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## County of Los Angeles DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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November 19, 2015

To: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor  
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From: Philip L. Browning  
Director

### **CHILDREN'S BUREAU OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA 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 Children's Bureau of Southern California Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in April 2015. The FFA has one licensed office located in the First Supervisorial District and one office in the Fifth Supervisorial District. The FFA provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS foster children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its mission is, "To prevent child abuse and neglect; protect, nurture, and treat abused children. Enhance the potential of families and communities to meet the needs of their children and advance the welfare of children and families through superior programs in foster care, adoptions, child development, parent education mental health research and advocacy."

The QAR looked at the status of the placed 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 all nine leave the number focus areas: Safety, Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, Teamwork and Tracking & Adjustment.

The FFA did not require a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) since they anytime you see "the FFA" leave as is scored at or above the minimal acceptable score in all focus areas of the QAR. In September 2015, the OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR.

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  
Cathy Allan, Foster Care/ Adoption Coordinator, Children's Bureau of Southern California FFA  
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division  
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*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"*

**CHILDREN'S BUREAU OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA 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 Children's Bureau of Southern California Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in April 2015. 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 & emotional support, education & 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:

- Assessment & Linkages why was the order changed?
- Engagement
- Service Needs
- 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 children, two Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSW), one DCFS Supervising Children's Social Worker (SCSW) (the CSW was on extended leave), three certified foster parents, two FFA Social Workers and one FFA Administrator.

At the time of the QAR, the focus children's average number of placements was four, their overall average length of placement was nine months and their average age was 12. 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.

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**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 child. 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
<p><b>Safety</b> - The degree to which the FFA ensures that the child is free from “of” is standard language used in all QARs abuse, neglect and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.</p>	6	6	<p><b>Optimal Safety Status</b> - 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. The focus child 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 child well at all times.</p>
<p><b>Permanency</b> - 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 support the plan.</p>	5	5	<p><b>Good Status</b> - 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.</p>
<p><b>Placement Stability</b> - 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.</p>	5	6	<p><b>Optimal Stability</b> - The focus children have optimal stability in placement settings and enjoy positive and enduring relationships with primary caregivers, key adult supporters and peers. There is no history of instability over the past 12 months and little likelihood of future disruption. Only age-appropriate changes are expected in school settings.</p>

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<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Minimum Acceptable Score</b>	<b>FFA QAR Score</b>	<b>FFA QAR Rating</b>
<p><b>Visitation</b> - The degree to which the FFA staff support important connections being maintained through appropriate visitation.</p>	5	5	<p><b>Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation &amp; Connections</b> - Generally effective family connections are being sought for all significant family/NREFM through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies.</p>
<p><b>Engagement</b> - The degree to which the FFA staff are 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.</p>	5	6	<p><b>Optimal Engagement Efforts</b> - To an optimal degree, a rapport has been developed, such that the FFA, staff, DCFS CSW, certified foster parent and the child/youth feel heard and respected. Reports indicate that excellent efforts are being used by the FFA staff as necessary to find and engage the child, caregivers and other key people.</p>
<p><b>Service Needs</b> - 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.</p>	5	5	<p><b>Good Supports &amp; Services Needs</b> - 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.</p>
<p><b>Assessment &amp; Linkages</b> - 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.</p>	5	6	<p><b>Optimal Assessment and Understanding</b> - The child's functioning and support systems are comprehensively understood. Knowledge necessary to understand the child's strengths, needs and preferences is continuously updated. Present strengths, risks and underlying needs requiring intervention or supports are fully recognized and understood.</p>

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Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
<p><b>Teamwork</b> - The degree to which the “right people” for the child and family have formed a working team that meets, talks and makes plans together.</p>	5	6	<p><b>Optimal Teamwork</b> - The team contains all of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's life, including informal supports. The team has formed an excellent, consistent working system that meets, talks and plans together. Face-to-face team meetings are held regularly and as frequently as the team sees the need as well as at critical points to develop plans.</p>
<p><b>Tracking &amp; Adjustment</b> - 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.</p>	5	5	<p><b>Good Tracking and Adjustment Process</b> - Intervention strategies, supports and services being provided to the focus children are generally responsive to changing conditions. Frequent monitoring, tracking and communication to the team of focus children’s status and service results are occurring. Generally, successful adaptations are based on a basic knowledge of what things are working and not working for the children.</p>

Try not change what is in the grid; unless it is an obvious grammatical or spelling error.

