County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 351-5602

PHILIP L. BROWNING
Director

Board of Supervisors
HILDA L. SOLIS
First District
MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Second District
SHEILA KUEHL
Third District
DON KNABE
Fourth District
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

February 9, 2016

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: Philip L. Browning
Director

GARCES RESIDENTIAL CARE SERVICES GROUP HOME 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 Garces Residential Care Services Group Home (the Group Home) in March 2015. The Group Home has one site located in the First Supervisorial District. The Group Home provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS foster children and youth. According to the Group Home's program statement, its stated mission is, "to provide services to court dependent developmentally disabled children."

The QAR looked at the status of the placed children's safety, permanency and well-being during the most recent 30 days and the Group Home's practices and services over the most recent 90 days. The Group Home scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all 9 focus areas: Safety, Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, Teamwork and Tracking & Adjustment.

The Group Home did not require a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) as the Group Home scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all focus areas of the QAR. In August 2015, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the Group Home to discuss results of the QAR.

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
Carlos Garces, Executive Director, Garces Residential Care Services Group Home
Lajuannah Hills, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

GARCES RESIDENTIAL CARE SERVICES GROUP HOME
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 Garces Residential Care Services Group Home (the Group Home) in March 2015. The purpose of the QAR is to assess the Group Home's service delivery and to ensure that the Group Home 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 Group Home'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), two Group Home administrators, and one Group Home social worker.

At the time of the QAR, the placed children's average number of placements was two, their overall average length of placement was 15 months and their average age was 16. 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 Group Home 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 Group Home 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	G H QAR Score	G H QAR Rating
Safety - The degree to which the Group Home 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 Group Home staff, caregivers and CSW, support the plan.	5	5	**Good Status** - The focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the children, Group Home staff, caregivers, caseworker, and team members have confidence will endure lifelong.
Placement Stability - The degree to which the Group Home 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 settings and enjoy positive and enduring relationships with primary caregivers, key adult supporters, and peers. There is no history of instability over the past 12 months and little likelihood of future disruption. Only age-appropriate changes are expected in school settings.
Visitation - The degree to which the Group Home support important connections being maintained through appropriate visitation.	5	5	**Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections** - Generally effective connections are being sought for all significant family/Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFM) through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	G H QAR Score	G H QAR Rating
Engagement - The degree to which the Group Home 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 Group Home staff, DCFS CSW, and the focus children feel heard and respected. Reports indicate that good, consistent efforts are being used by the Group Home staff as necessary to find and engage the focus children, caregivers and other key people.
Service Needs - The degree to which the Group Home 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 Group Home 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 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	5	**Good Teamwork** - The team contains most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's life, including informal supports. The team has formed a good, dependable working system that meets, talks, and plans together; face-to-face family team meetings are held periodically and at critical points to develop plans.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	G H QAR Score	G H QAR Rating
Tracking & Adjustment - The degree to which the Group Home 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 child 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 Group Home's safety status was optimal. The Group Home's program administrator, Group Home social worker, and staff ensure that the focus children feel safe in placement. The Group Home administrator stated that they contract with an outside agency that provides training in safety to his staff monthly; this training includes identifying behaviors of the placed children that could possibly lead to unsafe actions. The Group Home administrator reported that he engages with each focus child daily to inquire as to how they are doing at the Group Home and at school. The Group Home administrator stated that he believes the focus children's behavior will match that of their surroundings; so he directs his staff to also work to create a safe physical environment by keeping the Group Home clean and neat. The Group Home social worker stated that she provides the staff with monthly training on a number of topics with safety as the main goal for placed focus children.

The Group Home adhered to policies and procedures for submitting Special Incident Reports (SIRs), as all SIRs were submitted timely and properly cross-reported to all required parties. The Group Home submitted two SIRs via the I-Track database in the last 30 days. The SIRs did not pose a child safety concern. One SIRs involved a focus child. The first incident reported as staff related and Other, involved a placed child becoming verbally aggressive toward the Group Home staff and refusing to get out of bed and prepare for school. The placed child subsequently apologized. The Group Home staff monitored his behavior for the remainder of the day and reported no further incidents. The second incident involved the third focus child who failed to complete several homework assignments during the first semester of school and refused to do the make-up assignments when given the opportunity by his teacher. The Group Home administrator and Group Home manager spoke with the focus child and encouraged him to complete his school assignments.

