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December 21, 2015

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
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From: Philip L. Browning
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OPTIMIST 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 Optimist Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in June 2014. The FFA has one site located in the Fifth Supervisorial District and provides services to County of Los Angeles DCFS foster children. According to the FFA's program statement, its purpose is "to provide culturally sensitive, comprehensive treatment, specialized education, and support services to abused, neglected, or at-risk children, youth, and their families, to establish stability within families and communities."

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 focus areas: Safety, Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, Tracking & Adjustment and Teamwork.

If you have any questions, your staff may contact me or Aldo Marin, Board Relations Manager, at (213) 351-5530.

PLB:EM:KR:gw

Attachments

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OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW (QAR)
FISCAL YEAR 2013-2014

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a quality assurance review (QAR) of Optimist Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in June 2014. 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 DCFS Children's Social Workers (CSWs), three certified foster parents, two FFA social workers, and one FFA administrator.

At the time of the QAR, the placed children's average number of placements was two, their overall average length of placement was 36 months and their average age was 14. None of the focus children were included as part of the sample for the 2013-2014 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 is 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 CSW, supports the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** - Focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the focus children, 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	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 sought for all significant family/Non-Related Extended Family Member (NREFM) through appropriate visits and other

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
			connecting strategies.
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 strengths and needs.	5	5	**Good Engagement Efforts** - To a strong degree, a rapport has been developed, such that the FFA staff, DCFS CSW, certified foster parent and the focus child 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 are functioning and support systems are generally understood. Information necessary to understand the child'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	5	**Good Teamwork** - The team contains most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives, including informal supports.

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 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 provided optimal safety status and a highly safe living situation for all of the focus children. The FFA ensured that children are safe in their placements and protective strategies are in place to keep the focus children safe from harm. All three focus children reported that their Certified Foster Homes (CFHs) are a safe place to live. One focus child reported he feels safe in his CFH; he says that he is well cared for by his Certified Foster Parents (CFPs). Another focus child reports that she feels safe, comfortable, respected and well cared for in her CFH. She states that her CFH is an ideal home that she has always dreamed of having. The third focus child reports he feels secure, protected and has a highly safe living environment with full support from his foster parents. The CFPs reported that the FFA provides them the ongoing training to assist them with providing optimum care to the focus children.

The three DCFS CSWs interviewed reported there were no safety issues regarding the FFA's CFHs. The FFA is generally providing a safe living environment free of harm for the placed children with competent, caring caregivers.

The FFA submitted three Special Incident Reports (SIRs) through the I-Track database during the past 30 days. None of the incidents involved the focus children. The SIRs included one medical related incident, one "other" incident regarding the CFP's concern regarding the children's behaviors being out of control, and one self-injurious behavior. The FFA social worker and FFA supervisor acted appropriately by making a face-to-face visit to the child with self-injurious behavior to assess the child. They also contacted the Department of Mental Health and were informed that the child was being assessed for a higher level of care, but was placed with the FFA in the interim. The FFA and

the CFP developed and put in place a safety plan to ensure the child's safety; no further incidents occurred. The child's DCFS CSW was contacted along with the County of Los Angeles Department of Mental Health. The FFA complied with SIR reporting guidelines. All SIRs were properly cross-reported and submitted timely via the I-Track database. According to Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section, there were no substantiated referrals or open investigations for the FFA during the last 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The FFA provides substantial permanence for the focus children. The FFA works with the focus children, the CFPs and with the DCFS CSW to assist in the development and determination of the most appropriate permanent plan for the focus children.

The FFA maintains contact with the DCFS CSWs and discusses case plan goals for the focus children. The FFA engages the DCFS CSWs, CFPs and the focus children in discussions of court orders. The DCFS CSWs report that the FFA and CFPs are supportive of the focus children's permanency plan.

The permanent plan for the three focus children is Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA). The first focus child indicated that the plan of PPLA is the "judge's plan for now." He states that he may be returned to his mother's care in the future once she obtains housing but he is content to remain in his current CFH until he reaches the age of majority. The second focus child reports that she feels well cared for in her CFH, she stated that she gets along with everyone in the home and enjoys being part of a family.

