COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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J. TYLER McCAULEY
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

February 27, 2007

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

FROM: J. Tyler McCauley
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW**

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

Background

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

Optimist is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. Optimist oversees a total of 49 certified foster homes in which 107 DCFS children were placed. Optimist's headquarters is located in the First and Fifth Districts and the Agency operates two additional offices in which DCFS children are placed.

DCFS pays Optimist 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, Optimist 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 Optimist approximately $2.3 million for Fiscal Year 2005-06.

Purpose/Methodology

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

Results of Review

The foster homes visited were well maintained. 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. In addition, Optimist maintained the appropriate staffing levels and their social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by the CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Optimist did not always ensure that Quarterly Reports contained all the information required by the County contract. Four of the twelve Quarterly Reports did not identify the children's progress towards achieving their short and long term goals. In addition, the Quarterly Reports did not always address the children's unmet needs and efforts made by the Agency to meet the needs.

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

Review of Report

On January 29, 2007, we discussed our report with Optimist who generally agreed with the findings. In their attached response, Optimist's management identified the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Optimist 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
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Joan Probst, Director, Optimist 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
OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Optimist Foster Family Agency (Optimist 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 49 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Optimist billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in March and April 2006. We also interviewed 10 of the 11 foster parents and 8 of the 17 children placed in the 9 homes. In addition, we reviewed the case files for the 11 foster parents and 12 of the children. We also reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The nine foster homes visited were all well maintained and in compliance with Title 22 safety regulations. The eleven foster parents were certified in compliance with the County contract and Title 22 regulations and the Agency ensured that the foster parents received the required training hours.

Optimist did not always ensure that the Needs and Services Plans were signed by the DCFS social worker indicating the social workers' approval of the Plans as required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, the Quarterly Reports did not always indicate progress the children made towards achieving their short and long term goals. The Quarterly Reports also did not always identify the children's unmet needs and efforts made by the Agency to meet those needs. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitations

- Two (33%) of the six foster homes visited did not conduct a disaster drill with the children within the last six months as required. The County contract and Title 22 regulations require the Agency to monitor to ensure that foster parents conduct disaster drills with children at time of placement and every six months thereafter.

Quarterly Reports, Needs and Services Plans, and Children's Records

- Four (33%) of the twelve Quarterly Reports prepared for the DCFS social workers were not prepared in compliance with the requirements of the County contract. The four Quarterly Reports did not indicate the children's progress towards short and long term goals or unmet needs for the children and the efforts taken by the Agency to meet the needs.

- Two (17%) of the twelve Needs and Services Plans (Plans) did not contain the signature of the DCFS social workers indicating the social workers' approval of the Plans as required. Optimist forwarded both Plans to the DCFS social workers for approval. However, when the Plans were not returned, the Agency did not follow-up with the DCFS social workers to obtain their signature.

- Two (29%) of the seven children taking psychotropic medications did not have current court authorizations for the administration of the medications as required. At the time of our review, the authorizations had been expired for an average of four months. Subsequently, the Agency obtained current court authorizations for the children.

Recommendations

Optimist management:

1. **Ensure foster parents conduct and document disaster drills with children at time of placement and every six months thereafter.**

2. **Ensure that Quarterly Reports contain all the information required by the County contract and that the DCFS social worker approves in writing all Needs and Services Plans.**

3. **Ensure that children taking psychotropic medications have current court authorizations for the administration of the medications.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed eight children placed in six of Optimist's certified foster homes and ten foster parents to confirm the services Optimist billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from Optimist 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 Optimist's social workers' case loads did not exceed fifteen placements and whether the supervising social worker did not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed the director and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for March and April 2006.

Results

The Agency's eight social workers maintained an average caseload of twelve cases and the three supervising social workers supervised an average of five social workers during the months of March and April 2006.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed Optimist's director. 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

Optimist's director, supervising social workers and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. The Agency also 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.

Today's Children Tomorrow's Promise

OPTIMIST FOSTER FAMILY & ADOPTION SERVICES

A division of Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services

Serving Youth Since 1906

Silvio John Orlando, ACSW
Executive Director

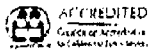
Joan E. Probst, LMFT
Associate Director

Date: February 1, 2007

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

Re: Response to Contract Review Audit Letter Dated January 29, 2007

Affiliations



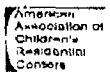
ACCREDITED

Accredited by California Alliance

A·C·H·S·A

American Association of Children's Residential Centers

Optimist International



We are in receipt of the contract compliance review which was conducted by the Auditor-Controller's Countywide contract Monitoring Division. The following is the response to the findings and recommendations from above mentioned audit.

