COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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April 3, 2008

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

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe
Acting Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **EXCEL FAMILY INTERVENTION FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW - A DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Excel Family Intervention Foster Family Agency (Excel or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Excel, 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.

Excel 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 nine certified foster homes in which 19 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Excel is located in the Second District.

DCFS paid Excel a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, Excel received between $1,589 and $1,865 per month, per child. Out of

these funds, the Agency paid the foster parents between $624 and $790 per month, per child. Excel was paid approximately $534,000 during Fiscal Year 2006-07.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether Excel 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 Excel'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 Excel generally met their expectations and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. In addition, Excel's social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by CDSS Title 22 regulations. Excel also ensured that staff working on the County contract possessed the education and work experience required.

Excel needs to ensure that foster homes comply with other County contract and CDSS Title 22 requirements. For example, one of two homes visited did not adequately secure cleaning solutions and knives. In addition, Excel recertified one of the two homes visited without conducting an annual comprehensive safety inspection.

Excel also did not always ensure that the Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) contained all of the information required. For example, the children's goals listed in all three NSPs reviewed were not measurable and specific and were not approved by the children's DCFS social worker. In addition, Excel did not always ensure that the Agency's social workers visited children weekly during the first three months of placement.

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

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Excel on February 20, 2008. In their attached response, Excel'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 Excel 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.

WLW: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
Lillian Tennell, Executive Director, Excel FFA
Regina Cox, Administrator, Excel FFA
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
EXCEL FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2006-2007

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

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

Verification

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

Results

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

Excel needs to ensure foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. For example, Excel needs to ensure that annual comprehensive safety inspections are conducted prior to recertifying the foster homes. Excel also needs to ensure that Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), Quarterly Reports, foster parent certification files, and children's case files contain all of the information required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, Excel needs to ensure that children are visited weekly by the Agency's social workers during the first ninety days of placement and that DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitation

- One (50%) of the two homes visited did not adequately secure cleaning solutions and knives.

- One (50%) of the two homes visited did not maintain a list of emergency contacts as required. In addition, the foster parent in this home did not conduct and document disaster drills with the children at least every six months.

- One (50%) of the two foster homes visited was recertified without conducting an annual comprehensive safety inspection. Excel's Program Statement requires the Agency to conduct annual comprehensive safety inspections prior to recertifying foster homes.

Foster Parent Certification Files

- One (33%) of the three foster parent certification files reviewed did not contain a current copy of the foster parent's driver's license. A copy of the driver's license maintained in the files had expired approximately two years prior to our review.

Needs and Services Plans and Quarterly Reports

- None of the three NSPs reviewed contained goals that were measurable and specific. In addition, none of the three NSPs identified the reason the child was in placement.

- None of the three NSPs reviewed were approved by the children's DCFS social worker as required. However, for one of the NSPs, the efforts to obtain the approval signature were documented.

- One (33%) of the three Quarterly Reports reviewed was approximately three months past due at the time of our review. The other two (66%) Quarterly Reports did not contain all the information required by the County Contract. For example, the two Quarterly Reports did not include a discussion of the child's progress, a reassessment of unmet needs, tasks to be performed and the likelihood of family reunification. In addition, none of the two Quarterly Reports were signed by a representative of the Agency as required by the County contract.

- One Quarterly Report did not include a copy of the Transitional Independent Living Plan and Emancipation Contract as required for children over 14 years old. At the time of our review, only one child was over 14 years old.

Our prior audit report, dated March 9, 2005, also noted that Excel did not always ensure that NSPs and Quarterly Reports contained all of the required information.

Children's Case Files

- One (33%) of the three case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the child was visited weekly by Excel social workers during their first three months of placement. Three of the weekly visits were not documented in the child's case file during the period.

- None of the three case files contained documentation that the DCFS social workers were updated monthly regarding the children's progress.

- One (33%) of three case files reviewed did not contain documentation that the child received a weekly allowance during his first few months of placement. The County contract requires foster parents to provide a weekly allowance that is appropriate to the child's age.

Recommendations

Excel management ensure that:

1. **Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and Title 22 regulations.**

2. **Cleaning solutions and knives are stored where they are inaccessible to children.**

3. **Foster homes maintain a list of emergency contacts and conduct and document disaster drills with children at time of placement and at least every six months thereafter.**

4. **Annual comprehensive safety inspections are conducted for foster homes prior to annual recertification of the homes.**

5. **Foster parent certification files contain all the required information.**

6. **Needs and Services Plans and Quarterly Reports contain all the required information and are prepared within the timeframes specified in the County contract.**

7. **Children are visited weekly during the first three months of placement by the Agency's social workers and the DCFS social worker is updated at least monthly regarding the children's progress.**

8. **Foster parents provide age-appropriate weekly allowances to children.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Excel billed to DCFS.

Verification

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

Results

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

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether Excel's social workers' caseloads do not exceed fifteen 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 Excel's administrator and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

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

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

Determine whether Excel 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 Excel's administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances, ongoing training and performance evaluations.

Results

Excel's administrator, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. However, none of Excel's staff had current performance evaluations on file and there was no documentation indicating that Excel's staff received in-service training as required.

Recommendation

9. **Excel management ensure that staff working on the County contract receive annual performance evaluations and in-service training as required.**

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 outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2004-05 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on March 9, 2005.

