County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 351-5602

PHILIP L. BROWNING
Director

Board of Supervisors
HILDA L. SOLIS
First District
MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Second District
SHEILA KUEHL
Third District
DON KNABE
Fourth District
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

February 10, 2016

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: Philip L. Browning
Director

SERENITY INFANT CARE HOMES, INC. 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 Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc. Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in March 2015. The FFA has one licensed office located in the Fifth Supervisorial District and provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its stated mission is, "to provide the quality foster home for abused, abandoned, and neglected infants and children with special emphasis on the care of drug affected infants."

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 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 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
Jennifer Choctaw, Chief Executive Officer, Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc. FFA
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

SERENITY INFANT CARE HOMES, INC. FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW
FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc. Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in March 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 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), one FFA administrator, three FFA social workers, and three certified foster parents.

At the time of the QAR, the placed children's average number of placements was three, their overall average length of placement was five months and their average age was six. The focus children were randomly selected. None of the focus children were included as part of the sample for 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 generally 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 FFA staff, caregivers and DCFS CSW, support the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** – The 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 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.

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	6	**Optimal Maintenance of Visitation & Connections** - Fully effective connections are being excellently maintained for all significant family/Non Related Extended Family Members through regular and where appropriate, increasing frequent visits.
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's 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 focus children feel heard and respected. Reports indicate that good, consistent efforts are being used by the FFA staff as necessary to find and engage the child, caregivers and other key people..
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 and 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 focus children make progress toward planned outcomes.
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	6	**Optimal Assessment and Understanding** - The focus children's functioning and support systems are comprehensively understood. Knowledge necessary to understand the focus children's strengths, needs, and preferences is continuously updated. Present strengths, risks, and underlying needs requiring intervention or supports are fully recognized and understood. Necessary conditions for improved functioning and increased overall well-being are fully understood and used to select effective change strategies.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Teamwork - The degrees to which the "right people" for the child and family, have formed a working team that meets, talks, and make 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. The team has good necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to organize effective services with children of this complexity and cultural background. The focus children are substantially involved in the team.
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 focus 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 provides good permanency for the focus children. The FFA provides the services to support each focus child's permanency plan recommended by DCFS. The primary permanency and concurrent goals were appropriately developed and processed in a timely manner. The permanency plan for each of the focus children is Family Reunification, and the concurrent plan is Adoption.

The FFA and the certified foster parents demonstrate efforts to support the focus children in achieving permanency. The FFA makes certain the treatment team is aware of and complies with DCFS recommendations and court orders to ensure the focus children are reunified with their families. The

FFA and the certified foster parents ensure that the focus children maintain contact with their biological families and assists in strengthening those relationships. The FFA and the certified foster parents encourage regular communication and facilitate visitation. The FFA and the certified foster parents work collaboratively with the DCFS CSWs, providing transportation for the focus children to and from visits, as well as monitoring visits, when necessary.

The first focus child and her two sisters were temporarily placed in her certified foster home, pending approval of the maternal grandfather's home. Prior to the completion of this QAR, the focus child and her sisters were replaced to their grandfather's home.

The second focus child and her younger sister are placed together in their current certified foster home. The focus child shared that she is happy residing there, especially because her sister is placed with her. The focus child expressed that she wants to live with her mother, but in the meantime, she would like to remain placed with her certified foster mother.

The third focus child stated she wants to return home to her mother, but expressed that if she cannot return home, she would like to remain with her certified foster mother. The focus child further shared that she likes her current certified foster home and that she is happy. The DCFS CSW reported that the focus child is residing in a nurturing home environment and is treated as a member of the family.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA has provided good stability for the focus children, and the focus children have positive and enduring relationships with the primary caregivers and key adult supporters. The FFA is committed to working with the focus children and takes responsibility in meeting the focus children's needs. The FFA provides its staff and the certified foster parents with assistance and training to make sure they are equipped with the necessary tools to meet the needs of the focus children and certified foster parents. The FFA works with the DCFS CSWs to assess the needs of the focus children prior to placement to ensure a good match with the certified foster parents. The FFA ensures the well-being of the focus children through weekly visits to the certified foster homes by the FFA social workers, as well as weekly family meetings with the focus children and the certified foster parents.

The focus children are adapting well in their current certified foster homes. The three focus children reported that they felt comfortable, secure and stable with their certified foster parents. They also shared that they would like to continue residing with their certified foster parents if they are not able to return to their biological families. The focus children reported that their caregivers and the FFA are meeting all of their needs. The focus children have formed a good relationship with their caregivers.

The DCFS CSWs for the focus children indicated they are pleased with the placement stability the FFA is providing for the focus children. The DCFS CSWs expressed that they see commitment and dedication in the certified foster parents. The DCFS CSWs also reported that the certified foster parents work in partnership with the focus children's teachers to address their educational needs.

Visitation (6 Optimal Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA has demonstrated optimal efforts in maintaining effective connections for the focus children and their families. All of the focus children have regular weekly visits with family members. The FFA adheres to the court-ordered visitation plans and engages in discussion of the focus children's visitation plans with the DCFS CSWs and certified foster parents. The FFA works collaboratively with their certified foster parents and the DCFS CSWs to ensure transportation is provided for the focus children to the visitation location, and that monitoring of the visits occurs, as required.

