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December 28, 2015

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

PLB by Diane Iglesias

**LIFECIRCLES 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 Lifecircles Group Home (the Group Home) in October 2014. The Group Home has one site located in the Third Supervisorial District and provides services to County of Los Angeles DCFS foster children. According to the Group Home's program statement, its purpose is "to provide a stable, constant, nurturing and normal environment that is responsive to the individual resident's needs, to minimize the risk factors that may impede the resident's ongoing development, to encourage the bonding process and to strengthen parent/child attachment. Finally, our purpose is to support the parents' efforts to reunite with their child by providing parent education, advocacy, and support."

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 8 of 9 focus areas: Safety, Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages and Tracking & Adjustment. OHCMD noted opportunities for improved performance in the focus area of Teamwork.

The Group Home provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) addressing the recommendations noted in this report. In May 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the Group Home to discuss results of the QAR and to provide the Group Home with technical support to address methods for improvement in the area of Teamwork.

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

PLB:EM:KR:tm

Attachments

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
John Naimo, Auditor-Controller
Public Information Office
Audit Committee
Dewayne Winrow, PhD, Executive Director, Lifecircles Unlimited, Inc.
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Leonora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

# LIFECIRCLES 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 Lifecircles Group Home (the Group Home) in October 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 two focus children, as there were only five children placed at the Group Home at the time of the QAR, two Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSW), a Group Home facility manager, Group Home social worker/administrator and the Group Home administrator.

At the time of the QAR, the focus children's average number of placements was eight, their overall average length of placement was 16 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 child. 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 | 6 | **Optimal Safety Status** - The focus children are optimally and consistently avoiding behaviors that cause harm to self, others, or the community and is free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and/or intimidation in placement. |
| **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 CSW, supports the plan. | 5 | 5 | **Good Status** - The focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the focus children, Group Home staff, caseworker, and team members expect will endure until the focus child reaches maturity. Reunification or Permanency goals are being fully supported by the Group Home. |
| **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 past 12 months with none in the past six months. 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-Relative Extended Family Member (NREFM) through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies. |

| Focus Area | Minimum Acceptable Score | GH QAR Score | GH QAR Rating |
|---|---|---|---|
| **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 strengths and needs. | 5 | 5 | **Good Engagement Efforts** - To a strong degree, a rapport has been developed, such that the Group Home staff, DCFS CSW, 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 & Services** - A good and substantial array of supports and services substantially matches intervention strategies identified in the case plan. The services are generally helping the child make progress toward planned outcomes. A usually dependable combination of informal and formal supports and services is available, appropriate, used, and seen as generally satisfactory. |
| **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 systems are generally understood. Information necessary to understand the children's strengths, needs, and preferences is frequently updated. Present strengths, risks, and underlying needs requiring intervention or 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 | 4 | **Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork** - The team contains some of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's life, including informal supports. The team has formed a minimally adequate to fair working system that meets, talks, and/or plans together; at least one face-to-face team meeting has been held to develop plans. |

| Focus Area | Minimum Acceptable Score | GH QAR Score | GH QAR Rating |
|---|---|---|---|
| **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. | | | **Good Tracking and Adjustment Processes** - Intervention strategies supports and services being provided to the focus children are generally responsive to changing conditions. Frequent monitoring, tracking, and communication of child status and service results to the team are occurring. Generally successful adaptations are based on a basic knowledge of what things are working and not working for the focus children. |

**STATUS INDICATORS**
*(Measured over last 30 days)*

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

**Safety (6 Optimal Safety Status)**

The Group Home ensured that the focus children feel safe in placement. The Group Home staff members continuously address safety issues through communication with all team members, including the child. The Group Home social worker/therapist and the Group Home administrator are knowledgeable of the focus children they serve. The Group Home administrator and child care worker/facility manager expressed the importance of observing the children, identifying the problem and using precautions to maintain child safety.

The Group Home submitted three Special Incident Reports (SIRs) via the I-Track database system during the past 30 days. Two of the SIRs involved focus children having money stolen from their rooms by another placed child. The Group Home met with all three of the placed children and resolved the issue by developing a repayment plan. The third SIR was for suicidal ideation and did not involve any of the focus children. The Group Home followed SIR reporting guidelines and immediately contacted the Psychiatric Mobile Response Team who quickly arrived and assessed the placed child. The Group Home complied with policies and procedures to ensure the safety of placed children.

Both focus children interviewed reported feeling safe in the Group Home and expressed that they can discuss their concerns with any staff member and did not express any safety concerns. The focus children also stated that having the staff available to talk with makes them feel safe.

Both DCFS CSWs stated they had no concerns regarding matters of safety within the agency during the last 30 days. They also stated that the focus children did not express any safety concerns during their monthly visits. One of the DCFS CSWs added that her focus child told her that he felt safe in the Group Home and had no safety concerns.

There were no substantiated investigations from Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section (OHCIS) during the past 30 days.

