# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
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October 9, 2008

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

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe FOR
Acting Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **NIÑOS LATINOS UNIDOS FOSTER HOMES, INC. FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW – A DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Niños Latinos Unidos Foster Homes, Inc. Foster Family Agency (Niños Latinos or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provider.

## Background

DCFS contracts with Niños Latinos, 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.

Niños Latinos 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 92 certified foster homes in which 197 DCFS children where placed at the time of our review. Niños Latinos' headquarters is located in the Fourth District and the Agency also has an office in the First District.

DCFS paid Niños Latinos 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, Niños Latinos 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 Niños Latinos approximately $3.8 million during Fiscal Year 2007-08.

## Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether Niños Latinos 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 the Agency's staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed the children and foster parents.

## Results of Review

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

Niños Latinos needs to ensure that foster homes, Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), and case files are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. For example:

- Three of the eight foster homes visited did not have a written disaster plan for the home and four of the homes were not conducting disaster drills with the children at least every six months.

- Three of the eight foster homes reviewed were not assessed by Niños Latinos to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home.

- Of the 20 NSPs reviewed:

  - Seventeen contained goals that were not measurable and specific and eleven contained goals that were not time limited.
  - Eight did not have documentation that the children or their foster parents had been offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs.
  - Sixteen were not approved by the children's DCFS social workers as required.

- Seven of the 20 case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the children's DCFS social workers were provided with monthly updates on the children's progress.

- Three children did not have a Termination Report prepared even though the children were discharged from the Agency.

- Four of the seven children taking psychotropic medications did not have monthly evaluations by the prescribing physician documented in the children's case files as required.

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

## Review of Report

We discussed our report with Niños Latinos on August 28, 2008. In their attached response, Niños Latinos indicates general 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 Niños Latinos 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
Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Fahri Milian, Chairperson, Niños Latinos Unidos Board of Directors
Pedro Travieso, Director of Programs and Operations, Niños Latinos Unidos FFA
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

# FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
# NIÑOS LATINOS UNIDOS FOSTER HOMES, INC.
# FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

## BILLED SERVICES

### Objective

Determine whether Niños Latinos Unidos Foster Homes, Inc. Foster Family Agency (Niños Latinos or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

### Verification

We visited eight of the 92 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Niños Latinos billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in October and November 2007, and interviewed nine foster parents and 14 of the 25 children placed in the eight homes. We also reviewed the case files for eight foster parents and 20 children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

### Results

Niños Latinos needs to ensure that foster homes are maintained in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Niños Latinos also needs to ensure that Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), case files, Quarterly Reports, and Termination Reports contain all the required information. In addition, the Agency needs to ensure that children are visited the required number of times and that children's dental and medical examinations are conducted within the required timeframes. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitation

- One (12%) of the eight foster homes visited did not adequately secure detergents and cleaning solutions.
- Three (37%) of the eight foster homes visited did not have a written disaster plan in the home.
- Four (50%) of the eight foster homes visited were not conducting disaster drills with the children at least every six months.
- One (12%) of the eight homes visited did not have an operable smoke detector in the hallway leading to the children's bedroom. In addition, two of the eight homes visited did not have a fire extinguisher as required.

- Three of the eight foster homes reviewed were not assessed by Niños Latinos to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home. At the time of our visit, three children were placed in each home.

Needs and Services Plans and Children's Case Files

- Seventeen (85%) of the 20 NSPs reviewed contained goals that were not specific and measurable. In addition, for 11 NSPs, the goals were not time limited.

- Five (25%) of the 20 NSPs reviewed did not indicate the reason the child was in placement.

- Eight (40%) of the 20 NSPs reviewed did not contain documentation that the children or the foster parents had been offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs.

- Sixteen (80%) of the 20 NSPs reviewed were not approved by the children's DCFS social worker as required.

- Three (15%) of the 20 case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the children were visited weekly by Niños Latinos' social workers during their first three months of placement as required. During this period, 13 required visits were not documented.

