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February 25, 2016

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

NUEVO AMANECER LATINO CHILDREN'S SERVICES 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 Nuevo Amanecer Latino Children's Services Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in May 2015. The FFA has three licensed offices located in the First, Third and Fifth Supervisorial Districts, one office in San Bernardino County and one office in Orange County. The offices provide services to the County of Los Angeles foster children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its mission is "to provide children with a continuity of family based foster care, nurturance and services which will meet their individual needs and expectations, and those of their biological families."

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 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
David Danwing, Executive Director, Nuevo Amanecer Latino Children's Services Foster Family Agency
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

NUEVO AMANECER LATINO CHILDREN'S SERVICES 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 Nuevo Amanecer Latino Children's Services Foster Family Agency (the 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 two children, the third child was not interviewed as she reunified with her parents during the QAR process, three Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSWs), three FFA staff members, three certified foster parents, and three therapists.

At the time of the QAR, the focus 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	5	**Good Safety Status** - The focus children are generally and substantially 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 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 & 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 child'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	5	**Good 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. 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 Permanency 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 CSW to assist in the development and determination of the most permanent plan for the focus children. During weekly visits, the FFA social workers assess the attachment between the certified foster parents and the focus children. The FFA maintains consistent communication with the DCFS CSWs to discuss case plan goals for the focus children.

The certified foster parents reported that the FFA provides them with training to better work with the focus children. The certified foster parents expressed the willingness to provide lifelong connections with the focus children. The FFA shares court information regarding permanency with the focus children and their certified foster parents.

The DCFS CSW reported that there is communication with the FFA social workers and that the FFA and the certified foster parents are supportive of the focus children's permanency plan. The permanent plan for the three focus children is Family Reunification. The second focus child stated that there was a strong possibility of him being reunified with his biological family at the next court hearing; yet, he reported being happy residing in his current certified foster home. The third focus child stated that she would like to go home to live with her biological family.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: All the focus children have substantial placement stability in placement and in their school settings. The focus children's placement has been stable with no placement or school disruptions. The FFA utilizes an intake process by assessing placed children's needs prior to placement to ensure a good match with the certified foster parents. The FFA social workers conduct weekly visits to the certified foster homes to assess the focus children's adjustment to placement. Additionally, during the first 30 days of placement, the FFA social workers engage the children in conversations with the certified foster parents to assist the focus children in developing a positive relationship with their certified foster parents.

The FFA social worker stated that the focus children are adjusting well to placement and reported feeling safe and respected. They also reported having a feeling of closeness with their respective certified foster parents. None of the focus children have had any placement disruptions during the last 30 days.

The certified foster parents reported there is frequent communication with the DCFS CSWs, the FFA social workers and the focus children's therapist. They see communication as one of the keys for the focus children's successful adjustment to placement. The first focus child's certified foster parent reported that she tries hard to work with placed children so they do not have to be replaced.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA social workers communicate with them regarding the focus children's adjustment to placement. The second focus child's DCFS CSW stated that she holds meetings with the FFA social workers and the certified foster parents regarding the focus child's adjustment to placement.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA has generally maintained effective visitation and maintenance of family connections for the focus children. The FFA follows the court ordered visitation plans and engages in discussions of the visitation plan with DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents and placed children on a regular basis. If the placed children do not wish to have visitation with their family members, the FFA, the certified foster parents and the DCFS CSWs encourage and support the placed children in maintaining connections with their family members and are encouraged to maintain telephone contact with those who are important to them. The FFA and the certified foster parents also monitor visits and provide transportation, when needed. If the certified foster parents are unable to provide transportation, the FFA social workers will transport in order to ensure that visits are not missed.

The certified foster mother for the first focus child reported that the focus child had monitored weekend visits with her biological mother and three siblings. The second focus child has unmonitored weekend visits with his biological mother. The focus child stated that he enjoys the visits with his family and he looks forward to the visits with his mother. The third focus child has weekly, unmonitored visits with her biological mother and two siblings. The focus child stated that she enjoys the visits, and would like for them to be longer.

The certified foster parents reported that they follow the FFA social worker's instructions regarding court ordered visitation. They also reported that visitation orders for the focus children are discussed with their DCFS CSWs to make sure that everyone is on the same page and there are no misunderstandings regarding whom the focus children are permitted to visit.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they make sure the court order visitation plan is shared with the FFA social workers, the certified foster parents, and the focus children.