**Permanency (5 Good Status)**

**Permanency Overview:** The Group Home provided good permanence for the focus children. The Group Home makes efforts to collaborate with the DCFS CSWs and the focus children to assist in the determination of the best permanent plan for the focus children. The permanency goals that are established by the DCFS CSW are supported by the Group Home.

The DCFS CSWs indicated that the Group Home is supportive and works toward maintaining family ties for the focus children. Permanent Planned Living Arrangement is the permanency plan for both of the focus children, and the Group Home supports the plan by ensuring that each focus child maintains an appropriate relationship with an adult who is able to provide a lifelong connection.

One of the focus children maintains weekly visits with an adult sibling who will be the permanency option for him once the criminal clearance is completed. In addition, his DCFS CSW is working to reunify him with his father who resides in another country. The second focus child maintains regular contact with his family. The Group Home supports this connection by allowing him to obtain community passes and providing transportation for visits when needed. The Group Home is assisting the focus child in the area of self-sufficiency by providing training in various areas such as shopping, obtaining public transportation, meal preparation and discussing future options with the focus child, including the option of transitional housing.

**Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)**

**Placement Stability Overview:** The Group Home provided substantial placement stability for the two focus children. The Group Home staff socializes and interacts with the children on a daily basis; both the staff and the focus children have developed a positive relationship and the focus children report having positive connections with the Group Home staff. One of the focus children indicated that he liked being in the Group Home because the staff were nice to him and the other focus child indicated that he liked residing in the Group Home and that he got along well with the other boys in the home.

In order to establish positive relationships with the children placed in the Group Home, the staff members take the time to talk with each of the focus children and all other placed children to see how they are doing. One strategy that the Group Home uses to maintain stability is a points system to encourage positive behavior from the focus children. With the points system, the focus children's positive behavior is rewarded with extra privileges, such as increased allowance, later bedtimes and curfew.

Neither of the focus children have had any disruptions during the last 30 days in the Group Home. The DCFS CSWs for the focus children indicated that there is constant communication with the Group Home and that the Group Home has been a stable placement.

**Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)**

**Visitation Overview:** The Group Home has established and maintained family connections for both focus children through their support of visitation. The Group Home staff engages the DCFS CSWs and

children in discussing the visitation orders to ensure everyone has the same understanding regarding visitation. The Group Home is able to monitor visits for the focus children and their families or important connections, they display flexibility with visitation time and location to enable visits to be convenient for all parties.

The Group Home provides community passes and arranges transportation for the focus children when needed. One of the focus children has unmonitored visits with a relative every weekend. The focus child stated that he enjoys visiting with his relative. When visits cannot occur, the Group Home shows support for maintaining family connections by ensuring the children have the opportunity to maintain telephone contact. The second focus child maintains regular telephone contact with relatives and has unmonitored weekend visits with family members which occur sporadically. The DCFS CSW is working on replacing the focus child to a Group Home that is closer to his family.

## 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 has established and maintained good engagement efforts with the focus children and key parties. The Group Home has developed an open dialog regarding the well-being and progress of the focus children with the DCFS CSWs, relatives of the focus children and other professionals providing services.

Each focus child reported that their concerns were heard and respected; they indicated that they can talk to one or more Group Home staff members about their concerns. Both focus children also stated that the Group Home administrator is available on a daily basis to meet with them.

The Group Home has developed a rapport with the DCFS CSWs and keeps them informed of issues impacting the focus children. The DCFS CSWs reported that the communication with the Group Home was open and fluid. According to the Group Home administrator, the Group Home staff is available to talk with the DCFS CSWs during visits to the Group Home.

**Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)**

**Service Needs Overview:** The Group Home provides the focus children with an array of services and extracurricular activities to help the focus children make progress toward their planned outcomes. Both of the focus children receive Wraparound and therapeutic services to assist them with any mental health issues that may arise. The focus children also participate in tutoring to enhance their academic functioning. There is a constant review of resources to ensure positive outcomes for the focus children.

The Group Home provides Youth Development Services (YDS) for older children. The YDS component of the Group Home program is geared toward assisting older children in moving toward self-sufficiency. One of the focus children receives YDS, which includes teaching the focus child how to utilize public transportation, shopping, meal preparation and maintaining personal hygiene.

The Group Home is supportive of one focus child's relationships in the community and transports him to church where he attends bible study and serves as an usher while being mentored. In order to ensure that placed children are connected, the Group Home seeks mentors and services from the faith based programs in the community as they are needed.

The focus children's DCFS CSWs report that they are able to give and receive feedback from the Group Home in relation to the needs of the focus children. Both of the focus children reported that the services they receive from the Group Home meet their needs.

**Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)**

**Assessment & Linkages Overview:** The Group Home generally understands the focus children's functioning and support systems. The focus children's strengths and underlying needs are recognized and understood by the Group Home and all key parties. The services provided, such as Wraparound, therapy, tutoring and YDS, are geared to assist the focus children toward making progress and improving their functioning and well-being.

