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February 23, 2016

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

From: Philip L. Browning
Director

HATHAWAY-SYCAMORES 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 Hathaway-Sycamores Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in February 2015. The FFA has one licensed office located in the Fifth Supervisorial District, and provides services to the County of Los Angeles foster children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its mission is, "to provide safe family home environments that offer more structure, services opportunities than traditional foster care but are less restrictive and intensive than a psychiatric group home."

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

The FFA provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan addressing the recommendation noted in this report. In August 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 Teamwork.

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
Joe Ford, Vice-President of Operations, Hathaway-Sycamores Foster Family Agency
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

HATHAWAY-SYCAMORES 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 Hathaway-Sycamores Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in February 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), three FFA staff members, three certified foster parents, and a therapist.

At the time of the QAR, the placed children's average number of placements was four, their overall average length of placement was six months and their average age was 11. 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	6	**Optimal Safety Status** - The focus children are optimally and consistently avoiding behaviors that cause harm to self, others, or the community and are 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 CSW, supports the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** - The focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the focus children, the 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. The focus children have established positive relationships with primary caregivers, key adult supporters and peers in those settings.
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 Members (NREFMs) through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
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 the focus 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** - 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	5	**Good Assessment and Understanding** - The focus children are 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	4	**Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork** - The team contains some of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's life, including informal supports. The team has formed a minimally adequate to fair working system that meets, talks, and/or plans together; at least one face-to-face team meeting has been held to develop plans.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	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 the 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)

Safety (6 Optimal Safety Status)

Safety Overview: The FFA's safety status was optimal. The focus children have highly safe living situations with reliable and competent caregivers who protect the focus children at all times. The FFA has incorporated various elements to ensure the safety of their certified foster homes such as the FFA social workers meet privately with the placed children during their weekly visits, and conduct unannounced home visits. The FFA also developed a quarterly safety check list to ensure the children's safety. The FFA social workers also address Title 22 regulations with the certified foster parents to ensure child safety.

The certified foster parents reported the FFA social workers talked privately with them and placed children regarding safety in their certified foster homes. They also reported there is a constant communication with the FFA social workers via telephone and emails.

Two of focus children reported feeling safe in their certified foster homes. The first focus child stated "there is no drama". The second focus child had initially agreed to be interviewed, but declined the interview. The third focus child stated he felt safe because he is placed with his siblings.

The DCFS CSWs for each of the focus children reported there were no safety concerns regarding the focus children's current certified foster homes. They also reported that the children's safety is discussed during home visits to the certified foster homes, and at Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings.

The FFA submitted 36 Special Incident Reports (SIRs) via the I-Track database over the last 30 days. None of the SIRs submitted posed an immediate child safety concern and none of the SIRs involved

the focus children. The FFA followed SIR procedures and protocols as the SIRs submitted were timely, thoroughly documented and properly cross-reported.

The Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section did not have any substantiated referrals or open investigations for the FFA within the last 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provides substantial permanence for the focus children. The FFA works with the focus children, the certified foster parents and with the DCFS CSWs to assist in the development of the most permanent plan for the focus children. The FFA social workers provide input to the DCFS CSWs regarding the permanency and concurrent plans for the placed children. The FFA assists with Youth Development Services (YDS) for older children. The YDS component of the FFA program is geared toward assisting older children moving toward self-sufficiency.

The certified foster parents reported that the FFA provides them with different training topics to better assist them in working with the children in their care. The FFA social workers discuss with the certified foster parents the importance of encouraging the focus children to maintain family ties. The FFA social workers share court information with the certified foster parents and the focus children regarding their permanency plan.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA ensures that everyone is in agreement and understands the importance of the focus children maintaining family ties. For all three focus children, Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (PPLA) is their permanency plan. The two focus children interviewed indicated that they are not interested in adoption or legal guardianship. However, their attachment to their foster mothers is very strong, they are building a lifelong connection, and the plan is for the focus children to remain placed in their current certified foster homes beyond the age of 18.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA provided substantial placement stability for the focus children. The FFAs intake procedures ensure that certified foster parents are the best match for the placed children in order to ensure a positive outcome. Additionally, the FFA social workers conduct family meetings with certified foster parents and the focus children during home visits to assess the well-being of the focus children. The FFA social workers also meet individually with placed children and utilize Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings and Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings to assess the focus children's adjustment to placement and stability in their certified foster homes.

The focus children appeared to be adapting well in their current foster homes and reported feeling safe, comfortable and respected. No major issues or concerns were expressed.

The two focus children interviewed expressed a feeling of closeness with their respective certified foster parents. The focus children reported they have a supportive relationship with their caregivers. The first focus child added that her certified foster parent is a mother to her.

