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February 25, 2016

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

HOMES OF HOPE 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 Homes of Hope Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in April 2015. The FFA has one licensed office in the First 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 ensure children are provided with a continuity of care, nurturance and services that will meet their needs and those of their families as prescribed by their Needs and Services Plans. A secondary goal is the achievement of legal permanency for children. When family reunification has been determined by the court and the placing agency is no longer a viable option and a child's case goal has been determined to be the achievement of legal permanency through adoption or guardianship, the Agency will make every effort to achieve these goals."

The QAR looked at the status of the placed children's safety, permanency and well-being during the most recent 30 days and the Group Home's practices and services over the most recent 90 days. The FFA scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all 9 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, as the FFA scored at or above the minimal acceptable score in all focus areas of the QAR. In August 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss 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

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HOMES OF HOPE 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 Homes of Hope 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 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, two FFA social workers, and one FFA administrator.

At the time of the QAR, the FFA supervised 96 DCFS placed children in 39 certified foster homes. The focus children's average number of placements was one, their overall average length of placement was 13 months and their average age was twelve. 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, 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. The focus children have established positive relationships with primary caregivers, key adult supports, 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 parents and the 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 focus children, caregivers and other key people. Useful accommodations are used to provide scheduling times and locations based on convenience of appropriate parties. Engagement efforts are made frequently and on an ongoing basis.
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. A usually dependable combination of informal and formal supports and services are 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 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. Necessary conditions for improved functioning and increased overall well-being are generally understood and used to select promising change strategies.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
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 lives, including informal supporters. The team has formed a good, dependable working system that meets, talks, and plans together.
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 for the focus children. The FFA utilized different protective strategies such as, providing adequate training to their FFA social workers and certified foster parents including Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and First Aid training. The FFA also interviews placed children privately during their weekly visits to certified foster homes and holds regular meetings with certified foster parents. The FFA social workers were trained to conduct home inspections during their weekly visits to the certified foster homes to ensure that all certified foster homes are meeting the Title 22 regulations. The FFA schedules meetings with the DCFS CSWs and other important parties to address Special Incident Reports (SIRs) that are related to child safety. The FFA makes sure that certified foster parents have the ability and knowledge to address emergencies if they should arise; report incidents in a timely manner; and comply with the SIR reporting guidelines. The FFA provides their 24-hour emergency telephone number to all certified foster parents and provides support and instruction during a crisis.

The focus children reported that they felt safe because their certified foster parents are always home and they received adequate supervision and support from their certified foster parents. The focus children stated that they have never been hurt while in the current placement and they would feel comfortable speaking with their certified foster parents, if someone tried to hurt them.

The certified foster parents stated that they received training from the FFA on different topics to assist them in recognizing situations that could place the focus children in imminent danger. They understood that it is their responsibility to provide a safe home and comply with Title 22 rules and regulations.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they maintain contact with the FFA social worker, and certified foster parents via telephone or e-mails. The DCFS CSWs also reported speaking with the focus children privately during their face-to-face monthly visits to ensure the safety of the focus children. The DCFS CSWs reported that they have no safety concerns regarding the FFA and their certified foster homes.

The FFA submitted a total of 26 Special Incident Reports (SIRs) through the I-Track database in the last 30 days. None of the SIRs were related to the focus children. Four SIRs posed a child safety-related concern. Two incidents involved runaway behavior and two incidents involved assaultive behavior towards others.

The two runaway incidents involved a placed child running away from school and a placed child running away from the certified foster home. The certified foster parents took appropriate action by contacting the FFA social workers and DCFS CSW immediately after determining the placed children had runaway. The FFA complied with the runaway procedures and protocols by making reports to the Child Protection Hotline and filing a missing person report. When the children returned, the FFA social worker held a team meeting with the certified foster parents and the placed children to develop a safety plan to ensure the safety of the placed children and to prevent further incidents. The FFA social workers followed up with the certified foster parents and continued to monitor implementation of the safety plan. The FFA social workers also shared the information with the placed children's therapists so that making better decisions and choices could be addressed in therapy.

