COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
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July 5, 2007

TO: Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: J. Tyler McCauley
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **FREE TO BE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Free to Be Foster Family Agency (Free or Agency), a Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) contracts with Free, a private non-profit community-based organization, to recruit, train and certify foster care parents for the supervision of children placed in foster care by DCFS. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

Free is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. Free oversees a total of 47 certified foster homes in which 58 DCFS or Regional Center children were placed. Free is located in the Fifth District.

DCFS pays Free a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Funding and Rate Bureau. Free receives $4,386 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between $1,750 and $2,350 per month, per child. DCFS paid Free approximately $387,000 for Fiscal Year 2006-07 through May 2007.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether Free was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed the Agency's staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed the children and the foster parents.

Results of Review

The foster homes visited were well maintained. In addition, the foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. However, one (33%) of the three Needs and Services Plans reviewed was not signed by the child's assigned DCFS social workers, and the Agency's social workers did not contact DCFS social workers on a monthly basis as required.

The details of our review along with recommendations for corrective action are attached.

Review of Report

On June 24, 2007, we discussed our report with Free who generally agreed with the findings. In their attached response, Free's management identified the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Free for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (626) 293-1102.

JTM:MMO:DC

Attachment

c: David E. Janssen, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Ms. Cathy Lichtenberger, Clinical Director, Free to Be Foster Family Agency
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
FREE TO BE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2006-2007

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Free to Be Foster Family Agency (Free or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited three of the forty-seven Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Free billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in November and December 2006 and interviewed four of the five foster parents and two of the eight children placed in the three homes. We also reviewed the case files for the five foster parents and three of the children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The three foster homes we visited were well maintained and in compliance with CDSS Title 22 safety regulations. In addition, the foster parents at the homes we visited were certified in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations and received the appropriate amount of annual ongoing training by Free's social workers in accordance with the requirements of the County contract.

One (33%) of the three Needs and Services Plans (Plan) reviewed did not contain the signature of the child's DCFS social worker indicating the social worker's approval of the Plan as required by the County contract. In addition, all three children's case files did not contain documentation that DCFS social workers received monthly telephonic updates concerning the children's progress as required by the County contract.

Recommendations

Free management:

1. **Ensure that DCFS social workers approve in writing all Needs and Services Plans.**

2. **Ensure that staff contact the DCFS social workers on a monthly basis to discuss children's progress.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

To determine whether the program participants received the services that Free billed DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed two children placed in three Free certified foster homes and four foster parents to confirm the services Free billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from Free met their expectations and their assigned social workers visited them regularly. The children interviewed also stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether Free's social workers' case loads do not exceed fifteen placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Free's director and supervising social worker. In addition, we reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for November and December 2006.

Results

Free's supervising social worker supervised an average of four social workers and the Agency's social workers carried an average caseload of 11 cases during the months of November and December 2006.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

Determine whether Free's staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether Free conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training and performance evaluations to staff.

Verification

We interviewed Free's director and supervising social worker. In addition, we reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances, ongoing training and performance evaluations.

Results

Generally, Free's director, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, the Agency conducted hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract as required. However, none of the six employees' personnel files contained annual performance evaluations.

Recommendation

3. **Free management ensure that staff receive annual performance evaluations.**

Date: June 29, 2007

To: Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: Audrey Hughes Audrey Hughes
Administrator
Free to Be – Foster Family Agency

Subject: Response to Agency Contract Review

Free to Be Programs received the agency contract review report dated June 2007 from the County of Los Angeles, Department of Auditor-Controller. We agree with the findings of the report and will implement the three recommendations as follows.

Recommendation 1: *Ensure that DCFS social workers approve in writing all Needs and Service Plans.*

Free to Be Programs sends an approval form to the DCFS social worker with the final copy of the individualized Needs and Service Plans. From this point forward, we will follow-up with the social worker by phone if the approval form is not returned within 30 days. If we are unable to reach the social worker, a message will be left on the worker's voice mail. The date of this follow-up call will be documented in the child's case file. If the approval form is not received within an additional 15 days, we will follow-up by e-mail or by letter. A copy of this second follow-up will be placed in the child's file.

Recommendation 2: *Ensure that staff contact the DCFS social workers on a monthly basis to discuss children's progress.*

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Social workers contact each child's DCFS social worker at least once per month. From this point forward, social workers will document this contact on their monthly contact log. The contact log will specify the date the social worker was contacted as well as providing a summary of the contact. If our agency social worker is unable to reach the DCFS worker, a message will be left on the worker's voice mail. The date and content of the message will be documented in the contact notes. The supervising social worker for the agency collects and reviews monthly contact logs. She will follow-up with agency social workers to ensure that they complete and document this contact.

Recommendation 3: *Free to Be Management will ensure that staff receive annual performance evaluations*

Employees will receive annual written performance evaluations. This evaluation will be completed by the administrator of the agency. A meeting will be scheduled with the employee to review the performance evaluation. The administrator and the employee will sign the review. A copy of the completed evaluation will be placed in the employee file.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact me at (818) 366-6682.