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DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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March 22, 2016

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

WALDEN ENVIRONMENT dba FAMILY 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 Walden Environment dba Family Services Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in June 2015. The FFA has one licensed office located in the Third Supervisorial District and an office in Riverside County. The FFA provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children and youth. According to the FFA's program statement, its mission is, "to support the lives of children and families through lasting relationships; and does so by providing advocacy and placement services for abused, neglected, and at-risk children in need of out-of-home 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 8 of 9 focus areas: Safety, Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, and Tracking & Adjustment. OHCMD noted opportunities for improved performance in the focus area of Teamwork.

The FFA provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan addressing the recommendations noted in this report. In December 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
Sue Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Walden Foster Family Agency
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

WALDEN ENVIRONMENT dba FAMILY 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 Walden Environment dba Family Services Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in June 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 two, their overall average length of placement was 16 months and their average age was six. The focus children were randomly selected. None of the focus children were included as part of the sample for the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review.

QAR SCORING

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

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Safety - The degree to which the FFA ensures that the child is free of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.	6	6	**Optimal Safety Status -** The focus children are optimally and consistently avoiding behaviors that cause harm to self, others, or the community and are free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and/or intimidation in placement.
Permanency - The degree to which the child is living with caregivers, who are likely to remain in this role until the child reaches adulthood, or the child is in the process of returning home or transitioning to a permanent home and the child, the FFA staff, caregivers and 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. 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 excellently maintained 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, 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. A usually dependable combination of informal and formal supports and services is available, appropriate, used, and seen as generally satisfactory.
Assessment & Linkages - The degree to which the FFA staff involved with the child and family understand the child's strengths, needs, preferences, and underlying issues and services are regularly assessed to ensure progress is being made toward case plan goals.	5	5	**Good Assessment and Understanding -** The focus children's 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.
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 some of the important supporters and decision makers in the children's lives, including informal supports. The team has formed a minimally adequate to fair 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 focus children's status and service results to the team are occurring. Generally successful adaptations are based on a basic knowledge of what things are working and not working for the focus children.

STATUS INDICATORS

(Measured over last 30 days)

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

Safety (6 Optimal Safety Status)

Safety Overview: The FFA's safety status was optimal. The FFA administration ensures that the focus children feel safe in placement. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents are trained in recognizing problems and situations that could place children in imminent danger and in reporting special incidents. To further ensure the children's safety, the FFA social workers visit the certified foster homes to conduct facility checks and meet with the placed children and their certified foster parents weekly for the first 90 days of placement and twice a month thereafter. The FFA social workers also conduct monthly extensive home inspections to make certain the homes are free from safety hazards. The certified foster parents reported that the FFA has strict safety rules to ensure the placed children are safe. The certified foster parents reported that they are able to receive guidance from the FFA staff at anytime through the FFA's 24-hour hotline.

The focus children reported feeling safe while in their current foster homes, as their respective certified foster parents always supervise them. The first focus child reported that he feels very comfortable living in the certified foster home and that he participates in fire drills and that the home has an alarm system. He stated that his certified foster parent always supervises him and makes sure he is safe. The second focus child reported that he feels safe at home and in the community. The third focus child reported that her certified foster parent is always home and she makes her feel safe.

The DCFS CSWs interviewed reported having no safety concerns regarding the FFA's certified foster homes or the care that the focus children receive from their certified foster parents.

The FFA submitted two Special Incident Reports (SIRs) during the last 30 days. None of the SIRs involved the focus children or consisted of immediate child safety concerns. One SIR involved a school suspension due to a child assaulting his school mate. The second SIR was for an incident that involved a child who was scratched by a dog. The child sustained superficial cuts and was taken to the emergency room for treatment. The FFA adheres to policies and procedures for submitting SIRs via the I-Track database. The SIRs were submitted timely and properly cross-reported to all required parties. There were no investigations substantiated or referrals opened by the Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section during the last 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provides good permanence for the focus children. The FFA staff collaborates with the DCFS CSWs by ensuring the focus children's permanent plan is supported. The FFA social workers and certified foster parents were aware of the focus children's permanent plans. The FFA provides services that correspond to the permanency plan for the focus children. For children whose permanent plan is Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (PPLA), the FFA provides independent living classes to assist in preparing the children for self-sufficiency. For the focus children whose permanent plan is family reunification, the FFA makes efforts to ensure family connections are maintained.

