



**County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

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July 13, 2017

To: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman
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Supervisor Kathryn Barger

From: *for* *Brandon T. Nichols*
Brandon T. Nichols
Acting Director

**ALLIANCE HUMAN SERVICES 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 Alliance Human Services Foster Family Agency (the FFA) in November 2016. The FFA has three offices; one located in the Fourth Supervisorial District, one in San Bernardino County, and one in Kern County, and all provide services to the County of Los Angeles DCFS placed children and Probation youth. According to the FFA's Program Statement, its stated purpose is, "to strengthen and enhance support and services to children and families."

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 8 of 9 focus areas: Permanency, Placement Stability, Visitation, Service Needs, Engagement, Assessment & Linkages, Teamwork, and Tracking & Adjustment. The OHCMD noted an opportunity for improved performance in the focus area of Safety.

In January 2017, the OHCMD 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 the area of Safety. The FFA provided the attached approved Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) addressing the recommendations noted in this report.

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

BTN:KR
NS:pbg

Attachments

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
John Naimo, Auditor-Controller
Public Information Office
Audit Committee
Terri McDonald, Chief Probation Officer
Luigi Grimaldi, Executive Director, Alliance Human Services Foster Family Agency
Lenora Scott, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division

**ALLIANCE HUMAN SERVICES FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW
FISCAL YEAR 2016-2017**

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of the Alliance Human Services Foster Family Agency (the FFA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-2017 in November 2016. 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, three certified foster parents, and two service providers.

At the time of the QAR, the FFA supervised 42 DCFS placed children in 40 certified foster homes; their overall average length of placement was eight months. The focus children's average number of placements was four, their overall average length of placement was ten months, and their average age was eight. 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) FY 2016-2017 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, interviews with the FFA staff, DCFS CSWs, service providers, and the focus children. The minimum acceptable score is six in the area of Safety and five in all remaining areas.

Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
<p>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.</p>	6	5 - Good Safety Status	<p>The focus children have a generally and substantially safe living situation with reliable and competent caregivers who protect the focus children well under usual daily conditions. Protective strategies are generally operative and dependable.</p>
<p>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, Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) support the plan.</p>	5	5 - Good Status	<p>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.</p>

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Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
<p>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.</p>	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.
<p>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.</p>	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.
<p>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.</p>	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.

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Focus Area	Minimum Acceptable Score	FFA QAR Score	FFA QAR Rating
<p>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.</p>	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.
<p>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.</p>	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.
<p>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.</p>	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.

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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.

The OHCMD conducted the previous QAR of the FFA for FY 2015-2016 in January 2016; the FFA scored at or above the minimum acceptable score in all nine focus areas. In May 2016, the Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of that QAR and to provide the FFA with technical support to address methods for maintaining and improving their level of service. Based on the following information, it appears there is a need for improvement in the area of Safety on their FY 2016-2017 QAR.

STATUS INDICATORS
(Measured over last 30 days)

Status Indicators	Safety	Permanency	Placement Stability	Visitation
2015-2016 Scores	6	5	6	5
2016-2017 Scores	5	5	5	5

In the area of Safety, although the focus children reported feeling safe in their certified foster homes and their DCFS CSWs reported no child safety concerns, the FFA scored below the minimum acceptable score. The OHCMD noted concerns related to the supervision of the placed children in the certified foster homes. In one reported incident, the certified foster parent did not supervise two placed children, a sibling set. The certified foster parent found the placed children behind the couch; the older placed child was choking his younger sibling and touching him inappropriately. The FFA initiated a safety plan which included increased supervision of the placed child to prevent future incidents. The FFA staff followed up with the certified foster parents to ensure they were following the safety plan. The following day, the FFA reported a second incident involving the same placed children. The incident involved the older placed child pushing his brother against a desk and he sustained a small bump to his head. The Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA staff to discuss ensuring the

safety of all placed children and the importance of constant supervision, and timely reporting of special incidents.