**STATUS INDICATORS**

*(Measured over last 30 days)*

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

**Safety (6 Optimal Safety Status)**

**Safety Overview:** The FFA’s safety was optimal. The focus children reported feeling safe at all times while in their current Certified Foster Homes (CFHs) and that their Certified Foster Parents (CFPs) ensured their safety. They have not shown any suicidal behaviors or exhibited any self-injurious behaviors. The focus children also reported that if there was a safety concern, they would report it to their certified foster parents and/or FFA social worker.

The FFA utilized various methods to train their certified foster parents and enhance safety for placed children. The FFA staff stated that they do their best to ensure that children feel safe in their placements. CFPs participate in Parent Resources for Information, Development and Educational (PRIDE) training prior to certification and then receive refresher training on a monthly basis on

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PRIDE, Title 22 regulations and Jigsaw Puzzle. The Jigsaw Puzzle is an assessment tool utilizing the child's chronological, intellectual, educational, emotional and social age. It also takes into consideration the child's cultural, ethnic and/or religious experiences. The FFA social workers indicated that during their weekly home visits, they conduct safety assessments and when needed, they also review PRIDE training concepts which are individualized to the placed children within the certified foster home. The FFA staff also indicated that each CFH has quarterly safety assessments and the FFA provides certified foster parents with a list of important phone numbers, such as Poison Control, the FFA social worker and DCFS CSW. The certified foster parents reported having daily discussions with the focus children and all placed children within their homes. The certified foster parents reported that they explain to each child that they will ensure their safety and that they are available to hear any concerns. The certified foster parents also indicated that the FFA social workers are always available for home visits when there are any issues that need to be addressed immediately.

The FFA demonstrates great efforts in keeping all children placed in their certified foster homes safe. The FFA submitted 13 Special Incident Reports (SIRs) over the last 30 days. None of the SIRs involved the focus children. The SIRs did not report any immediate child safety concerns. Seven SIRs were related to accidental injuries not requiring medical treatment, three regarding illness, two regarding lice infestation and one incident regarding disclosure of sexual exposure by a placed child prior to the current FFA placement. The FFA complied with SIR-reporting policies and procedures. All SIRs submitted to the I-Track database were submitted in a timely manner.

Based on the QAR, the protective strategies used by the FFA were optimal in reducing risks of harm to placed children. There were no investigations substantiated or referrals opened to the Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section during the last 30 days.

### **Permanency (5 Good Status)**

**Permanency Overview:** The FFA provided good permanence for the focus children. The FFA provided supports and services that correspond to the permanency plan for each of the focus children and worked with the DCFS CSWs in supporting the specific DCFS case plan goals. The focus children, certified foster parents, FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs were aware of the focus children's permanent plan. The FFA supervisor reported that the FFA ensures that all certified foster homes are approved at the adoption level. The FFA social workers indicated that they explain the permanent plan to the placed children and the certified foster parents in order to discuss their options and process their feelings about permanency. If there is a therapist assigned to the placed child, the FFA social workers shares permanency planning with the therapist to ensure therapeutic support is provided to the child. If the plan is family reunification, the FFA social workers assist with coordinating family visitation. If the plan is adoption, the FFA social workers review adoption workbooks with the placed children and assist with transition meetings and visitation with the prospective adoptive family. The FFA mainly places young children, but whenever they place a teenager, the FFA social workers encourage them to participate in Independent Living Program services and refer the youth to activities that provide self-sufficiency training and education.

The permanent plan for two of the focus children is adoption. For the first focus child, who is in an adoptive placement, the FFA social worker indicated that she worked with the DCFS CSW during the adoption-matching process. The certified foster parent and focus child indicated that they understood

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the plan was adoption from the beginning. The focus child indicated that he understood adoption as his foster parents being his parents forever. The DCFS CSW indicated that the certified foster parents and the FFA social worker have been supportive in the adoption process. The focus child's adoption was finalized subsequent to the QAR.

The second focus child had a prospective adoptive family identified. The FFA social worker and certified foster parent coordinated visitation with the prospective adoptive parents to assist with the transition. The focus child and DCFS CSW indicated that the certified foster parents and the FFA social worker were supportive of the adoption; however, the adoption recently disrupted. After the prospective adoptive parents stopped the adoption process, the FFA social worker met with the certified foster parent and the focus child to allow her to process her feelings about the failed adoption and her permanency plan. The focus child indicated that she wanted to remain in her current foster home while a prospective adoption family is being explored.