The first focus child's permanency plan is Family Reunification with his father and his concurrent plan is PPLA. The focus child reported that he gets along very well with his certified foster parent and regards her as family. The focus child has only recently met his father, they have developed a bond as they maintain daily phone contact; however, his father is unable to provide a stable home at this time. The focus child stated he plans to remain as placed until he is reunified with his father. The certified foster parent reported that the focus child was assisted by the DCFS Permanency Partners Program CSW who has connected the child with his maternal aunt. The focus child maintains telephone contact with his maternal aunt. The focus child's DCFS CSW reported that the FFA and the certified foster parent are supportive of the focus child's permanent plan.

The second focus child's permanency plan is PPLA with an emphasis on transitioning out of care. The focus child's family lives outside of the country and the only family living nearby is his adult brother. The focus child plans to reside in transitional housing following his graduation from high school. The focus child's DCFS CSW reported that the FFA and the certified foster parent support the focus child's permanent plan.

The third focus child's permanent plan is adoption. Her certified foster parents are interested in pursuing adopting the focus child and her siblings. They have initiated the adoption process and the Adoption Home Study has been completed. The DCFS CSW reported that the FFA social worker has been supportive of the focus child's permanency plan.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The focus children have substantial stability in their placement and in their school settings. The focus children's placements have been stable with no disruptions during the past 30 days. The FFA Director stated that to promote stability, during the intake process the FFA attempts to match children with their prospective certified foster parents. Additionally, the FFA social

workers conduct weekly visits to the certified foster home during the period of adjustment to ensure the children's well-being. The FFA provides the certified foster parents with additional support and training as deemed necessary.

The focus children reported that their needs are being met and they have a good relationship with their certified foster parents. The first focus child reported that he is happy living in the certified foster home and that his foster parent has been providing him with a lot of support. The focus child feels that his certified foster parent cares about him and treats him like a family member. The certified foster parent reported that the focus child can stay at her home as long as he wants. The DCFS CSW reported that the focus child's placement is stable.

The second focus child has lived in his certified foster home for the past five years without interruption. The focus child reported the placement meets his needs and that he feels supported by the FFA social worker and his certified foster parent. At the time of the QAR, the certified foster parent informed the FFA and the focus child's DCFS CSW that she will be moving to another city and will no longer foster children. The FFA was making efforts to ensure that the focus child's education will not be disrupted and has sought to find a suitable certified foster home in the same area. The DCFS CSW reported that the FFA has been very supportive of the focus child's need to attend the same school and has demonstrated great efforts to find another certified foster home to accommodate the focus child's need.

The third focus child reported that she loves her certified foster home and her needs are being met. The focus child's DCFS CSW reported that the FFA social worker and the certified foster parent provide the focus child with the support needed to meet the focus child's needs.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA has established effective visitation and maintenance of family connections for the focus children. The FFA staff, certified foster parents and DCFS CSWs work together to assist the focus children in maintaining connections with their family. As needed, the FFA or the certified foster parents monitor and provide transportation for the focus children's visits with their family. The FFA follows the court ordered visitation plans and collaborates with the DCFS CSWs in ensuring the focus children have regular visits with their family members.

All three focus children have regular visits with their family members. The first focus child has regular unmonitored visits with his father twice a month. The certified foster parent transports the focus child to and from a designated meeting site. The focus child reported that he and his father spend time together going shopping or to the movies. The focus child reported that he enjoys the time he spends with his father.

The second focus child is 17 years old and is able to take public transportation. The focus child has unmonitored visits with his adult brother twice a month. He reported that he takes the public bus to visit his brother, however, his brother frequently picks him up from his certified foster home for visits and that he enjoys spending time with his brother.

