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December 11, 2015

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
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From: Philip L. Browning
Director

MURRELL'S FARM AND BOYS HOME GROUP HOME QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of Murrell's Farm and Boys Home (the Group Home) in November 2014. The Group Home has two sites located in the Fifth Supervisorial District and provides services to County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children and youth. According to the Group Home's program statement, its stated mission is, "to ensure that each client has a clear understanding of the expectations for success."

The QAR looked at the status of the placed children's safety, permanency, and well-being during the most recent 30 days and the Group Home's practices and services over the most recent 90 days. The Group Home scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in 7 of 9 focus areas: Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, Teamwork, and Tracking & Adjustment. OHCMD noted opportunities for improved performance in the focus areas of Safety and Permanency.

The Group Home provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) addressing the recommendations noted in this report. In May 2015, OHCMD quality assurance manager discussed the results of the QAR with the Group Home and provided technical support to address methods for improvement in the areas of Safety and Permanency.

If you have any questions, your staff may contact me or Aldo Marin, Board Relations Manager, at (213) 351-5530.

PLB:EM:KR:rds

Attachments

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
John Naimo, Auditor-Controller
Public Information Office
Audit Committee
Emmett Murrell, Chief Executive Officer, Murrell's Farm and Boys Home
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

MURRELL'S FARM AND BOYS HOME GROUP HOME
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW (QAR)
FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of Murrell's Farm and Boys Home Group Home (the Group Home) in November 2014. The purpose of the QAR is to assess the Group Home's service delivery and to ensure that the Group Home is providing children with quality care and services in a safe environment, which includes physical care, social and emotional support, education and workforce readiness and other services to protect and enhance their growth and development.

The QAR is an in-depth case review and interview process designed to assess how children and their families are benefiting from services received and how well the services are working. The QAR utilizes a six-point rating scale as a *yardstick* for measuring the situation observed in specific focus areas. The QAR assessed the following focus areas:

Status Indicators:

- Safety
- Permanency
- Placement Stability
- Visitation

Practice Indicators:

- Engagement
- Service Needs
- Assessment & Linkages
- Teamwork
- Tracking & Adjustment

For Status Indicators, the reviewer focuses on the child's functioning during the most recent 30 day period and for Practice Indicators, the reviewer focuses on the Group Home's service delivery during the most recent 90 day period.

For the purpose of this QAR, interviews were conducted with three focus children, three Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSWs), three Group Home staff members, the Group Home social worker and the Group Home administrator. DCFS records and Group Home files were reviewed.

At the time of the QAR, the placed children's average number of placements was one, their overall average length of placement was 11 months and their average age was 15. The focus children were randomly selected. None of the focus children were included as part of the sample for the 2014-2015 contract compliance review.

QAR SCORING

The Group Home received a score for each focus area based on information gathered from on-site visits, agency file reviews, DCFS court reports and updated case plans, and interviews with the Group Home staff, DCFS CSWs, service providers, and the children. The minimum acceptable score is 6 in the area of Safety and 5 in all remaining areas.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	GH QAR Score	GH QAR Rating
Safety - The degree to which the Group Home ensures that the child is free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.	6	4	**Fair Safety Status** - The focus children are usually avoiding behaviors that cause harm to self, others, or the community, but rarely may present a behavior that has low or mild risk of harm. The focus children may have had related history, diagnoses, or behavior presentations in the past, but may have presented risk behaviors at a declining or much reduced level over the past 30 days.
Permanency - The degree to which the child is living with caregivers, who are likely to remain in this role until the child reaches adulthood, or the child is in the process of returning home or transitioning to a permanent home and the child, the Group Home staff, caregivers and DCFS CSWs, support the plan.	5	4	**Minimal to Fair Status** - The focus children have minimally acceptable to fair permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the child, the Group Home staff, caregivers, case worker, and team members expect will endure until the focus children reach maturity.
Placement Stability - The degree to which the Group Home ensures that the child's daily living, learning, and work arrangements are stable and free from risk of disruptions and known risks are being managed to achieve stability and reduce the probability of future disruption.	5	5	**Good Stability** - The focus children have substantial stability in placement and school settings with only planned changes and no more than one disruption in either setting over the last 12 months with none in the past six months. The focus children have established positive relationships with primary caretakers, key adult supporters, and peers in those settings. Any known risks are now well controlled.