The permanency plan for the third focus child is legal guardianship. According to the DCFS SCSW, the focus child told her DCFS CSW that she does not want to be adopted but is willing to have her foster parents obtain guardianship. The certified foster parents indicated they are willing to be the focus child's legal guardians and provide her with a permanent home. The FFA administrator stated that the FFA social worker was utilizing an adoption workbook to help the focus child fully understand what it means to be adopted. The FFA administrator indicated that the focus child has misconceptions about adoption, which may be contributing to her unwillingness to consider adoption as a viable plan.

### **Placement Stability (6 Optimal Stability)**

**Placement Stability Overview:** At the time of pre-certification, the FFA prepares the certified foster parents to provide short term foster care but to also be available to provide a permanent home through adoption, if necessary. At intake, the FFA staff reported that if the permanency plan is adoption, the FFA staff makes every effort to match the placed children with a prospective adoptive family. Additionally, the FFA works directly with the DCFS Placement and Recruitment Unit, to identify children needing an adoptive placement, as the FFA has many families wanting to pursue adoption. If the permanency plan is family reunification, the certified foster parents are aware that the concurrent plan is adoption. The FFA social workers and certified foster parents communicate with the DCFS CSWs, service providers and family members regarding any changes in the status of the focus children.

The FFA provided optimal placement stability for the focus children. The focus children's placements have been stable, with no placement or school disruptions. The focus children feel safe, comfortable and respected. The focus children reported that their caregivers and the FFA are meeting all of their needs, and they have formed a remarkable supportive relationship with their certified foster parents and their extended families.

The FFA social workers and certified foster parents reported that when there is placement instability, the FFA social worker conduct immediate home visits. The certified foster parents, FFA social workers, DCFS SCSW and DCFS CSWs reported that each of the focus children is stable and adjusting well in their certified foster homes. The certified foster parents indicated feeling supported by the FFA social workers.

**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 with the biological family and certified foster parents who usually provide transportation for the focus children to family visits. When the certified foster parents are unavailable, the FFA social workers are available to provide transportation and monitor the visits.

The first focus child is in an adoptive placement. According to the DCFS CSW, family visits were terminated once adoption became the permanent plan for the focus child. The certified foster parent indicated that the focus child has not had any contact with the biological family for a long time, which may make him sad but he does not talk about it. The focus child indicated that he could not remember when he last had a visit with his biological family.

According to the DCFS CSW and DCFS SCSW, the other two focus children have monitored visits with their family. The second focus child has weekly, two-hour monitored visits with her siblings at a park located midway between all the certified foster parents. The third focus child has two-hour visits with her mother twice a week and a one-hour monthly sibling visit.

**PRACTICE INDICATORS**

*(Measured over last 90 days)*

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

**Engagement (6 Optimal Engagement Efforts)**

**Engagement Overview:** The FFA develops optimal rapport and appears to be making excellent efforts in engaging key parties and bringing the team together as necessary to meet the needs of the focus children. The FFA has maintained ongoing communication regarding the well-being and progress of the focus children with the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents, focus children and their relatives, and service providers. The FFA social workers support healthy relationships between the focus children and their certified foster parents by conducting weekly home visits. One of the FFA social workers indicated having contact with the DCFS CSW at least two to three times per month to provide an update on the progress of the first focus child's adoption.

Two of the focus children and the certified foster parents reported that their concerns were heard and that they felt respected by FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs. The third focus child indicated that she trusts and respects her FFA social worker, who attends special events, such as school functions. The focus children reported that they are able to discuss any issues or concerns with their certified foster parents, FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs. Two certified foster parents expressed ongoing support and a good working relationship with the FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs. The third certified foster parent reported that in the past, she did not feel supported by her assigned FFA social worker; however, once she informed the FFA supervisor, her relationship with the FFA social worker became positive, and her concerns are immediately addressed.

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The DCFS CSWs and DCFS SCSW reported that the FFA staff were supportive and provided ongoing updates regarding the focus children.

## **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. The FFA social workers become familiar with community resources within the area for each of their certified foster homes. At the beginning of placement and ongoing, they discuss with the DCFS CSWs the needed services for the placed children and then are able to match the appropriate resources to assist placed children in meeting their care plan goals. The certified foster parents indicated that they team with the FFA social workers to identify appropriate resources for the placed children and develop a working relationship with the service providers. One of the certified foster parents indicated that her assigned FFA social worker attends school meetings with her for all children placed in her home.

