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DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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February 25, 2016

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

COUNSELING & RESEARCH ASSOCIATES d.b.a. MASADA HOMES 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 Counseling & Research Associates d.b.a. Masada Homes Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in May 2015. The FFA has four offices: one located in the Second Supervisorial District, two located in the Fifth Supervisorial District and one office located in San Bernardino County. The offices provide services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS foster children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its stated mission is, "to provide children with a stable and supportive living environment while preparing them for reunification with their biological families or placement."

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 6 of 9 focus areas: Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, and Tracking & Adjustment. OHCMD noted opportunities for improved performance in the focus areas of Safety, Permanency and Teamwork.

The FFA provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan addressing the recommendations noted in this report. In October 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 areas of Safety, Permanency and 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
George Igi, Chief Executive Officer, Masada Homes Foster Family Agency
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

COUNSELING & RESEARCH ASSOCIATES d.b.a.
MASADA HOMES 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 Counseling & Research Associates d.b.a. Masada Homes FFA in May 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 social workers, and three certified foster parents.

At the time of the QAR, the placed children's average number of placements was four, their overall average length of placement was five months and their average age was 13. The focus children were randomly selected. None of the focus children were included as part of the sample for the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review.

QAR SCORING

The FFA received a score for each focus area based on information gathered from on-site visits, agency file reviews, DCFS court reports and updated case plans, and interviews with the FFA staff, DCFS CSWs, service providers, and the children. The minimum acceptable score is 6 in the area of Safety and 5 in all remaining areas.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Safety - The degree to which the FFA ensures that the child is free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.	6	5	**Good Safety Status** - The focus children are generally and substantially avoiding behaviors that cause harm to self, others, or the community and are 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 CSW, support the plan.	5	4	**Minimal to Fair Status** - The focus children have minimally acceptable to fair permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the children, FFA staff, caregivers, caseworker, and team members expect will endure until the child reaches maturity.
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.
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 CSWs, and the focus children 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 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	5	**Good Assessment and Understanding** - The focus children's functioning and support systems are generally understood. Information necessary to understand the focus children's strengths, needs, and preferences are frequently updated. Present strengths, risks, and underlying needs requiring interventions and 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 most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives, including informal supports. The team has formed a good dependable 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.

STATUS INDICATORS

(Measured over last 30 days)

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

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA is providing good stability for the focus children. The children experience positive relationships with their certified foster parents and the FFA staff. Each of the focus children stated that they really like their foster families. All of the focus children's DCFS CSWs reported that the focus children are in stable living environments.

Each of the certified foster parents is committed to the focus children. During the interviews at their respective certified foster homes, each of the focus children appeared relaxed and right at home. The focus children were free to move around the home without restriction and appeared to be very comfortable in their living environment. The focus children interacted positively with their certified foster parents and appear content and responsive to them. The focus children have all adapted well to their respective certified foster family with no major issues or concerns. The certified foster parents are meeting the focus children's needs.

For each of the focus children, their certified foster home appears to be a stable and an appropriate environment and placement. The certified foster parents have formed good supportive relationships with the focus children. The FFA staff consistently works with the focus children and their DCFS CSWs and family members to reduce the probability of placement disruption.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA is generally effective in maintaining family contact and follows the court visitation orders. The FFA is committed to ensuring the focus children receive their visitation. The FFA will also monitor visits when necessary. The FFA is in constant communication with the DCFS CSWs and follows each focus child's visitation plan. The DCFS CSWs and the FFA staff ensure that the plans are adhered to and that the outcomes of the visits are shared among the key

players for the focus children. Family members and approved visitors are encouraged to maintain contact with and visit the focus children.

The first focus child visits with both parents. However, visits with his mother occur more frequently than visits with his father. The visits are monitored by the maternal uncle. However, when there was a change in the maternal uncle's work schedule; the DCFS CSW intervened to ensure visits were monitored. All team members are aware of the focus child's visitation plan and support the plan. The focus child enjoys the time with his family.