Visitation - The degree to which the Group Home staff support important connections being maintained through appropriate visitation.	5	5	**Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections** - Generally effective family connections are being sought for all significant family/Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFM) through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies.
Engagement - The degree to which the Group Home staff working with the child, biological family, extended family and other team members for the purpose of building a genuine, trusting and collaborative working relationship with the ability to focus on the child's strengths and needs.	5	5	**Good Engagement Efforts** - To a strong degree, a rapport has been developed, such that the Group Home staff, DCFS CSWs, and the focus children feel heard and respected.
Service Needs - The degree to which the Group Home staff involved with the child, work toward ensuring the child's needs are met and identified services are being implemented and supported and are specifically tailored to meet the child's unique needs.	5	5	**Good Supports and Services** - A good and substantial array of supports and services substantially match intervention strategies identified in the case plan. The services are generally helping the focus children make progress toward planned outcomes.
Assessment & Linkages - The degree to which the Group Home staff involved with the child and family understand the child's strengths, needs, preferences, and underlying issues and services are regularly assessed to ensure progress is being made toward case plan goals.	5	5	**Good Assessment and Understanding** - The focus children's functioning and support system are generally understood. Information necessary to understand the focus children's strengths, needs, and preferences are frequently updated. Present strengths, risks, and underlying needs requiring interventions and supports are substantially recognized and well understood.

Teamwork - The degree to which the "right people" for the child and family have formed a working team that meets, talks, and makes plans together.	5	5	**Good Teamwork** - The team contains most of the important supporters and decision-makers in the focus children's life, including informal supports. The team has formed a good dependable working system that meets, talks, and/or plans together; at least one face-to-face team meeting has been held to develop plans.
Tracking & Adjustment - The degree to which the Group Home staff who is involved with the child and family, is carefully tracking the progress that the child is making, changing family circumstances, attainment of goals and planned outcomes.	5	5	**Good Tracking and Adjustment Process** - Intervention strategies, supports, and services being provided to the focus children are generally responsive to changing conditions. Frequent monitoring, tracking, and communication of the focus children status and service results to the team are occurring.

STATUS INDICATORS
(Measured over last 30 days)

What's Working Now (Score/Narrative of Strengths for Focus Area)

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The Group Home is generally effective in maintaining family contact and follows the court's visitation orders. The Group Home is committed to ensuring children receive their visitation, including providing monitored visits when necessary or required. The Group Home is in constant communication with the DCFS CSWs and follows each focus child's visitation plan. The DCFS CSWs and the Group Home staff ensure that the plans are adhered to and that the outcomes of the visits are shared amongst the key players for the focus children. Family members and approved visitors are encouraged to maintain contact with and visit the focus children.

The Group Home is supportive of contact and visitation between the focus children and their family members. The Group Home facilitates telephone calls and, if necessary, provides transportation or tokens for public transportation to and from visits. The Group Home's efforts to support a focus child's visitation arrangements were demonstrated when the Group Home administrator maintained weekly contact with a focus child's brother and aunt, as they were Spanish-speaking to confirm visits and to also obtain feedback. The aunt and brother reported that the visits were going well. Additionally, the Group Home facilitated telephone contacts between a focus child and his maternal aunt who resided out-of-state.

Although the Group Home is supportive of and encourages the focus children to visit with and maintain contact with their relatives, the Group Home staff also respect the focus children's right to choose not to maintain contact. However, when appropriate, the Group Home will still make efforts to keep the relatives informed of the focus children's progress. An example of the Group Home's efforts is contacting one focus child's mother to provide her with updates, as she always wanted to know how the child is doing, even though the focus child refused to speak with her.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The Group Home is providing good stability for the focus children. The children experience positive relationships with the staff. Each of the focus children stated that the Group Home has provided support, meet their needs, intervene as necessary and provides shelter and clothing. One focus child's DCFS CSW reports that the Group Home is consistent with providing Spanish-speaking personnel to make the focus child feel more comfortable and to ensure clear communication for both the focus child, Group Home staff, and parents. Another focus child's DCFS CSW commented that the Group Home is very good in working with the focus child and does not "give up." The third focus child's DCFS CSW expressed that although the focus child was resistant to placement, the staff are continuously encouraging the focus child to be positive and participate in the Group Home program, school activities and other activities of his choosing. The focus children react positively to Group Home staff interactions and appear content and responsive to them.

For each of the focus children, the Group Home appears to be the least restrictive and most appropriate placement. The Group Home staff consistently work with the focus children and their DCFS CSWs and family members to reduce the probability of placement disruption.

