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March 9, 2016

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

INNER CIRCLE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION 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 Inner Circle Foster Care and Adoption Services Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in May 2015. The FFA has two offices, one in the Third Supervisorial District and one in the Fifth Supervisorial District, and provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children. According to the FFA's program statement, its purpose is, "to promote the growth of children and youth will strengthen the family unit."

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 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 areas of the QAR. In September 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss results in 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

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
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INNER CIRCLE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION SERVICES FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW
FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of Inner Circle Foster Care and Adoption 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 three focus children, three Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSWs), one FFA administrator, three FFA social workers and three certified foster parents.

At the time of the QAR, the focus children's average number of placements was three, their overall average length of placement was 14 months and their average age was nine. The focus children were randomly selected. None of the focus children were included as part of the simple for the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review.

QAR SCORING

The FFA received a score for each focus area and 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 DCFS CSW, support the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** - The focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that 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	6	**Optimal Stability** - The focus children have optimal stability in placement settings and enjoy positive and enduring relationships with primary caregivers, key adult supporters, and peers. There is no history of instability over the past 12 months and little likelihood of future disruption. Only age-appropriate changes are expected in school 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 CSWs, certified foster parents 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's functioning and support systems are generally understood. Information necessary to understand the focus children's 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 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.

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 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, as the FFA provided a highly safe living situation for the focus children during the past 30 days. The FFA complied with all its procedures and protocols to ensure child safety. The FFA ensures that the focus children feel safe in their placement at all times.

The focus children appear to be well cared for and comfortable in their certified foster homes. The three focus children reported that they feel safe in their current certified foster homes. The focus children further stated that they are always supervised and that they can express their concerns with their FFA social workers and certified foster parents. The first focus child stated that his certified foster mother takes good care of him. He also shared that he has a dog that protects him. The second focus child stated that he feels safe, because he is supervised when he plays and that no one hurts him. The third focus child stated that he loves his foster mother and that he would let her know if anyone would ever try to hurt him or fight with him.

The certified foster parents reported that they follow all the safety guidelines set by the FFA. The focus children are appropriately supervised. The certified foster parents are very involved and work collaboratively with the FFA to provide an optimally safe living environment for the focus children.

The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA staff is committed to the focus children and place the focus children's safety as a priority. The DCFS CSWs stated that there were no safety concerns regarding the FFA, the certified foster home, or the care the focus children receive.

Based on the interviews with the three focus children's DCFS CSWs and the FFA staff, the focus children appear to feel safe and are happy with their certified foster parents.

The FFA submitted eight Special Incident Reports (SIRs) via the I-Track database during the past 30 days. There were no safety concerns for the focus children. Additionally, the SIRs were comprehensive, capturing the aspects of the reported incidents. The SIRs were submitted timely and properly cross-reported. In each of the reported incidents, the certified foster parents and the FFA staff responded appropriately, taking the necessary actions to ensure the focus children received necessary medical treatment for illness or minor injuries, follow-up appointments were timely and children were safe.

Further, the Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section did not have any open referrals during the past 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provides substantial permanence for the focus children. The FFA works collaboratively with the DCFS CSWs, their certified foster parents and the focus children to assist in the development of the most appropriate permanency plan for the focus children. The FFA complies with recommendations of the court and DCFS, as well as provides the services that correspond with each of the focus children's permanency plans and demonstrates efforts to assist the focus children and their families in achieving permanency. The FFA ensures that the focus children maintain appropriate family ties and aims to ensure there is a strong bond between the focus children and their certified foster parents.

The permanency plan for the first focus child is family reunification, and the concurrent plan is adoption. The focus child is happy that he is placed with his younger brother in the certified foster home. The focus child stated that he would like to be reunified with his parents; however, he indicated that if he cannot reunify with his family, he would like to remain with his certified foster mother. The certified foster mother stated that she would like to adopt the boys. She shared that she and the focus child have a close bond. The DCFS CSW shared that she is supportive of the certified foster mother adopting the focus child and his brother. She had no concerns regarding the care the focus child has received.