Results

The prior monitoring report contained four outstanding recommendations. Excel fully implemented three of the recommendations. As indicated earlier, a finding relating to Recommendation 6 contained in this report was also noted during the prior year's review.

Recommendation

10. **Excel management implement the outstanding recommendation from the Fiscal Year 2004-05 monitoring report.**

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March 6, 2008

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

FROM: Lillian Tennel, MA
Executive Director

Regina Cox, MA
Program Director

SUBJECT: Corrective Action Plan for La County Audit Controller FFA Contract Review

Excel continues to be a strong multi-service agency in the community with programs in Foster Care, Adoptions, Transitional Living, Familiy Preservation, Mental Health and a First 5LA funded Family Learning center that offers a Parenting Rehabilitation Clinic and a School Readiness Learning Center. We value and welcome the audit review findings so that corrections may be made that help us improve services and operations and maintain our position of excellence.

We are in agreement with the findings and what follows are the corrections that have been and will be implemented to correct the noted deficiencies.

Audit Recommendation #1 Ensure that staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the county contract and Title 22 regulations.

Correction: Management will review with all staff at the clinical staff meeting, the use of the mini-home audit checklist. Staff are to use audit on a quarterly bases to ensure that

all homes comply with the County contract and Title 22 regulations. QA (quality assurance) will monitor parent files for the completed audit checklists.

Audit Recommendation #2 Ensure that cleaning solutions and knives are stored where they are inaccessible to children.

Correction: The Social worker visited the home that was sited. Social worker reviewed Title XXII regulations with foster parent and discussed the importance of storing cleaning solutions and knives so that they are consistently inaccessible to children. Agency will conduct a training and refresher review with all foster parents to revisit Title XXII regulations and stress vigilant monitoring of the homes by social workers.

Audit Recommendation #3 Ensure that foster homes maintain a list of emergency contacts and conduct and document disaster drills with children at the time of placement and at least every six months thereafter

Correction: Notice has gone out to all foster parents reiterating that their list of emergency contacts must be posted upon initial placement and documented disaster drill dates must be turned into their worker every six months thereafter. QA person will monitor files and alert social worker at least two weeks before disaster drill needs to be held.

Audit Recommendation #4 Ensure that annual comprehensive safety inspections are conducted for foster homes prior to annual recertification of the homes.

Correction: Audit review meeting with social workers addressed the issue of making sure that foster home recertifications are not issued before the home inspection is conducted. QA person will check for recertification dates before an approval is given.

Audit Recommendation #5 Ensure that foster parent certification files contain all required information

Correction: We have received a copy of the missing driver license from the foster parent and have updated the file. QA person will review files and alert foster parent and social worker at least 30 days before a document is to expire.

Audit Recommendation #6 Ensure that NSPs and Quarterly Reports contain all the information required and that they are prepared within the time frames specified in the County contract.

Correction: FFA social workers have attended the training on the use of the new NSP/Quarterly template provided by the county. Excel is now using this template.

- This will ensure that the goals are more specific and measurable as questions on the document are asked in such a way that the responses will automatically elicit specific and measurable goals.

- When a child had been re-placed, Excel had been previously documenting the reason why the child was placed into our agency but not the reason for the initial removal from the home. We are now documenting why a child was initially removed from home and or re-placed on all NSPs.
- The supervisor will review the Quarterly document at least two weeks before the due date to ensure that it is sent out within the time frame specified by the County.
- The Quarterly will be checked for completeness including social worker signatures, attachment of emancipation contracts, which will be obtained from the CSW, and discussion of progress made toward long term and short-term goals and Independent Living Plan. Social workers will assess if current treatment plans need to be modified and if reunification is likely.
- QA person will double check for all signatures and the social workers have been instructed to make at least three attempts to obtain CSW signatures: two attempts to contact the social worker and one to the supervisor so as to ensure that the document has been approved.

Audit recommendation #7 Ensure that children are visited weekly during the first three months of placement and that the DCFS social worker is updated at least monthly regarding the children's progress.

Correction: Excel will ensure that all children newly placed will receive weekly visits during the first three months of placement. Monthly CSW contacts will be documented on the CSW contact log and placed in the file

Audit recommendation#8 Ensure that foster parents provide age appropriate weekly allowances to the children.

Correction: FFA social worker will ensure that the weekly allowance are given to children and will check with each child during the first visit following the disbursement period. Social worker will monitor allowance logs to make sure that they are signed and document the allowances given to children.

Audit recommendation #9 Excel management ensure that staff working on the County contract receive annual performance evaluations and in-service training as required

Correction: Excel has updated all personnel files with annual performance evaluations. Program Director will monitor and require all evaluations to be submitted two weeks before evaluation due date.

Audit recommendation #10 Excel management implement the outstanding recommendation from the fiscal year 2004-05 monitoring report

Correction: As indicated in recommendation # 6 of this report, we have implemented the prior recommendation corrections, which is to ensure that NSPs and Quarterly Reports contain all required information and are prepared within the timeframes specified in the County contract.

It was a pleasure working with the representative from your office. We make every effort to provide a professional, and positive environment for the reviewers Your staff was positive, professional and receptive to addressing our concerns, questions and protests.

Any further questions or concerns can be addressed to Regina Cox, Program Director or myself Lillian Tennell, Executive Director on 323-293-5008 ext120.

Sincerely

Lillian Tennell, MA
Executive Director