

TACT - WRITTEN EVIDENCE (PR0012)

TACT is the UK's largest fostering charity and we have been helping to provide fostering families for vulnerable children for over 25 years. As a charity, we put young people at the heart of every decision and we passionately believe that all children deserve to live in loving, safe and stable homes. We are not driven by profit, but by the best possible outcomes, which is why all our surplus income is put back into services for our carers and the children they look after.

Since the lockdown was decreed, we have been successful in moving all our services online successfully and our total enquiry numbers have stayed fairly consistent in comparison to the same period last year. All TACT employees are now home based, including Social Work teams. We continue to operate our services at the same level as before as a fostering agency, but all support is now made through calls and video calls. All foster care recruitment activities including initial visits and Form F assessments are also done using these methods. We have actually seen an 11% rise in people contacting us interested in becoming a foster carer. Placements are still being made and training & support groups for foster carers are taking place virtually.

We also launched our foster carer portal at the end of March, which is another platform of communication and access to information and resources for our carers. It also connects carers from across the country through the forum and we have also hosted Q&A live sessions, to ensure carers feel engaged with TACT and also able to get any other of their questions answered.

We have also set up new collaborations with other organisations such as Research in Practice to examine the impact of the lockdown on families, children and carers with a view of using that learning to go forward and adapt, or even redesign, the services that we provided with an evidence-practice approach.

We have undertaken pulse surveys of carers and staff to ascertain how they are coping with lockdown. In both surveys over 90% of staff and carers were satisfied with TACT's response and the services they were receiving. Conversely only 60% of four carers were satisfied with the service they have received from their child's local authority during lockdown.

With regards how effectively has the Government worked with the charitable sector to ensure services have continue to operate during the Covid-19 outbreak, we feel that the lack of consultation of the Department of Education with the third sector needs to be highlighted. An example of this can be found in The Adoption and Children

(Coronavirus)(Amendment) Regulations 2020 (statutory instrument 445) where not consultation with the sector and children and families whatsoever was held previously to its introduction. We believe that if there would have been a consultation it would have been clearly demonstrated that these changes to regulations were not required

Conversely the DfE has not focussed on areas that did require action. An example of this is that some of our foster carers have been impacted financially. Some have had one carer furloughed from a non-fostering role and that has impacted the family. Carers are spending an extra £40-£50 per week due to school closures. We in conjunction with other organisations have been raising this actively with the Department for Education and the Children's Minister to request a ring-fenced funding for foster carers during the lockdown period with no success at all. Foster carers are subsidising the state through lockdown which is unacceptable