The first assaultive behavior incident involved a placed child pushing a child at school. The FFA social worker followed up with the placed child's school teacher and informed the teacher to notify the FFA if the placed child continues to display any further aggressive behavior at school. The second incident involved a placed child becoming upset and aggressive after being asked by the certified foster parent to complete his homework. The FFA social worker responded to the certified foster home immediately and Law Enforcement was contacted to ensure that the placed child was not a danger to self or others. The FFA social worker also referred the placed child for further behavioral services to address his aggressive behavior. In the incidents related to assaultive behavior, the FFA social workers share information with the placed children's therapist and DCFS CSW and develop a safety plan. Additionally, during the weekly visits to the certified foster homes, the FFA social workers discussed with the placed children alternatives to engaging in aggressive behavior.

Not only has the FFA provided support and supervision to the certified foster parents during emergent situations, the FFA takes precaution in incidents that are child safety related. For example, all reported special incidents were documented in the FFA's SIR tracking log to monitor the number of incidents that occurred at the certified foster parents' home. The FFA administrator reviews and monitors the FFA SIR tracking log on a regular basis to identify certified foster homes that reported

two or more incidents at their homes. The FFA administrator also reviews and monitors the child abuse referral investigation log to ensure that all placed children are living in a safe environment. Certified foster parents who received multiple referrals were provided additional training to assist them in understanding child abuse laws. The FFA had no child abuse referrals investigated or substantiated by the Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section during the last 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provided substantial permanency for the focus children. The FFA collaborates with DCFS CSWs and provides support and services to assist the focus children towards achieving their legal permanence goals. The focus children's permanency goals were documented in their Needs and Services Plans (NSPs). The FFA social workers stated that they discuss the permanency goals with the focus children on a regular basis. The FFA social workers reported that they make certain that other team members are also aware of the focus children's permanency goals. If reunification is not viable, the FFA works with the DCFS CSWs and certified foster parents to develop and implement a concurrent plan that best fits the focus children's permanency needs.

All focus children reported that the FFA social workers discuss their permanency goals with them on a regular basis. The first and second focus child are receiving court-ordered family reunification services. The focus children's concurrent plan is legal guardianship. They reported that the FFA and the DCFS CSWs are working together by encouraging them to maintain contact with their parents.

The permanent plan for the third focus child is Permanent Planned Living Arrangement. She reported that she wants to continue to reside with her current certified foster parent until she reaches the age of majority. The focus child is planning to attend college after she graduates high school. The DCFS CSW referred her to the Independent Living Program (ILP), and she has attended several ILP classes already. Her certified foster parent is also assisting her with daily living skills, such as how to do laundry.

The certified foster parents reported that they were aware and fully understood each of the focus children's permanency goals and they discussed the permanency goals with the focus children and their parents or family members, if available. They reported providing the focus children with independent living skills, such as laundry and personal hygiene.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the focus children's permanency goals are shared with the FFA social workers and the certified foster parents.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA provided substantial stability in placement for the focus children. The FFA Intake social worker completes an intake assessment and collects background information for children requiring placement which includes placement history, language and culture. This information is obtained prior to placement to ensure a good match is made to determine which certified foster parent would best meet the needs of the children requiring placement. Strategies utilized by the FFA to maintain placement stability include completing weekly face-to-face visits to certified foster homes, and speaking to placed children individually. During weekly visits to certified foster homes, the FFA social worker discusses with the certified foster parents the focus children's status, in order to work through any issues or concerns to avoid potential placement disruptions.

The focus children have adjusted well in their current certified foster homes. They reported that they feel safe, respected and their needs are being met. The focus children stated they feel comfortable in their current placements because the food and language are similar to their culture. They have formed very supportive relationships with their certified foster parents. The first focus child reported that he feels as though he is living in a home setting and his certified foster parent helps him do his homework. The second focus child stated that he likes his certified foster home because his certified foster parent always tells him that he needs to focus on his education and teaches him how to take care of himself. The third focus child reported that she likes her certified foster home because it is similar to her own culture.