For the third focus child, family reunification efforts were unsuccessful because his parent's whereabouts remain unknown. The FFA and his DCFS CSW are making attempts to assist the focus child with establishing positive and appropriate extended family connections. The focus child expressed his interest to continue staying with his CFPs and remains in contact with his maternal grandmother.

Each of the CFPs expressed the willingness to provide lifelong connections with the focus children. They stated that they are willing to care for the focus children to the age of majority.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The FFA provided substantial placement stability for the three focus children. The FFA engages the DCFS CSWs and assesses each child's needs prior to placement to ensure a good match with the CFPs. Strategies include weekly visits to the CFH by FFA social workers to assess the well-being of the focus children and weekly family meetings with CFPs and the focus children. The FFA also provides CFPs with support groups and ongoing training.

The focus children reported that they feel close to their CFPs. The CFPs reported that the FFA social workers visit on a weekly basis and discuss how the focus children are doing in the CFHs. The focus children and the CFPs reported that the FFA social workers talk to the CFPs and the focus children separately and then everyone meets together. The CFPs also report that the training, which is provided by the FFA is very helpful in maintaining stable placements for the focus children.

None of the focus children have had placement disruptions since being placed with the FFA. The DCFS CSWs for the focus children reported that the FFA provides updates on the focus children's adjustment in the certified foster homes, community and school.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: The FFA has established and maintained acceptable family connections for the focus children. The FFA monitors family visits and provides transportation. The FFA staff, CFPs and DCFS CSWs have worked together to assist placed children to maintain their connections with their family members. If children do not wish to have any visitation, the FFA, CFPs and DCFS CSWs will encourage and support all placed children to maintain connections with their relatives. The FFA follows the court ordered visitation plans and engages in discussions of the visitation plan with DCFS CSWs, CFPs and placed children, on a regular basis.

The FFA conducts monitored visits at the FFA office. Transportation for visits is provided by the CFPs. When the CFPs are unable to transport the focus children to visits, the FFA social workers will transport in order to ensure that a visit is not missed. Prior to a scheduled visit, the FFA will contact the birth parent or the person scheduled to visit the focus child to confirm that the visit will occur. If a visit is cancelled, the FFA will immediately contact the CFPs and have them schedule an alternative activity for the focus children. The FFA social workers and the CFPs provide an opportunity for the focus children to express how they feel about their visits. The focus children are encouraged to maintain telephone contact with family members and friends.

The first focus child has face-to-face visits with family members and maintains telephone contact. He reports that his visits with family are okay. The two other focus children maintain regular telephone contact with family members; both have chosen not to participate in face-to-face visits due to their feelings regarding their families. The FFA staff and the CFPs for these focus children reported that they continue to discuss with the focus children about the importance of keeping communication open with family members. The DCFS CSWs reported that there are no problems with the FFA in the area of visitation.

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 and maintained good engagement efforts with key parties. The FFA developed a strong rapport and consistently engages the focus children, CFPs, DCFS CSWs and therapists. Engagement efforts are made frequently on an ongoing basis and reasonable efforts have been made by the FFA to engage the focus children, CFPs, DCFS CSWs and therapists.

All of the focus children reported that their concerns were heard and they feel respected. The focus children reported that they could discuss their issues or concerns with their CFPs.

Each of the CFPs reported that prior to the focus children's placement, they were given information about their histories. They reported that they work closely with the FFA social worker and DCFS CSW to ensure that the focus children's needs are met. Each of the focus children's DCFS CSWs expressed ongoing support and communication with FFA social workers and the CFPs.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The FFA provides a substantial array of supports and services that match intervention strategies identified in the focus children's case plans. Each of the focus children is receiving therapeutic services to address mental health needs. The FFA provides all placed children the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities of their choice. The FFA social workers and the CFPs also provide support to assist the focus children in making progress towards their case plan goals.

The CFPs reported that they are included in the discussion of service needs of the focus children. The FFA in collaboration with the focus children, CFPs, and DCFS CSWs review and modify the goals as necessary. There is a constant review of resources to ensure positive outcomes for the focus children. The focus children's DCFS CSWs report that they are contacted by the FFA and are asked to provide input in regards to the needs of the focus children. All of the focus children reported that their needs are being met.

