COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 525
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-2706
PHONE: (213) 974-8301 FAX: (213) 626-5427

J. TYLER McCAULEY
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

WENDY L. WATANABE
CHIEF DEPUTY

November 14, 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: **SERENITY INFANT CARE HOMES, INC. FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW – A DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES SERVICE PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc. (Serenity or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Serenity, 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.

Serenity is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 81 certified foster homes in which 55 DCFS children were placed. Serenity is located in the Fifth District.

DCFS pays Serenity 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, Serenity 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. Serenity was paid approximately $1,467,000 during Fiscal Year 2006-07.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether Serenity was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed Serenity's staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed several children and foster parents.

Results of Review

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Serenity generally met their expectations, and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. In addition, the three homes visited were in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 safety regulations. Serenity also ensured that their social worker caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Serenity did not always ensure that the goals in the children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) included all of the elements required. For example, the goals listed in the NSPs for the six children reviewed were not time-limited or measurable. Serenity's social workers also did not conducted their bi-weekly visits for three (50%) of the six children sampled within the timeframes specified.

In addition, Serenity did not always ensure that children received their annual dental examinations within the timeframes specified in the County contract. At the time of our review, two of six children's annual dental examinations were 49 days past due. Serenity also did not always ensure that foster parents received annual training. For example, two foster parents completed 30 minutes of the required 15 hours of annual training. A third foster parent did not complete any of the required 15 hours of annual training.

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

Review of Report

On September 10, 2007, we discussed our report with Serenity who generally agreed with the findings. In their attached response, Serenity's management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Serenity 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: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Jennifer Choctow, Director, Serenity Infant Care Homes FFA
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
SERENITY INFANT CARE HOMES, INC.
FISCAL YEAR 2006-2007

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

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

Verification

We visited three of the 43 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Serenity billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in March and April 2007 and interviewed four of the six foster parents and two of the eight children placed in the three homes. We also reviewed the case files for the six foster parents and six children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

Serenity needs to ensure that the children's Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) address all of the elements required by the County contract. The Agency also needs to ensure that children receive their annual dental exams within the timeframes specified in the County contract. In addition, Serenity needs to ensure that foster parent files contain all the information required. Specifically:

Needs and Services Plans and Children's Case Files

- None of the six NSPs reviewed contained goals that were time-limited and measurable.

- During one month, three (50%) of six children's bi-weekly visits by Serenity's social workers were not conducted within the timeframes specified. Two children's bi-weekly visits were conducted 21 days apart, while the other child's bi-weekly visits were conducted 26 days apart. The County contract requires that after the first 90 days of placement there be no fewer than two face-to-face visits per month, approximately 14 days apart.

Medical Services

- Two (40%) of six children did not receive their annual dental examinations within the timeframes specified in the County contract. At the time of our review, the children's examinations were 49 days past due. Subsequent our review, the children received their dental examinations.

Foster Parent Certification

- Three (50%) of six foster parents' certification files did not contain documentation that they completed 15 hours of ongoing annual training. Two foster parents completed only 30 minutes of the required ongoing annual training The third foster parent did not complete any of the required annual ongoing training. The County contract requires foster parents to complete 15 hours of annual ongoing training.

Recommendations

Serenity management:

1. **Ensure that Needs and Services Plans contain all of the information required by the County contract.**

2. **Ensure that social workers conduct monthly visits to children within the timeframes specified in the County contract.**

3. **Ensure that children's dental exams are conducted within the time frames specified in the County contract.**

4. **Ensure that foster parents complete the required amount of annual ongoing training.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed two children placed in three Serenity certified foster homes and four foster parents to confirm the services Serenity billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster children indicated they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency met their expectations.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether Serenity's social workers' caseloads do not exceed fifteen placements and whether the supervising social workers do not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Serenity's administrator and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social workers.

Results

Overall, Serenity's seven social workers carried an average caseload of eleven cases, and the Agency's two supervising social workers supervised an average of three social workers.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed Serenity's director and 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

Serenity's director, supervising social workers and social workers possessed the education and work experience required. In addition, the Agency conducted required hiring clearances and completed annual performance evaluations for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP

Objective

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the prior monitoring review completed by the Auditor-Controller.

Verification

We verified whether the recommendations from our Fiscal Year 2005-06 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on October 27, 2005.

Results

Serenity implemented all four recommendations contained in our prior report.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

October 11, 2007

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

From: Jennifer J. Choctaw, M.S.
Executive Director

Regarding: Centralized Contract Monitoring Division/ Foster Family Agency Program
Fiscal Year 2006-2007

In response to the audit results for Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc. covering the 2006-2007 fiscal year, I am respectfully submitting the following Corrective Action Plans as requested:

Recommendation: Ensure that the Needs and Assessment Plans contain all of the information required by the DCFS County contract.

Corrective Action Plan: Serenity's Director of Social Work has already ensured that our social work staff has been adequately trained in the use of the new Needs and Services Plan/Quarterly Update Form developed by DCFS. The use of this template was implemented in August of 2007 and ensures that all of the required contract information is documented.

Recommendation: Ensure that social workers conduct monthly visits to children within the time frames specified in the County contract.

Correction Action Plan: Although the majority of our children are seen four times each month, our social workers have been retrained to conduct the required two **in-home visits** no greater than 14 days apart as required by the County contract. The Monthly Accountability Forms, completed by each social worker, will be reviewed for compliance by a Director.

Recommendation: Ensure that the children's dental examinations are conducted within the time frames specified by the County contract .

600 South Grand Avenue • Covina, CA 91724 • (626) 859-6200 • Fax (626) 859-6206

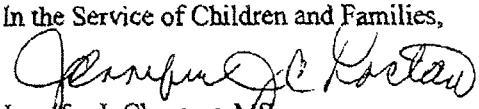
Corrective Action Plan: Social work staff has been retrained on the County contract guideline, stating that all children over the age of three years must have an annual dental examination. The supervising social workers will monitor for compliance in their weekly scheduled meetings with the foster care social workers.

Recommendation: Ensure that the foster parents complete the required amount of annual ongoing training.

Corrective Action Plan: Utilizing additional fields available in Serenity's Foster Trak computer software, support staff will generate reports on trainings hours for each family to monitor for compliance.

Serenity Infant Care Homes, Inc. recognizes that the oversight by the Auditor-Controller's Office helps us to improve the quality of care delivered to our children and families. The Corrective Action Plans have been implemented and we appreciate the timeliness, respect, and sensitivity displayed by the our auditor to our certified families. If there are additional questions, please contact me at your earliest convenience at (626) 859-6200.

In the Service of Children and Families,



Jennifer J. Choctaw, MS
Executive Director