The certified foster parents reported that the FFA social workers provided support, such as helping them in recognizing and handling the focus children's past trauma. The DCFS CSWs reported that the focus children are placed in certified foster homes that are consistent with their language and culture. They also stated that the focus children feel more comfortable communicating with their certified foster parents in their native languages.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptance Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA maintains generally effective family connections for each of the focus children. The FFA provides transportation and monitors visits for placed children as needed. Visitation is documented in the FFA visitation log and tracked by the FFA administrator or FFA social worker. If visits are missed, the FFA reschedules the visit in a timely manner. The FFA certified foster parents and DCFS CSWs encourage and support the focus children in maintaining connections with their parents and family members.

All three focus children have weekly visits with their parents and family members. The first focus child reported that he has monitored visits with his mother, maternal grandmother, and adult sister. The certified foster parent provides transportation for the visits. He stated that he enjoyed his visits with his mother. He also reported that his mother gave him a haircut during his last visit. The second focus child reported that he missed one visit with his father but the FFA rescheduled the visit in a timely manner. He reported that he is very excited about his visits with his father. The third focus child has weekly unmonitored visits with her mother; she reported that she enjoyed visits with her mother because her mother cares about her.

The certified foster parents stated that they discuss court ordered visits with the DCFS CSWs and any concerns reported by the focus children regarding visitation is reported to the DCFS CSWs and the FFA social workers.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they work with the FFA administrator, FFA social workers and certified foster parents to ensure that the visits are convenient for all parties and is congruent with the focus children's court ordered visitation plan. The outcomes of the visits are shared among the key parties.

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 developed a strong rapport with the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents, and the focus children. In order to build a working partnership with the focus children and DCFS CSWs, the FFA communicates with them through face-to-face visits, and regular telephone contact or emails. The FFA social workers review the focus children's intake assessment forms, certified foster parents' weekly notes and speak with the focus children to identify the key people for the focus children before they start the engagement process. The FFA administrator worked with the FFA social workers to ensure that rapport is established between the focus children, the DCFS CSWs and the certified foster parents. The certified foster parents reported that the engagement between the FFA, the focus children and DCFS CSWs is good.

The focus children reported that they could rely on their certified foster parents. The focus children stated that their DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers and certified foster parents have meetings at the certified foster parents' homes to discuss how they are doing. They also reported that if they need to modify their treatment goals, the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents and the FFA social workers are all interacting and speaking with each other such that they are able to discuss issues or concerns.

The DCFS CSWs reported that during meetings with the focus children, FFA social workers, and certified foster parents, they discuss the focus children's needs and progress that was made toward the focus child's identified treatment goals. The DCFS CSWs added that they have developed a good relationship with the FFA social workers and certified foster parents and they maintain regular communication.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provided a good and substantial array of services and support that match intervention strategies identified in the focus children's case plans. The focus children are receiving therapeutic services to address their mental health needs, as well as regular medical and dental check-ups. The FFA social workers discuss services being provided with the focus children and certified foster parents during the weekly home visits to ensure that services for the focus children are in place and that the focus children are making progress toward their NSP goals. The FFA utilized a team approach to develop the focus children's NSP goals. The FFA social worker always involves the focus children in developing their goals.

The first focus child was referred to the Department of Mental Health for a psychological assessment to determine if he is in need of any therapeutic services. The referral was closed after the assessment determined that the focus child did not require services. The focus child shared in the past that he has had difficulty completing his assignments. His certified foster parent discussed this with his teacher and counselor and determined that the focus child would be provided with tutoring services to assist him in improving academically.