The first focus child and her siblings have weekly monitored visits with their mother. The focus child shared that she was happy to have the visits with her mother. Her certified foster mother transports the focus child and her sisters to the FFA office, and the FFA social worker monitors the visits.

The second focus child and her sister have weekly monitored visits with their mother at the FFA office. Her certified foster parent transports the focus child and her sister to the FFA office for visits. The FFA social worker monitors the visits. The FFA social worker and the DCFS CSW report that the visits are going well.

The third focus child has visits three times a week with her mother at her DCFS CSW's office. The focus child's maternal grandmother and great-grandmother sometimes joins her mother for the visits. The FFA social worker and the DCFS CSW have a collaborative working relationship, as they share the responsibility of monitoring the visits; the FFA social worker monitors the visits two times per week. The certified foster mother transports the focus child to the visits. The focus child looks forward to the visits with her mother.

The DCFS CSWs for the three focus children indicated that the FFA is actively involved in assisting them with the visitation arrangements. They further reported that the FFA social worker communicated the outcomes of the monitored visits and immediately reported their concerns. The DCFS CSWs were also pleased with the support the certified foster parents provided.

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

Safety (5 Good Safety Status)

Safety Overview: The FFA's safety status was good. The FFA makes sure the focus children feel safe in their certified foster homes. The focus children were free from harm in their daily settings. The focus children reported that they felt happy and safe in their certified foster homes and that their certified foster parents take care of them. The focus children have been free from abuse, neglect, exploitation and intimidation during the past 30 days.

The FFA social workers conducted weekly visits with the focus children in their certified foster home and utilized protective strategies to make certain that the focus children are fully supervised and well cared for. The FFA social workers ensure that the certified foster parents are properly trained and provide close supervision of the focus children.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they had no safety concerns regarding the FFA's certified foster homes or the care that the focus children received.

During the past 30 days, the FFA submitted four Special Incident Reports (SIRs) via the I-Track database. None of the SIRs involved the focus children. Although the FFA adhered to the policies and procedures for submitting SIRs timely, the FFA scored below the minimum acceptable score of six in the area of Safety as one SIR was not properly cross-reported to OHCMD. Additionally, there was a SIR that raised a child safety concern, as a placed child who had presented with severe emotional and behavior problems was left unsupervised in the backyard of a certified foster home; further, the child had entered the pool area, as the gate preventing access to the pool was not secured. Additionally, the child had engaged in self-injurious behavior.

Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section reported that there were no investigations or referrals received during the last 30 days.

PERFORMANCE 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 has established and maintained good engagement efforts with the focus children and key parties. The FFA has developed a good rapport with the DCFS CSWs, the certified foster parents and the focus children. The FFA staff maintains open and consistent communication regarding the progress and well-being of the focus children with the DCFS CSWs, family members of the focus children, and other professionals providing services. The FFA includes these key individuals in decisions that are being made for the focus children.

Communication between the DCFS CSWs, the FFA administrator and the FFA social workers is ongoing. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA communicates with them frequently by telephone, e-mail, or face-to-face during visitation or meetings, and keeps them informed of the focus children's progress or needs.

The FFA staff is supportive of the relationship between the focus children and their certified foster parents. The FFA social workers encourage the certified foster parents to support communication between the focus children, their family members and their DCFS CSWs. The focus children are comfortable in sharing their concerns and expressing their needs with their certified foster parents, their DCFS CSWs and their FFA social workers.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provides a substantial array of supports and services matching the intervention strategies identified in the case plans of the focus children. The focus children are also receiving educational support services, as well as regular medical and dental check-ups.

The first focus child was doing well academically, as she was earning A's and B's. However, her certified foster mother and the focus child's teacher had been working together to address the focus child's behavior at school. They implemented a reward system to help her improve her behavior at school. The focus child was also referred for mental health services to address her aggressive behavior toward peers, as well as assist her in adjusting to being separated from her family.

The FFA has been supportive in addressing the second focus child's educational needs. There were concerns based on the child's slow progress as to whether she would be held back in Kindergarten. During a school meeting, it was determined that the focus child would repeat Kindergarten in the Fall of 2015. The certified foster parents are working with the focus child to develop practice essential skills so that she will be ready for Kindergarten in the Fall. The focus child is not currently receiving any therapeutic services. At the time of placement, the focus child had a Multidisciplinary Assessment Team meeting. The team decided that the child should be referred to therapy. However, after attending three sessions, the therapist determined that the focus child did not require further sessions, as she was doing well. The FFA social worker, DCFS CSW and certified foster mother are working together to meet the focus child's needs.

The third focus child is receiving mental health services; she attends therapy weekly. The FFA and her certified foster parents are working closely with the focus child's therapist, as it is documented that the therapist is recommending the focus child undergo a Regional Center assessment and psychological testing to further assess the causes for the focus child's delays. Additionally, psychological testing has been initiated. Her certified foster parents are supportive of the focus child's educational needs. They have collaborated with her teacher and school counselor to provide a supportive learning environment and establish a homework routine. The focus child also receives tutoring and educational services through her Individualized Education Plan to assist her in achieving her academic related goals.