Recommendations:

Optimist management:

1. Ensure foster parents conduct and document disaster drills with children at time of placement and every six months thereafter.

   - This requirement has been added as a check off item on the agency's placement paperwork and on foster parent recertification documentation. *See Other Plan of Correction below.

2. Ensure that Quarterly Reports contain all the information required by the County contract and that the DCFS social worker approves in writing all Needs and Services Plans.

   - Social workers will make a minimum of two attempts to obtain social work signatures on Initial and Quarterly reports. The third request will be made to the Supervising CSW. *See Other Plan of Correction below.

3. Ensure that children taking psychotropic medications have current court authorizations for the administration of the medications.

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Long Beach Office: 1145 East San Antonio Drive • Long Beach, California 90807 • Tel: (562) 423-4475 / Fax: (562) 423-4050
Orange County Office: 14081 Yorba Street, Suite 238 • Tustin, California 92780 • Tel: (714) 838-7472

- The DCSF-FFA contract requires agencies to obtain copies of current court authorizations for the administration of psychotropic medication. However, the following factors impact the ability of FFA's to get a copy of the authorization.

- FFA's are not included in the psychotropic authorization protocol;
- The request for authorization is submitted by the prescribing psychiatrist directly to the court;
- *FFA's have no control over psychiatrist's timely submission of requests for authorization to the court.*
- According to the Psychotropic Medication Protocol dated January 17, 2006: "In Dependency Court, after the court has ruled on the Form, the psychotropic desk clerk will send copies of the Form to the JCMHS, child's attorney, physician, and DCFS D-Rate Unit. The DCFS D-Rate Unit will send copies of the Form to the assigned CSW and caregiver." FFA clients are not D-rate clients and neither FFA's nor certified foster parents receive a copy of the authorization from the D-Rate Unit.
- The CSW is required by DCFS policy to send a copy of the approved authorization to the FFA within 24 hours of receipt of the approved psychotropic authorization.
- In both cases cited by the Auditor Controller, Optimist had copious documentation in the files of multiple contacts to the prescribing psychiatrists and the DCFS CSW's requesting copies of the approved authorizations. Optimist also has been utilizing a protocol developed by ACHSA that requests a copy directly from the DCFS Psychotropic Desk, the RA, the Public Health Nurse, the Supervising CSW and the CSW. (Copy of form attached)

We do not believe that there is any Plan of Correction that Optimist can implement that will correct the above-described situation. Optimist will continue to document our continued efforts to obtain the appropriate authorizations. *See Other Plan of Correction below.

*Other Plan of Correction: Optimist Foster Family and Adoption Services (OFFAS) conducted training on June 29, 2006 regarding the legal and ethical responsibilities of social workers to document required elements per our County contract, State Licensing regulations, Federal laws, and as employees of OFFAS. All social workers received this training, either on the day of the training or later individually. The training included all of the above recommendations regarding improving documentation.

Submitted by:

Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services

Joan Probst, MA, LMFT
Associate Director

Cc. Sil Orlando, Executive Director
Maria Bhattachan, Director of Quality Improvement

NOTICE OF MISSING PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATION AUTHORIZATION (PMA) FORM

To: _____
Children's Social Worker/ FAX #

_____
Supervising Children's Social Worker/ FAX #

_____
DCFS Public Health Nurse/ FAX #

Marilyn Sklar
Supervisor, DCFS Psychotropic Medication Desk/ FAX # (626) 859-3761

From: _____
Placement Agency Representative

_____
Placement Agency Name

_____ _____
Placement Agency Phone # *Placement Agency FAX #*

Date: _____

RE: _____
Minor's Name and Date of Birth (DOB)

Dear CSW and PMA Desk:

We submitted a PMA request on _____ for the above named minor and have still not received a copy of the approved PMA form. Per DCFS Policy #0600-514.10, the CSW is supposed to provide the caregiver with a copy of the PMA form. The PMA process outlined by Edelman Children's Court also requires that the DCFS Psychotropic Medication Desk send the PMA to the FFA or group home.

We called the minor's CSW on _____, but have not received a return phone call regarding this matter. We are therefore requesting that the DCFS Psychotropic Medication Desk fax a copy of the PMA to the above named Placement Agency Caseworker. Thank you for your assistance.