What's Not Working Now (Score/Narrative of Strengths for Focus Area)

Safety (5 Good Safety Status)

Safety Overview: The FFA's safety status was good. The focus children have good safe living environments with reliable caregivers who protect the focus children at all times. The FFA social workers address safety concerns when they meet privately with the focus children during their weekly visits to the certified foster homes. The FFA social workers also conduct unannounced home visits to the certified foster homes, once a month, to ensure the placed children's safety.

The focus children reported feeling safe at all times in their certified foster homes. The second focus child stated that the certified foster home is a safe place to live; he also stated that his "mom (certified foster mother) is great." The third focus child stated that her certified foster mother always takes care of them.

The certified foster parents reported that they make sure the focus children are safe at all times by keeping consistent communication with them through calling or texting. The second focus child's certified foster mother stated that she also meets and talks to the parents of the focus child's friends before he is allowed to go out in the community.

The DCFS CSWs for each of the focus children reported there were no safety concerns regarding the safety of the certified foster homes. They reported that the FFA social workers keep them informed if concerns arise regarding the safety of the focus children. One of the DCFS CSWs reported that when she receives a Special Incident Report (SIR) regarding the focus child, she calls the focus child's certified foster parent to find out what has occurred and together they address the incident.

The FFA submitted 54 SIRs through the I-Track database during the past 30 days. The SIRs did not pose an immediate child safety concern. The SIRs included Assaultive Behaviors (at school; toward caregiver; peer-to-peer); Inappropriate Sexual Behavior; Police Involvement; Self Injurious Behavior (superficial cuts and scratches on arm); and Suicidal; Hospitalizations; Injury; Runaways; and Other (mainly consisting of medical visits).

Although the FFA adhered to policies and procedures for submitting SIRs and were submitted timely and cross-reported to all required parties; the FFA fell below the minimum acceptable score in the area of Safety, due to the Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section (OHCIS) having seven open referrals being investigated for the FFA during the last 30 days. Three referrals were evaluated out, two referrals were closed as unfounded, one referral was closed as inconclusive and one is still under investigation.

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 developed a strong rapport with the DCFS CSWs and engages key parties and the focus children in decisions that are made for the focus children. The FFA social workers engage certified foster parents, birth parents and anyone who is important to the focus children to obtain ideas to better service the focus children.

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 certified foster parents reported that the FFA social workers included them in the development of the focus children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), share information regarding the focus children's progress, and praised the FFA social workers for their professionalism and good working relationship.

The DCFS CSWs reported that everyone works together and communicate regarding the focus children's progress. They also stated that cooperation and collaboration has been the key in making the focus children's case plans successful.

The service providers interviewed indicated that they communicate with the focus children's DCFS CSWs, the certified foster parents, and the focus children via e-mail, telephone calls, and face-to-face contact.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provides a good array of supports and services to the focus children with services and extracurricular activities to help the focus children make progress toward their planned outcomes. The FFA supervising social worker, the FFA social worker, the certified foster parents and the focus children meet and discuss what direction to take to meet the needs of the focus children. Per the FFA social workers and their certified foster parents all three focus children were provided with therapeutic services. According to the focus children's therapists, therapeutic services are provided weekly at the certified foster home or at school.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they are contacted by the FFA and are asked to provide input regarding the needs of the focus children. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA social workers are attentive to the focus children and provide the appropriate services to meet the focus children's needs.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA has a good understanding of 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 to placed children by the FFA, such as therapy, Wraparound services, and tutoring are geared to provide support for the focus children, make their placement successful, assist them in making progress toward their case plan goals and improving their functioning and well-being.

The FFA social workers and the certified foster parents reported engaging the focus children through dialog and observation to gain a clear picture of the focus children's strengths and needs.

The focus children's therapists reported conducting an initial assessment prior to providing individual therapy in order to assess their needs and strengths.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they communicate with the FFA social workers and the certified foster parents and receive NSPs quarterly, which are used to assess the focus children's progress.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA involves most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team consists of the focus children, their certified foster parents, DCFS CSW, the FFA social workers, and the focus children's therapists. There is collaboration between team members, communication and information is shared, and team meetings are occurring. One FFA social worker reported that she tries to meet with team members during her weekly visits to the certified foster home. The FFA supervising social worker reported meeting with the FFA social worker to discuss the focus children's concerns, needs and progress. The FFA also reported requesting Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings, when needed.