The second focus child's permanency plan is family reunification. The focus child shared that he is very happy that he is placed with his brother and sister in the certified foster home. The focus child and his siblings have bonded well with their certified foster family. The certified foster mother stated the FFA is supportive of developing a relationship between the focus child, his siblings, and his certified foster family. She also stated that the FFA is adhering to the focus child's reunification plan. His certified foster mother also stated that although the focus child's mother does not maintain consistent contact, his maternal grandparents are involved and maintain contact with the focus child and his siblings. The DCFS CSW stated that the FFA is providing the support and services the focus child requires.

The third focus child's permanency plan is family reunification and his concurrent plan is adoption. The focus child's brother is also placed in the certified foster home. The focus child shared that he likes his certified foster mother and that she takes good care of him. He is happy and wants to live

with his certified foster mother. He further stated that he has a good relationship with his certified foster mother, as he was placed with her when he previously came into out-of-home care. The FFA social worker and his DCFS CSW are supportive of this placement and of the permanency goals for the focus child.

Placement Stability (6 Optimal Status)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA is providing optimal stability for the focus children. The focus children have a positive, enduring relationship with their certified foster parents. The FFA is committed to working with each of the focus children and their caretakers. The FFA takes responsibility in ensuring the needs of the focus children, as well as making sure that the focus children and their certified foster parents may access services at school and in the community to achieve placement stability and support improved functioning in the community. The focus children are doing well, and reported that they enjoy the positive enduring relationships they share with their certified foster parents.

The certified foster parents stated that the FFA social workers address their concerns and share pertinent information regarding the focus children so that they are prepared to care for them. The FFA provides its staff and certified foster parents with regular training to prepare them to address the needs of placed children and their families. All three DCFS CSWs expressed that they were pleased with the stability the focus children have demonstrated and the care and support the certified foster parents have given the focus children.

The first focus child shared that his certified foster mother treats him well and that he is happy. He further stated that he is doing well in school and that his certified foster mother motivates him to do better.

The second focus child shared that he had been in numerous placements before being placed in his current certified foster home. He shared that his needs are being met and that he likes his certified foster family very much. The focus child stated he had no complaints because his certified foster parents are doing a good job of caring for him and his siblings. Although the focus child has demonstrated some difficulty at school and at his certified foster home, the certified foster parents have been patient and supportive. The FFA staff has also ensured that the focus child receives the necessary services and treatment to help the focus child improve his behavior. The DCFS CSW stated that the focus child is doing well in his current certified foster home, and the FFA and certified foster parents are supportive of the focus child's needs.

The third focus child is also doing well in his certified foster home. The focus child stated that he likes his certified foster mother and that he is happy in his certified foster home. With the support, and care that he is receiving, the child's behavior has improved, and he is doing well at school.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they are very satisfied with the well-being of the focus children and the overall stability they have demonstrated. They further reported that they believe the FFA and the certified foster parents are working together to provide a stable placement for the focus children and the focus children have informed them that they are happy and feel secure in their placements.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA is generally effective in maintaining family contact for the focus children and their families, and the FFA is following the visitation recommendation of the DCFS CSWs and court orders. The certified foster parents encourage the focus children to maintain regular contact with their families, provide transportation to the visits, as well as monitor the visits, when necessary. The FFA maintains documentation of all visits between the focus children and their family. The FFA and their certified foster parents keep the DCFS CSWs informed of how the visits are going. Each of the focus children are having visits with their family.

The FFA social workers coordinate visitation schedules with the DCFS CSWs, the certified foster parents and the focus children's family in an effort to ensure visits occur. The certified foster parents or FFA social workers assist the focus children in making telephone calls to communicate with their families.

The first focus child and his brother have weekly monitored visits with their mother. The certified foster mother provides transportation to the visits, and the FFA social worker and DCFS CSW alternate monitoring the visits. Visits may occur at a local park, as the focus child and his brother enjoy playing and like having their visits at the park. The certified foster mother is supportive of the focus child and the visitation plan. The focus child reported that he and his brother enjoy visitation with their mother.

