COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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J. TYLER McCAULEY
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August 16, 2006

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

FROM: J. Tyler McCauley
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **AMERICA CARE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW**

We have completed a contract compliance review of America Care Foster Family Agency (America Care or Agency), a Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) contracts with America Care, a private, non-profit, community-based organization to recruit, train, and certify foster care parents for the supervision of children placed in foster care by DCFS. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

America Care is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. America Care oversees a total of 31 certified foster homes in which 92 DCFS children were placed. America Care's headquarters is located in the First and Fifth Districts.

DCFS pays America Care a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Funding and Rate Bureau. Based on the child's age, America Care receives between $1,589 and $1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between $650 and $810 per month, per child. DCFS paid America Care approximately $1,950,000 for Fiscal Year 2005-06.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether America Care was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and County contract. We also evaluated America Care's ability to achieve planned staffing levels. Our monitoring visit included verifying whether America Care received the appropriate reimbursement rate for each child and whether the certified foster parents received their portion of the reimbursement rate in a timely manner. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files, and interviewed America Care's staff, the children and the foster parents. We also visited a sample of certified foster homes.

Results of Review

Overall, America Care provided the services required by the County contract. The foster parents interviewed stated the services they received from the Agency met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. In addition, America Care maintained the appropriate staffing levels and their social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by the CDSS Title 22 regulations.

America Care did not always detect unsafe conditions at the homes during their monthly site visits to the homes. Two of four homes visited did not store detergents/cleaning solutions and sharp objects such as knives and gardening picks in a secured location. In addition, one home stored ammunition for a firearm and the firearm in the same location which is not allowed by the County contract.

America Care also did not properly assess three of four homes sampled prior to placing more than two children in the homes or always complete the children's Needs and Services Plans in accordance with the County contract.

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

Review of Report

On August 8, 2006 we discussed our report with America Care who were in general agreement with the findings. In their attached response, America Care management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank America Care for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions, or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (626) 293-1102.

JTM:MMO:DC

Attachment

c: David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer
Joan Smith, Acting Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Alicia Gelsi-Ciriani, Chief Operations Officer, America Care Foster Family Agency
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

COUNTYWIDE CONTRACT MONITORING DIVISION
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2005-2006
AMERICA CARE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether America Care Foster Family Agency (America Care or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 Regulations.

Verification

We visited 4 of the 31 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that America Care billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in December 2005 and January 2006 and interviewed 4 of the 7 foster parents and 12 of the 16 children placed in the four homes. We also reviewed the case files for the 7 foster parents and 12 children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency met their expectations, and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. America Care also ensured that their foster parents were certified in compliance with the County contract and Title 22 regulations and attended the required amount of annual on-going training.

America Care needs to improve their oversight of their foster homes to ensure social workers inspect foster homes when visiting children for safety and compliance with the County contract and Title 22 safety regulations. The Agency also needs to complete an assessment to evaluate the foster parents' ability to provide quality care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in a home as required by the County contract. In addition, America Care needs to ensure that children taking psychotropic medications have current court authorizations for the administration of the medication and that the medications are incorporated into the children's Needs and Services Plans.

Foster Home Visitations

- In one (25%) of four homes visited, the foster parents owned a firearm that was appropriately locked to prevent access by the children. However, the ammunition and the firearm were stored in the same location. The County contract and Title 22 regulations require that ammunition be stored and locked separately from firearms.

- Two (50%) homes visited did not adequately secure detergents and cleaning solutions as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, one of the two homes did not secure knives as required by the County contract. Both homes also had unlocked tools in their yards that posed a safety hazard as they were accessible to the children. Subsequent to the conclusion of our review, the one home purchased a new lock for the cabinet that was used as a storage area for cleaning detergents and knives.

- One (25%) of four homes visited did not have a written emergency plan as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations.

- Three (75%) of four homes visited had more than three children placed in the home and America Care did not conduct an assessment to evaluate the foster parents' ability to provide quality care for the more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the homes as required by the County contract. The three homes had an average of five children in each home.

Medical Services

- One (33%) of three children taking psychotropic medication did not have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. Prior to the issuance of this report, the child was no longer taking psychotropic medication. In addition, the three children's case files did not contain documentation that the children were being seen monthly by the prescribing physician as required by the County contract. Subsequent to the conclusion of our review, America Care provided documentation that the children were being seen monthly by the prescribing physician.

Children's Case Files and Needs and Services Plans

- Seven (58%) of twelve Needs and Services Plans reviewed did not include a discussion of the children's personal care and grooming or the children's ability to manage money as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations.

- Nine (75%) of twelve Needs and Services Plans reviewed did not contain documentation that the children's foster parents were offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the Plans as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations.

- Twelve (100%) of twelve Needs and Services Plans reviewed did not contain the signature of the children's DCFS social worker indicating the social worker's approval of the Plans as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In all twelve cases, the Plans were forwarded to the DCFS social worker for approval. However, the Agency did not follow-up when the signatures were not obtained.