The first focus child has been faced with some challenges in school and in his CFH. He is receiving tutoring and weekly therapy sessions. The second focus child is a teen mother who participates in weekly therapy sessions and parenting classes. The third focus child reports that his FFA social worker, his CFPs, DCFS CSW and wraparound team are all aware of his needs and they are willing to work with him and appropriately engage the resources he needs. The focus children's service providers reported that they participate in discussions with the FFA regarding the needs of the focus children.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The FFA generally understands the focus children's functioning and support systems. The focus children's strengths and underlying needs are recognized and understood by the FFA and all key parties. The services provided such as therapy, tutoring and emancipation services are geared to assist the focus children toward making progress and improving their functioning and well-being. For example, the FFA social worker and the CFP assessed the parenting skills of the second focus child and determined that she needed assistance in learning how to care for her infant; the FFA consulted with the DCFS CSW and it was decided that the focus child would benefit from the participation in parenting classes, which she was enrolled in. One FFA social worker reported that during weekly visits she gets an update from the CFP and the focus child as to how things are going. The FFA social worker assesses the focus child's behavior to determine if any additional services are needed to assist the focus child meeting his treatment goals.

Each of the focus children expressed being well-cared for by their CFPs and that their FFA social workers were there to help them. The DCFS CSWs reported that they are updated monthly on the focus children's progress by the FFA social workers and the CFPs.

Teamwork (5 Minimally Adequate to Fair Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The FFA provides good teamwork, ensuring that most of the important supporters in the focus children's life are involved. Each of the focus children is aware of their team members. DCFS CSWs, FFA social workers, CFPs, therapists and identified family members are working collaboratively as a team. In essence, the focus children's respective teams appeared to be attuned with the children's strengths and needs and are providing support in addressing their identified issues.

The FFA ensures that members meet and collaborate through weekly meetings and face-to-face contact. Each team member is available to provide the best service for the focus children. The team members have ongoing effective communication in regard to the focus children's needs. The focus children and their CFPs reported that the children were benefitting from the services they receive.

The focus children reported that their needs were being met by their teams. They reported they are treated as a valued member of the teams. All three focus children reported knowing who their team members were and reported that they can speak either to their therapist or to their DCFS CSW to call a team meeting. The focus children reported participating in team meetings on a regular basis with their DCFS CSW, their FFA social workers, CFPs, therapist, and other service providers.

The DCFS CSWs and the CFPs reported that they are included in discussions and team meetings regarding the well-being of the focus children.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The FFA's intervention strategies, supports, and services provided to the focus children are generally responsive to changing conditions. The focus children appeared well adjusted. The FFA has ensured that the DCFS CSWs were regularly updated with any changes with regards to the focus children.

The FFA is aware of the ongoing and changing needs of placed children and modifies the needed services accordingly. Information of intervention strategies, supports, and services are communicated with the key members of the team. During weekly visits to the CFHs, the FFA social workers through interviews with the CFPs and focus children track the focus children's behavior in the foster home, school and the community.

The FFA social workers develop Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), which address progress towards the case plan goals, adjustments and any modification to the goals to ensure positive outcomes for the focus children. The NSPs are developed by the FFA social workers in conjunction with the DCFS CSWs, CFPs, therapists and the focus children.

One focus child was doing poorly academically in school. The CFP met with school officials to discuss what was needed to ensure improvement. The CFP teamed with the FFA social worker and weekly tutoring was arranged to ensure that the homework assignments were completed and that the focus child had a clear grasp and understanding of his subjects. As part of an incentive to improve academically, the FFA promised to enroll the focus child in an extracurricular activity that he had

expressed an interest in joining. The focus child was able to improve his grades and the FFA enrolled the focus child in the activity, which resulted in a positive outcome for the focus child.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In June 2014, OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2013-2014 contract compliance review. Technical support included maintaining sufficient recreational equipment/educational resources; disposing of expired food; maintaining money and clothing allowance logs; obtaining the County CSW's authorization to implement NSPs; tracking children's progress towards NSP goals; developing timely and comprehensive NSPs; enrolling children in school within three days of placement; maintaining children's current report card/progress report; tracking children's academic progress; allowing age-appropriate children to be involved in the selection of their clothing; encouraging or assisting children in the development of life books/photo albums; and ensuring children complete high school prior to being discharged.

In November 2014, quality assurance reviewer discussed with the FFA the results of the QAR. The FFA scored at or above the minimum acceptable score; 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.