All of the focus children are receiving therapeutic services. The first focus child is participating in weekly in-home individual therapy. The focus child also has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and is receiving special education services at school. The focus child indicated that his therapist is helping him to improve his interaction with others. The certified foster parent indicated that the therapist has been helping the focus child address his mental health needs.

The second focus child receives tutoring services three times per week at school. The focus child indicated that her math teacher is helping her with her math homework. The focus child and certified foster parent indicated that the focus child was receiving individual weekly in-home therapy; however, it was recently concluded, as the focus child showed improvement and was doing well. The DCFS CSW for the second focus child indicated that she first speaks to the focus child about any services that she may need, and then discusses services needed with the certified foster parent and FFA social worker. The DCFS CSW indicated that at this time, the focus child is not in need of any additional services.

The third focus child is also receiving in-home individual therapy weekly. The focus child also participates in a team sport at school, which she reported enjoying. Although the focus child is addressing a history of lengthy family turmoil in individual therapy, she indicated that she did not believe that she needed therapy because for the past few years, she has been dealing with her problems on her own. The certified foster parent, FFA supervisor and DCFS SCSW indicated that the focus child has been adjusting well to placement.

The certified foster parents, FFA social workers, DCFS CSWs, DCFS SCSW and focus children indicated that the progress being made with services in place is discussed during the FFA social worker's weekly home visits, the DCFS CSW's monthly home visits and during the FFAs team meetings.

## **Assessment & Linkages (6 Optimal Assessment and Understanding)**

**Assessment & Linkages Overview:** In general, the FFA comprehensively understands the focus children's functioning, strengths, needs, preferences and support systems. The necessary support

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and services for improved functioning and increased overall well-being of the focus children are understood and used to continuously update changes. The FFA psychologist administers a questionnaire to each placed child to when they are initially placed and then every six months to assess the placed children's strengths and needs. Additionally, the FFA has a protocol to conduct the initial Needs and Service Plan (NSP) meeting within 30 days of placement. The NSP meetings are facilitated by the FFA social worker and supervisor. The meetings are attended by all key parties and are utilized as a forum to discuss the child's progress and to determine if any modifications are needed in services being provided to assist the focus children in achieving their case plan goals. According to the FFA staff, the FFA social worker completes the referrals for services and follows up with service providers until the needed services are in place.

### **Teamwork (6 Optimal Teamwork)**

**Teamwork Overview:** The FFA effectively involves the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The FFA conducts face-to-face team meetings within 30 days of placement and approximately every six months thereafter. The meetings regularly include the DCFS CSW, DCFS Adoption CSW, FFA psychologist, FFA social worker, FFA supervisor, FFA adoption coordinator, therapist, certified foster family and focus children.

The first focus child was not able to identify his team members; however, he indicated that he is able to count on his certified foster parents, FFA social worker and DCFS CSW. The focus child's certified foster parent and FFA social worker indicated that they attended the focus child's IEP meeting at school and are fully aware of the services the focus child is receiving to address the academic delay. The second and third focus children indicated that they felt supported by their team and observed the team to work well together.

The DCFS CSWs and DCFS SCSW reported receiving needed information, such as updates on the focus children's status and NSP from the FFA staff on a regular basis. The DCFS CSWs and DCFS SCSW only gave positive remarks regarding their working relationships with the FFA staff.

### **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. During the weekly home visits, the FFA social workers assess the status of the focus children and have a general understanding of what is working and what is not working. The focus children and certified foster parents reported being involved in developing NSP goals and discussing the focus children's progress with the FFA social workers and DCFS CSWs.

The on-going 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 visit notes, NSPs, monthly FFA group supervision and individual supervision. The FFA staff modifies interventions and goals when appropriate. According to the FFA staff, any NSP modifications necessary prior to the next team meeting, are discussed with DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents and placed children.

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The DCFS CSWs and DCFS SCSW reported that they are updated by the FFA social workers on any modifications related to their focus children's services and NSP goals, as well as their progress in general. The DCFS CSWs indicated that they also make modifications to services, interventions and NSP goals. Further, any modifications to the NSPs are agreed upon by the DCFS CSWs and FFA social workers.

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

In January 2015, OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review, including following Title 22 guidelines, developing NSP-specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time-limited goals, and encouraging placed children to update their life book or photo album.

In September 2015, OHCMD met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR. The FFA met the minimum acceptable level in all focus areas, therefore, no Quality Improvement Plan is required. As needed, the OHCMD Quality Assurance staff will continue to provide the FFA with on-going technical support, training and consultation.