The certified foster parents reported that there is communication with the DCFS CSWs, the FFA social workers and the focus children's therapist. The second focus child's certified foster parent reported that it would be helpful to receive more information regarding the focus children's behaviors

at time of placement. However, with the support of the FFA she is able to work with all children placed in her care.

The DCFS CSWs for the focus children indicated that the FFA always shares information with them regarding the focus children's progress in and adjustment to placement.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA has established and maintained acceptable family connections for the focus children. The FFA and the certified foster parents work with the DCFS CSWs and focus children to ensure that the court visitation orders are followed. The FFA is supportive of visitation and monitors visits, if needed. The FFA engages the DCFS CSWs, placed children, and the certified foster parents in discussing visitation orders to ensure everyone has the same understanding. The FFA reported that their certified foster parents are trained regarding their roles when they monitor the placed children's visits, as the certified foster parents frequently monitor visits and provide transportation.

The focus children are encouraged to maintain telephone contact with those who are important to them. The first focus child stated that she does not want to visits her adult sister, but has telephone contact with her whenever she desires. The certified foster parent for the second focus child reported that he has visits with his adult brother every other month. The third focus child has weekly, monitored visits with his mother. His certified foster parents provide transportation and monitor the visits.

The certified foster parents reported that they follow the DCFS CSWs' instructions regarding the court ordered visitation plan. They also reported being supportive of the focus children's visits with the important people in their lives by providing transportation and or monitoring the visits, as needed.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA social workers and certified foster parents follow the visitation court orders. The DCFS CSWs added that the FFA social workers and certified foster parents are very good at encouraging the focus children to visit and/or call family members.

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 has established and maintained good engagement efforts with key parties. The FFA works to ensure that rapport has been developed among the FFA staff, DCFS CSWs, service providers, family members, as well as the certified foster parents and the focus children. Weekly face-to-face home visits are conducted by the FFA social workers with the certified foster parents and the focus children. The FFA social workers maintain constant communication via emails and telephone with the DCFS CSWs and service providers such as therapists and Wraparound facilitators. The FFA also provides the DCFS CSWs with progress reports.

The focus children interviewed reported sharing positive relationships with their certified foster parents and the FFA social workers as they were people on which they could count on. The focus children reported that during home visits, the DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers and their certified foster parents communicate, and discuss how they are doing.

The certified foster parents reported that they are included in discussions regarding the focus children and have open communication with the FFA social workers, DCFS CSWs, the focus children's therapist, and the focus children's families. The certified foster parents also reported that there is a great deal of communication between all key parties.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they have built good rapport with the FFA social workers and certified foster parents; everyone works together and communicates what is needed for the focus children.

The focus children's therapist indicated that she maintains constant communication with the focus children's DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers, the certified foster parents, the focus children's families, and the focus children via email, telephone calls, and monthly reports.

Service Needs (5 Good Support & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provides the focus children with an array of services and extracurricular activities to help the focus children make progress toward their planned outcomes. The FFA supervising social worker, the FFA social workers, and the focus children's therapist meet and discuss what direction to take to appropriately meet the needs of the focus children. The FFA, in collaboration with the focus children, certified foster parents, and DCFS CSWs review and modify the goals as necessary. The FFA provides Youth Development Services, independent living skills, mentoring services, individual therapy, and academic services such as tutoring to placed children.

The two focus children interviewed reported that their needs are met. The first focus child receives therapy. The second focus child enjoys music, and he plays for his church's choir. He is also receiving academic support services, such as attending an afterschool program, where he receives tutoring services and assistance with homework. Additionally, he attends weekly, individual therapy. The third focus child receives after school tutoring services and weekly individual therapy.

The certified foster parents reported that they are included in the discussion of service needs for the focus children. The certified foster parents also stated that through interaction with the focus children, they are able to recognize the needs of the children; this information is provided to the FFA social workers and therapist to assist them in getting a better understanding of the services needed for the focus children.

The focus children's DCFS CSWs reported that they communicate with the FFA social workers on a regular basis to ensure that the appropriate services are in place. The DCFS CSWs reported that they are asked to participate in the development of the Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) for the focus children, and their needs are discussed.

The focus children's therapist reported that she provides written reports to the FFA social workers to better assist the focus children with services needed to meet and achieve their case plans and goals.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA generally understands the focus children's functioning and support systems. The focus children's strengths and underlying needs are recognized and understood by the FFA and key parties. The services provided such as therapy and tutoring are geared to assist the focus children toward making progress and improving their functioning and well-being. The FFA social workers and the certified foster parents engage the focus children through private talks and observation to gain a clear picture of the focus children's strengths and needs.

