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DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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January 11, 2016

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
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Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: for Philip L. Browning
Director

NIÑOS LATINOS UNIDOS FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY 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 Niños Latinos Unidos Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in October 2014. The FFA has two licensed offices located in the First and Fourth Supervisorial Districts and one office in Riverside County that provides services to County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its mission is "to recruit, train, certify, and provide support for Latino homes. Provide bilingual (English/Spanish) and bicultural staff to work with certified foster parents, potential foster parents, CSWs, and foster children. Provide culturally sensitive supervision to the foster homes and ensure that quality culturally sensitive foster care is provided. Provide Latino children culturally sensitive foster care services and foster homes to enable them to reunify with biological family whenever possible. If reunification is not an option, a more permanent plan such as adoption or emancipation services will be pursued. During this time, all efforts will be made to provide consistency for the children by keeping them with the same certified foster home."

The QAR looked at the status of the focus children's safety, permanency and well-being during the most recent 30 days and the FFA's practices and services over the most recent 90 days. The FFA scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in 8 of 9 focus areas: Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, Teamwork and Tracking & Adjustment. OHCMD noted opportunities for improved performance in the focus area of Safety.

The FFA provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan addressing the recommendations noted in this report. In May 2015, OHCMD quality assurance reviewer met with the FFA to discuss results of the QAR and to provide the FFA with technical support to address methods for improvement in the area of Safety.

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
Fahir Milián, Executive Director, Niños Latinos Unidos FFA
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

NIŇOS LATINOS UNIDOS FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
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 Niňos Latinos Unidos Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in October 2014. The purpose of the QAR is to assess the FFA's service delivery and to ensure that the FFA 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 FFA'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 Certified Foster Parents (CFPs), two FFA social workers, and one FFA administrator.

At the time of the QAR, the focus children's average number of placements was three, their overall average length of placement was 10 months and their average age was 14. 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 FFA 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 FFA 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	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Safety - The degree to which the FFA ensures that the child is free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.	6	5	**Good Safety Status** - The focus children are generally and substantially avoiding behaviors that cause harm to self, others, or the community and are free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and/or intimidation in placement. The focus children may have had related history, diagnoses, or behavior presentations in the past but has not presented risk behaviors at any time over the 30 days. The focus children have a highly safe living situation with fully reliable and competent caregivers who protect the children well at all times.
Permanency - The degree to which the child is living with caregivers, who are likely to remain in this role until the focus child reaches adulthood, or the child is in the process of returning home or transitioning to a permanent home and the child, the FFA staff, caregivers and CSW, supports the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** - Focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the children, FFA staff, caregivers, caseworker, and team members have confidence will endure lifelong.
Placement Stability - The degree to which the FFA 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.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Visitation - The degree to which the FFA 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 Member through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies.
Engagement - The degree to which the FFA 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 FFA staff, DCFS CSW, certified foster parent and the child feel heard and respected.
Service Needs - The degree to which the FFA 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 Needs** - A good and substantial array of supports and services substantially matches intervention strategies identified in the case plan. The services are generally helping the focus children 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 FFA 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 focus 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	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 plans together; face-to-face family team meetings are held periodically and at critical points to develop plans.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Tracking & Adjustment - The degree to which the FFA 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 focus children's 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 children.

STATUS INDICATORS
(Measured over last 30 days)

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

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provided substantial permanence for the focus children. The FFA provides supports and services that correspond to the plan for each of the focus children and works with the DCFS CSWs in supporting each child's specific case plan goals. The FFA makes efforts toward maintaining permanent family connections by encouraging telephonic contact and visits with family members when possible. In addition, CFPs and FFA social workers work collaboratively to support the focus children's permanent plan and adjustment. The FFA administrator reported that the DCFS CSWs only discuss concurrent planning with FFA social workers when adoption or legal guardianship is being considered.

Two of the focus children have family reunification as their permanency plan. The CFPs provide transportation to their family visits. For the first focus child, the FFA social worker and DCFS CSW have addressed concurrent planning with the CFP and the CFP is considering legal guardianship or preparing the child for adoption by another family. The DCFS CSW for the second focus child is newly assigned and reported that the concurrent planning discussion with the FFA social worker will occur after building rapport with the focus child.