<u>What's Not Working Now and Why (Score/Narrative of Opportunities for Improvement)</u>

Safety (4 Fair Safety Status)

Safety Overview: Safety of the children is a key focus of the Group Home staff. The Group Home staff provides good supervision of the focus children. The DCFS CSWs' comments include that the staff have a good understanding of the focus children and develop safety plans and strategies in working with the focus children on improving negative behaviors. The Group Home staff has learned to recognize the behaviors of each focus child. The communication by the Group Home staff to the DCFS CSWs is good, informative and helpful both to the focus children and the DCFS CSWs.

The three focus children reported that they feel safe at the Group Home, as they know that staff is always present, and that the Group Home is a safe place to live. They further stated that they can inform any of the Group Home staff of their concerns and they know their concerns will be addressed.

It was noted the Group Home submitted a total of 29 Special Incident Reports (SIRs) over the last 30 days. Eleven of 29 SIRs were submitted to report incidents not related to child safety, such as children refusing to sit and complete work with the tutor, refusing to attend counseling, or school enrollment problems. The remaining 18 SIRs involved the safety of children, as children had AWOLed from the Group Home. Three SIRs involved incidents in which all three focus children had left the Group Home without approval and had not informed Group Home staff of their whereabouts.

Two of the focus children returned a few hours after leaving the Group Home and one focus child returned to the Group Home the following evening. Although each of the SIRs were submitted timely and properly cross-reported, it was a concern that the Group Home did not have a plan for working with the children in efforts to reduce AWOL incidents or deter them from AWOLing. Further, there was no plan for addressing the AWOL with the child upon return to the Group Home.

Permanency (4 Minimal to Fair Status)

Permanency Overview: The Group Home provided minimally acceptable to fair permanency for the three focus children. Although each of the focus children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) indicated permanency case plan goals and concurrent plans, there was no documentation as to what efforts were made by the Group Home or the progress each focus child had made toward achieving these goals. Further, there were no alternative plans developed to ensure safeguard in the event that placement with the family did not occur. The Group Home did not refer the focus children to mentoring programs or other programs to assist the focus children in creating positive lifelong connections in the community. When this was discussed with the Group Home administration, they stated that because of the Group Home's location, community resources are limited.

Per the Group Home administrator, one of the focus children failed to follow the conditions of the visits and often would not show up to the visits, or would not return to the Group Home after the visits. Although the DCFS CSW curtailed the visits until the focus child demonstrated he could return from the visits without running away, the Group Home could have taken further action to ensure the focus child attended the visits and returned to the Group Home, such as transporting him to the visits, rather than providing him with transportation tokens or vouchers. Also, the Group Home did not take further action to address the issue of running away with the focus child. Based on the QAR, the Group Home needs to make greater efforts in deterring the placed children from running away.

The DCFS CSWs and the Group Home staff expressed that there is always open communication between the focus children's key team members, which included the DCFS CSWs, the therapists, and appropriate family members and are all working in the children's best interest. The Group Home social worker meets with the Group Home staff and offers the DCFS CSWs the opportunity to attend and discuss the focus children with the staff and other key members during weekly contacts and at any visitation. The Group Home staff is quick to respond to all DCFS CSWs, school and law enforcement inquiries about the focus children to ensure that communication is open, accurate and shared with all team members. The focus children participate in discussions regarding any concerns they may have or which exist at the Group Home; the focus children are involved with and provide input in formulating solutions.

Although it was noted that the focus children's team members share information regularly, better collaboration between the Group Home staff, DCFS CSWs, the focus children and family members is needed to ensure that an appropriate permanency plan is identified and that there is also an appropriate concurrent plan in place.

PRACTICE INDICATORS

(Measured over last 90 days)

What's Working Now (Score/Narrative of Strengths for Focus Area)

Engagement (5 Good Engagement Efforts)

Engagement Overview: The Group Home makes consistently good efforts to engage the focus children and key people in decisions that are made on behalf of the focus children. The Group Home has developed a strong rapport with the team members. Further, it appears the Group Home utilizes reasonable efforts in informing key parties and bringing the team together, as necessary, to meet the needs of the focus children. There is a strong rapport amongst all the team members and the focus children are respected and well cared for. Each of the focus children reported being understood and helped by the Group Home's staff. The Group Home social worker conducts weekly meetings with the Group Home administrator to discuss the status of each of the focus children; information from the DCFS CSWs, is shared, if not present. Staff provides insight regarding the children's progress, issues and concerns and key members confer on methods to address any concerns.

