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July 21, 2016

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
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From: Philip L. Browning
Director

COUNSELING & RESEARCH ASSOCIATES DBA MASADA HOMES 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 the Counseling & Research Associates dba Masada Homes Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in October 2015. The FFA has four offices; one located in the Second Supervisorial District, two offices located in the Fifth Supervisorial District and one office in San Bernardino County. The FFA provides services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children. According to the FFA's Program Statement, its stated purpose is, "to provide children with a stable and supportive living environment while preparing them for reunification with their biological families or placement."

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

In March 2016, OHCMD Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR. The FFA did not require a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) as the FFA scored at or above the minimum score in all nine areas of the QAR.

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

PLB:KR
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Attachments

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
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COUNSELING & RESEARCH ASSOCIATES DBA MASADA HOMES
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW (QAR)
FISCAL YEAR 2015-2016

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of the Counseling & Research Associates dba Masada Homes Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in October 2015. 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 QAR focuses on the focus child's functioning during the most recent 30-day period and for Practice Indicators, the QAR 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 Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Children's Social Workers (CSWs), three FFA staff members and three certified foster parents.

At the time of the QAR, the FFA supervised 79 DCFS placed children in 40 certified foster homes. The focus children's average number of placements was one, their overall average length of placement was 21 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 Contract Administration Division's (CAD's) 2015-2016 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 focus 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 staff and certified foster parents ensure that the focus children are free of abuse, neglect and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.	6	6 - Optimal Safety Status	The focus children have a highly safe living situation with fully reliable and competent caregivers and are protected well at all times. Protective strategies are fully operative and dependable.
Permanency - The degree to which the focus children are living with certified foster parents, who are likely to remain in this role until the focus children reach adulthood, or the focus children are in the process of returning home or transitioning to a permanent home and the focus children, the FFA staff, certified foster parents, DCFS CSWs and if applicable, Department of Probation Officers (DPOs) support the plan.	5	5 - Good Status	The focus children have substantial permanence. The focus children live in a family setting that the focus children, FFA staff, caregivers and team members have confidence will endure lifelong.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Placement Stability - The degree to which the FFA staff and certified foster parents ensure that the focus children's daily living, learning and work arrangements are stable and free from risk of disruptions. Known risks are being managed to achieve stability and reduce the probability of future disruptions.	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 in either setting over the past 30 days.
Visitation - The degree to which the FFA staff and certified foster parents support maintaining important connections with significant family members/Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFMs) through appropriate visitation and other means.	5	5 - Substantially Acceptable Maintenance of Visitation & Connections	Generally effective family connections are being sought for all significant family members/NREFMs through appropriate visits and other connecting strategies. All appropriate family members/NREFMs have regular visits.
Engagement - The degree to which the FFA staff and certified foster parents working with the focus children, their family members/NREFMs and other team members for the purpose of building a genuine, trusting and collaborative working relationship with the ability to concentrate on the focus children's strengths and needs.	5	5 - Good Engagement Efforts	To a strong degree, a rapport has been developed, such that the FFA staff, DCFS CSWs, DPOs (if applicable), caregivers and the focus children feel heard and respected. Reports indicate that good, consistent efforts are being used.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Service Needs - The degree to which the FFA staff and certified foster parents involved with the focus children work toward ensuring the focus children's needs are met and identified services are being implemented and supported and are specifically tailored to meet the focus children's unique needs.	5	5 - Good Supports and Services	A good and substantial array of supports and services substantially matches intervention strategies identified in the focus children's case plans. The services are generally helping the focus children make progress toward planned outcomes.
Assessment & Linkages - The degree to which the FFA staff and certified foster parents involved with the focus children and their family members/NREFMs understand the focus children's strengths, needs, preferences and underlying needs and services provided are regularly assessed to ensure progress is being made toward case plan goals.	5	5 - Good Assessment and Understanding	The focus children's functioning and support systems are generally understood. Information necessary to understand the focus children's strengths, needs and preferences is frequently updated.
Teamwork - The degree to which the "right people" for the focus children and their family members/NREFMs, have formed a working team that meets, talks and/or 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. The team has formed a good, dependable working system that meets, talks and/or plans together.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
Tracking & Adjustment - The degree to which the FFA staff and certified foster parents involved with the focus children and their family members/NREFMs are carefully tracking the progress that the focus children are 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 the focus children's status is occurring.

