COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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J. TYLER McCAULEY
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

August 21, 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: **ALPHA TREATMENT CENTER FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Alpha Treatment Center Foster Family Agency (Alpha or Agency), a Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) contracts with Alpha, 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.

Alpha is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. Alpha oversees a total of 43 certified foster homes in which 82 DCFS children were placed. Alpha operates offices in the First and the Fifth Districts.

DCFS pays Alpha 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, Alpha receives between $1,589 and $1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between $624 and $790 per month, per child. DCFS paid Alpha approximately $1,600,000 for Fiscal Year 2005-06.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether Alpha was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and County contract. We also evaluated Alpha's ability to achieve planned staffing levels. Our monitoring visit included verifying whether Alpha 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 Alpha's staff, the children and the foster parents. We also visited a number of certified foster homes.

Results of Review

Overall, Alpha provided the services required by the County contract. The foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. In addition, Alpha maintained the appropriate staffing levels and their social workers caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by the CDSS Title 22 regulations. Alpha also ensured their social workers visited children weekly during the first 90 days of placement and bi-weekly thereafter as required by the County contract.

Alpha needs to ensure that children having difficulty maintaining passing grades receive additional educational services. One of six children's files reviewed indicated that the child was in danger of failing the third grade and Alpha did not arrange for additional educational services or recommend increased foster parent intervention for the child as required by the County contract.

Alpha also needs to ensure that DCFS social workers sign the children's Needs and Services Plans (Plans), including any updates, to document their approval of the Plans. Ten (83%) of the twelve Plans reviewed were not signed by the DCFS social workers prior to the Plans being implemented.

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

Review of Report

On July 25, 2006, we discussed our report with Alpha who agreed with the findings. In their attached response, Alpha management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Alpha 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
Jean Jones, Administrator, Alpha Treatment Center 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
ALPHA TREATMENT CENTER FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

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

Verification

We visited 6 of the 43 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Alpha billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in November and December 2005 and interviewed the 10 foster parents and 9 of the 12 children placed in the 6 homes. We also reviewed the case files for the 10 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. The Agency 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. Alpha also ensured their social workers visited children as required.

Alpha needs to ensure that foster homes post emergency telephone numbers, discuss emergency situations with children and practice emergency procedures when a child is initially placed and every six months thereafter. In addition, Alpha also needs to ensure that a child's educational needs are being met in accordance with the County contract and Title 22 requirements.

Foster Home Visitations

- One (17%) of six homes visited did not have a posted list of emergency contacts or a written emergency disaster plan. Prior to the conclusion of our review, the Agency provided documentation that the home posted an emergency contacts list and had a written disaster plan.

Educational Services

- One (8%) of twelve children's educational needs was not adequately addressed by Alpha's social worker. The child was in danger of failing the third grade and efforts were not made to provide the child tutoring or have the child's foster parent become more involved with the child's education. The County contract requires Agencies to arrange for tutoring to improve a child's basic skills to the extent these services are available. In addition, the County contract requires Agencies to monitor for compliance that the certified foster parents make reasonable efforts to work with the child's teachers and academic counselor to monitor educational progress, educational level, assessment of strengths and weaknesses and the overall academic achievement.

Needs and Services Plans and Quarterly Reports

- Ten (83%) of twelve Needs and Services Plans (Plans) reviewed were not signed in a timely manner by the DCFS social worker. The Plans were signed between five and twelve weeks after they were developed. The County contract and Title 22 regulations require that the DCFS social workers sign the Plans and any modifications to the Plans prior to the Agency implementing them.

Recommendations

Alpha management:

1. **Ensure that staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure the homes post emergency contact lists and have a written emergency disaster plan.**

2. **Ensure the Agency social workers monitor children's educational progress and take necessary actions, including tutoring and foster parent participation, when a child's educational progress is below average.**

3. **Ensure that the DCFS social worker gives written approval of children's Needs and Services Plans prior to implementing the Plans.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

To determine whether the program participants received the services that Alpha billed DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed nine children placed in six Alpha certified foster homes and ten foster parents to confirm the services Alpha billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from Alpha 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 Alpha'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 one of Alpha's two directors and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for November and December 2005.

Results

Alpha's two supervising social worker supervised an average of three social workers and the Agency's six social workers maintained an average caseload of twelve cases during the months of November and December 2005.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed one of Alpha's two directors. In addition, we reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances, ongoing training and performance evaluations.