The second focus child also receives academic assistance from his school teacher and certified foster parent. His teacher encourages the focus child to work on his assignments after class in order for him to earn extra credit. His certified foster parent also provides assistance to help him complete his homework. The first and second focus child reported that because of the tutoring and support they receive from their certified foster parents, their school grades have improved. They also expressed that they understand that for their grades to improve; they need to complete homework and assignments in a timely manner.

The third focus child reported that she needs 60 credits to graduate from high school and her main goal is to graduate from high school and attend college; she also reported working part-time. The focus child stated that her needs are being met.

The certified foster parents reported that they discuss the focus children's progress with them regularly, maintain communication with the school staff, attend the focus children's school conferences and frequently check their grades. Their certified foster parents also reported providing the focus children with basic living skills, such as preparing breakfast, keeping their rooms clean, and doing laundry.

The DCFS CSWs reported discussing services being provided with the focus children, certified foster parents, FFA social workers and other team members to ensure that the focus children's identified services needed are implemented. The DCFS CSWs also reported working with the FFA staff to develop and implement the focus children's NSPs. The DCFS CSWs ensure that services provided are coordinated with the focus children's case plan and their NSPs.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA generally understood the focus children's functioning and support systems. The FFA staff monitors the focus children's progress toward treatment goals weekly. The FFA social workers interview the focus children to determine if the identified services and goals are reasonable and viable. They also meet with the certified foster parents weekly to discuss the focus children's progress; they review school report cards, therapists' notes and input provided by the school staff, and observe if there is a reduction in incidents. The FFA social workers review goals documented in the focus children's NSPs and by assessing the focus children's progress on an ongoing basis, the FFA social workers can determine if the focus children are progressing toward their identified goals.

The certified foster parents explore additional resources to assist the focus children with participation in extracurricular activities. For example, the second focus child stated that he informed his certified foster parent he was interested in participating on his school's softball team. His certified foster parent discussed his desires with the softball coach and they decided that he could join the team. The focus child reported being happy, now that he participates on the team.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA formed a team with a good and dependable working system that meets, talks, and plans together to develop the treatment plans for the focus children. The FFA involves most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team consists of the DCFS CSW, FFA social worker, certified foster parents, family members, the focus

children and their therapist. The team has ongoing discussions and works collaboratively in case planning.

Team members ensure that communication is consistent, open, and accurate, and information can be shared or updated amongst the team. The focus children's progress is documented in the focus children's files, and is shared with the FFA staff members and other team members. If the focus children are not satisfied with the way their teams are functioning, they are able to report this to their team members or inform their certified foster parents, FFA social workers, DCFS CSWs, or their family members.

The focus children reported that they are included in the team meetings and are aware of who their team members are. The DCFS CSWs reported that they have maintained consistent and regular communication with the focus children's team members and they have a good working relationship with the FFA. One of the certified foster parents reported that the good teamwork of the focus child's team makes her feel more confident in working with the focus child, as she knows that she has support.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, and services provided are generally responsive to the focus children's needs. The FFA reviewed and evaluated the focus children's status weekly or more often if needed. The services provided to the focus children are regularly evaluated and tracked. The FFA social workers use weekly visitation notes, NSPs, DCFS CSWs' contact notes, certified foster parents' monthly notes, school report cards, and SIR tracking logs to determine if the focus children are progressing toward meeting their NSP goals.

The FFA social workers meet monthly with their supervisors and other treatment team members to discuss the focus children's progress and to determine if modification of treatment goals is necessary. Additionally, if the focus children are not progressing, the FFA social workers assess the situation and contact the team members to schedule a team meeting to discuss whether the focus children's goals or services need to be modified. If modifications are necessary, the FFA social workers make the adjustments.

NEXT 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, which consisted of the following: discussion of compliance regarding Title 22 regulations; improving the certified foster home inspection process; and providing training to certified foster parents regarding improving communication with placed children.

In August 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss results of the QAR. As the FFA scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all focus areas, a Quality Improvement Plan was not requested of the FFA. However, OHCMD Quality Assurance staff will continue to provide ongoing technical support, training, and consultation, as needed to the FFA.