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DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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October 1, 2008

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

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe
Acting Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **AVIVA FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES CONTRACT REVIEW - A DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY SERVICE PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Aviva Family and Children's Services (Aviva or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Aviva, a private non-profit community-based organization to recruit, train and certify foster 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.

Aviva is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 12 certified foster homes in which 13 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Aviva is located in the Third District.

DCFS paid Aviva a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, Aviva received between $1,589 and $1,865 per month, per child. Out of

these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between $624 and $790 per month, per child. DCFS paid Aviva approximately $480,000 during Fiscal Year 2007-08.

Purpose/Methodology

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

Results of Review

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Aviva generally met their expectations and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. Aviva also ensured that the Agency's social workers possessed the required qualifications and that their caseloads were within required guidelines. However, Aviva did not always comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. For example:

- One of the two homes visited had detergents, cleaning solutions and a sealed liquor bottle inadequately secured. The home's carpeting and tile flooring were worn out and dirty and some of the interior walls of the home were in need of painting. In addition, the home's back yard was overgrown and contained dog feces and had a tool shed that was left open exposing unsafe tools and construction debris.

- One of the two homes did not have an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.

- None of the case files for the two children who were old enough to receive allowances contained documentation that the children received their weekly allowances. Aviva management indicated that the foster parents purchased items for the children instead of giving cash. However, the purchases were not documented and the Agency's Program Statement indicated that children ages three to eleven years old should receive allowances ranging from $1 to $7 per week, depending on the maturity of the child.

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

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Aviva on July 2, 2008. In their attached response, Aviva indicates agreement with our findings and the actions they have taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Aviva 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.

WLW:MMO:DC

Attachment

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Wendy Wolf, Chair, Board of Directors, Aviva Family and Children's Services
Andrew Diamond, President and CEO, Aviva Family and Children's Services
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
AVIVA FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Aviva Family and Children's Services (Aviva or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited two of the 12 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Aviva billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in January and February 2008, and interviewed the two foster parents and two of the five children placed in the two homes. We also reviewed the case files for two foster parents and five children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. However, Aviva did not always comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

Foster Home Visitation

One (50%) of the two homes visited was not adequately maintained as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

- Detergents, cleaning solutions and a sealed liquor bottle were not adequately secured. The cleaning solutions and liquor bottle were stored on top of the refrigerator which made access to children more difficult. However, Title 22 regulations require foster parents to adequately secure potential safety hazards.

- The home did not have an operable smoke detector installed in the hallway to the children's bedroom.

- The home's carpeting and tile flooring were worn out and dirty. The bathroom toilet and living room furniture were dirty and stained. Some of the interior walls of the home were in need of painting.

- The backyard was overgrown and contained dog feces. In addition, the tool shed in the backyard was left open exposing unsafe tools and construction debris. The

backyard also had an open fire pit filled with wood that did not have a screen or a protective barrier.

The second home visited did not secure kitchen knives. The knives were stored in an upper cabinet where accessibility to the younger children living in the home was difficult. However, Title 22 regulations require foster parents to lock away knives. In addition, the emergency plan did not include an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of an emergency.

Medical Services, Children's Case Files and Needs and Services Plans

- One of the two case files for children who received medical services referrals did not contain documentation that the child received the recommended medical services. The referral was made in May 2007.

- None of the case files for the two children who were old enough to receive allowances contained documentation that the children received their weekly allowances. Aviva management indicated that the foster parents purchased items for the children instead of giving cash. However, the purchases were not documented and the Agency's Program Statement indicated that children ages three to eleven years old should receive allowances ranging from $1 to $7 per week, depending on the maturity of the child.

- None of the five case files contained documentation that the children or DCFS social workers were informed about the Agency's personal rights and complaint policies as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Recommendations

Aviva management ensure that:

1. **Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and Title 22 regulations.**

2. **Foster parents adequately secure knives, detergents, cleaning solutions and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to the children.**

3. **Foster homes have operable smoke detectors in the hallways to the children's bedrooms.**

4. **Foster homes are clean for the well-being of the children.**

5. **The yards of foster homes are well maintained and free of potential safety hazards.**

6. **Foster homes' emergency plans include an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.**

7. **Children receive appropriate medical services recommended by their physicians.**

8. **Foster parents provide age-appropriate weekly allowances to children consistent with the Program Statement and maintain the required documentation.**

9. **Children and the County social workers receive a comprehensive overview of the Agency's policies.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Aviva billed to DCFS.

Verification

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

Results

The foster children interviewed stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether Aviva social workers' caseloads 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 Aviva's administrator and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

Overall, Aviva's three social workers carried an average caseload of six cases and the Agency's supervising social worker supervised an average of three social workers.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed Aviva's administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

Aviva's administrator, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, Aviva conducted hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP

Objective

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the prior monitoring review completed by the Auditor-Controller.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2005-06 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on May 2, 2006.

