



Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

KERRI E. NEIFELD
Acting Commissioner

ROGER BEARDEN, J.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

VIA USPS CERTIFIED MAIL & EMAIL

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March 02, 2022

Akwasi Achampong, Executive Director
Unique Life, Inc.



Yolande M. Thomas, President, Board of Directors



Dear Mr. Achampong and Ms. Thomas:

The purpose of this letter is to formally notify you that Unique Life Inc. (Unique Life) was placed on Early Alert effective February 18, 2022, due to significant compliance issues identified by the Division of Quality Improvement (DQI). To ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities in New York State receive appropriate services and protections, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) has established an internal Early Alert Committee. The purpose of the Early Alert process is to monitor the performance of a provider that has been unable to sustain compliance with applicable laws and regulations and/or has significant fiscal issues that may affect the health and safety of individuals receiving services. OPWDD has placed your agency on Early Alert due to the following concerns:

The agency has failed to maintain compliance with incident management, supervision, and other needs during a review by the DQI Bureau of Program Certification (BPC) and received a 45-day letter following an agency review for the following issues:

1. Agency management practices deficient, including policies for leadership and governing body.
2. The agency has no procedures for complaints and objections, individual rights protections, and has no written policy or procedure noted for behavioral intervention services.
3. Numerous hiring practices were deficient including failure to develop policy and procedures for background checks and failure to conduct Mental Hygiene Law 16.34 checks for employees.
4. The agency has no policy and procedure to ensure effective evaluation and ensure the competency of its employees. The agency has no mechanism to monitor/track required trainings and there are no systems in place for staff development and retention.
5. Deficient practices were noted in the areas of safety and maintenance as no written policies were in place at the time of DQI's survey.
6. All areas of incident management are not in compliance, including failure to report incidents as required, make the required notifications, update information on incidents in the Incident Report Management Application (IRMA), complete thorough investigations and corrective actions plans and submit as required in a timely manner. The agency had not adhered to time frames for incident closure. The agency also does not comply with Incident Review Committee membership and trending requirements. Additionally, the agency failed to implement their Plan of Corrective Action (POCA) for a Statement of Deficiency (SOD) for failure to close out an Allegation of Abuse reported in 2019.

While on Early Alert, OPWDD will monitor the Agency's progress and will determine whether your agency has the ability to remedy the deficient practices and sustain compliance going forward. While in Early Alert status, OPWDD will not consider any Agency requests for expansion of services and may suspend any expansion that is in process.

Representatives from OPWDD will meet with Agency leadership and the Board of Directors to further discuss the Early Alert process and OPWDD's expectations. This meeting will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for the agency and the Board. If you have any questions prior to the meeting, please contact Lisa Jones, BPC Area Director, at: lisa.c.jones@opwdd.ny.gov or (646) 766-3467.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tammy Devine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tammy Devine, Acting Deputy Commissioner

Division of Quality Improvement

cc: Board of Directors

Kerri Neifeld, Commissioner
Roger Bearden, Executive Deputy Commissioner
Brian O'Donnell, Statewide Director, DQI, Bureau of Program Certification
Barbara Van Vechten, Statewide Director, Incident Management and Continuous Quality Improvement Units
Karisa Capone, Director, Incident Management Unit
Richard Cicero, Director of Internal Controls
Abiba Kindo, Deputy Commissioner, Service Access, Program Implementation and Provider Relations
Deborah Ellis, Statewide Operations Director
Ann Marie Peterson, Associate Deputy Director, Service Access, Program Implementation and Provider Relations
Eileen Hayes, General Counsel
Joanne Howard, Director, Fiscal Reporting and Data Analysis
Earl Jefferson, Director, Central Operations
Delia Tucker, Director, Region 4
Josh Olsen, Deputy Counsel, Counsel's Office