The Group Home administrator and Group Home social worker meet weekly with their staff to discuss concerns regarding placed children. The Group Home staff utilizes daily observation and socialization with the focus children to gain a clearer picture of the focus children's strengths and needs. The focus children's DCFS CSWs stated that the Group Home engages the focus child and shares pertinent information with them.

The focus children reported that the Group Home staff interacts with them and inquires about their feelings and relationships with their families, peers and school. The focus children report that the Group Home staff regularly calls the school to check on their attendance and progress.

**Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)**

**Tracking & Adjustment Overview:** The Group Home's intervention strategies, supports, and services provided generally reflect the focus children's needs. Regular monitoring and tracking of the focus children's status is communicated between the Group Home and the DCFS CSWs. The Group Home reviews the focus children's status on a daily basis. Daily progress notes of the focus children's behavior in and out of the Group Home is documented by the Group Home child care workers. The progress notes track the focus children's behaviors and well-being in the Group Home, at school and in the community. Reviews of daily progress notes are shared with team members for both of the focus children.

The Group Home staffs meets and discuss how the focus children are working towards meeting their Needs and Services Plan (NSP) goals. The Group Home social worker meets with the focus children on a weekly basis. The Group Home reconvenes members of the focus children's teams to review and modify the goals when necessary. The NSPs are developed by the Group Home social worker in conjunction with the DCFS CSWs and the focus children. The DCFS CSWs reported that goals and the focus children's progress towards those goals are discussed on a monthly basis.

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

**Teamwork (4 Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork)**

**Teamwork Overview:** The Group Home involves some of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team consists of the focus children, DCFS CSWs, the Group Home administrator, the Group Home social worker, Wraparound coordinator, Wraparound therapists and a relative for one of the focus children.

Each team has formed a fair working system that has communication between some of the team members who work collaboratively and contribute to the development of the focus children's case plans. However, this work is often done without input from the whole team, as there are no face-to-face meetings which included all members. It appears that efforts are not being made by the Group Home to pull together a team meeting to include all key parties.

Although both focus children did participate in DCFS team meetings that were scheduled by the DCFS CSWs in collaboration with the Group Home administrator and Group Home social worker; on a whole, teams are minimally formed at the Group Home and all key parties are not present for team meetings. According to the Group Home administrator, they have weekly staff meetings and extend invitations to all DCFS CSWs by calling and asking them to attend. One DCFS CSW stated the Group Home would email and call them about SIRs and other issues that they had concerns about. The second DCFS CSW stated she did not recall the specifics about the case. One focus child stated that he has stated to his team members that he wanted to be placed closer to his mother's home so he could visit every weekend. The second focus child reported he felt most of his team members were doing a good job.

**PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES**

In November 2014, the quality assurance reviewer provided the Group Home with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 contract compliance review. The technical support included submitting SIRs timely, proper maintenance of vehicles, Group Home cleanliness, documenting contact with DCFS CSWs, enrolling children in school promptly, obtaining proper authorization for psychotropic medications, creating life books and ensuring employees have current drivers' licenses and necessary clearances.

In February 2015, the quality assurance reviewer provided the Group Home with SIR training.

In May 2015, the quality assurance reviewer met with the Group Home to discuss the results of the QAR and to provide the Group Home with technical support to address methods on improving in the area of Teamwork. The Group Home submitted the attached QIP. OHCMD quality assurance staff will continue to provide ongoing technical support, training, and consultation, as needed, to assist the Group Home.

Lifecircle

*We make a way when there's no way℠*
*That's the circle of life.*

**Lifecircle Unlimited Inc.**
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July 2, 2015

Attn: Adellna Arutyunyan, MSW
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**Lifecircles Group Home Quality Improvement Plan:**

**Focus Area Teamwork QA Rating Score 4**

**Teamwork finding**

According to the Quality Assurance Review The degree to which the "right people" for the child and family, have formed a working team that meets, talks, and make plans together.
Lifecircles Group Home score a 4 which the minimum acceptable score is 5.

Action Plan: Lifecircles Group Home will place emphasis on arranging team meetings which include important support and decision makers who are involved in the children's lives. This team will consist of parents, Siblings, Group Home Social Worker, Mentors, DCFS CSW, Group Home Administrator, Therapist and his Psychiatrist if available. All involved parties will be notified by phone and E-Mail; A record of notification will be kept by the Group Home Social Worker and Administrator. Sign in sheets will be provided and meeting notes will be kept. Copies will be given to all involved at the conclusion of the meeting. Meeting notes will be placed in the child files for review.

Person responsible for implementing Quality Improvement Plan, Group Home Social Worker.
Person Responsible for monitoring to ensure Quality Improvement Plan remains implemented and is working as intended- Director.

Plan was Implemented on June 10, 2015.

Submitted by Mamie Nelson,Director

July 2, 2015
Date