The focus children interviewed, reported that their certified foster parents and FFA social workers care about them and their well-being, and that their needs are being met. The first focus child attends Junior College. The FFA social worker for the second focus child is encouraging him to pursue higher education and linked him to a college tour, which he attended.

The certified foster parents added that through observation, they become aware of the focus children's strengths and needs and encourage the focus children to participate in extracurricular activities of their choice.

The DCFS CSWs reported that through communication via email and telephone with the FFA social workers and the certified foster parents, they are updated as to the focus children's progress.

The focus children's therapist reported she provides therapy to the focus children weekly, provides monthly updates to the DCFS CSWs, and provides input in the development of NSPs.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, supports, and services provided, generally reflect the focus children's needs. The FFA administrator and the FFA social workers review the focus children's status on a weekly basis to discuss the focus children's progress towards their NSP goals. Adjustments and modifications to the focus children's NSPs are made as needed. The FFA social workers reported that the NSPs are developed in conjunction with the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents, the therapist and the focus children.

The certified foster parents reported that they are active participants in the development of the focus children's NSPs. The certified foster parents added that they track the focus children's behavior at home and at school so that any issues are identified immediately and adjustments to their treatment plan can be made timely. For example, the third focus child was experiencing academic challenges. One of his NSP goals was to improve his grades, with the assistance from the school, his tutor and his certified foster parent, the focus child was able to improve academically and accomplish his NSP goal.

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

Teamwork (4 Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA involves some of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team consists of the focus children's family, the focus children, DCFS

CSWs, the FFA social worker, the certified foster parents, and the focus children's therapist. While there is collaboration between the team members, information is communicated in a fluid manner regarding the focus children. The FFA social workers coordinate and invite the team members to face-to-face meetings, however, the FFA does not conduct team meetings which include all key members and supports of the focus children.

The first focus child reported that there are no face-to-face meetings with all of the team members present and she does not feel a need for them as she is a young adult and doing well. The certified foster parent for the second focus child reported that information regarding the focus child is shared with her, but there are no face-to-face meetings. The third focus child's certified foster parent indicated that there are face-to-face meetings.

The DCFS CSWs reported that there is a great deal of communication with the FFA staff via email and telephone. The first focus child's DCFS CSW reported the focus child is a young adult and makes her own decisions. The second focus child's DCFS CSW reported not participating in team meetings with all of the key parties present. The third focus child's DCFS CSW reported that monthly face-to-face meetings are held at the certified foster home; she also stated that the focus child not only enjoys the meetings, but also has benefited from them.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In December 2014, OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review. Technical support and training provided to the FFA addressed ensuring properly cross-reporting SIRs and Title 22 regulations; ensuring that criminal background clearances are processed timely; ensuring the foster homes maintain an adequate amount of nutritious perishables and non-perishables and that the children are provided with the appropriate weekly allowance; review of procedures for submitting timely, comprehensive NSPs, recommendations on required assessments and ensuring required monthly visits to placed children; ensuring that required follow-up medical examinations are conducted timely and current court-approved authorizations for the administration of psychotropic medication; ensuring that placed children have life books; and employees not having timely health screenings.

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

Hathaway-Sycamores
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

August 14, 2015

Darío Villamarín, CSA I
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Reference: Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services, FFA #197805715
Out-Of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD)
FFA-GH Quality Assurance Review
Quality Improvement Plan

Dear Mr. Villamarin,

This letter is written per your request for Hathaway-Sycamores Foster Family Agency to provide a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) due by August 14, 2015, to address the issue of ensuring teamwork between FFASW and other team members involved in the youths case.
The plan of Correction is as follow:

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division noted a concern in the area of "Teamwork." The FFA Teamwork status was good. However, we were informed that improvement was needed in the area of Teamwork between the FFASW, DCFS, CSW, Resource Parents, Case Therapist, Wraparound, CASA workers, birth parents and other parties who are part of the case team.

On August 10, 2015, the FFA Director provided training to the FFA Social Workers on Teamwork and communication between DCFS, CSW, Resource Parent, Case Therapist, Wraparound, TBS, Mentors, CASA workers, birth parents and other parties who are part of the team and approved by DCFS regarding children's case plan and treatment. Our teamwork approach will be as follow: The FFASW will be emailing all parties and invite them to participate in the case plan of the foster youth. The FFASW will also place a phone call to all parties inviting them to participate in the case plan of the youth, document the phone call on a contact log. The FFASW will also check in with the resource parents, CSW, Case Therapist, CASE worker, birth parents, TBS, Mentors, Wraparound by phone or in person on any updates and changes of the foster youth, as needed and the FFASW will document this on a contact log.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Jorge Razo
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