In the area of Permanency, the FFA staff and the certified foster parents continue to support each placed child's permanency plan. They work collaboratively with the DCFS CSWs to develop appropriate, clear permanency goals, and concurrent plans for the focus children. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents ensure family connections are maintained, when appropriate. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents continue to support the focus children's permanency plans by adhering to the court's orders. Family Reunification (FR) services are being provided to all three focus children. Although FR with his biological family is the plan, the first focus child's certified foster parents shared that they are interested in pursuing legal guardianship in the event FR does not occur. The focus child reports that he likes his certified foster home and interacting with his certified foster parent's biological son. The second focus child's certified foster parent also reported that she would like to pursue legal guardianship in the event FR efforts are unsuccessful. The certified foster parent reported that she prefers to be the focus child's legal guardian because she likes the idea of having ongoing DCFS involvement and support for the focus child. The third focus child is looking forward to reunifying with her biological father. The DCFS CSWs shared that the FFA staff are committed to the focus children's permanency plans.

In the area of Placement Stability, the FFA staff and the certified foster parents continue to provide the focus children with a stable living environment. The focus children have established positive relationships with their certified foster parents, which the FFA staff and the DCFS CSWs have confidence will endure lifelong. None of the focus children have experienced any disruptions in their current placements. The certified foster parents reported feeling supported by the FFA staff and indicated that they are provided with vital information about the children's history prior to placement to assist them in better understanding the placed children's needs, and reduce the probability of future placement disruptions. The Quality Assurance Reviewer found the certified foster parents to be attentive, caring and devoted to the focus children and they seem to be very comfortable in their respective homes. The first focus child has remained placed with his certified foster parents for over a year. His certified foster parents shared that the focus child loves playing with their birth son. The certified foster parents also reported they provide the focus child with structure and limits. The focus child reported that he understands the house rules and that homework comes before playtime. He explained that he is not able to play outside until his homework is complete. The second focus child has been placed with his certified foster parent for nine months. His certified foster parent, the FFA staff, and his DCFS CSW reported that the focus child was quiet and shy when he was initially placed. However, since his placement in his current certified foster home, his communication skills have greatly improved. The third focus child has been placed with her certified foster parents for seven months. The FFA staff and her certified foster parents shared that they maintain open communication with the focus child's biological father to support placement stability, as well as ensure reunification occurs as soon as possible. The focus children's DCFS CSWs shared that the focus children are in stable placements.

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In the area of Visitation, the FFA continues to provide effective services to ensure important connections between the focus children and their family members/NREFMs are maintained. The FFA adheres to the focus children’s visitation arrangements, as established by the DCFS CSWs and the Court. All of the focus children have visitation with their family members/NREFMs. The first focus child visits with his siblings who are also in placement, as well as his aunt who resides out-of-state. The focus child reported that he enjoys visiting with his family. The second focus child has sporadic visits and monitored phone calls with his biological mother; his certified foster parent is the approved monitor. The third focus child has visits with her biological parents, siblings, and her grandparents every weekend. She reported that she loves spending time with her family. This focus child shared her Life Book, which included many pictures of her and her family members/NREFMs, with the Quality Assurance Reviewer. The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA staff is doing a good job supporting visitation between the focus children and their family members/NREFMs, such as assisting with transportation and monitoring the visits.

PRACTICE INDICATORS
(Measured over last 90 days)

Practice Indicators	Engagement	Service Needs	Assessment & Linkages	Teamwork	Tracking & Adjustment
2015-2016 Scores	5	5	5	5	5
2016-2017 Scores	5	5	5	5	5

In the area of Engagement, the FFA continues to make good efforts to engage and collaborate with the focus children, their DCFS CSWs, their certified foster parents, family members/NREFMs, and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). The DCFS CSWs reported that the FFA staff is supportive and actively involved with the focus children, as the FFA Social Workers visit the focus children at least two times per month. The focus children reported that they enjoy the visits and the conversations with the FFA Social Workers. The certified foster parents keep the DCFS CSWs and the FFA Social Workers updated on their focus children’s progress, and engage the focus children’s family members/NREFMs when planning the visits. All of the focus children reported they can rely on their certified foster parents when they need them. The certified foster parents, the FFA Social Workers, and the DCFS CSWs all reported having good and consistent communication with each other via telephone, e-mail, or face-to-face. The DCFS CSWs shared that the certified foster parents and the FFA staff are responsive to the focus children’s needs, as well as their requests for information.