The FFA social workers and the certified foster parents also provide support to assist the focus children in making progress toward their case plan goals. The FFA maintains constant communication with service providers. Based on the progress the focus children have demonstrated, the focus children are benefitting from the services they are receiving.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessment and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA demonstrates making good assessments and having a thorough understanding of the functioning, challenges, traumas and support systems for the focus children. The FFA social workers assess the focus children's needs and provide appropriate interventions for the focus children to function effectively at school, at their certified foster homes, and in the community.

The FFA social workers meet with the focus children and their certified foster parents weekly to assess the focus children's progress and to evaluate their needs. The FFA utilizes information from observations of the focus children, as well as information obtained through collaboration with the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents, and the service providers to develop Needs and Services Plan (NSP) goals for the focus children and to ensure the services the focus children are receiving are appropriate.

The FFA continuously monitors progress the focus children and their families are making, and the FFA updates the team of changes in the focus children's strengths, needs and services being provided.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA includes most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. Each focus child's team, consists of the DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers, certified foster parents, family members, the focus children, and focus child's therapist, if applicable. The team has formed a good dependable working system that has ongoing discussions and works collaboratively in case planning. The team members appear to be in tune with the focus children's needs and strengths, and they work together to provide the focus children with the necessary supports and services to address their underlying needs.

Each of the focus children's teams has formed a good working relationship in which there is constant communication and exchange of information. The FFA social workers collaborate with the DCFS CSWs, the certified foster parents, and the focus child's therapist to address concerns regarding the focus children's development, visitation with family members, school performance and treatment needs. Through input from the team members, progress is evaluated and additional recommendations are made.

The DCFS CSWs and the certified foster parents reported that the FFA is considerate of and accommodates their scheduling needs. Visitation and team meetings occur at times which are convenient for them, as well as the focus children's family members. The FFA office is centrally located, and visits, team meetings, as well as training for the certified foster parents, are convenient.

The certified foster parents reported that they feel that the FFA is very supportive of them and of the focus children. They shared that they are visited weekly by the FFA social workers. They are able to discuss the focus children's progress and needs, as well as any concerns they may have. They reported feeling heard and respected.

The DCFS CSWs for the focus children reported that they meet with the FFA social workers to address the focus children's progress and any concerns. They also stated that the FFA maintains constant communication with them via telephone, e-mail, and mail.

Although the focus children are young, the FFA social workers interact with them in an age-appropriate manner. The FFA social workers inquire about their feelings and relationships with their certified foster parents, family members, and peers, as well as their functioning in the certified foster home and at school.

The FFA social workers interact with the family members of the focus children during monitored visits. However, there was no documentation to support that the family members had been included in meeting where all the team members were present. The FFA social workers acknowledges that the FFA and the focus children would greatly benefit if appropriate family members are included in team meetings.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, supports and services provided to the focus children and their family are generally responsive to changing conditions. The focus children's needs and progress are regularly evaluated, and services provided are modified accordingly. The FFA is aware of the ongoing and changing needs of the focus children and barriers encountered and any strategies modified are communicated with key members of the team. Adjustments are promptly made when it is determined that specific services are not producing the desired results.

The FFA conducts monthly team meetings to address concerns regarding the focus children and to discuss their progress, intervention strategies, supports and services provided. The FFA ensures ongoing monitoring, tracking and communication of the focus children's status through weekly contact records, monthly DCFS CSW contacts, and visits with the focus children and their certified foster family. The FFA also utilizes the NSPs to document and closely monitor the progress each focus child has made toward their treatment goals.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In March 2015, the OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review. Technical support consisted of ensuring that the FFA submitted SIRs timely, NSPs are signed in accordance with NSP requirements, documentation of medical treatment for children is submitted by the next working day, and ensuring employee files are properly maintained.

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

Serenity
Infant Care Homes, Inc.
(Specialized Foster/Adoptive Families)

January 7, 2016

Out-of-Home Care Management Division
9320 Telstar Ave. #216
El Monte, CA 91731

Attn: Patricia Bolanos-Gonzales CSA

Quality Improvement Plan

SAFETY: The degree to which Serenity Care Homes, Inc. ensures that all children are safe is by requiring that the staff and certified foster parents have Special Incident Report (SIR) training by following the CCL and OHCMD Special Incident Report Guide for Foster Family Agencies.

- This Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is to address the Quality Assurance Review completed in March 2015. Agency was notified of the required QIP in December of 2015.
- Future SIR's will include extra details to more fully explain and address all important questions related to the incident, including who, what, where, when and details related to proper supervision. SIR's will continue to be read by a social work supervisor or Serenity Director to ensure all necessary details are included in the report.
- Additional and pertinent information gathered after submission of SIR will be submitted through an SIR addendum.
- Social work staff will be retrained on SIR reporting by January 12, 2015.

1·7·16

Angela Kalies, LCSW
Serenity Supervisor

Date

600 South Grand Avenue · Covina, CA 91724 · (626) 859-6200 · Fax (626) 859-6206