The Group Home administrator limited the focus child's community pass privileges so that he would have more time at the Group Home to complete his school assignments. In addition, the Group Home administrator and Group Home manager have sought additional tutoring services from the school district. The Group Home administrator stated that they will also seek tutoring for the focus child through the community program, School on Wheels. The Group Home manager stated that this is a new program and it may offer some benefits that may meet the needs of the focus child.

Based on the QAR, the protective strategies used by the Group Home were fully operable and dependable. All three focus children stated that they felt safe in the Group Home and that the staff was always available for them to speak with, if they had a concern for their safety. The DCFS CSWs interviewed reported that they did not have any safety concerns regarding the care that the focus children received. The Out-of-Home Care Investigations Section reported that there were no substantiated referrals or open investigations for the Group Home during the last 30 days.

Permanency (5 Good Status)

Permanency Overview: The Group Home provides good permanence. The Group Home administrator stated that they assess each focus child carefully before placement to ensure they will have the best opportunity to obtain positive outcomes in their Group Home. The Group Home administrator stated that he also talks to the child's parents, DCFS CSW, and his staff before accepting children for placement in order to ensure the best placement match and thereby limit placement disruptions. The Group Home staff works with the focus children, their parents, and the DCFS CSWs to assist in the development of the permanent plans for the focus children.

The Group Home social worker stated that she discusses the permanent and concurrent plan with each of the focus children. The Group Home staff demonstrates efforts to assist the focus children in achieving their permanent goals by scheduling regular team meetings to discuss permanent options for the focus children. The team meetings include the focus child, Group Home administrator, Group Home manager, Group Home social worker, and the DCFS CSWs.

The Group Home maintains contact with the DCFS CSW through team meetings, phone calls and emails to discuss the permanent plan for the focus children. The Group Home staff meets with each DCFS CSW during their scheduled monthly visit to the Group Home to discuss the focus child's individual case plan goals. The permanent plans, goals, and progress made by each of the focus children is also discussed and evaluated weekly by the Group Home social worker and the Group Home staff. The DCFS CSWs reported that the Group Home staff follows DCFS recommendations and supports the case plan goals for the focus children.

The first focus child's permanent plan is Permanent Planned Living Arrangement. The focus child who is a Non-Minor Dependent met with his DCFS CSW, Group Home social worker, and the Group Home administrator and decided to enter the extended foster care program. The focus child stated that he will apply for transitional housing after he graduates from high school this year.

The second focus child's permanent plan is family reunification with his mother and his concurrent plan is adoption with an extended family member. The DCFS CSW stated that they are working with his mother to identify any appropriate and willing family members and non-related extended family members as potential placement options for the focus child. The focus child has stated that he would like to live with his mother.

The third focus child's permanent plan is reunification with his legal guardian. The focus child's concurrent plan is adoption, if reunification with his legal guardian is not successful. The focus child stated that he is willing to maintain contact with his legal guardian; however, he does not want to return to his legal guardian's home. The focus child stated that he would like to remain in his Group Home for the time being. According to the focus child, he would like to be adopted and live in a home with both, a mother and father. The DCFS CSW stated that they would explore this permanency option.

Placement Stability (5 Good Stability)

Placement Stability Overview: The focus children have good stability in placement and good positive relationships with the Group Home administrator and staff. There have been no placement disruptions for the three focus children. The Group Home utilizes several strategies to maintain placement stability for placed children. The Group Home works with the community to provide a wide range of services to address the needs of the focus children. The Group Home administrator provides the staff with monthly support and training geared towards meeting the needs of placed children and to assist them in establishing positive relationships with the placed children, further ensuring placement stability.

The focus children reported that the Group Home is meeting all of their needs, and they have formed a good, supportive relationship with the staff. The focus children expressed a desire to remain in this Group Home.

The DCFS CSWs stated that they did not have any concerns about the focus children's placement stability at the Group Home. The Group Home staff discuss placement issues and concerns as they arise with each focus child. In addition, the Group Home staff meets with each DCFS CSW during their scheduled monthly visit to discuss the focus child's individual plans with placement being a part of the discussion. During weekly meetings with Group Home staff, placement stability is discussed and evaluated for each focus child.

Visitation (5 Substantially Acceptable Visitation & Connections)

Visitation Overview: Fully effective connections are excellently maintained for all of the focus children and their family through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies. The Group Home follows the recommendations and visitation guidelines set by the DCFS CSWs. The Group Home staff encourages the focus children to maintain regular contact with their families. The Group Home administrator stated they discuss and review the visitation plans during monthly meetings with the DCFS CSWs, focus children, and Group Home staff.