In the area of Service Needs, the FFA provides the focus children with a good array of supports and services, which match the intervention strategies identified in the focus children’s case plans. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents ensure the focus children receive the necessary services to meet their needs. The first focus child is currently

receiving weekly individual therapy. Additionally, his CASA reported that he continues to advocate for Individualized Education Program (IEP) services for the focus child, as he holds the educational rights. As a result of his CASA's advocacy, the focus child is receiving support services and tutoring at school, as he was having some challenges with Mathematics. The second focus child is a client of the Regional Center. He is receiving weekly speech therapy and individual counseling. This focus child is also receiving school-based support services through his IEP. His certified foster parent shared that the FFA Social Worker was supportive and accommodating when she had to attend a week-long work-related conference out-of-town. This required temporary respite placement with another certified foster parent within the FFA, familiar with the focus child. To prevent any disruption to the focus child's school attendance and routine, the FFA Social Worker would pick up the focus child from the respite care provider's home each morning and transport him to his certified foster parent's home so that he could ride the school bus. In addition, the Alliance Direct Service Employee (DSE) worked with the focus child weekly on his speech delay, as well as provided support to the certified foster parent. The DSE reported that the focus child has become more independent with things such as, picking up after himself and dressing himself. The DSE attributed the focus child's change in behavior to consistent structure and the commitment of the certified foster parent and the FFA staff. The third focus child is receiving individual therapy through the Wraparound program. The focus children reported that their certified foster parents ensure their regular medical and dental check-ups are up to date.

In the area of Assessment & Linkages, the FFA staff continues to assess the focus children's needs and provides interventions for them to function effectively in daily settings. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents ensure that the focus children's emotional and behavioral needs are comprehensively understood. The FFA staff and the certified foster parents communicated their concerns regarding the focus children and the need for thorough assessments resulting in the first focus child being linked to mental health services and the second focus child receiving Regional Center services. Additionally, the third focus child's certified foster parents expressed their concerns regarding the focus child's moods and behaviors to the FFA Social Worker and her DCFS CSW. The DCFS CSW initiated a referral to Wraparound. The focus child is now receiving the necessary services. Further, the focus children have all participated in activities within the community that contribute to their social growth and development, such as attending the Boys and Girls Club, swimming lessons, and after-school programs. The services and supports are regularly assessed and modified to ensure progress is made toward case plan goals.

In the area of Teamwork, the FFA is ensuring team meetings are occurring regularly or as needed. The DCFS CSWs reported that they have all participated in team meetings with the focus children, the FFA staff, the certified foster parents, and family members/NREFMs. In addition, the CASA for the first focus child reported that he has met with all of the key parties for the focus child. The CASA reported that he has attended court hearings, spoken to the focus child's teachers, and remains in contact with both the DCFS CSW and the certified foster parents. The DCFS CSWs reported that the focus children's progress, case plans, and treatment goals are discussed at the team meetings. Although the focus children are relatively young, they were able to name their DCFS CSWs and their FFA Social Workers,

and they share their concerns with them. The DCFS CSWs report that the FFA staff has kept them informed of the focus children's progress and well-being. The FFA staff report that they have a good, positive working relationship with the DCFS CSWs and are working in the best interests of the focus children.

In the area of Tracking & Adjustment, the FFA Social Workers review the focus children's status with the certified foster parents during their visits to the certified foster homes and the information is documented in the focus children's case notes, and in the quarterly Needs and Services Plan (NSPs). The FFA staff evaluates and modifies the focus children's treatment plan goals to ensure the focus children's needs are being met and that the services are producing the desired outcomes. The DCFS CSWs reported being included in discussions regarding the children's progress, the development of the NSPs, and the identified treatment plan goals. The DCFS CSWs also reported that the FFA staff consistently updates them on the focus children's progress and they receive the NSPs quarterly.

NEXT STEPS TO SUSTAIN SUCCESS AND OVERCOME CURRENT CHALLENGES

In February 2017, the OHCMD provided the FFA with technical support related to the CAD's FY 2016-2017 Contract Compliance Review findings in the areas of Licensure/Contract Requirements, Maintenance of Required Documentation and Service Delivery, and Personal Needs/Survival and Economic Well-Being. Technical support was provided on how the FFA can ensure proper reporting of Special Incident Reports (SIRs), reducing the number of Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) complaints, ensuring the development of comprehensive NSPs, and ensuring that weekly monetary allowances are issued to all placed children.