Results

The prior monitoring report contained three recommendations. Aviva fully implemented all three recommendations.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

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July 30, 2008

To: Wendy L. Watanabe
Acting Auditor-Controller

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

Re: Response to Contract Review Audit of April 15, 2008, Aviva Family and Children's Services Contract Review – Foster Family Agency Service Provider

We are in receipt of the contract compliance review which was conducted by the Auditor-Controller's Countywide Contract Monitoring Division. We want to thank Ms. Susan Kim, Supervisor, of the Auditor Controller for her fairness in reviewing the initial report, and her openness to our concerns, as well as the concern expressed by a foster parent. We appreciate her thoroughness and openness during the process. The following is the response to the findings and recommendations from above mention audit.

Billed Services

Results

The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. However, Aviva did not always comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

Foster Home Visitation

One (50%) of the two homes visited was not adequately maintained as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

Detergents, cleaning solutions and a sealed bottle of alcoholic beverage were not adequately secured. The cleaning solutions and the alcoholic beverages were stored on top of the refrigerator, which made the access to younger children more difficult. However, the Title 22 regulations

require foster homes ensure items that could pose a potential safety hazard to the children are adequately secured.

Aviva's Response

As stated in Title 22, "medicines, disinfectants, cleaning solutions, poisons, firearms and other dangerous items shall be stored where inaccessible to children". "Storage areas for poisons, and firearms and other dangerous weapons shall be locked."

One home had laundry soap on the washing machine as the foster mother was in the process of doing laundry. This has been addressed with the foster parent and all laundry soap will be locked in between loads while a foster parent is doing the laundry.

A bottle of cleaning solution as well as a **sealed** bottle of alcoholic beverage was on the top of the refrigerator all the way in the back, again, inaccessible to the children living in the home. This has been addressed with the foster mother and all such items will not only be "adequately secured" but locked.

The home did not have an operable smoke detector installed in the hallway to the children's bedroom.

Aviva's Response

The foster home in question is only 964 square feet. There are a total of 5 smoke detectors in the home. One placed near the kitchen, one in each of the three bedrooms. The one noted that needed a battery at the time of the audit, was on the living room side of the hall and not mounted on the side of the wall in the hallway. However, the bedrooms and hallway of the home are all within approximately 10 feet and had 3 operable smoke detectors within that area. As per Title 22, "all smoke detectors shall be audible in each bedroom or sleeping room." As there was a smoke detector in each bedroom, this part of the regulation was satisfied. It is true that the one smoke detector needed a battery, and we believe that the intent of Title 22 regulations were met, but a new battery was placed in the smoke detector in question.

The carpeting and tile flooring throughout the home were worn out and dirty. The bathroom toilet and living room furniture were dirty and stained. Some of the interior walls of the house were in need of painting.

Aviva's Response

This home is more reflective of a very low socioeconomic family's home, with worn furnishings carpeting, etc. The tile flooring had been swept and mopped. The living room furniture, again worn and stained, and mainly the result of having small children eating, spilling and living in the home. The sofa cushions are cleaned regularly by the foster mother in the washing machine. The bathroom toilet has rust stains in the bowl, however again, cleaned regularly, thus not "dirty". The bedroom walls are in need of painting, but

this is more cosmetic and a reflection of the economic situation of the family. We agree that portions of the home were not as clean as we would have liked, we will step up monitoring in that area

The rear of the backyard was covered with overgrown weeds and dog feces. The tool shed was left open exposing unsafe tools and construction debris. In addition, an open fire pit filled with wood did not have a screen or other protective barriers.

Aviva's Response

The foster mother has a gardner who tends to the yard on a monthly basis. As the visit was conducted on the 25th of the month, the grass was in need of cutting. "Overgrown weeds" is an exaggeration.

The family has 3 dogs and, therefore, the dog feces were in the rear half of the back yard was not an accumulation of waste over time. This is cleaned up on a regular basis by the foster mother and her daughter.

The tool sheds have been secured and any wood has been removed from the area. The fire pit was only used under strict supervision when the family sits outside in the evening. However that has been removed as well.

The second home visited did not secure kitchen knives. The knives were stored in an upper cabinet where accessibility to the younger children in the home was difficult. However, the Title 22 regulations require foster parents ensure that knives are locked away. In addition, the emergency plan did not include an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of an emergency.

Aviva Response

The knives were stored in an upper cabinet above the oven/stove and entirely inaccessible to the younger children living in the home. However, this has been discussed with the foster parent and the knives will continue to be "secured and inaccessible" as stated in Title 22, but, at the suggestion of the auditor will be locked. In regards to the emergency plan, the foster parent has purchased an emergency ladder to be hung outside of the window for escape in this event.