The first focus child stated that he has visits with his mother and sister when his mother's work schedule permits. The focus child's mother reported to the Group Home staff that she works everyday and it is difficult to get time off work. Further, she now resides in another county farther away from the Group Home, making it difficult to have consistent visits with the focus child. The focus child maintains weekly contact with his mother by cell phone and through Facebook. The DCFS CSW stated the focus child has unmonitored visits and has been provided a bus pass and Metrolink train pass for visitation. The Group Home administrator stated that they have also assisted the focus child with visits by transporting him to the Metrolink station for weekend visits with his mother and sister.

The second focus child stated he enjoys his bi-monthly visits with his mother and siblings on Sunday at the park. The Group Home staff transports the focus child and monitors the visits. The second focus child stated that he looks forward to spending time with his family during visits.

The third focus child has unmonitored visits with his legal guardian and siblings. He initially stated that he did not want to visit with his legal guardian and siblings. However, the DCFS CSW and the Group Home staff have continued to encourage the focus child to maintain contact with his family. The focus child changed his mind and decided to visit with his family once a month.

The DCFS CSWs indicated that the Group Home staff makes great efforts to ensure the focus children's visits are successful.

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 Group Home provides good engagement for the focus children. The Group Home administrator initiates an intentional engagement process at the start of the focus child's placement by interviewing the focus children after speaking with their DCFS CSW. The Group Home administrator stated that he also contacts the focus child's parents to speak with them about their concerns. In addition, he stated that he meets with his staff to discuss his assessment and gets their input on the possible placement. The Group Home administrator stated that their program is structured to engage and build a working relationship with the focus children and their families, in an effort to achieve the best outcomes for the focus children.

The Group Home administrator stated that all of the focus children interact with some of the members of their team on a daily basis. The Group Home administrator stated that he stresses to his staff to engage the focus children when they return from school, as they do not want the focus children to just go to their rooms and isolate themselves. In addition, the Group Home staff meets with the DCFS CSWs during their scheduled monthly visit to the Group Home to discuss the focus child's individual case plan goals. The focus children expressed a feeling that they could speak with any of the Group Home staff members to discuss a need or concern, and they felt they were heard. The DCFS CSWs reported that the Group Home engages key parties in the focus children's life.

Service Needs (5 Good Supports & Services)

Service Needs Overview: The Group Home provides an excellent array of residential supports and services that fully match intervention strategies identified for the focus children. The Group Home makes certain the focus children's needs are met and that identified services are being implemented as stated in their case plans. The focus children reported that their needs are being met. The Group Home makes sure there is a review of resources to ensure positive outcomes for the focus children occur. The focus children receive individual counseling from the Group Home social worker to address goal attainment, academics, family, life skills, and any issues within the Group Home.

Although the frequency of therapy differs, each focus child also receives individual therapy at a community agency.

The first focus child stated that he participates in weekly individual therapy. The Group Home administrator stated that the focus child is responsible for attending therapy and rescheduling his appointments, if he is unable to attend; since he is legally an adult, the Group Home cannot make mental health or medical decisions on his behalf. However, the Group Home social worker encourages the focus child to attend therapy. His therapist also calls and emails the focus child to encourage him to attend therapy. The focus child participated in a 10-week substance abuse and anger management therapy at his high school. Additionally, the Group Home staff created a reward system for the focus child to motivate him to complete his homework assignments.

The second focus child participates in individual therapy twice a week from a community agency and individual counseling from the Group Home social worker. The focus child stated that he enjoys his therapy sessions and added that therapy helps him by providing a place for him to discuss and work through his problems. The focus child receives mental health services on a monthly basis for the purpose of medication management. The Group Home manager and social worker attend school related activities to support the focus child. The Group Home manager also communicates with his teacher twice a week. In addition, the Group Home manager uses the school's web-based program called Parent Connect, which allows parents to communicate online with teachers as well as monitor their homework assignments and track their progress throughout the school year. The focus child is receiving tutoring services at his school. The Group Home staff reported that the focus child is doing well in school.

The third focus child participates in individual therapy once a month. The focus child also receives Wraparound Services monthly. The Group Home social worker stated that the Wraparound social worker discusses how the focus child is adjusting to the placement, school, medication management, and his relationship with his legal guardian.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they communicate with the Group Home on a regular basis to make certain that the appropriate services are in place for the focus children.