The second focus child has court-approved monitored visits with her adult cousin. The DCFS CSW reported that the court recently ordered monitored visits for the focus child with her former legal guardian; however, the focus child does not wish to visit with her cousin or her former legal guardian at this time, as she shared that she did not want to talk about her family situation. The FFA and the certified foster parents are supportive of the focus child's decision not to visit with her cousin or former legal guardian, but they do remind the focus child to consider maintaining connections with extended family members, when appropriate.

The third focus child has weekly monitored visits with his birth mother, and he is also allowed to have overnight weekend visits with his maternal uncle. The focus child, nonetheless, has refused to visit with them. Although the focus child is refusing to visit with his mother, his mother calls him weekly; the certified foster parents monitor the phone calls. The maternal uncle has also made an effort to remain involved; he recently attended the focus child's high school graduation and also joined the certified foster family for the graduation celebration dinner. The certified foster parents remind the focus child that whenever he is ready to reestablish visits with his family, they are ready to support him. The DCFS CSW reported that the focus child stated that he will consider initiating calls to his mother.

The FFA is supportive of and encourages the focus children to visit with and maintain contact with family members. The FFA staff is also very respectful of the focus children's decision to not visit with their family members. However, when appropriate, the FFA makes efforts to keep the family members informed of the focus children's progress. For example, the certified foster parents for the third focus child contacts his family member regularly to provide updates. The family member also contacts the FFA periodically wanting to know how the child is doing.

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

Safety (5 Good Safety Status)

Safety Overview: Based on the QAR, the FFA is providing good safety for the focus children. The FFA reports that safety of the children is a key focus. The DCFS CSWs reported that the focus children were all in safe living environments.

The first focus child shared that he liked his foster mother and the school he was attending. He also stated that he felt safe in his foster home. The second focus child stated that she felt safe in her current foster home. She also shared that she really liked her foster home, and she felt that her foster mother really cared about her. The third focus child shared that he felt right at home, and that he felt safe. His certified foster parents shared that they really love the focus child.

Although protective strategies were in place for the three focus children, the FFA fell below the minimum score of six due to the FFA not following Special Incident Reports (SIRs) procedures and protocols. The FFA submitted five SIRs via I-Track database in the last 30 days. Two SIRs were not properly cross-reported and one SIR did not thoroughly document the incident. None of the SIRs involved the focus children. Further, two of the SIRs were safety-related. The first SIR involved a placed child expressing suicidal ideation. The FFA and the certified foster parent worked together to ensure the immediate child safety and a safety plan was developed. The second SIR involved child to child injury, where a child sustained a sprained arm which required medical attention; there was a concern regarding the supervision of the two children involved. The FFA social worker addressed the incident with the involved placed children and the certified foster parent.

The Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section did not receive any investigations during the last 30 days.

Permanency (4 Minimal to Fair Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provided minimally acceptable to fair permanency for two of the three focus children. Although each of the focus children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) indicated permanency case plan goals and concurrent plans, there was no documentation as to what efforts were made by the FFA or the progress each focus child had made toward achieving these goals. Further, there were no alternative plans developed to ensure safeguard in the event that placement with the family did not occur.

The first focus child's permanency plan was family reunification with Family Finding Efforts. The focus child's NSP did not identify a specific person that reunification would take place with or FFA efforts to assist the focus child in achieving this goal. The second focus child's permanency plan is family reunification with Family Finding Effort. The focus child's NSP also did not identify a specific person that reunification would take place with or FFA efforts to assist the focus child in achieving this goal. The third focus child's permanency and concurrent goal was Permanent Planned Living Arrangement.

In addition, the FFA had not referred the focus children to mentoring programs or other programs to assist the focus children in creating positive lifelong connections in the community.

Although the focus children's team members share information, better collaboration between the FFA staff, DCFS CSWs, the focus children, certified foster parents and family members is needed to ensure that an appropriate permanency plan is identified. Additionally, the need for documentation of the FFA's efforts to support the permanency plan is necessary to demonstrate the FFA is supportive of the permanency plans and that the plans are being implemented.