The third focus child is a Non-Minor Dependent (NMD) mother with the permanency plan of self-sufficiency. The FFA social worker, the CFP and DCFS CSW have provided the focus child with resources to ensure that she meets the extended foster care requirement to either attend school or obtain employment; however the focus child has not taken advantage of the resources provided. The focus child indicated that she is able to count on her CFPs support and that she wanted to remain in her placement until the age of 21 or until she is able to live on her own. The CFP indicated that she will provide care for the focus child until she is able to care for herself.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA provided substantial placement stability for the three focus children. The focus children's placements have been stable with no placement or school disruptions. The focus children reported feeling safe, comfortable and respected. The focus children reported that they have at least one of their CFPs as a confidant with whom they are able to share any concerns. Two of the focus children have had multiple placements and their current placement is their longest. The two focus children have not had any placement issues within the last 30 days. One of the focus children expressed appreciation for their CFP participating in all school meetings.

The FFA works with their CFPs to assist them in meeting the focus children's needs and establishing positive relationships with the placed children. The FFA staff reported that at intake the FFA makes great efforts to match each placed child with the CFPs that would best meet their needs. The FFA social workers and two of the CFPs reported that when there is placement instability, the FFA social worker conducts home visits every other day until stability has been achieved. The other CFP reported that her FFA social worker provides a lot of support for the placed children to accomplish their goals. The three CFPs reported that the ongoing communication and support from their FFA social workers has assisted with placement stability. Further, the CFPs, FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs reported that the focus children are stable and adjusting well in their Certified Foster Homes (CFHs).

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA has established generally effective visitation and maintenance of family connections for the focus children. The FFA engages the DCFS CSWs and biological family in conversations regarding the visitation plan. The FFA social workers make visitation arrangements and CFPs usually provide transportation for the focus children visiting with family. To avoid visitation disruptions when CFPs are unable to transport or monitor a visit, the assigned FFA social worker provides the placed child with transportation and assists with monitoring the visits.

According to the DCFS CSW, the first focus child has three-hour unmonitored visits with her father and sibling at least once a month. The DCFS CSW, FFA social worker, CFP and focus child reported that at this time the father is not making himself available for visits. When her father was visiting the focus child regularly, the CFP would drive the focus child to her father's home. The focus child indicated that she wished that her father's visits occurred consistently. The focus child reported that when she does visit with her father and siblings, the visits go well.

The second focus child has three-hour monitored visits twice a month with his mother. The DCFS CSW reported that the focus child's CFP is the monitor for the visits. The DCFS CSW reported that there have not been any concerns reported regarding the visits with his mother. The focus child reported that his visits with his mother are fun and he also has telephonic contact with his mother, which is encouraged by the CFP.

According to her DCFS CSW, the third focus child has no visitation plan. The DCFS CSW reported that the focus child maintains contact with her father and stepmother via Facebook. The focus child indicated that she has telephonic and written communication with family members.

What's Not Working (Score/Narrative of Strengths for Focus Area)

Safety (5 Good Safety Status)

Safety Overview: The FFA provides good safety for the focus children. The DCFS CSWs reported there were no child safety issues regarding the CFPs. The focus children have not shown any suicidal behaviors or exhibited any self-injurious behaviors over the last 30 days. The focus children have been free from harm in their placement and other daily settings, including at school and in the community.

The focus children reported feeling safe at all times while in their current CFHs, as well as, having at least one of their CFPs as someone to report any safety related concerns. The FFA's administration stated that they try ensuring that placed children feel safe in their placements. The FFA social workers conduct weekly home visits, monthly walk-throughs of the CFHs and quarterly home assessments as part of the FFA's child safety protocols. One of the FFA social workers reported that they also do unannounced home visits as part of their safety assessments of placed children. The FFA staff reported that the CFPs have trainings on safety, supervision, addressing the special needs of the placed children, the adjustment process for the children, red flags for the different types of abuse/neglect and to have emergency telephone numbers (Psychiatric Mobile Response Team, duty worker, administrator's cell, FFA social worker and DCFS CSWs) easily available. Two CFPs reported that they have ongoing communication with the focus children placed in their homes to assure them of their safety and to help them feel comfortable sharing any concerns. One of the CFPs also reported that they can count on the FFA social worker to immediately conduct a home visit when there is a special incident, such as a child disclosing suicidal ideation.

Although the FFA demonstrates good efforts in keeping all children placed in their CFHs safe; the FFA fell below the minimum acceptable score in the area of Safety. The FFA reported a total of 24 Special Incident Reports (SIRs), none of these SIRs involved the focus children. Four of the SIRs posed a child safety concern. Two SIRs involved AWOLs, where children did not return at their expected time; one incident involved a child that was placed at the FFA the prior day and the second AWOL involved a child who returned home from school late. There were two SIRs that involved inappropriate sexual behavior between children; the first SIR involved two children where one child touched another child inappropriately; the second incident involved a placed five year-old child having inappropriate sexual contact with a two-year old child visiting. The FFA handled all four child safety related incidents appropriately. The SIRs were properly cross-reported to all required parties and submitted timely via the I-Track database. However, the CFP did not report the last incident to the FFA timely as required. There were no investigations substantiated or opened to the Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section during the last 30 days.

