County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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

PHILIP L. BROWNING
Director

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

February 25, 2016

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

From: Philip L. Browning
Director

FAMILIES UNITING FAMILIES 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 Families Uniting Families Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in May 2015. The FFA has one licensed office located in the Fourth Supervisorial District. The office provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS foster children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its stated mission is, "to help children achieve secure and continuous attachment relationships for social and emotional development throughout their lifespan."

The QAR looked at the status of the placed children's safety, permanency and well-being during the most recent 30 days and the Foster Family Agency'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 September 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss results of the QAR. In August 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer discussed the results of the QAR with the FFA.

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
James Schrage, Executive Director, Families Uniting Families FFA
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

FAMILIES UNITING FAMILIES 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 Families Uniting Families 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 three focus children, three Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSWs), three FFA staff members, and three certified foster parents.

At the time of the QAR, the focus children's average number of placements was five, their overall average length of placement was 15 months and their average age was 15. 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 but rarely may present a behavior that has low or mild risk of harm. The focus children may have had related history, diagnoses, or behavior presentations in the past but may have presented risk behaviors at a declining or much reduced level over the past 30 days. .
Permanency - The degree to which the child is living with caregivers, who are likely to remain in this role until the child reaches adulthood, or the child is in the process of returning home or transitioning to a permanent home and the child, the FFA staff, caregivers and DCFS CSW, supports the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** - The focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the children, FFA staff, caregivers, caseworker, and team members have confidence will endure lifelong.
Placement Stability - The degree to which the FFA ensures that the child's daily living, learning, and work arrangements are stable and free from risk of disruptions and known risks are being managed to achieve stability and reduce the probability of future disruption.	5	5	**Good Stability** - The focus children have substantial stability in placement and school settings with only planned changes and no more than one disruption in either setting over the last 12 months with none in the past six months. The focus children have established positive relationships with primary caregivers, key adult supporters, and peers in those settings. Any known risks are now well controlled.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Visitation - The degree to which the FFA staff support important connections being maintained through appropriate visitation.	5	5	**Substantially Acceptance 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.
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	6	**Optimal Supports & Services** - An excellent array of supports and services fully matches intervention strategies identified in the case plan. The services are substantially helping the focus children make progress toward planned outcomes. The array provides a wide range of options for appropriate treatment interventions and selection of providers.
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.

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 supports. The team has formed a good, dependable working system that meets, talks, and plans together; face-to-face family team meetings are held periodically and at critical points to develop plans.
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 provides a safe living environment for the focus children. The FFA's administration uses several protective strategies, such as conducting home inspections on a regular basis to ensure certified foster parents are providing a safe living environment. The FFA ensures that certified foster parents are highly competent to work with the focus children and are well trained on FFA policies, rules and Title 22 regulations. The FFA social workers interview the focus children privately during home visits and assess their well-being on an ongoing basis. The FFA social workers provide on-site training to the certified foster parents during their home visits. All of the focus children reported feeling safe while in their current certified foster homes and none of the focus children have shown any suicidal behaviors, or exhibited any self-injurious behaviors in the last 30 days.

The certified foster parents reported that training, such as child development and Title 22 regulations were provided to them, specifically addressing child safety. The certified foster parents reported receiving constant reminders regarding reporting special incidents to the FFA in a timely manner.

The certified foster parents stated that if placed children present a pattern of self-endangering behaviors or behaviors that are a risk to others, they need to inform the FFA social workers and work together to formulate a plan to ensure child safety. The certified foster parents reported that the FFA provided the certified foster parents with a 24-hour emergency contact phone number for law enforcement, Psychiatric Mobile Response Team, and the DCFS Child Protection Hotline.

The DCFS CSWs reported that there were no safety concerns regarding the FFA or their certified foster parents; and that the FFA provides a safe living environment for the focus children with competent and caring certified foster parents.

