appropriately quorate and its administration is good. Currently, the panel's central list does not include an independent panel member who is a foster carer. The agency decision-maker is a qualified, experienced social worker. There have been no issues considering panel meetings' recommendations.

The leadership and management of the fostering service require improvement to be good. Leaders of the service are ambitious for change and some aspects of the fostering service's leadership and management are very positive. Identified shortfalls in the management of the service do not impact negatively on the outcomes, experiences and safety of children, as these are good.

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: SC063688

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Inspector(s)

Sandra Jacobs-Walls: social care inspector

Linda Kim-Newby: social care inspector



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