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 FFA develops a strong rapport and makes excellent efforts toward engaging key parties and bringing the team together, as necessary, to meet the needs of the focus children. The FFA social workers attempt to join the DCFS CSWs during their monthly home visits and have regular telephonic contact with the DCFS CSWs to develop working relationships. One of the FFA social workers reported that she immediately emails the DCFS CSW when assigned to a placed child, to report any updates and to inquire about court hearing results. Two focus children and the CFPs reported that their concerns were heard and they felt respected. The DCFS CSW and FFA social worker provided the third focus child with appropriate resources in order to encourage her to comply with extended foster care requirements.

The CFPs expressed ongoing support and good working relationships with the FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs. In addition, the DCFS CSWs reported that they receive frequent telephonic and/or email updates from the FFA social workers.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA had a good array of supports, extracurricular activities and services to help the focus children make progress toward planned outcomes. Each of the CFPs reported that the FFA social workers find resources in their community for the placed children and comply with DCFS CSW's requests. One focus child indicated that she was provided with needed services, which she successfully concluded. The second focus child indicated that he is provided with an adequate array of services to meet his needs.

The DCFS CSWs and FFA social workers provided the focus children with needed services and resources. One of the focus children is not participating in services due to successfully concluding her weekly therapy and tutoring. The DCFS CSW and FFA social worker indicated that the focus child is succeeding academically and had met her therapeutic goals. The focus child stated that she is earning good grades and does not need therapy anymore.

The second focus child is participating in a school social group and in weekly individual therapy to address his anger management and aggressive behavior towards siblings. The focus child reported that his weekly therapy helps him; as a result, he has raised his grade point average. The FFA social worker confirmed that he did raise his GPA. The FFA social worker indicated that as a result of therapy, the focus child has lessened aggressive behaviors and is managing his anger more appropriately. The DCFS CSW indicated that she has not received any concerns from the certified foster parent or therapist.

The third focus child, an NMD, is not participating in any services due to her lack of compliance with the services offered; including a high school with childcare on-site, Adolescent Family Life Program, parenting classes and meeting with a Pregnant and Parenting Teen Resource Specialist. The focus child denied receiving helpful resources. The FFA social worker and DCFS CSW reported that they are challenged by the focus child's lack of follow-through. The DCFS CSW expressed being concerned about the focus child losing her extended foster care status, as she is not meeting criteria.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: In general, the FFA understands the focus children's functioning, strengths, needs, preferences and support systems. The necessary support and services for improving functioning and increasing overall well-being are also generally understood by the FFA staff and CFPs. The CFPs indicated that the FFA social workers help find resources that are accessible within their community for the focus children.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA follows the court orders and provides supportive services to the focus children. All of the DCFS CSWs reported that they are receiving the focus children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), which they review and approve. One of the DCFS CSWs reported that she allows the FFA social worker to develop and change treatment goals. Another DCFS CSW reported that she informs the FFA of the focus child's needs so that the FFA could identify and link the focus child to the appropriate services within their community.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA social worker, the focus children, certified foster parents and DCFS CSW work effectively as a team. The FFA social workers reported having at least weekly home visits with the focus children and ongoing telephonic communication with the CFPs. The FFA social workers attempt to join the DCFS CSWs during their monthly home visits and work collaboratively in the best interest of placed children. For the second focus child, the FFA social worker successfully joined the DCFS CSW with the focus child, siblings and CFP to discuss ongoing dynamics among the siblings and their progress. The other two focus children had their DCFS CSWs conduct unannounced home visits within the last 90 days, which did not give the opportunity for the FFA social workers to join the DCFS CSWs for home visits.

The focus children reported that they considered their FFA social workers, DCFS CSWs and CFPs as part of their teams. The focus children reported that they could confide in various team members if needed, to discuss any issues or concerns that may arise. Despite the ability to confide in various team members, the focus children report that they mainly relied on their CFPs and FFA social workers.

The CFPs and FFA social workers reported that they have informal family meetings in the CFHs. The third focus child attended family meetings which included the DCFS CSW, CFP and the foster parent's adult daughter. These team members utilize this forum to discuss and address placement issues, the focus child's progress toward meeting NSP goals and any concerns.