- Three (25%) of twelve children's case files reviewed did not contain a signed acknowledgement by the child or the child's DCFS social worker of receipt of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights, The Legal Rights of Teens, house rules, discipline practices, grievance/complaint procedures and discharge procedures as required by the County contract. In addition, another two case files did not contain a signed acknowledgement by the child or the child's DCFS social worker of receipt of the Agency's house rules policy as required by the County contract.

Required Reports

- Seven (27%) of 26 Termination Reports prepared for children discharged from the Agency during December 2005 and January 2006 did not contain a closing summary of the Agency's records relating to the placement as required by the County contract.

Recommendations

America Care management:

1. **Ensure that staff adequately monitors foster homes to ensure the homes comply with the County contract and Title 22 Regulations.**

2. **Ensure that foster homes lock and store ammunition separately from firearms.**

3. **Ensure that foster homes lock cleaning detergents, knives and other items that could pose a safety hazard to children.**

4. **Ensure foster homes have a written emergency plan as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations.**

5. **Ensure that assessments are completed to evaluate a foster home's capability to provide quality care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home.**

6. **Ensure that current court authorizations for children using psychotropic medication are maintained and that documentation is maintained to support that the children are being seen monthly by the prescribing physician.**

7. **Ensure that children's case files, Needs and Services Plans and Termination Reports contain all the information required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that America Care billed DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed twelve children placed in four America Care certified foster homes and four foster parents to confirm the services America Care billed to DCFS.

Results

Overall, the foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from America Care met their expectations and their assigned social workers visited them regularly. The children interviewed also stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether America Care's social workers' case loads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed America Care's chief operations officer and reviewed case load statistics and payroll records for the months of December 2005 and January 2006.

Results

America Care's three supervising social worker supervised an average of five social workers during the months of December 2005 and January 2006. The Agency's fifteen social workers maintained an average caseload of seven cases during the months of December 2005 and January 2006.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

Determine whether America Care's staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether America Care conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff, and provided ongoing training.

Verification

We interviewed America Care's chief operations officer. In addition, we reviewed each employee's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances, ongoing training and performance evaluations.

Results

America Care's director, supervising social workers and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, the Agency completed hiring clearances for employees assigned to the County contract and provided ongoing training and performance evaluations for the employees.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

America Care Foster Family Agency

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August 14, 2006

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

FROM: America Care Foster Family Agency
Alicia J. Gelsi-Ciriani
Executive Director

SUBJECT: AMERICA CARE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CORRECTIVE PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE 03-23-06 AUDITOR'E RECOMMENDATIONS.

America Care wishes to express its gratitude for a comprehensive and rewarding teaching experience. We appreciate the courtesy, professionalism, and respect we were dispensed with by the Auditor and her Supervisor , as well as for their generosity in sharing knowledge and providing guidance.

The following is a Corrective Plan of Action, aimed to address the Auditor's recommendations:

1.- Ensure that staff adequately monitors foster homes to ensure the homes comply with the county contract and Title 22 regulations.

America Care conducts monthly home inspections and documents the process in a form that is placed in the foster parent's file. Six new items have been added to said list for a total of 19, following Title 22 regulation and Community Care Licensing guide lines expressed in their last Administrator's training on 08-07-06

2.- Ensure that foster homes look and store ammunition separately from fire arms'

FCSW managing the case considered that the requirement was complied with since the two were in different drawers of the same lock cabinet. However, the objections of the Auditor were reasonable. The weapon and the ammunition were separated and kept under key the same day the objections were presented.

3.- Ensure that foster homes lock cleaning detergents, knives and other items that could pose a safe hazard to children.

America Care will reinforce the issue to the foster parents, however, it should be considered that at times those items are part of the Needs and Services Plan and are key elements to teach children at a right age, skills needed for the daily living.

4.- Ensure foster homes have a written emergency plan as required by L.A. county contract and Title 22,

Item # 17 of the Home Monthly Inspection form calls for the current certification, personal rights, emergency disaster plan/escape routes and house rules, to be posted.

5.- Ensure that assessments are completed to evaluate a foster home's capability to provide quality care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the home.

America Care has reviewed the existing form and made the corrections and additions necessary to meet the Auditor's recommendations.

6.- Ensure that current court authorizations for children using psychotropic medication are maintained and that documentation is maintained to support that the children are being seen monthly by the prescribing physician.

America Care will document the monthly medical visits or request from the physician a written statement indicating time and date for the follow up visit. We will take this opportunity to mentioned that even when FFA's are held responsible for having the Court authorization for psychotropic medications on file, we do not have the authority to pursue its issuing.

7.- Ensure that children's case files, Needs and Services Plans and Termination Reports contain all information require by the County contract and Title 22.

Needs and Services Plan and Termination Report's forms have been modified to meet Auditor recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

Alicia J Gelsi-Ciriani
Executive Director