- Seven (35%) of the 20 case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the children's DCFS social workers were provided with monthly updates on the children's progress.

- Two (10%) of the 20 case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the children's dental and/or medical examinations were conducted. In addition, one of the children's initial medical examinations was conducted 93 days late.

- Four (57%) of the seven children taking psychotropic medications did not have monthly evaluations by the prescribing physician documented in the children's case files as required.

Quarterly Reports and Termination Reports

- Three (15%) of the 20 Quarterly Reports reviewed did not contain the date they were sent to the DCFS social worker. As a result, we could not determine if they had been sent to the DCFS social worker timely. In addition, the three Quarterly Reports did not address all the required information such as the children's progress in achieving short-term and long-term goals.

- Two Quarterly Reports did not contain an Emancipation Preparation Contract as required for children 14 years old and over. At the time of our review, five children were over 14 years old. In addition, the two Quarterly Reports did not address the status of the children's Transitional Independent Living Plan.

- Eleven (65%) of the 14 Termination Reports reviewed did not indicate the reason the children's placement ended. In addition, for three children, a Termination Report was not prepared even though the children were discharged from the Agency.

## Recommendations

**Niños Latinos management ensure:**

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

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

3. **Foster parents maintain a written disaster plan in the home and conduct and document disaster drills with children at least every six months.**

4. **Foster homes have operable smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.**

5. **Foster homes are maintained in accordance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.**

6. **Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.**

7. **NSPs contain goals that are specific, measurable, time limited, and indicate the reason the children are in placement.**

8. **Children and foster parents are offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs.**

9. **NSPs are approved by the children's DCFS social workers.**

10. **Children are visited weekly during the first three months of placement by the Agency's social workers.**

11. **DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.**

12. **Children's dental and medical examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.**

13. **Children taking psychotropic medications are seen monthly by the prescribing physician.**

14. **Quarterly Reports contain all the required information and are prepared within the required timeframes.**

15. **For children 14 years old and over, Quarterly Reports contain an Emancipation Preparation Contract and address the status of the children's Transitional Independent Living Plan.**

16. **Termination Reports contain all the required information and are prepared for all the children discharged from the Agency.**

## CLIENT VERIFICATION

### Objective

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

### Verification

We interviewed 14 children placed in eight Niños Latinos certified foster homes and nine foster parents to confirm the services the Agency billed to DCFS.

### Results

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

#### Recommendation

**There are no recommendations for this section.**

## STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

### Objective

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

## Results

The Agency's eight supervising social workers supervised an average of four social workers. However, five of the 29 social workers carried more cases than allowed by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. The five social workers carried an average caseload of 19 cases during the two-month period we reviewed.

### Recommendations

**Niños Latinos management:**

17. **Ensure that social workers do not maintain more cases than allowed by CDSS Title 22 regulations.**

18. **Hire additional social workers if the number of cases exceeds the maximum number allowed by CDSS Title 22 regulations.**

# STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

## Objective

Determine whether Niños Latinos 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 Niños Latinos' administrator and supervising social worker and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

## Results

Niños Latinos' administrator, supervising social workers, and social workers possessed the education and work experience required. In addition, the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff working on the County contract.

## Recommendation

**There are no recommendations for this section.**

NIÑOS LATINOS UNIDOS, INC.®
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
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September 12, 2008

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

From: Pedro V. Travieso, Director of Programs & Operations
Niños Latinos Unidos, Inc.

Subject: Response to Niños Latinos Unidos, Inc. Foster Family Agency Contract Review –A Department of Children and Family Services Provider

Dear Supervisors:

We would like first of all here to thank Brian Henricks and his staff at the Auditor-Controller's office for the professional manner in which they conducted the contract compliance review of our Foster Family Agency.

The following corrective action plan response will address the findings and recommendations made by the Auditor–Controller/ Contract Monitoring Division in their Foster Family Agency Contract Review Report:

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

   Niños Latinos Unidos, FFA (NLU) will conduct monthly clinical staff trainings on Title 22 regulations. In addition, our Quality Assurance Department (QA) Home Inspector will be sent out to make random home visits to monitor for compliance in this area.