During the QAR, the third focus child participated in a DCFS Pregnant and Parenting Teen (PPT) conference at a DCFS office. The conference included the focus child, certified foster mother and her adult daughter, DCFS CSW, DCFS Supervising CSW, PPT resource specialist and DCFS PPT conference facilitator. The team decided to assign the PPT resource specialist to the focus child to provide additional support, advocacy and to assist in linking the focus child to resources, as she has not been open to participating in the past. The FFA social worker was invited to the team meeting; however, she was not able to attend due to scheduling conflicts. The DCFS CSW indicated that she and the FFA social worker continued to provide support and resources for the focus child to assist her in maintaining her NMD status and work toward becoming self-sufficient.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, supports, and services provided to the focus children are generally responsive to changing conditions. The FFA monitors the status of the focus children and has a general understanding of what's working and what's not working. The FFA communicates with the DCFS CSWs regularly regarding any changes in the status of the focus children. When services are ineffective and NSP goals are not appropriate, the FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs collaboratively determine the modifications needed. The FFA social workers and CFPs implement and review the modifications with the focus children. The focus children appeared well adjusted to their living environment. The focus children reported being involved in developing NSP goals and choosing extracurricular activities.

The ongoing adjustments to interventions, goals and services are tracked by the FFA and DCFS CSWs. The FFA social workers track all adjustments and progress through their weekly home visits, notes, SIRs and NSPs. The DCFS CSWs reported that they are updated with any changes related to their focus children. Overall, the progress of the focus children, family visitation, case planning and participation of services was noted in the children's NSPs, contact notes, DCFS case plans and Status Review Hearing Court reports.

STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In May 2015, OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review consisting of Community Care Licensing, completing comprehensive and timely NSPs with appropriate signatures and maintaining clothing allowance log guidelines.

In May 2015, OHCMD met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR, and to provide the FFA with technical support to address methods on improving in the area of Safety. The FFA submitted the attached Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). OHCMD quality assurance staff will continue to provide the FFA with ongoing technical support, training and consultation to assist the FFA in implementing their QIP.

NIÑOS LATINOS UNIDOS®

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

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October 16, 2015

Out-of-Home Care Management Division
Elizabeth Villalobos, MSW, CSAI
9320 Telstar Avenue, Suite 216
El Monte, CA 91731

Re: Quality Assurance Review

Dear Ms. Villalobos:

Niños Latinos Unidos (NLU), Foster Family Agency (FFA) will address recommendations set forth in the recent Quality Assurance Review by Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Out-of-Home Care Management Division, as follows:

SAFETY

- RUNAWAY:
  - In an effort to secure the safety of all the children in the home the following steps will be implemented, as of October 16, 2015, in the following manner:
    - Certified Foster Parent (CFP) will contact Duty Worker (DW) to report missing placed child. CFP will provide all their attempts to locate and communicate with placed child. CFP will provide name, badge number of officer taking the report and the report number.
    - Foster Care Social Worker (FCSW) will document all information provided including the police report number and officer name and badge number (#).
    - FCSW will call the Child Abuse Hotline and report the placed child as a runaway and provide the operator with all the information necessary and include the officer's name and badge number.
    - FCSW will immediately complete and submit a Special Incident Report (SIR) when the runaway report is called.
    - An addendum will be completed upon the placed child's return to the foster home.
    - A meeting will be set up with the CFP, placed child, Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Worker (CSW), FCSW, and when possible the Supervisor for Foster Care Social Worker (SFCSW) in order to discuss the reason why the placed child left and what safety plan can be developed so this incident will not reoccur.

- INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR:
    - In an effort to secure the safety of all the children in the home the following steps will be implemented, as of October 16, 2015, in the following manner:
        - During the intake process every effort will be made to gather all the necessary information as to the placed child's behaviors, past history of abuse to include sexual abuse.
        - The DCFS 709 will be requested and reviewed by FCSW for any behaviors of concern.
        - FCSW will contact DCFS CSW and request additional information as to the placed child's placement history, reason for placement, and behaviors to include sexualized behaviors.
        - CFP will supervise placed children very closely and immediately report any and all behaviors or incidents in a timely manner.
        - Once information comes to light that reflects any history of sexual abuse or sexualized behaviors then a safety assessment will be conducted and a safety plan developed which will then be implemented in the home.

The safety plans will go into effect as of 10/16/2015 at which time a staff meeting will be held informing the staff of the additional steps added to our current procedures.

If you have any further questions regarding the contents of this response, please contact me at your earliest convenience at (562) 925-7473.

Respectfully,

Yvette Cucuta, MSW
Supervisor/Assistant Administrator