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 makes consistent good efforts to engage the focus children and key people in decisions that are made on behalf of the focus children. The FFA has developed a strong rapport with the team members. Further, it appears the FFA utilizes reasonable efforts in informing key parties and bringing the team together, as necessary, to meet the needs of the focus children. There is a strong rapport among all team members, and the focus children are respected and well cared for. Each of the focus children reported being understood and heard by their certified foster parents and the FFA staff. The FFA social workers conduct bi-monthly visits with the focus children and the certified foster parents to discuss the status of each focus child; information from the DCFS CSW is shared if not present. The certified foster parents provide insight regarding the focus children's progress, issues, and concerns, and key members confer on methods to address any concerns.

Both the FFA and the DCFS CSWs are dedicated to providing the focus children with whatever is needed to assist the focus children in making progress toward achieving their case plan goals. The focus children are encouraged to contact any FFA staff member, their DCFS CSWs and all team members, as they desire. The FFA is in constant contact with the key members of the focus children's team, by phone, fax, via e-mail, face-to-face meetings, or team meetings. The FFA staff and DCFS CSWs expressed that there is always open communication between the focus children's key team members, which included the DCFS CSWs, the therapists, and appropriate family members, and all are working in the focus children's best interest.

In addition, the DCFS CSW reported having good rapport with the FFA staff. They further reported the FFA staff is always accessible.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports and Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provides the focus children with a good and substantial array of supports and services, which match the intervention strategies identified in the focus children's case plans and NSPs. Through collaboration with the key members involved in the focus children's lives, observations by the FFA, input from the focus children and their certified foster parents and continual communication, the FFA ensures services are provided to meet the needs of the focus children. The FFA ensures all medical and dental appointments are arranged for each of the focus children. The FFA has a good array of supports to help the focus children make progress toward their planned outcomes. The focus children have been in their respective certified foster homes for less than a year; they are all in school and participate in extracurricular activities and services.

The FFA therapist provides weekly individual therapy for each of the focus children. The FFA encourages participation in extracurricular activities, such as after school clubs, sports and school activities. Transportation to extracurricular activities is provided by the certified foster parents and/or the FFA.

The FFA ensures each of the focus children are receiving tutoring and educational support services. The three focus children have made progress in school and continue to show improvement in attendance and academics.

The first focus child participates in a dance class. The certified foster parent shared pictures of the focus child in her dance attire. The focus child reported enjoying participating in the class. The focus child also reported that she would be participating in a dance recital next week. The focus child was happy about her upcoming graduation.

The second focus child is enrolled in the afterschool program, where he participates in supervised activities, and he receives assistance with his homework assignments. The focus child also participates in a speaking program. The focus child plays baseball through an organized community baseball team.

The third focus child ran track for his high school; he also attended his prom. He plans on attending a local community college. He feels that all of his needs are being met and that he is receiving the appropriate services and support.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessment and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA provides good assessments and linkage for each of the focus children. The FFA social workers meet with the focus children bi-monthly to assess their progress, evaluate their needs and link them to appropriate services.

The FFA social workers meet with each of the focus children and seek out their interests, likes, and dislikes. Each of the focus children expressed that they are offered the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and proudly shared their activities. The certified foster parents are very supportive and active in ensuring that each focus child is participating in activities within the community and school. The DCFS CSWs report that each of the focus children is receiving the required services as well as making progress because of the support and services they are receiving.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking and Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: Intervention strategies, supports, and services are being provided to the children by the FFA. The FFA staff provides monitoring and tracking of the focus children's status and progress. The information is conveyed to the team members, including the DCFS CSW, teachers, and other key supporters. Implementation of strategies, supports and services are tracked by progress notes, case plans, NSPs, and communication with the certified foster parents and focus children. The FFA prepares NSPs that are informative and include information from key members. Tracking of each focus child's progress occurs weekly. The FFA social worker adjusts treatment goals to meet the focus children's needs as needed or when services are not producing desired results.

An example of the tracking and adjustment of treatment goals and services is in the case of the first focus child. The focus child was initially experiencing academic challenges. The FFA and the certified foster parent met with the school to discuss the focus child's academic performance. The focus child was immediately referred to tutoring, which is provided at the certified foster home and at

an after school program and the communication between the teacher and the certified foster parent was increased. The certified foster parent also became more involved in ensuring the focus child was completing and turning in homework assignments.