OHCMD conducted the last QAR of the FFA in May 2015 and noted an opportunity for improvement in the focus areas of Safety, Permanency, and Teamwork. In October 2015, the Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR and to provide the FFA with technical support to address methods for improvement in these areas. Based on the information below, it appears that the FFA showed improvement in the areas of Safety, Permanency, and Teamwork on their 2015-2016 QAR.

STATUS INDICATORS
(Measured over last 30 days)

Status Indicators	Safety	Permanency	Placement Stability	Visitation
2014-2015 Scores	5	4	5	5
2015-2016 Scores	6	5	5	5

In the area of Safety, OHCMD found that the FFA had implemented the 2014-2015 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to enhance the quality of care and supervision provided to the placed children in its care. During the last QAR, a foster parent failed to provide adequate supervision of a placed child, and the child was injured. Concerns were also noted regarding the FFA's reporting of special incidents. To address the findings of the last QAR, the FFA is providing ongoing training to certified foster parents regarding reporting of special incidents with emphasis on safety and supervision of the placed children. The training assists certified foster parents to recognize situations that may pose a safety risk to the placed children. It appears the FFA has demonstrated improvement in the area of Safety. The FFA ensures that the placed children are in safe homes that provide for the placed children's basic needs. The FFA Social Workers visit with the focus children weekly to check on their well-being. There were no injuries sustained by the placed children during the current review period. The

focus children reported that they feel safe and comfortable in their certified foster homes. The DCFS CSWs for the focus children did not report any child safety concerns.

In the area of Permanency, the OHCMD found that the FFA implemented the 2014-2015 QIP to enhance permanency services to the placed children and to ensure the placed children are making progress towards achieving their permanency goals. During the last QAR, the OHCMD found that the FFA had not documented their efforts or the progress made by the focus children toward achieving their permanency goals, and there were no alternative plans developed to ensure safeguard if the permanency goal was not achieved. Additionally, the FFA had not referred the focus children to mentoring programs or other programs to assist the focus children in creating positive, lifelong connections. To address the findings, the FFA would include the topic of Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) in its ongoing training curriculum for FFA staff, and Permanency would be addressed during weekly staff supervision meetings and at the time of the NSP review. The FFA would also discuss mentoring programs with the placed children and document the discussion in the placed children's progress notes. During the 2015-2016 QAR, the FFA demonstrated improvement in the area of Permanency. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents are supportive of ensuring permanency for the focus children. The FFA is providing services that correspond with each focus child's permanency plan. The permanency plan for two focus children is Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA). Both of the focus children are doing well academically, and they have expressed a desire to attend college and reside on campus. Their certified foster parents are supportive of their goals, and they are preparing the focus children to become self-sufficient. They are teaching the focus children about being responsible, how to budget, shop, do laundry and cook. Although the third focus child's permanency plan is Family Reunification, he is receiving independent living skills training. The focus child expressed that he wants to reunify with his mother, but he understands his mother is unable to care for him at this time. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA is supportive of the permanency plans established by DCFS.

The FFA is providing substantial stability for the focus children. The FFA and the certified foster parents are providing stable home environments, and the focus children appeared happy, healthy, and well cared for. The focus children have established positive relationships with their certified foster parents, and the focus children expressed wanting to remain in their certified foster homes until they have graduated high school. The certified foster parents shared that they care about the well-being of the focus children, and they stated that they want the focus children to remain in their care as long as is necessary. The focus children have not experienced any placement disruptions while placed in their current certified foster homes. The DCFS CSWs reported that all of the focus children are doing well, and they expressed no concerns.

