COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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October 1, 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: **ASPIRANET CONTRACT REVIEW - A DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROVIDER**

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

Background

DCFS contracts with Aspiranet, 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.

Aspiranet is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. Aspiranet oversees a total of 76 certified foster homes in which 90 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Aspiranet's offices in Los Angeles County are located in the First, Fourth and Fifth Districts.

DCFS paid Aspiranet 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, Aspiranet received 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 Aspiranet approximately $2.2 million during Fiscal Year 2007-08.

Purpose/Methodology

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

Aspiranet needs to ensure that Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

- Four of the 12 initial NSPs reviewed were not prepared within 30 days from the date of the children's placement. The four NSPs were completed an average of 14 days late.

- Two of the 12 NSPs reviewed did not address the children's ability to manage their own money as required. The two children were 14 and 16 years old.

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

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Aspiranet on July 8, 2008. In their attached response, Aspiranet indicates general agreement with our findings and the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Aspiranet 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
Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Art Chaparro, Chair, Board of Directors, Aspiranet
Vernon Brown, Executive Director, Aspiranet
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
ASPIRANET
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

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

Verification

We visited eight Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Aspiranet billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in January and February 2008, interviewed nine foster parents, six of the 12 children, and observed three toddlers placed in the eight homes. We also reviewed the case files for 14 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 Aspiranet met or exceeded their expectations and the children stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. The toddlers we observed appeared to be well cared for and happy. Aspiranet's social workers also visited the children the required number of times and appropriately documented the visits in the case files. However, Aspiranet did not always comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

Foster Home Visitation and Foster Home Certification

- One (12%) of eight foster homes visited was not well maintained. The carpet throughout the home was stained and dirty. In addition, the wall behind the kitchen stove was covered with grease and the tempered glass of the oven door was missing. Prior to the conclusion of our review, the Agency assisted the home with cleaning the carpet, painting the kitchen wall and replacing the oven door glass.

- One (7%) of the 14 foster parents did not complete the required 15 hours of annual continuing education training.

Needs and Services Plans and Quarterly Reports

- Four (33%) of the 12 initial NSPs reviewed were not prepared within 30 days from the date of the children's placement. The four NSPs were completed an average of 14 days late.

- Two (17%) of the 12 NSPs reviewed did not address the children's ability to manage their own money as required. The two children were 14 and 16 years old.

- One (8%) of the 12 Quarterly Reports reviewed was approximately 25 business days past due.

Medical Services

- One (8%) of the 12 children's initial dental examinations was not conducted timely. The initial examination was conducted approximately two months late.

Recommendations

Aspiranet management ensure:

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

2. **Foster homes are clean and are maintained in accordance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.**

3. **Foster parents complete the required amount of annual continuing education training hours.**

4. **NSPs and Quarterly Reports are prepared within the required timeframes and NSPs contain all the required information.**

5. **Children's initial dental examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

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

Verification

We interviewed eight children and observed three toddlers placed in eight Aspiranet certified foster homes and interviewed nine foster parents to confirm the services Aspiranet billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster parents interviewed stated that the services they received from the Agency met or exceeded their expectations and the foster children interviewed stated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. The toddlers also appeared to be well cared for and happy.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether Aspiranet 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 one of Aspiranet's administrators and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social workers.

Results

Overall, Aspiranet's nine social workers carried an average caseload of 10 cases and the Agency's two supervising social workers supervised an average of five social workers.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

Determine whether Aspiranet'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 to staff.

Verification

We interviewed one of Aspiranet's administrators and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances, and ongoing training.

Results

Aspiranet's administrator, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required. Aspiranet also conducted hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

ASPIRAnet

Rescuing Hope, Empowering Communities

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Salinas
San Bernardino
San Francisco
San Jose
San Mateo
San Rafael
Santa Fe Springs
Stockton
Turlock
Ventura
Visalia

July 21, 2008

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

FROM: Vernon Brown, CEO
Aspiranet

SUBJECT: Aspiranet Response to Contract Review Recommendations

Following are Aspiranet's responses to comments and recommendations resulting from the Contract Review by Los Angeles County Department of Auditor-Controller:

Foster Home Visitation and Foster Home Certification

Auditor Recommendation #1:
Staff adequately monitors foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and Title 22 Regulations.

Auditor Recommendation #2
Foster homes are clean and are maintained in accordance with County contract and Title 22 Regulations

***Auditor comment**:
"One (12%) of eight foster homes visited was not well maintained. The carpet throughout the home was stained and dirty. In addition, the wall behind the kitchen stove was covered with grease and the tempered glass of the oven door was missing. Prior to the conclusion of our review, the Agency assisted the home with cleaning the carpet, painting the kitchen wall, and replacing the oven door glass."

Aspiranet Response to Recommendation #1:
It is Aspiranet's policy and practice to complete a home inspection for each certified home on a monthly basis, in addition to Annual home inspections of Certified Homes to ensure compliance with County contract and Title 22 Regulations (please see enclosed Aspiranet Monthly Home Inspection and Aspiranet Annual Home Inspection documents). These inspections are

accounted for through Aspiranet's database and reports are regularly monitored and reviewed by managers. At the time of the review we were working with the foster parent to complete the above mentioned improvements that needed to be completed.