The FFA submitted three Special Incident Reports (SIRs) through the I-Track database in the last 30 days. Two incidents involved absence without leaves (AWOLs) from school and the third incident involved substance abuse at school. None of the SIRs were related to the focus children. The FFA followed the SIR guidelines and procedures and reported all three SIRs in a timely manner and were cross-reported to all required parties. The Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section (OHCIS) reported that the FFA did not have any open referrals within the last 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA is providing the services that correspond with the focus children's permanency plans. The FFA staff collaborated with the DCFS CSWs through meetings and telephone contact to discuss permanency options for each of the focus children. The focus children reported that they are aware of their permanent plans. The FFA staff and certified foster parents are very supportive of the focus children's permanent plans. The FFA demonstrated efforts to support the DCFS CSWs' plan by documenting in the focus children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) to ensure that team members are aware of each focus child's permanent plan.

The first focus child is receiving Family Reunification services. She stated that her FFA social worker, certified foster parent, and DCFS CSW always encourage her to maintain contact with her mother. The focus child reported that the FFA social worker is assisting her in developing basic social skills to improve her relationship with her mother. The DCFS CSW reported that she shares the court orders with the focus child's FFA social worker and certified foster parent to ensure that everyone is aware of the focus child's permanency plan.

Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (PPLA) is the permanent plan for the second focus child. The second focus child stated that she does not want to be reunified with her mother. Her plan is to remain in care until she transitions out of care. She is not interested in adoption or legal guardianship however she wants to continue to stay with her current certified foster parent until she reaches the age of maturity. The focus child reported that her FFA social worker and certified foster parent are supportive of her permanent plan.

The permanency plan for the third focus child is PPLA. His DCFS CSW stated that Family Reunification services for his mother were terminated by the court. His DCFS CSW reported referring the focus child to the Transitional Independent Living Program to assist him in building support systems, responsible decision-making, and effective communication skills. The focus child reported that he refuses to be adopted. He prefers to stay at his current certified foster home until he

transitions out of care. His plan is to attend college after graduating from high school. His certified foster parents are supportive of his plan.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA provided substantial stability for the focus children. The FFA staff reviewed information regarding the focus children provided by the DCFS CSWs at time of placement. The FFA assessed each focus child's needs prior to placement to ensure a good match with the certified foster parents is made. The FFA makes efforts to provide certified foster homes that were consistent with the focus children's language and culture to further minimize placement disruption for the focus children.

The FFA staff reported that the focus children's placements have been stable and there have been no recent disruptions. The FFA provides adequate support for the certified foster parents; there are weekly family meetings with the certified foster parents to assist the focus children in achieving a stable living and learning environment.

The focus children reported that they are adapting well in their current foster homes. The first focus child reported that her placement meets her needs. The certified foster parent stated that she reviews the focus child's placement history, court visitation orders, and also the focus child's behavioral issues and tries to understand the focus child and her family in order to provide the best care for the focus child. The DCFS CSW reported that he always looks at the certified foster parents' family culture and provides the focus child's placement history to the certified foster parent. To ensure that the placement is not disrupted, he makes sure the focus child feels comfortable.

The second focus child stated that her certified foster parent is respectful to her and trusts her. The certified foster parent reported that she is sensitive to the focus child's culture. She states that she provides diverse food and activities which keep the focus child connected to her culture. The certified foster parent always discusses with the focus child about her culture and her feelings about the placement. The third focus child reported that he likes his placement and because of the assistance provided by the certified foster parent, his grades are improving. The certified foster parent stated that the focus child has resided in his foster home for more than a year and they have established positive relationships with one another. The DCFS CSWs for the second and third focus children stated that immediately if needed, or during monthly visits to the certified foster homes, they would address any placement concerns with the certified foster parents and work together to resolve issues to avoid a placement disruption.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA provided generally effective connections for the focus children. During the intake process, the FFA staff obtained information from the DCFS CSWs on the court's visitation orders for the placed children. The FFA supports the focus children's visitation plans by providing transportation and monitoring visits to ensure that visits can be conducted in a manner that is convenient for all parties. The FFA engages the approved parties in scheduling visits for the focus children. If visits are missed; the visit is rescheduled by the certified foster parents or the FFA social workers in a timely manner. The FFA staff encourages the focus children to maintain connections

with their family members and important people in their lives by using alternative methods of communication, such as telephone, e-mails, and social media.