The second focus child's mother has been struggling with complying with the case plan, and visits with the focus child and his siblings have been inconsistent. However, the focus child has unmonitored weekly visits with his maternal grandparents; the maternal grandparents have been visiting the children consistently. The certified foster parents have been supportive of the visitation arrangements. They transport the focus child and his siblings to the visits. The focus child reported that he enjoys having visits with his grandparents. The FFA social worker obtains feedback regarding the visits from the children and their certified foster parents. The DCFS CSW stated that the FFA and the certified foster parents are supportive, and they are adhering to the visitation orders and recommendations.

The third focus child and his brother visit with their mother two days per week. The visits are monitored, and they may take place at a local restaurant or at a park, or at the FFA office. The focus child shared that he speaks with his mother on the telephone often. The focus child said he feels happy when he sees his mother and other family members. The certified foster mother is supportive of the visitation plan; she transports the children to the visits. The certified foster mother shared that the focus child looks forward to the visits.

During the visits, the FFA social worker keeps the focus children's family members informed of any concerns and successes the focus children experience.

PRACTICE INDICATORS

(Measured over last 90 days)

Engagement (5 Good Engagement Efforts)

Engagement Overview: The FFA demonstrates good and consistent efforts to engage and build a rapport with the focus children, their DCFS CSWs, the certified foster parents and appropriate family members and shares pertinent information regarding the focus children with them. Information may be shared vie e-mail, telephone, or face-to-face. Meetings or visits are scheduled at times that are convenient for all parties.

The FFA social workers ensure that key parties are involved in the planning of the focus children's services and treatment goals and plans. The input of all team members is important, and all team members feel heard and respected. Communication between the DCFS CSWs and FFA social workers is ongoing. The focus children are familiar with the FFA staff and are confident in expressing their needs and expectations. The three focus children indicated that they feel comfortable with their certified foster parents and the FFA staff. The FFA staff and certified foster parents encourage the focus children to communicate with their DCFS CSWs and their family members.

The FFA social workers and the certified foster parents also make efforts to include the children's teachers in discussions regarding the focus children's academic progress and share the information and school reports with the other team members.

The focus children reported that they could count on their certified foster parents and they discuss their feelings and goals.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they have a good relationship with the FFA social workers and certified foster parents and they stay in constant communication. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA social workers and certified foster parents keep them informed of the focus children's progress.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports and Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provides a substantial array of supports and services matching the intervention strategies identified in the case plan for the focus children. The FFA social workers collaborate with the DCFS CSWs, the focus children and the FFA staff to develop Needs and Services Plan (NSP) goals for the focus children. The FFA follows the recommendations made by the focus children's DCFS CSWs and ensures the focus children are referred for appropriate services, such as counseling and tutoring, and that the focus children are receiving regular medical and dental check-ups.

The certified foster parents are involved with the focus children's schooling, following-up with their teachers to address academic performance and their needs. The certified foster parents provide a supportive learning environment at home and assist the focus children with their homework.

The first focus child stated that he has everything he needs. He stated that his foster mother takes really good care of him. The focus child is receiving weekly individual therapy. The focus child's therapist reported that his certified foster mother takes the focus child to all of his therapy

appointments and participates in some of the sessions. The therapist also shared that the FFA is responsive to the focus child's needs and is interested in the child's progress. The therapist further stated that the FFA is cooperative and ensures that the focus child attends therapy as required. The focus child is also receiving speech therapy and has clearly benefitted from the services, as his speech has improved and he is less fearful of speaking up for himself.

The second focus child has made improvements in his behavior at home and at school. According to school reports, the focus child enjoys school, and he is working on improving his academic performance in mathematics and language arts. His certified foster parents have been working closely with the focus child's teacher to ensure that he received the needed educational supportive services, such as tutoring services. The certified foster parents also provide a supportive and structured learning environment for the focus child.