The Group Home accommodates the scheduling of staff meetings and communication with all the key adult supporters to ensure uniformity, clarity and understanding of the focus children. Both the Group Home and the DCFS CSWs are dedicated to providing the focus children with whatever is needed to assist them in progressing positively. The focus children are encouraged to contact any staff member, their DCFS CSWs and all team members as they desire. The Group Home is in constant contact with the other key members of the focus children's team, by phone, fax, via e-mail, face-to-face meetings or team meetings. In addition, DCFS CSWs have indicated they have good rapport and are able to contact the Group Home when needed.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports and Services)

Service Needs Overview: Through collaboration with the key members of each of the focus children, observations by the Group Home, input from the focus children and continual communication, the Group Home ensures services are provided to meet the needs of the focus children. The Group Home ensures all medical and dental appointments are arranged for each of the focus children. The Group Home has a good array of supports to help the children make progress toward planned outcomes. The Group Home social worker and the Group Home therapist provide weekly individual therapy for each of the focus children. The Group Home encourages participation in extra-curricular activities, such as the Boys Club, sports, explorer programs, and school activities. Transportation needs are provided by the Group Home.

The Group Home ensures each of the focus children is receiving tutoring and educational support services. Each focus child has made progress in school and continues to show improvement in attendance and academic areas.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessment and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The Group Home provides good assessments for each of the focus children. The Group Home social worker meets with the focus children weekly to assess their progress and evaluate their needs and the Group Home therapist provides weekly therapy sessions for the focus children.

Each of the focus children expressed that they are offered the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. The Group Home administrator meets with each of the focus children and seeks out their interests, likes, and dislikes. The administrator researches activities or course offerings within the community and assists the focus children with enrollment. One of the focus children is interested in the arts. He further plans to get involved and participate in school sports, but realizes his education progress needs improvement. He acknowledges that staff would contact the coaches when he is ready. Another focus child is interested in learning about and playing musical instruments. The Group Home has contacted the school and assisted in enrolling in classes for instruments of his choice; piano and violin. The third focus child has expressed his disinterest in therapy and seems timid in participating in extracurricular activities. He acknowledges that all he would need to do is ask the staff and they would assist in ensuring he is enrolled in a program and transport him to ensure he attends the activity and/or course.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The Group Home has a good working system of teamwork. The Group Home does conduct face-to-face meetings with DCFS CSWs and requests and arranges team meetings, as needed. The Group Home social worker has weekly meetings with the Group Home staff and administrator, as well as any DCFS CSWs that wishes to attend. Phone contact, faxes and emails are utilized as well. Information is shared among the Group Home staff. Team meetings may be requested at any time by any team member. DCFS CSWs for the focus children reported that they are made aware of the children's progress toward achieving their NSP goals, and the Group Home maintains regular contact with them via phone contact, fax, or e-mails. Actions of the team generally reflect a coherent pattern of effective teamwork and any collaborative problem-solving, when needed.

The focus children have contact information for all the team members and have access to call them as needed. One focus child's DCFS CSW commented that the Group Home does well in communicating and collaborating with her. She spoke highly of the Group Home staff and mentioned that the Group Home staff provides a lot of mentoring, as well as teaches the children independent living skills. The DCFS CSW for another focus child commented that the Group Home is very good about working with the child and providing support and encouragement. The DCFS CSW for the third focus child reported that both the Group Home and the focus child are very cooperative.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking and Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: Intervention strategies, supports and services are being provided to the children by the Group Home. The Group Home staff provides monitoring, tracking and communication of the focus children's status and service results and convey to other team members, including the DCFS CSWs, the teachers, and other key supporters. Implementation of strategies, supports and services are tracked by progress notes, case plans, NSPs, and

communication with the focus children. Tracking of each focus child's progress occurs daily. The Group Home social worker adjusts treatment goals to meet the focus children's needs or when services are not producing desired results. The interviewed DCFS CSWs expressed good communication and responsiveness by the Group Home social worker and administrator. Open communication occurs often and provides a good avenue to share information. Team meetings are requested by either the Group Home or DCFS CSWs to address issues that require input by all members to resolve or provide guidance. Weekly staff meetings are also held by the Group Home social worker and attended by Group Home staff, administrator and the DCFS CSWs, when they are available.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In February 2015 OHCMD provided the Group Home with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 contract compliance review, as well as SIR and NSP training to assist the Group Home in ensuring SIRs and NSPs are comprehensive and submitted timely. The Group Home administrator received a copy of the SIR reporting guidelines for Group Homes. The importance of ensuring the facilities are properly maintained, in compliance with DCFS and Title 22 Regulation, was also addressed by the QAR reviewer.