The focus children reported that they have regular visits with their family members. The first focus child stated she has two-hour monitored weekly visits with her mother. The certified foster parent provides transportation and monitors the visits. The DCFS CSW reported that she ensures the visit schedule is convenient for all parties by obtaining the biological parents and the certified foster parents' schedule. The second focus child reported that she has unmonitored visits with her mother, younger brother, and older sisters. The DCFS CSW stated that there have been no concerns reported, and the visits are going very well. The third focus child stated that he has unmonitored weekend overnight visits with his mother and adult brother. The DCFS CSW reported that visits are going well.

All of the certified foster parents reported that they are supportive and maintain regular contact with the focus children's biological parents and family members. They also reported following up with the focus children after every visit and there have been no concerns regarding the visits.

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 efforts to engage the focus children and key parties in the decision making process for the focus children. The FFA built good rapport with the DCFS CSWs, certified foster parents, therapist, Emancipation Specialist, Education Liaison, the focus children, and their family members. Engagement efforts are made frequently by the FFA social workers with the focus children, DCFS CSWs and certified foster parents.

The focus children reported that they have regular contact with their DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers, family members and others who are involved in their lives. The focus children are able to discuss their issues and concerns with all team members. All of the focus children reported that their concerns were heard and they felt respected. The FFA social workers reported that they maintain contact and provide information regarding the focus children to the DCFS CSWs via face-to-face contact, telephone, or e-mail.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA social workers worked with them to assist the focus children in progressing toward their NSP goals. All of the certified foster parents reported that they receive information regarding the focus children from the FFA social workers and the DCFS CSWs.

Service Needs (6 Optimal Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA has an excellent array of supports and services that fully match intervention strategies identified and are reflective in the focus children's NSPs. The focus children are receiving therapeutic services to address their mental health issues, as well as regular medical

and dental check-ups. The FFA's Educational Liaison provides additional support for the focus children to improve their academics. The FFA's Emancipation Specialist provides assistance to the focus children to build up their resumes, develop job skills, perform efficient job searches and learn how to fill out job applications. All focus children are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities to increase their social skills and build positive friendships. The FFA social workers and certified foster parents work with community partners to ensure appropriate resources are available for the focus children.

The first focus child reported that she participated in piano lessons twice a month and a meditation workshop at the FFA. The focus child stated that she learned different relaxation techniques that are helping her to relax. She receives assistance from the FFA Emancipation Specialist in enhancing her social skills, as well as basic life skills that will assist her in becoming self-sufficient. The FFA Emancipation Specialist has continued to be an additional support for the focus child by assisting her in developing independent living skills such as, time management, communication, healthy lifestyle, responsible decision making, building support systems, and goal-setting.

The second focus child reported that she was enrolled in a College Readiness Program and reported enjoying it. The program provides assistance to the focus child to improve her social skills through interactions with other peers in the program, increasing her independent living skills, and preparing her for college. As reported by the FFA social worker, the focus child is on track to meet her goal to attend college.

The third focus child struggles in Math and he receives tutoring through his after-school program. The FFA social worker and the certified foster parents track the focus child's progress and always encourage him to do well in school. The FFA social worker, certified foster parents, and the FFA Educational Liaison attend the school meetings and work closely with the school staff to ensure that the focus child is improving academically. The focus child reported that his certified foster parents assist him with his homework so that he could improve his grades because he wants to attend college after his high school graduation.