The interviewed DCFS CSWs expressed good communication and responsiveness by the FFA social worker and staff. The DCFS CSW added that open communication occurs often and provides a good avenue to share information. All of the focus children reported that they could always go to their DCFS CSW, certified foster parent or the FFA staff and ask for assistance when needed.

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

Teamwork (4 Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA has formed a minimally adequate to fair working system that meets, talks, and/or plans together. Two of the focus children reported that they had not participated in a team meeting in which all team members were present. Only one focus child shared that he had been included in at least one face-to-face team meeting within the last 90 days to discuss his progress and develop case plan goals.

Additionally, when the FFA social workers conduct bi-monthly visits with the certified foster parents and the focus children, the DCFS CSW is usually not present. The FFA is accommodating as to scheduling team meetings for the focus children and at communicating information regarding the focus children which is shared with all the key adult supporters. Phone contact, faxes, and e-mails are usually used as modes of communication among the key parties. Although information is shared amongst the FFA staff, certified foster parents and the focus children, as a whole, teamwork is not unified. The DCFS CSWs for the focus children reported that they are made aware of the children's progress toward achieving their NSP goals, and regular contact with the FFA staff is via phone contact, fax, or e-mails. The focus children reported having contact information for their team members and having access to call them as needed.

The FFA and most importantly, the focus children can benefit from regular team meetings in which all of the team members are present. The certified foster parents have been made aware that they can initiate a team meeting. The FFA understands that all key parties should be made aware of team meetings to ensure optimal teamwork is being implemented.

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, which consisted of the following: Licensing issues, Facility and Environment concerns and Maintenance of Required Documentation.

In October 2015, the Quality Assurance Reviewer discussed the results of the QAR with the FFA and provided the FFA with technical support to address methods for improvement in the areas of Safety, Permanency and 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 Foster Family Agency in implementing their QIP.

MASADA HOMES
... building a foundation
A Division of Counseling & Research Associates

December 23rd, 2015

Sonya Noil, CSA I
Department of Children and Family Services
Out-of-Home Care Management Division
9320 Telstar Avenue, Suite 216
El Monte, CA 91731

Re: Quality Assurance Review

Dear Ms. Noil,

Masada Homes, FFA has reviewed the report following the May 1st, 2015 Quality Assurance Review conducted by the Out of Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) and are submitting the following Quality Improvement Plan to remediate and address the recommendations brought forth.

Safety (5 Good Safety Status)

- During a particular SIR, foster parent failed to address adequate supervision causing one minor to sustain an injured wrist. Foster parent was decertified shortly after. As a means to improve on this area, ongoing monthly training (SIR Training/Per CCL & OHC Guidelines) has been provided as of November 2015 to all Certified Foster Parents; emphasis is placed on the areas having to do with Safety and Supervision. Such trainings have been conducted by a Supervisor and have taken place on November 12th and December 10th.

Permanency (4 Fair Permanency Status)

- At the time of review, an NSP (Permanency Goal) did not address a specific person/relative with whom the minor was to be reunified with. Such was immediately addressed. As a means to improve on this area, NSP Goals will continue to be a part of ongoing training curriculum. As of November 2015 Supervisors will ensure that the area of Permanency is addressed during weekly supervision and at the time of NSP review.
- At the time of review, the focus children were not referred to mentoring programs. Please note, that the specific minor in reference signed an affidavit stating 'he was not interested in having a mentor.' (Attached for your review.) As a means to improve, mentoring programs will be discussed with minors and documented on progress notes. Supervisors will assure that such is being documented during weekly supervision as of November 2015.

Teamwork (4 Fair Teamwork Status)

- Better collaboration between FFA staff, DCFS CSW's. Since the time of review, all FFA SWs are required to email CSWs in order to extend a cordial invitation to take part of reviewing the goals set for each of the minors. As of May 2015, FFA Administrator has assured this is being carried forth.

We sincerely extend our gratitude for your professionalism and your recommendations in order to continue improving our services. Please feel to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Thank you,

Leslie C. Oropeza
Site Administrator