Aspiranet Response to Recommendation #2:
In addition to the monthly and annual home inspections, social work staff are present in foster homes a minimum of twice per month. During these home visits, the safety, cleanliness, maintenance of the homes are observed and addressed by the social work staff. Any concerns regarding a certified home are addressed by social work staff with their supervisor during regular weekly meetings, and a corrective plan is established as necessary.

***Aspiranet Response to Auditor Comment**:
At the time of the audit, Aspiranet staff were aware of the concerns regarding the one home noted by auditors, and were working with the foster parents to correct. As noted in the auditor's comments, Aspiranet worked with the foster parents to resolve the deficiencies prior to the conclusion of the auditor's review.

Auditor Recommendation # 3:
Foster parents complete the required amount of annual continuing education training hours.

****Auditor Comment**:
"One (7%) of the 14 foster parents did not complete the required 15 hours of annual continuing education training."

Aspiranet Response to Recommendation #3:
Aspiranet maintains a database in which foster parent training hours are tracked for both Title 22 and County contract compliance. Foster parents are informed during the orientation and training process of annual training requirements, in addition, discussion and documentation of training and needed hours occurs during monthly home inspections and prior to re-certification. Managers review training hour database reports on a regular basis.

****Aspiranet Response to Auditor Comment**:
At the time of the audit, Aspiranet was aware of the parent that auditors noted had not completed 15 continuing education training hours. Aspiranet is working with this foster parent through a corrective plan to complete necessary training hours. Foster parent is a truck driver who has in the past spent a significant amount of time on the road. A new training plan has been established specific to him being able to meet the requirement.

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Needs and Services Plan and Quarterly Reports

Auditor Recommendation #4:
NSPs and Quarterly Reports are prepared within the required timeframes and NSP's contain all the required information.

*****Auditor comments:**
"Four of the 12 initial NSPs reviewed were not prepared within 30 days from the date of the children's placement. The four NSPs were completed an average of 14 days late.

One (8%) of the 12 Quarterly Reports reviewed was approximately 25 business days past due.

Two (17%) of the 12 NSPs reviewed did not adequately address the children's ability to manage their own money. The children did not have bank accounts and usually spent their allowance on treats. The two children were 14 and 16 years old."

Aspiranet Response to Recommendation #4:
It is Aspiranet's policy to complete all NSPs and Quarterly Reports within required timeframes. Aspiranet employs a database which provides reports for each social worker regarding upcoming due dates for both NSPs and Quarterly Reports. The database reports are regularly reviewed by social workers and their supervisors during schedule weekly meetings.

Aspiranet staff and managers are trained regarding both Title 22 and County contract requirements regarding required information to include in NSPs and Quarterly Reports. Supervisory staff read and review each NSP and Quarterly Report prior to providing an approving signature and the document being forwarded to the CSW.

*****Aspiranet Response to Auditor's Comments:**
As noted, Aspiranet utilizes a database for the staff and supervisors to monitor the completion of the NSPs and Quarterly Reports within required timeframes. When NSPs and/or Quarterly Reports are not completed in a timely manner, this is addressed as a performance issue, and performance warnings are issued. Following the audit, Aspiranet managers have increased the level of performance management around the timely completion of NSPs and Quarterly Reports.

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In order to adequately address the children's ability to manage their own money, within the Life Skills Training/Emancipation Preparation section of the NSP, Aspiranet staff utilize the 'comments' to document specific information regarding the child's money management skills.

Once a youth begins working, it is Aspiranet's policy that the youth open a savings account (please see attached Savings Account policy from the Aspiranet Foster Parent Manual). The 14 and 16-year olds identified for this review were not yet working, and therefore, savings accounts had not yet been established.

In regards to the expenditure of children's allowance on personal items, it is not Aspiranet's current policy that allowance be used as emancipation preparation funds that must be saved in a bank account. Youth may spend their allowance, at their discretion; provided their allowance is not used to purchase illegal substances or inappropriate items (Please see attached Aspiranet Foster Parent Manual Allowance policy).

Medical Services

Auditor Recommendation #5:
Children's initial dental examinations are conducted within required timeframes.

******Auditor comment:**
"One (8%) of the 12 children's initial dental examinations was not conducted timely. The initial examination was conducted approximately two months late."

Aspiranet Response to Recommendation #5:
It is Aspiranet's policy that all children receive medical and dental exams within 30 days of placement. Aspiranet's database provides reports to monitor due dates and completion of Title 22 and County contract documentation requirements including, but not limited to: medical and dental exams, clothing and personal property inventories, personal rights, NSPs, Quarterly Reports, etc.

Additionally, foster parents are trained regarding the importance of the children receiving timely exams at placement and annually, and this is addressed routinely by their assigned social worker.

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****Aspiranet Response to Auditor's Comment:**
The late dental exam noted by the auditor was for a child placed placed with the agency on 6/24/05. Since that time, Aspiranet has greatly improved our monitoring through database development. As noted, through database reports, social work staff and managers are able to monitor timely completion of Title 22 and County contract requirements.