In January 2017, the Quality Assurance Reviewer met with the FFA to discuss the results of the QAR and to provide the FFA with technical support addressing methods on improving in the area of Safety. The FFA submitted the attached approved QIP. The OHCMD Quality Assurance staff will continue to provide ongoing technical support, training, and consultation to assist the FFA in implementing their QIP.



June 8, 2017

Ms. Sonya Noil
County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services
Out-of-Home Care Management Division (Quality Assurance Review)

Dear Ms. Noil,

On January 27, 2017, Alliance Human Services, Inc. (Facility No. 197806287) received the findings from the Department of Children and Family Services Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) Quality Assurance Review, which was conducted in November 2016. Alliance Human Services Inc. received minimum acceptable scores in 8 of 9 focus areas. OHCMD identified one opportunity for improved performance in the area of Safety.

Finding:

- (1) Safety: the degree to which the FFA ensures that the child is free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others in his/her placement and other settings.**

Specifically, the finding was as follows:

In one reported incident, the certified foster parent did not supervise two placed children, a sibling set. The certified foster parent found the placed children behind the couch; the older placed child was choking his younger sibling and touching him inappropriately. The FFA initiated a safety plan which included increased supervision of the placed child to prevent future incidents. The FFA staff followed up with the certified foster parents to ensure they were following the safety plan. The following day, the FFA reported a second incident involving the same placed children. The incident involved the older placed child pushing his brother against a desk and he sustained a small bump to his head.

Agency Response to the Finding:

Once it was determined that the foster parent did not follow the verbal safety plan, which included a supervision plan, that was put in place on October 29, 2016, the Alliance Social Worker held a formal meeting with the family to implement a written safety plan, which addressed supervision. This was done on November 2, 2016. Documentation is in the family file.

In addition, the Alliance Social worker was to conduct weekly visits to monitor the implementation of the safety plan, to ensure the children were being appropriately supervised. This began on November 2, 2016 and briefly continued until the children involved in the incident were returned home to their biological family, as planned, on November 4, 2016.

Alliance Human Services, Inc has several systems currently in place to ensure a child is free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others while in care. These include, but are not limited to, annual training provided to staff and foster parents on safety issues, preventing abuse and neglect, and environmental safety in the home. In addition, Alliance conducts weekly home visits to assess the safety of the client in the home, conducts monthly confidential interviews with the client that addresses safety, abuse, and neglect concerns, as well as conducts quarterly health and safety assessments in each foster home. Alliance also has clinical supervision with the staff on a regular basis where incident reports and safety plans are discussed. These items, along with others such as the matching process and ongoing training and supervision provided to the Alliance staff and foster parents, help safeguard the clients in Alliance's care from encountering abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

All of these systems were evaluated and it was decided that an enhanced training on Safety Plans, including supervision related to Safety Plans, would help avoid this concern in the future, as the parents didn't follow the safety plan that was in place, which addressed supervision.

The Director of Compliance and Risk Management, along with the Executive Director, will develop a training component, to accompany safety training, to specifically discuss Safety Plans of children, what they are, why they are developed, and the importance of following them. This training will also include increased supervision of children, which is often a component of a Safety Plan. This training will be mandatory for both foster parents and staff. The Program Directors will conduct the training for the staff during a staff meeting. A designated Alliance staff will conduct the training for the families. This training will be done during the July monthly training in the AHS office. For those families who do not attend the training, their designated AHS SW will do a one-on-one training in the home. This training will be implemented on or before July 30, 2017. Documentation will be placed in the family file.

After the mandatory training held on or before July 30, 2017, the training will be offered on an annual basis as a refresher. It will only be mandatory a second time, should AHS identify that a particular family needs it. Then it will be done on an individual basis and documented in the file.

For new families, this training will be incorporated into the pre-service training, which is mandatory prior to becoming certified. The AHS staff, who is designated to teach pre-service, will conduct the training. Documentation will be placed in the file.

If you have any questions about the corrective actions in relation to this incident or anything else, please feel free to contact me at 310-792-8920.

Sincerely,



Luigi Grimaldi
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