Medical Services, Children's Case Files and Needs and Services Plans

One of the case files for two children who received medical services referrals from their physicians contained documentation that the children received the recommended medical services. The referrals were made in May 2007.

Aviva's Response

As noted, medical services were provided.

None of the case files for the two children who were six years old contained documentation that the children received weekly allowances. The agency management indicated that the foster parents provided purchased items in lieu of cash allowances because the two children were still too young to manage their own money. However, the Agency's Program Statement states that children in the age of three to eleven years old should receive allowances ranging from $1 to $7 per week depending on the maturity of the child.

Aviva's Response

Both children in question are six years of age and lack the maturity to manage money in an appropriate and responsible way. The County contract states "foster parents providing an allowance which is appropriate to the placed child's age and reasonably commensurate with peer group standards as described in the agency's program statement". The agency program statement states "allowances given for children ages 3 -11 should range from $1 to $7 per week, depending on the maturity level of the child." In both cases, these children have trouble keeping track of and or handling money as well as other personal items and thus, their foster parents, rather than giving them a set amount of money at a set time for them to misplace or lose at school, have discussed with the children that their "allowance" is given to them in toys, books, games, ice cream or other items the child may desire. Both children in question do not want for anything while residing in these foster homes. We believe that an addendum to the program statement for these very young children will be make their experience "less institutional," and explain more clearly the procedures for allowances for very young children. A notation will also be made on younger children's NSPs.

None of the five case files contained documentation that the children or DCFS social workers were informed about the Agency's personal rights and complaint policies as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Aviva's Response

Whenever a placement is made and the CSW is present, our agency's policies are presented to the child in an age-appropriate manner in the presence of the CSW. The "personal rights" of the children as well as the "form", is generated from licensing and not the Agency. Although the DCFS workers are familiar with "personal rights" as relating to foster children and as dictated by Title 22, in the future the agency will ensure that these two forms are included in the forms that the CSW's currently sign at placement, and not only signed by the child and foster parent.

Recommendations

1. Staff adequately monitors foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and Title 22 regulations.

Aviva's Response

The agency will continue to follow the County contract and Title 22 in ensuring that staff monitors foster homes and, to the extent reasonably possible, ensure that foster homes meet these requirements.

2. Foster parents adequately secure knives, detergents cleaning solutions and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to the children.

Aviva's Response

Recommendation was addressed in our earlier response.

3. Foster homes have operable smoke detectors in the hallways to the children's bedrooms.

Aviva's Response

We addressed this recommendation in our earlier response, made the correction, but do not believe this should be a finding.

4. Foster homes are clean for the well-being of the children.

Aviva's Response

Recommendation was addressed in our earlier response.

5. The yards of foster homes are well maintained and free of potential safety hazards.

Aviva's Response

We addressed this recommendation in our earlier response. Agency staff will monitor the yards of foster homes to ensure they are maintained and free of potential safety hazards.

6. Foster homes emergency plans include an adequate means of escape from the second story of the home in case of emergency.

Aviva's Response

We addressed this recommendation in our earlier response and a ladder has been purchased.

7. Children receive appropriate medical services recommended by their physicians.

Aviva's Response

We addressed this recommendation in our earlier response. The agency staff will ensure that any and all medical referrals are met within a timely manner, but DCFS must take responsibility for it's duties in this area when the origination of the referral is the department's responsibility (i.e. regional center referral).

8. Foster parents provide age-appropriate weekly allowances to children and consistent with the Program Statement and maintain the required documentation.

Aviva's Response

This recommendation was addressed in our earlier response.

9. Children and the County social workers receive comprehensive overview of the Agency's policies.

Aviva's Response

This recommendation was a documentation issue and not that the children and social workers fail to receive an overview of the agency's policies. As addressed in our earlier response, all policies are reviewed with the county social worker and in an age appropriate manner with the child. Agency staff will ensure that the personal rights and child's complaint **forms** are signed by the CSW at placement.

Client Verification

No recommendations for this section.

Staffing/Caseload Levels

No recommendations for this section.

Staffing Qualifications

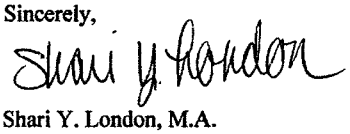
No recommendations for this section.

Prior Year Follow-Up

No recommendations for this section.

Once again, we thank Ms. Kim for her cooperation and support.

Sincerely,



Shari Y. London, M.A.
Foster Family & Adoption Agency Director

CC: Ira Kruskol, LCSW, Aviva, Vice President Community Services
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