The third focus child has also benefitted from the services he is receiving. The focus child attends individual counseling. The focus child shared that he likes participating in counseling and that he feels he has made improvement in his behavior. The focus child shared that counseling may be helpful for him and his mother, as he would like to attend counseling with his mother when they are reunified. His certified foster mother is also providing a nurturing, supportive home. The focus child is doing well academically, and according to school reports, the focus child made noted improvements after he was placed in his current certified foster home. His certified foster mother is actively involved with the focus child's schooling; she follows up with the school and monitors the focus child's progress.

The FFA social workers and certified foster parents keep the focus children's parents informed of the focus children's progress. The FFA social workers stay in contact with the service providers and collaborate with the DCFS CSWs to develop the NSP goals for the focus children. The certified foster parents indicated that the FFA also requires that their certified foster parent provide frequent reports regarding services being provided to the focus children to ensure their needs are being met and they are progressing toward their treatment plan goals.

The three focus children are treated as members of their certified foster families. The focus children feel loved and cared for. They participate in family outings and recreational activities. The FFA social workers reported that the focus children are doing well.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they are pleased with the FFA for ensuring that the children receive the recommended treatment services. The DCFS CSWs did not express any concerns regarding the focus children's service needs.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments & Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA developed good assessments of the focus children's needs. The FFA fully understands each focus child's functioning and support system, as well as the focus children's functioning, challenges, earlier life traumas and support systems. The focus children have been responsive to the intervention strategies, services and the supports they are receiving. The focus children are happy and they have made significant improvements at home, at school, and in the community.

The FFA selects services to address the unique needs of each focus child. The FFA social workers meet with the focus children and their certified foster parents to assess their progress and to evaluate their needs. The FFA determines if children are making progress towards their NSP goals by observing if there is a reduction in incidents, occurrences and acting out behaviors that the children exhibit. Progress is also determined by what the FFA social workers and certified foster parents observe and report.

Teamwork (5 Good Tracking and Adjustment Process)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA involves most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team consists of the DCFS CSW, the FFA social worker, the certified foster parents, and the focus children. The team has formed a good working system, and the members work collaboratively to develop the focus children's treatment plan and case plan goals. The FFA has regular team meetings to address the focus children's progress, and the FFA also ensures that when the FFA social workers visit the certified foster homes they are assessing the focus children's well-being and evaluate their needs. Additionally, the FFA administrator reported that the FFA staff meets weekly to discuss the children's cases and their progress in their certified foster homes.

The DCFS CSWs for the focus children reported that they meet with the FFA social workers or administration when there are concerns regarding the focus children, and the FFA social workers always keep them informed of the focus children's progress. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA communicates with them via e-mail and telephone to provide updates on the focus children. The DCFS CSWs further indicated that the FFA provides support to the certified foster parents and includes the certified foster parents as part of the team. However, the team could benefit the participation of the focus children's family members in team meetings.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA provides good monitoring and tracking of the focus children's progress, as well as how the focus children and their families are responding to intervention strategies, supports and services they are receiving. The FFA social workers maintain consistent contact with the certified foster parents and the focus children, and conduct visits to the certified foster home to check on the well-being of the focus children and address any concerns that may arise. The FFA also maintains consistent contact with the DCFS CSWs and keeps them informed of the changing needs of the focus children. The FFA social workers and administration communicate the need to adjust services, treatment strategies and goals, when appropriate. The FFA utilizes its weekly contact records, monthly CSW contact logs, quarterly health and safety assessments, information obtained from the certified foster parents, and NSPs to document and evaluate the children's progress and needs.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they collaborate with the FFA social workers to ensure that appropriate resources are in place for the focus children. The DCFS CSWs also maintain regular contact with FFA social workers and the focus children to ensure any necessary adjustments to the NSP goals are made, the treatment resources and supports for the focus children are in place, and they are involved in making modifications to the NSP case plans

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In May 2015, the OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer reviewed the FFA 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Report and no deficiencies were noted.

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