Results

Alpha's directors, supervising social workers and social workers possess the education and work experience required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, the Agency completed hiring clearances for staff assigned to the County contract and provided ongoing training and performance evaluations for the staff.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section

ALPHA TREATMENT CENTERS

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

Facility #197803842

August 2, 2006

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

Subject: Alpha Treatment Centers Foster Family Agency Contract Compliance Corrective Action Plan

This report will serve as Alpha Treatment Centers Foster Family Agency's Corrective Action Plan for the following recommendations.

Findings/Recommendations/Corrective Action Plan:

1) **Finding**: "One of six homes visited did not have a posted list of emergency contacts or a written emergency disaster plan. Prior to the conclusion of our review, the Agency provided documentation that the home posted an emergency contacts list and had a written disaster plan."

   Recommendation: Ensure that staff adequately monitors foster homes to ensure the homes post emergency contact lists and have a written emergency disaster plan.

   Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers' Social Workers will conduct monthly walk-thru home inspections to ensure Title 22, County Contract, and Agency compliance. Furthermore, Agency's Home Coordinator conducts thorough quarterly home inspections to ensure Title 22, County Contract, and Agency compliance. Agency will continue to train certified foster parents of these requirements.

2) **Finding**: "One (8%) of twelve children's educational needs was not adequately addressed by Alpha's social worker. The child was in danger of failing the third grade and efforts were not made to provide the child tutoring or have the child's foster parent become more involved with the child's education."

Recommendation: Ensure the Agency social workers monitor children's educational progress and take necessary actions, including tutoring and foster parent participation, when a child's educational progress is below average.

Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers' Social Workers will continue to monitor the foster children's educational progress monthly by contacts with the counselors/teachers, grade reports, and foster parent and child reports. If a child is found to be working below average, the Agency Social Worker, with input from the teachers, counselors, child, and authorization from the CSW, will develop a plan to help ensure that he/she reaches his/her academic potential. This plan could include but is not limited to, tutoring, home study time, and foster parent involvement.

3) **Finding:** "Ten of 12 Needs and Services Pan reviewed were not signed in a timely manner by the DCFS Social Worker"

Recommendation: Ensure that the DCFS gives written approval of children's Needs and Services prior to implementing the Plans.

Corrective Action Plan: Currently Alpha Treatment Centers mails the Needs and Service Plan (NSP) to the CSWs on a timely manner. The NSPs are submitted with an extra copy of both of the signature pages and a self-addressed envelope in hopes to expedite the return of the signature pages. Alpha Treatment centers will monitor the return of these signature pages on a log. If Alpha Treatment Centers has not received our signed signature pages within one week, ATC will call the CSW to encourage the prompt return of the signed NSP. If Alpha Treatment Centers does not receive the signed NSP after two weeks, ATC will call CSW once again to encourage the return of the signed NSP. If Alpha Treatment Centers does not receive the singed NSP within 3 weeks, ATC will call the SCSW to encourage the return of the signed NSP. If ATC does not receive the singed NSP within 4 weeks, ATC will call the ARA.

ATC has submitted a recommendation to Los Angeles County DCFS in order to help CSWs return the signed NSP in a timely manner. Please see attached:

We thank the Auditor Controllers office for their professionalism during our Contract Review. We were given valuable feedback from our auditor. If you have any questions please call Jean Jones at 909-624-2123.

Sincerely,

Jean Jones, LCSW
Social Services Director

Subj: **Fwd: Needs and Services Plan Suggestion**
Date: 3/8/2006 11:19:38 A.M. Pacific Standard Time
From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]

Forwarded Message:
Subj: **Needs and Services Plan Suggestion**
Date: 3/8/2006 11:19:08 A.M. Pacific Standard Time
From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
CC: [redacted]

Dear Ms. Elizabeth Howard,
I am writing with a suggestion in regards to the Needs and Services Plans. It is often very difficult for foster family agencies to receive back the signed copies of the Needs and Services plans from the county social worker. My suggestion is that the foster family agencies send them electronically (just like we do for SIRs and the ITACK system). We could "Needs and Service Plan Track" our Needs and Services Plan both to the County Social Worker and Supervising CSW (in case the CSW is on vacation). That way we have proof of the date we sent them to the CSW. The CSW could choose from three response buttons. One could be an approval of the Needs and Services Plan, a second response could be a denial of the Needs and Services Plan and maybe a third with a approval with any changes added by CSW.

I am just trying to think of a suggestion to make this more manageable!

Thanks,
Jean Jones LCSW
Alpha Treatment Centers FFA