

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Cherie Linde at: (661) 873-2327 or email [lindec@kerndhs.com](mailto:lindec@kerndhs.com) or Melissa Bodirsky at: (661) 873-2382 or email [bodirsm@kerndhs.com](mailto:bodirsm@kerndhs.com).

## Ombudsman Corner

We are pleased to announce that Monique Hawkins has been assigned to the Ombudsman position. She has been with the Department of Human Services for over 20 years and began her career as a social service worker, promoting to social service supervisor, and subsequently program director. As a result of her varied experience, Ms. Hawkins possesses a wealth of knowledge about child welfare practice and policy from a local and state perspective. She is well respected by staff, peers and community partners. You will find Ms. Hawkins to be reliable, competent, fair, and a strong advocate for children and resource families. She is one who understands that before one can lead he/she must know how to follow. Ms. Hawkins is diligent in her efforts to promote and support KCDHS' vision statement that, "Every child, individual, and family in Kern County is safe, healthy and self-sufficient."



### *A word from your new Ombudsman:*

I was ready for a change and am excited to take on the role of the Ombudsman. I look forward to working with the youth, resource families, community partners, and members of the public to address and resolve issues and complaints that may arise.

Contact information:

Monique Hawkins  
DHS Ombudsman/Program Director  
Ph # - 661-631-6188

## Coming Soon!

A new resource is on the horizon for all of our resource families! A special binder will be created for each foster youth that will allow the caregivers to record all medical and educational records as well as all report cards, special accomplishments, photos and memorabilia that the child would like to keep all in one place! This new binder combines the "Follow Me" binders that were created from the Quality Parenting Initiative as well as the "HEP" or Health and Education Passport packet that resource parents receive upon taking a placement. Once the binders are completed, they will be issued for every child and follow that child throughout their placements. More information on the binders, including their rollout, will be provided soon.

# YES! Conference

The third annual Youth Empowering Success! Conference was held on February 23<sup>rd</sup> at Bakersfield College. The event was a stage for foster youth to speak about their challenges and successes with the foster care system. In just three years, the YES! Conference has built quite the following with 233 attendees at this year's event. Those in attendance ranged from teachers and social workers to a juvenile court judge. The keynote speaker for the event was Mark Anthony Garrett who himself was a foster youth and who works to address concerns facing foster youth today. Mr. Garrett's message for the conference was having just one supportive person in a youth's life that can make the greatest difference. Mr. Garrett was very inspirational to the foster youth he met and motivated them to see their future selves and the many accomplishments they can achieve.



## *Melissa's Message*

As you all may be aware, a letter was sent out at the beginning of the year stating that by law, a foster youth's parent shall be given the telephone number to wherever the child is placed in order to maintain communication with the child. It is the Department of Human Services' goal to not only facilitate that parental bond but to also initiate a working relationship between the biological parent and the resource parent by implementing comfort calls. A comfort call is a practice of allowing the biological parent to contact the resource parent to collaborate on efforts to ease the child's transition to the resource family home. It is also a call for the parent to communicate with the child and to work in conjunction with the caregiver to maintain placement stability. The initial call will happen during the time the child is first placed into a resource family home with the intention to keep these calls ongoing in order to build a mentoring relationship between the biological parent and caregiver. More information about comfort calls will be given as this tool is starting to be implemented. The foster youth's social worker will work with you to set parameters for the calls and to discuss a calling schedule that is appropriate for all parties involved.



## *Aspiranet REACH Program*

Aspiranet has launched a new pre- and post-adoption program called REACH (Resources, Education, Advocacy, Crisis Intervention & Hope). This program is aimed at helping families who are considering adoption or who have adopted a child through Kern County Department of Human Services by providing education, support and counseling. Please contact the REACH team at (661) 323-1233 extension 0 for more information.

## *New Level of Care Rate*

A new foster care rate will be implemented starting in May 2018 called Level of Care (LOC). LOC is designed to identify the foster care youth's needs, the resource family's ability and willingness to meet these needs and match those to the appropriate rate level. The new rate will be determined from five factors or core domains that cover the primary care and supervision needs of the youth. The five core domains to be assessed are: physical, behavioral/emotional, educational, health and permanency/family services. The assessment is completed using a point system matrix determined by the score on the five core domains and a resource parent report that is designed to engage resource families to provide their input of the care of the foster youth. The score will determine whether the foster care rate will increase from the basic level rate to either a level 2, 3 or 4. A level of care assessment will be completed for new placements. For a placement existing prior to the implementation of the LOC, an assessment will only be conducted if there is a triggering event that affects the youth's needs and a change for the resource family to meet those needs. For more information on level of care, please contact the foster youth's primary social worker.

## *Post Adoption Sibling Contact*

If you have a foster youth in your care that you are considering adopting and/or going through the adoption process with, you will be asked to attend a post-adoption sibling contact meeting. This meeting serves the purpose of creating an agreement in regards to contact between biological siblings after the adoption has been finalized. Participants of a post-adoption sibling meeting include; the prospective adoptive parents, prospective adoptive youth, his/her siblings, the siblings' caretakers, attorneys for prospective adoptive youth and attorney for the Kern County Department of Human Services. During the meeting, all participants may be able to voluntarily develop a written plan that works for all parties involved. It is the prospective adoptive youth and his/her siblings' right to participate in the post-adoption sibling contact meetings. Caretakers are encouraged to speak with the prospective adoptive youth prior to the meetings about any questions or concerns the child may have. If you would like more information, please contact the child's assigned adoption social worker or call the adoption social worker of the day at (661) 873-2400.

## *Child & Family Team Meetings*

A child and family team (CFT) is comprised of family members, trusted adults and caring professionals who come together and collaborate in achieving goals for success. A CFTM helps develop plans to meet youth and family goals, recognizes youth and family as the experts in their life and fosters independence and begins transition planning from the beginning of care. CFTMs are conducted on a strength-based approach that allows every participant's voice to be heard. A CFTM can be held as frequently as needed to address issues, provide integrated and coordinated interventions and update the plan when necessary. Resource families serve an important role in these teams because they provide nurturance and support to the youth while removed from the biological parents and can offer insight on how the child is doing in their home. If a CFT member cannot be physically present at a CFTM, alternate attendance options such as video or voice conferencing are available, as well as a conversation with the assigned social worker prior to the meeting, to ensure that member's valued participation in the meeting.

## *Vacation Reminder*

As the time for summer vacations approaches, many of you may plan on traveling. When making travel plans, please remember that children under the court's supervision (dependent children) must be pre-approved for travel by the child's assigned social worker. If you are planning to go out-of-state, a court order must be obtained in advance of your trip. Please talk to the child's social worker as soon as possible regarding any travel plans. If you are planning to leave a dependent child with an alternate caregiver while you are away please let your social worker know as soon as possible. When the child will remain in your home with a non-licensed caregiver, there are specific background check criteria that must be completed, such as fingerprinting before approval can be granted.

Dependent children cannot be cared for by an alternate caregiver, outside of your home, for more than 72 hours without it being considered a placement change. Please contact the child's assigned social worker for more information.

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