Assessment & Linkages (5 Good Assessments and Understanding)

Assessment & Linkages Overview: The focus children's functioning, challenges, earlier life traumas and support systems are generally understood by all parties involved. The Group Home has a comprehensive understanding of the focus children's functioning and support systems. The Group Home staff assesses the focus children's needs and provides intervention to assist them with functioning effectively in their daily settings. The services and supports are assessed monthly by the Group Home staff to determine if the focus children are making progress toward their case plan goals. Educational supports such as tutoring are provided. The Group Home managers and Group Home social workers work collaboratively with the focus children's teachers to make sure the focus children's educational goals are met.

The Group Home staff determines if the focus children are making progress towards their Needs and Services Plan (NSP) goals by observing if there is a reduction in incidents, occurrences and acting out behaviors exhibited by the focus children. The Group Home social worker and Group Home staff

discuss their assessments of the focus children and make changes to their case plan and NSP goals if needed.

The Group Home has ensured that the services required to support the focus children are being received. The Group Home seeks to link the focus children with services that are required to increase their overall well-being. For example, the Group Home manager met with the third focus child when it was learned that he failed to complete school homework assignments. The Group Home administrator searched and found a community tutoring program to assist the focus child.

The DCFS CSWs reported that they communicate and participate with the Group Home staff and other key players on a regular basis in order to determine the appropriate services for each focus child. They stated that the Group Home has ensured the agreed upon services were provided to each focus child.

Teamwork (5 Good Teamwork)

Teamwork Overview: The Group Home administrator makes certain that meetings are held regularly to discuss permanent options for each of the focus children. The Group Home involves most of the important supporters and decision makers in the focus children's lives. The team, consists of the DCFS CSW, Group Home administrator, Group Home social worker, Group Home managers, family members, legal guardians, the focus children and their therapist. The team has formed a good, dependable working system that has ongoing discussions and works collaboratively in case planning. The team members for each of the focus children appear to be attuned to the focus children's strengths and needs, and they ensure the necessary supports are available to assist the focus children in addressing their underlying needs related to child abuse and neglect.

The Group Home social worker, managers, and staff meet with the focus children weekly to discuss any concerns. In addition, the Group Home social worker meets monthly with the Group Home administrator, Group Home managers and the other treatment team members to review and discuss the focus children's progress and any modifications to their treatment plans or to strategies needed to assist them in making progress. The Group Home social worker stated that she maintains regular contact with the focus children's DCFS CSWs, via face-to-face contacts, by telephone or via email.

The Group Home staff reported that they meet with the focus children and their DCFS CSWs to discuss the focus child's progress and needs during their monthly visit to the Group Home. The focus children receive ongoing feedback regarding their participation and progress toward their case plan goals from the Group Home staff and service providers. All three focus children stated during the interview that they are satisfied with the teamwork demonstrated by the team members. The focus children reported that they are included in their team, and feel respected.

The Group Home makes use of Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings to discuss case plan goals for the focus children. The DCFS CSWs reported that they maintain regular contact with the Group Home to coordinate any meetings and they continuously team with the Group Home to decide the case plan goals that best fit the needs of the focus children. The DCFS CSWs stated that they are invited to the CFT meetings that are held monthly by the Group Home on behalf of the focus children.

Tracking & Adjustment (5 Good Tracking & Adjustment Process)

Tracking & Adjustment Overview: The Group Home's intervention strategies, supports and services being provided to the focus children were generally responsive to changing conditions. Each week, the Group Home social worker meets with the focus children individually to track their progress and update the Group Home staff. The focus children's team evaluates and selects the best resources to assist the focus children in reaching their treatment plan goals, and when progress is not made, the Group Home social worker and Group Home administrator in collaboration with the focus children and their team members, modify the goals as necessary.

For example, when the Group Home staff was made aware that the first focus child was not on target to meet his educational goals, the Group Home social worker and the Group Home manager met with the focus child to discuss his educational goals. The team decided to provide him with tutoring services to assist him in improving his academic performance. According to the Group Home social worker, the second and third focus children are on track to meet their quarterly goals, therefore, there was no need to make modifications to their treatment plan.

The DCFS CSWs reported that if treatment goals are not sufficient, the goals are modified and they are involved in making the necessary modifications.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In June 2015, OHCMD provided the Group Home with technical support related to findings indicated in the 2014-2015 Contract Compliance Review, which consisted of the following: discussion of timely reporting of SIRs; reducing Community Care Licensing Division violations; documenting contacts on NSPs; ensuring staff have timely criminal background checks; and timely health screenings.

In August 2015, the OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the Group Home to discuss the results of the QAR. The Group Home was not required to submit a Quality Improvement Plan as they scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all 9 focus areas. The OHCMD Quality Assurance staff will continue to provide the Group Home with ongoing technical support, training and consultation.