The FFA social workers stated that they maintain frequent contact with the focus children's DCFS CSWs, by telephone or via email. In addition, all three certified foster parents reported there was communication with the focus children's FFA social worker, DCFS CSWs, and therapist.

Participation in the FFA's team meetings varied, as the certified foster parent for the first focus child reported that the focus child had participated in team meetings. The second focus child reported participating in team meetings, but the third focus child reported not participating in team meetings. The certified foster parents for the first and second focus children reported not participating in team meetings, while the certified foster parent for the third focus child reported participating in team meetings. Also, the DCFS CSW for the first focus child reported attending team meetings, but the DCFS CSWs for the second and third focus children reported that they had not attended any team meetings. The focus children's therapist also reported not attending team meetings.

Further, the communication between therapist and team members differed. The therapist for the first focus child reported providing regular updates to the DCFS CSW of the focus child, but does not have much contact with the FFA social worker. The therapist for the second focus child reported not having contact with the DCFS CSW or the FFA social worker. The therapist for the third focus child reported communicating with the DCFS CSW, the FFA social worker, and providing updates

regarding the focus child's progress. However, the therapist stated that there is a great deal of communication with the focus children and their certified foster parents.

It appears that the FFA is conducting team meetings; however, the team meetings do not include all key parties as the statements regarding teamwork among those interviewed vary. The FFA could benefit from the participation of all key parties in team meetings.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking and Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, supports, and services provided, generally reflect the focus children's needs. The FFA supervising social workers and the FFA social workers meet frequently to review the focus children's status.

The FFA social workers in conjunction with the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents, and the focus children develop the focus children's NSPs. The FFA uses NSPs to closely document and monitor the focus children's status and progress towards their treatment plan goals. The FFA supervising social worker and FFA social workers meet to discuss the focus children NSP goals and in collaboration with the focus children, certified foster parents, and DCFS CSWs make adjustments, and modify goals as needed.

The certified foster parents reported that they are included in the discussion of the focus children's case plans and in the development of the focus children's NSPs. The certified foster parents reported tracking the focus children's behavior at home and at school so that any concerns are identified immediately and adjustments to the treatment plan can be made promptly.

The DCFS CSWs stated that they receive written reports from the FFA social workers on a quarterly basis, as well as there being consistent communication with the FFA social workers via e-mail on the focus children's progress.

The therapist for the focus children reported providing the DCFS CSWs with written reports on the focus children's progress.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In July 2015, 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 SIRs are generated and the high number of Community Care Licensing substantiated complaints; ensuring children make progress in meeting their treatment goals; establishing NSP goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, result oriented and time limited; developing comprehensive NSPs; creating measurable and specific quarterly report goals; and ensuring that children have life books.

In August 2015, the Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR and to provide the FFA with technical support addressing methods on improving in the area of Safety. 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 its QIP.

Nuevo Amanecer Latino
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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September 16th, 2015

Darío Villamarín, CSA I
Department of Children and Family Services
Out-of-Home Care Management Division
9320 Telstar Avenue, Suite 216
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Re: Quality Assurance Review

Dear Dario Villamarin,

Nuevo Amanecer Latino Children's Services has received the report following the quality assurance review of our agency conducted by the Out of Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) and are submitting the following Quality Improvement Plan to remediate and address the recommendations noted.

Safety (5 Good Safety Status) At the time of the review there were six open child abuse/neglect referrals under investigation.

- As a means to continue to ensure the safety and well-being of all children, NALCS Social Work staff will conduct weekly face to face home visits throughout the duration of the placement, each visit requires to meet in private with the children or youth, unannounced home visits, one monthly safety and risk assessment visit. The Quality Improvement department conducts monthly record reviews to ensure that the weekly visitation, monthly unannounced visit, monthly safety risk assessment are conducted with all children.
- The ongoing training curriculum includes trainings of relevance that include topics from investigation outcomes data analysis as an effort to better prepare resource parents.

At this time, we would like to extend a genuine thank you to you for your professionalism before and after the annual review and for your recommendations and observations. We welcome the Department's feedback as a means to improve the quality of our services.

Should you have any further questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

David Danwing
Executive Director

"Providing children with a path to a better future life"