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

   NLU currently requires its Foster Care Social Workers (FCSW's) to perform routine facility spot checks at each of their assigned homes, during their mandatory visits. Going forward, the focus of these ongoing checks will shift to addressing potential safety hazards in the home.

3. Foster parents maintain a written disaster plan in the home and conduct and document disaster drills with children at least every six months.

   Whereas all NLU certified foster parents are required to maintain a written (filled-out) Disaster Plan in their certified home, the visible presence of this document will be monitored by FCSW's on a regular basis. All FCSW's have been instructed to check and document for the existence of fully-completed, up-to-date, and prominently displayed Facility Disaster Plans in their assigned homes. An immediate corrective action (within 24 hrs.) has been required for any home found in non-compliance. Further, a letter will be sent out to all foster parents, to ensure compliance in this area.

   FCSW's will continue to be required to obtain and file documentation regarding the completion of disaster drills in their assigned homes. FCSW's will be required to include a check for compliance in this area during their next monthly personal audit of files. Further, the months of March and September have been designated as disaster drill months. In addition, QA will include "disaster drill compliance" as part of their routine monitoring.

4. Foster homes have operable smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

   A check for operable smoke detectors and fire extinguishers in our certified homes will, as addressed in item #2 above, be included as part of the routine spot checks performed by FCSW's at each of their assigned homes. The QA Department along with the Supervisors of Foster Care Social Work (SFCSW'S) will monitor to assure compliance in this area.

5. Foster homes are maintained in accordance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

   Whereas compliance with items # 1,2 and 4 above shall go a long way to assure a correction here, NLU will in addition move to: (1) Include topics on DCFS & CCL facility requirements, during the up-coming Fall class offerings to foster parents; (2) Include presentations on topics related to DCFS & CCL facility requirements, during up-coming staff meetings; and (3) Advice FCSW's to serve use of the agency's Home Inspector, requesting that a special visit to a home be made whenever they feel multiple compliance issues or else potentially dangerous facility concerns may be present. In any event, FCSW's will continue to be held accountable for monitoring, documenting/ reporting and, enforcing County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations in their assigned homes.

6. Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.

   The NLU Intake Department has been advised to pay close attention to placement calls, requiring that an "Assessment" to determine foster parent's ability to care for more than two children be performed prior to the placement of a third child in a certified home. On-duty NLU clinical supervisors will be held responsible for the completion of a written "Assessment", when applicable, to be filed along with all other placement documentation. The QA Department along with SFCSW's will monitor to assure compliance in this area.

7. NSP's contain goals that are specific, measurable, time limited, and indicate the reason the children are in placement.

   Initial training on the new NSP template has been completed. NLU social workers will receive further NSP specific training between now and November 1st. During these trainings FCSW's will receive specific instruction on how to best structure goals to be specific, and time limited. The QA Department along with SFCSW'S will monitor to assure compliance in this area.

8. Children and foster parents are offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSP's.

   As identified in the above item (# 8) NLU has already conducted an initial training on the new NSP template. Included was a discussion on the need and importance of having FCSW's offer children and their foster parents the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSP. The QA Department along with SFCSW's will monitor to assure compliance in this area.

9. NSP's are approved by the children's DCFS social worker.

   NLU SFCSW's will ensure that their FCSW's make reasonable documented efforts to obtain DCFS CSW's signatures on Needs and Services Plans. If a signature for approval of a report is not obtained within a week's time of the initial phoned request, the FCSW will either e-mail or fax a second request and then make a follow-up telephone call to the CSW. In the event approval is not received within a week's time of that second request, the FCSW will call the SCSW to request the approval. During our most recent in-service NLU Administration advised its clinical Staff on the absolute importance of documentation, without which most of their efforts become unrecognized at best, and at worst an affirmation of non-compliance or negligence.