The FFA social workers, certified foster parents, and DCFS CSWs reported having excellent working relationships as they always collaborate for the best interest of the focus children; they use a team approach to develop the focus children's NSPs. Additionally, the focus children are always included in the development of their goals. The focus children reported they have made progress towards achieving their academic goals and the services received are appropriately meeting their needs.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA and all parties involved generally understand the focus children's functioning and support system. The FFA utilizes individual interviews with the focus children and their certified foster parents to determine if the focus children are progressing toward their identified treatment goals. The FFA social workers reported that they always observe and speak with the focus children during their weekly visits to the certified foster homes to better understand the focus children's strengths and needs. According to the certified foster parents, observation is also beneficial in determining if any additional services are needed.

The focus children reported being linked to all services that they needed and they report improvement. The DCFS CSWs reported having consistent contact with the FFA staff and expressed that the focus children's strengths and needs are comprehensively understood by the FFA. The DCFS CSW reported that the focus child expressed interest in skateboarding, and the DCFS CSW discussed the focus child's interest with his certified foster parent. The certified foster parent linked the focus child to a skateboard park where he can learn and practice different skateboarding skills. The focus child reported that he is very happy and enjoys his time in the park.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA provides good teamwork and involves most of the key parties, including the DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers, certified foster parents, therapists, the focus children, and their family members. The FFA formed a dependable working system that meets, talks, and plans together. The FFA social workers, focus children, and certified foster parents meet weekly during visits in the certified foster homes to discuss the focus children's progress and any concerns.

In addition, the FFA social workers meet monthly with either the FFA supervisors or the other team members, such as the FFA Educational Liaison, the Emancipation Specialist, and the therapist to review and discuss the focus children's progress and if any modifications to the focus children's treatment plan is needed. One FFA social worker reported that he attempts to coordinate his visit to the certified foster homes with the DCFS CSW monthly visits. The focus children's treatment plans are always discussed with the DCFS CSWs to ensure that the team is working together. One of the DCFS CSWs stated if he cannot attend the team meeting, he always provides input to the FFA social worker and certified foster parents before or after the team meeting. The certified foster parent for the third focus child reported that he attended a school meeting for the focus child where all team members attended. The third focus child reported that he feels his team supports him and his team is concerned about him.

The FFA maintains regular contact through telephone and e-mails to communicate with each team member and important supporters of the focus children. The communication amongst team members is always open, accurate, and important information regarding the focus children is shared with all team members. Any information provided by the DCFS CSWs is documented in the focus children's case file and is shared with their certified foster parents and FFA staff members. The focus children reported that they are satisfied with the teamwork and their team members.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, supports, and services provided generally reflect the focus children's needs. The focus children's needs and progress are regularly evaluated and services provided are modified accordingly by all the team members. A modification to the third focus child's education plan began with his certified foster parents monitoring and tracking his behavior at home and at school. His certified foster parents noticed that the focus child was performing poorly at school and lacked motivation. The FFA got their Educational Liaison involved and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting was scheduled. The IEP meeting resulted in modifications to the focus child's educational plan, which resulted in academic improvement.

The FFA social workers utilize various tools, such as the certified foster parents' monthly log, SIRs, and NSPs, to monitor the focus children's progress. The FFA social workers review the focus children's progress status at least once a week and consistently discuss with the focus children what is working and what is not working with them.

The FFA social workers reported that they always ensure the DCFS CSWs are regularly updated with any modifications or changes in the focus children's treatment goals. Each focus child's progress toward their treatment goals are documented in their NSPs. The DCFS CSWs reported that they reviewed the focus children's SIRs, NSPs, school reports and therapist reports to ensure the focus children are progressing towards their case plan goals

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, which consisted of the following: discussion of compliance regarding Title 22 regulations and maintenance of the facility and grounds; review and maintenance of staff files and compliance with training requirements; review of procedures for submitting timely NSPs; and addressing concerns related to the maintenance of the vehicles used to transport the children.

In August 2015, the OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer discussed the QAR results with the FFA. The agency met or exceeded expectations in all focus areas; therefore no Quality Improvement Plan was required.