In May 2015, the quality assurance review manager discussed the results of the QAR with the Group Home and provided the Group Home with technical support to address methods for improvement in the areas of Safety and Permanency. The Group Home submitted the attached Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). OHCMD quality assurance staff will continue to provide ongoing technical support, training and consultation to assist the Group Home in implementing their QIP.

Murrell's Farm & Boys Home, Inc. mentoring matters

August 12, 2015

To: Patricia Bolanos-Gonzalez
Department of Children and Family Services
Out-Of-Home Care Management Division
9320 Telstar Avenue, Suite 216
El Monte, CA 91731

From: Murrell's Farm & Boys Home
823 E. Pillsbury Street
Lancaster, CA 93535

Re: Quality Improvement Plan
2014 - 2015 Quality Assurance Review (QAR)

December 19, 2014, this Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) has been implemented as follows for the Murrell's Farm and Boys Home located at:

(1) Pillsbury Site
823 Pillsbury St., Lancaster, Ca., 93535 - License #197606874

(2) Hanstead Site
44423 Hanstead Ave Lancaster, CA 93535 – License # 197606254

Focus Area: Safety

The contract Compliance Monitoring Review revealed several safety-related findings.

Over the last 30 days, it was noted that one SIR had been filed for each of the focus children. The SIR's involved incidents in which each of the youth had left the Group Home without approval and had not informed Group Home staff of their whereabouts. Each of the focus children had returned to the facility. Two of the focus children returned a few hours after leaving the Group Home. One focus child had returned the following evening.

Although each of the SIRs was submitted timely and properly cross-reported, it was a concern that the Group Home did not have a plan for working with the children in efforts to reduce AWOL incidents or deter them from AWOLing. Further, there was no plan for addressing the AWOL with the child upon return to the Group Home.

Plan: To improve in this area:

Facility Managers were verbally retrained on 1/5/2015 on proper procedures and protocols for the completing and submitting SIRS via Itrack in the event of an AWOL (SIR), which results in an immediate Itrack, and making sure that the Itrack gets cross-reported to all reporting agencies in a timely manner to ensure the best possible outcome.

To address AWOL concerns in efforts of reducing AWOL incidents as well as deterring children from leaving the Group Home without approval, Murrell's has implemented the following Incentive Program: A Reward Board has been created and will be used to track AWOLS. Children who do not AWOL will be rewarded. Every two weeks, a child with no incidents of AWOL will earn a meal out at a restaurant of their choosing. In addition, for every month or 30-day period without incidents of AWOL, a child will be rewarded with a $25.00 gift Card.

In addition, the children will be reminded to follow all Group Home procedures of making contact with the staff if the agreed upon return time from a Community Pass is hindered for any reason.

If a child is threatening to AWOL, Staff will make efforts to counsel the child in order to help the child make a better decision and not AWOL. If a child makes the decision to AWOL, staff will follow procedure for reporting AWOL. Upon the child's return from an AWOL, staff makes efforts to meet with the child to discuss where the child went and what the child did during their AWOL. Staff will also discuss what the child believes will deter them from AWOL in the future.

Focus Area: Permanency:

Finding: The Group Home provided minimally acceptable to fair permanency for the three focus children. None of the focus children had concurrent permanency plans. Where the permanency plan for two of the focus children was family reunification, there were no alternative plans developed to ensure safeguard in the event that placement with the family did not occur.

Plan: To improve in this area:

Murrell's will continue to follow the case plan for children in regards to permanency. Murrell's will continue to receive input from the County Social Worker, child, and any other positive role model or other appropriate people in the child's life, and make telephone and or in person contact with family members to keep family up to date on their child. If the children refuse to visit and or speak with their families, Murrell's will provide stationary and postage stamps for the children to write and or send photos.

Murrell's Farm & Boys Home, Inc.

mentoring matters

Murrell's will work towards developing mentors and make connections with appropriate resources in the community for the children, such as Fire Explorer, Sheriff's Explorer, Sports, etc...

Murrell's will keep documentation of resources provided.

Emmett Murrell, CEO, will be responsible for supervising and enforcing the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Signature: _____ Date: 8-12-15
CEO Emmett Murrell

Signature: Lupe Rascon Date: 8/12/15
Lupe Rascon- Administrator

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