The third focus child is in adoptive placement. However, the court orders weekly monitored visits with her mother, grandmother and an aunt for four hours a week. The certified foster parent monitors the

visits. The FFA social worker reported that the certified foster parent is flexible and tries to accommodate the focus child's mother's visits. The focus child reported that she enjoys visiting with her family. According to the focus child's DCFS CSW, the focus child and her sibling's weekly visits with their mother and other family members were good.

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 established good rapport among the focus children, their family members, DCFS CSWs and certified foster parents. The FFA social workers make efforts to maintain monthly contact with their respective DCFS CSWs via telephone, e-mail or face-to-face meetings. The FFA makes efforts to include the placed children, the certified foster parents, the DCFS CSWs and their key supporters in goal planning to ensure positive outcomes are reached.

The first focus child reported that he feels respected and heard by the FFA social worker. According to the focus child, the FFA social worker listens to any concerns he may have and provides him with good advice. The focus child has developed a strong bond with his certified foster parent and feels she cares about him.

The second focus child indicated that he has developed a good relationship with the FFA social worker, his certified foster parents and his DCFS CSW. He feels that he can relate to his certified foster parents as they share a similar cultural background. The DCFS CSW reported that he collaborates with the FFA social worker and the certified foster parents to make sure that the focus child's needs are met.

The third focus child reported that her certified foster parent takes good care of her and she could count on her. The focus child was able to identify the key supporters in her life such as her DCFS CSW, her certified foster parent and the FFA social worker. She reported that they maintain communication by telephone and in-person. Her certified foster parent reported that she feels the FFA and the DCFS CSW are supportive and always helpful. The DCFS CSW stated that she has ongoing communication with the FFA social worker, the focus child and her certified foster parent.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA has a good array of support, extracurricular activities and services to help the focus children make progress toward meeting their case plan goals. The FFA social workers and the certified foster parents are able to identify the focus children's strengths and needs. The FFA social workers and the certified foster parents are able to match the appropriate resources to assist the focus children in meeting their case plan goals.

The first focus child is receiving therapeutic services. The focus child attends individual therapy weekly and reported that he feels comfortable talking to his therapist. The focus child is also enrolled

in a sport based after school program that he attends daily. The focus child reported that he enjoys the program and likes playing basketball and running.

The second focus child is described as a bright, goal driven and self-motivated person by his DCFS CSW, the FFA social worker and his certified foster parent. The focus child is interested in math and science and he participates in science-based after-school programs. As the focus child plans to attend college, the FFA social worker has provided him with college related information including financial aid and scholarship applications. The focus child is also receiving independent living services to prepare him to become self-sufficient. The focus child also participates in the Individualized Transitional Skills Program (ITSP) and meets with his ITSP mentor twice a month. The focus child reported that the resources provided meets his needs and he is satisfied with the services he receives. His certified foster parent reported that she taught the focus child basic independent living skills that include budgeting, how to cook, clean and do laundry.

The third focus child is having difficulties adjusting to the change from family reunification to adoption and often exhibits challenging behavior. The focus child participates in weekly individual therapy to address her adjustment issues. The focus child reported that therapy helps her a lot with handling her emotions. The focus child also receives tutoring services to assist her in improving her grades. She is provided with a variety of extracurricular activities such as swimming lessons and visiting amusement parks. The DCFS CSWs indicated that the services being provided meet the focus children's needs.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA generally understands the focus children's functioning, strengths, needs, preferences and support systems. Based on the FFA social worker's observations and interactions with the focus children, reports from the certified foster parents and other support systems, the FFA social worker develops Needs and Services Plan (NSP) goals for the focus children.