10. Children are visited weekly during the first three months of placement by the agency's social workers.

    NLU SFCSW's will ensure that their assigned FCSW's make weekly visits to foster children during the first three months of placement. The QA Department along with SFCSW's will monitor to assure ongoing compliance. FCSW's were reminded of this requirement in the most recent all-staff meeting, along with the added requirement of providing timely and adequate documentation of such visits.

11. DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.

    During our most recent in-service training FCSW's were reminded of the importance of documenting their telephone contacts with CSW's, as well as the need to serve use of such opportunities to offer progress reports regarding their children. The QA Department along with SFCSW's will monitor to assure ongoing compliance in this area.

12. Children's dental and medical examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.

    In order to better assure compliance in this area, NLU will now require that the initial medical and dental examination be completed within the first 21 days of placement. Any valid excuse (i.e. a prior physical exam that was performed very recently) that is presented as a reason to forgo an initial medical or dental examination will have to be documented, and further approved by the agency SFCSW, with the consent of the CSW.

13. Children taking psychotropic medications are seen monthly by the prescribing physician.

    During a recent in-service training NLU Administration reminded its FCSW's of the importance of monitoring that children taking psychotropic medication are being seen by their prescribing physician on a monthly basis. Added, the new NSP template should serve FCSW's as a reminder to assure compliance in this area. SFCSW's will be reviewing all NSP's to further support FCSW's in their compliance effort.

14. Quarterly Reports contain all the required information and are prepared within the required timeframes.

    The new NSP template, which we have already implemented at NLU, will serve as a very effective tool allowing for FCSW's to have readily accessible information needed for the completion of Quarterly Reports. NLU Administration has instructed its SFCSW's to pay close attention to their review of Quarterly Reports prior to their submission, as well as to provide advance notice to their assigned FCSW's to remind them of quickly approaching deadlines. The QA Department has been instructed to keep SFCSW's abreast of all non-compliance concerns in this area.

15. For children 14 years old and over, Quarterly Reports contain an Emancipation Preparation Contract and address the status of the children's Transitional Independent Living Plan.

    All current FCSW's will be advised on the importance of providing an Emancipation Preparation Contract along with their Quarterly Reports addressing among other matters the status of the children's Transitional Independent Living Plan, for all children 14 years old and over in their caseload. The QA Department along with SFCSW's will monitor to assure ongoing compliance in this area.

16. Termination Reports contain all the required information and are prepared for all the children discharged from the Agency.

    All NLU FCSW's, SFCSW's, QA staff, and Intake Department staff have been made aware of our shared responsibility in ensuring that Termination Reports are complete and accurate, prior to filing. A new template will be developed for the purpose of ensuring that Termination Reports are completed accordingly. Further, The QA Department along with SFCSW's will monitor to assure ongoing compliance in this area.

17. Ensure that social workers do not maintain more cases than allowed by CDSS Title 22 regulations.

    It has long been a priority of NLU to ensure that FCSW caseloads are maintained below full capacity, as per (CDSS) Title 22 regulation. In the course of managing or navigating through, (1) maternity related leaves, (2) vacations, and (3) dealing with the career whims of what is for the most part a young and highly mobile clinical work force, among other disruptions, NLU is intent on remaining compliant.

18. Hire additional social workers if the number of cases exceeds the maximum number allowed by CDSS Title 22 regulations.

    Whereas NLU has, in spite of its year-round recruitment efforts, off and on had difficulty in finding eligible (Master level, Spanish bi-lingual) social workers (FCSW's) to meet varying caseload demand levels, all agency caseloads are at this time fully compliant. Our compliance efforts in this area are ongoing.

We very much appreciate the diligence, conscientious manner and ultimate feedback you have provided us in the course of performing this review. Rest assured that we at Niños Latinos Unidos will continue to use the findings here as a tool to assist us all in improving our provision of services to foster children. If you have any questions regarding this response, or if I may otherwise be of help in any other way, please call me at your earliest convenience.

With Regards,

Pedro V. Travieso, MSW, MBA
Director of Programs & Operations