In the area of Visitation, the OHCMD found that the FFA is providing substantially acceptable maintenance of visitation and family connections for the focus children and their family members. The FFA and the certified foster parents are supportive of consistent visitation between the focus children and their family members and they take an active role in ensuring visits occur. The certified foster parents provide transportation and assist with the monitoring of visits, when necessary. One focus child has weekly overnight visits with her family

members. She shared that she especially enjoys her overnight visits with her adult sister who lives in the dorms at a local university. The second focus child has monitored visits with her family at a neutral site; her certified foster parents monitor the visits. The third focus child has unmonitored visits with his mother, as well as a paternal uncle. The focus children reported they look forward to the visits with their family members.

PRACTICE INDICATORS
(Measured over last 90 days)

Practice Indicators	Engagement	Service Needs	Assessment & Linkages	Teamwork	Tracking & Adjustment
2014-2015 Scores	5	5	5	4	5
2015-2016 Scores	5	5	5	5	5

In the areas of Engagement, Service Needs, Assessment & Linkages, and Tracking & Adjustment, the FFA continues to make consistent, good efforts to engage placed children and the key people in decisions that are made on the children's behalf. The FFA staff has a good understanding of the focus children's functioning and support systems. The FFA provides the focus children with a good and substantial array of supports and services, which match the intervention strategies identified in the focus children's case plans and NSPs. The focus children are receiving weekly individual therapy, as well as tutoring and educational support services. Additionally, the certified foster parents provide a supportive learning environment at home. The FFA encourages participation in extracurricular activities; the focus children are involved in afterschool clubs, sports and school activities. One focus child is enrolled in an afterschool program at the Boys and Girls Club where he participates in supervised activities and receives assistance with his homework assignments. Another focus child received mental health services to assist her in addressing issues with separation. The FFA provides monitoring and tracking of the focus children's status through regular team meetings, and monthly face-to-face contacts with the focus children to discuss NSP goals, and to ensure that the focus children are making progress towards achieving those goals. The FFA Social Workers meet with the focus children and the certified foster parents regularly to address any concerns the focus children may have at school or at their certified foster home. One example of the FFA's tracking and adjustment of treatment goals and services is in the case of one focus child who was not performing well academically. The focus child wants to remain on his high school's football team and needs to maintain passing grades. The FFA staff and the focus child's certified foster mother met with the focus child's teacher and the school counselor to discuss the focus child's progress in school. The focus child was immediately referred to tutoring; he receives tutoring at the certified foster home and at the Boys and Girls Club. Communication between the teacher and the certified foster mother has increased and the focus child's academic performance has improved. The focus children reported that they have a good connection with the FFA staff and they feel they are benefitting from the services they are receiving. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA

Social Workers and staff are responsive in addressing concerns and the focus children's needs, and there is good communication. They further shared that the FFA Social Workers discuss any adjustments to the focus children's services and/or treatment plans.

In the area of Teamwork, the OHCMD found that the FFA had implemented the 2014-2015 QIP. During the last QAR, the focus children and DCFS CSWs were not being included in team meetings, and there was little to no collaboration between the FFA staff and DCFS CSWs. To improve in the area of Teamwork, the FFA is ensuring better collaboration between the FFA staff and DCFS CSWs. The FFA Social Workers are notifying the DCFS CSWs of upcoming meetings via e-mail, inviting them to take part in the review of the treatment goals and progress of the placed children. The FFA is having team meetings, which include the DCFS CSWs and service providers, as well as key persons in the focus children's lives. The FFA is accommodating in the scheduling of the team meetings. Information is being shared between the FFA staff, certified foster parents, the DCFS CSWs and the focus children. The focus children reported being included in regular team meetings with the key people in their lives. The DCFS CSWs reported that they are made aware of the focus children's progress and there is regular contact with the FFA staff via telephone and e-mail.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

The FFA had no findings related to the CAD's 2015-2016 Contract Compliance Review, therefore no technical support was provided to address contract-related issues.

In March 2016, the Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR. The FFA did not require a QIP, as the FFA scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all focus areas of the QAR. However, the OHCMD Quality Assurance staff will continue to provide ongoing technical support, training and consultation as needed.