The FFA ensured support services were in place for the first focus child, due to his recent traumatic loss of a parent. For the second focus child, when a new home was needed, the FFA promptly made efforts to find a new placement that would allow him to remain in his current school. The FFA arranged for an educational assessment to be conducted and tutoring services provided when the focus child showed poor academic progress. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA updates them regarding the focus children's progress.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA intervention strategies, supports, and services provided to the focus children are generally responsive to changing conditions. During the visits to the certified foster homes, the FFA social workers assess the status of the focus children and have general understanding of what is working and what is not working. The FFA social workers track the focus children's progress through observation and from reports made by the focus children's therapists and the certified foster parents. Interventions and goals are modified as needed by the FFA social worker. The FFA social workers reported that they send NSPs to the DCFS CSWs.

The first and the second focus child reported that they participate in developing their respective NSP goals. The third focus child is too young to be involved in developing her own goals. Based on her assessment of the focus child's needs, the FFA social worker develops the focus child's goal.

The DCFS CSWs reported they are updated by the FFA social workers regarding any modifications related to their focus children's overall progress, services and NSP goals.

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

Teamwork (4 Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA involves some of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team consists of the focus children and their family members, DCFS CSWs, the FFA social workers, certified foster parents, and key supporters.

The first focus child's father, FFA social worker, certified foster parent, and therapist worked collaboratively to meet the focus child's needs. The focus child reported that his team members support him; however, there have been no face-to-face team meetings with the focus child and all key supporters in attendance.

The DCFS CSW for the second focus child has worked with the FFA social worker and the certified foster parent to ensure the focus child's needs are met. The DCFS CSW, the certified foster parent and the focus child had a team meeting regarding emancipation planning. The most recent collaboration between the DCFS CSW and the FFA social worker was during their combined efforts to find a new home for the focus child which would enable him to continue attending the same school. The focus child reported that his DCFS CSW, the FFA social worker and his certified foster parent worked together as a team.

The DCFS CSW for the third focus child formed a good working relationship with the focus child's FFA social worker and certified foster parents. The focus child reported that her team consisted of her therapist, the DCFS CSW, her tutor and the FFA social worker. The focus child, her certified foster parents and the DCFS CSW reported that they have not participated in any team meetings facilitated by the FFA.

Although there appeared to be collaboration between the FFA social worker, focus children, their DCFS CSWs and the certified foster parents; the FFA has not established consistent team meetings for the focus children. The FFA could benefit from holding team meetings where the focus children and their key supporters are included in face-to-face team meetings allowing them the opportunity to form a united and effective team that works together for the benefit of the focus children.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In August 2015, OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review including developing NSPs and obtaining the DCFS approvals, and encouraging placed children to update their life book or photo album.

In December 2015, the 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. 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 their QIP.

January 12, 2016

Department of Children and Family Services
Out of Home Care Management Division
9320 Telstar Ave., #206
El Monte, CA 91731

Dear Gladys,

This is in response to your request for the Quality Assurance Review you conducted in 2015. The audit resulted in the following area that needed to be addressed:

Team Work: Adequate to fair.

- Walden Social Workers will be trained in team work, face to face needs and services planning meetings and documenting all contact and attempted contact with the DCFS CSW and other team members. This will be completed by the Program Directors, Supervisor on 1/28/16 at the Encino Office and 1/23/16 at the Riverside Office. A sign in sheet will be provided.
- Foster parents will be provided individual, group and community trainings on working as a productive member of the child's team and working with the team to assist the children to meet their goals. The training will be held 2-17-2016 in the Encino Office. Program Director will facilitate this training.
- The Walden social workers will document all contact with the DCFS CSW and other team members in the weekly notes. The notes will be reviewed by the supervisors and/or program directors. Walden will document invitations to treatment team meetings with DCFS CSWs and other team members. Invitations to team meetings, such as Needs and Services Team Meeting will be sent by email or fax to DCFS CSWs and other pertinent team members. Walden Social Workers will upload the documented invitations into the child file. This will be effective beginning 2/1/16 after all staff are trained.

It is always a pleasure to work with you and we appreciate your time and input. If you need further information please feel free to contact me at (818) 365-3665.

Sincerely,

Karen Crossan

Karen Crossan

Program Director