

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Stephanie Soza (661) 873-2303 or email sozas@kerndhs.com or Melissa Bodirsky at: (661) 873-2382 or email bodirsm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

Happy Holidays! The holiday season is here! Most households are already in a flurry of activity- decorating, purchasing gifts, preparing for trips or visiting family and preparing holiday goodies. For most families holidays are magical, filled with joy, excitement and a special time for family fun and togetherness. Unfortunately, for children in the foster care system holidays can be very difficult. Conflicting loyalties, missing their birth families and the thought of being in unfamiliar situations may be emotionally stressful. Here are some suggestions that I hope will help you to manage the holidays.



- Talk about how your family celebrates the holidays. This gives children time to anticipate the upcoming activities.
- Talk about your family's specific customs and activities.
- Allow the children to share their customs/traditions. Try to incorporate some of their traditions into your families.
- Be mindful of religious differences.
- Use the holidays as an opportunity to expose children to new ideas and information that will hopefully reinforce skills, knowledge and support their success in school.
 - Cooking together is a great way to have fun and teach about nutrition. It can also reinforce reading and math skills.
 - Creating holiday greeting cards or gifts provides a great opportunity for children to practice their handwriting, grammar, spelling and creative writing skills.

In closing, I would like to thank you for providing your foster child (ren) with the most important gift of all – Love. May the holiday spirit be with you and your family today and throughout the New Year.

Contact Monique Hawkins, DHS Ombudsman/Program Director, at 661-631-6188.

Melissa's Message

A Tribute of Thankfulness

As the holiday season approaches, The Department of Human Services (DHS) would like to take this opportunity to show thanks to our staff, resource parents and community partners.

TO THE RESOURCE FAMILIES

To all our Resource Families, we are grateful for your dedication and service in caring for our foster youth and giving them the gift of permanency, whether that is assisting in the reunification process or providing the youth a permanent place in your home and heart through adoption. DHS takes pride in and is humbled by all the committed families that support our foster youth.

"I would like to express my gratitude for caretaker (Resource Parent) Diana. One of the children on my caseload has special needs. Diana has mentioned several times that despite the challenges that this child presents, she refuses to give up, as she recognizes this child's need for stability, connection, and appropriate services to assist with overcoming the effects of the trauma this child has faced. Diana has mentioned many times that she wants only the best for this child, and she hopes that placement in her home will have a lifelong positive effect in this child's life. Diana has asked for WRAP services, and while she awaits the decision on WRAP, she took the initiative to contact AspiraNet and enroll in the training "Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent." She provided me with a copy of the flier to pass along to other resource parents who may be working with children that have been severely affected by trauma." — Family Services Social Worker

"I have a special family that opens their

home to siblings that are more difficult to place. My applicants have eagerly transported foster children to various schools and even picked up a child at Madera Hospital. They have been willing to complete last minute trainings and have never complained. The family has 3 children of their own and have stated that they are grateful for the opportunity to help others. They are a kind and loving family and I feel that this is a family that represents how a Resource Family is in Kern County. Thank you very much!" — Resource Family Approval Social Worker

To the Community Partners

Thank you to all the community partners that have collaborated with DHS to better the lives of Kern families.

DHS is grateful for their partnership with the Juvenile Probation Department. The juvenile probation officers work closely with our Resource Family Approval (RFA) social workers to approve families that are willing to take placement of Kern County's youth that are placed through the juvenile probation system. The probation officers also participate in our orientation classes to discuss the need of RFA approved families for probation foster youth.

A special thank you to Bank of the Sierra who initially awarded the Department a \$5,000 grant to start the Operation Fresh Start program and again this year gave an additional \$5,000 to continue this program. Operation Fresh Start assists relatives and non-related extended family members who receive placement prior to being fully approved. Without this grant, the Operation Fresh Start program would not exist and it would not be the successful program that it is today.



The PG&E Employee Contribution Program has also been gracious enough to grant the Department additional funding for the Operation Fresh Start Program. A heartfelt thank you goes to all the PG&E employees that kindly donated out of their own pockets to give to foster youth in need.

Another special thank you goes out to our local KERO channel 23 news station for their continued support and partnership with the Department of Human Services. Their dedication to covering heartwarming foster care stories, such as national Adoption Day and heart Gallery, and providing media at our community events is always appreciated.

The Department would also like to extend our gratitude to Dollar General for donating items that are given to our Resource Families such as household supplies and toys to help support families during initial placements. Their donations are always welcome and our resource families and the children in their care appreciate them immensely.

Lastly, the Department of Human Services would like to extend an overwhelming thank you to James Goepinger, franchise owner of the Papa John's Ridgecrest location at 820 N

China Lake Blvd.
Suite A Ridge-
crest, CA 93555.

Mr. Goepfinger
and his staff col-
laborated with the
Department to
show appreciation
to our Ridgecrest
Resource Families.
The collaboration
included free pizza

and delivery as well as a discount code
to our Resource families that chose to
participate. This pizza promotion was a
big success and all of the participating
families expressed their gratitude to
Papa John's for recognizing and appre-
ciating them. Thank you once again and



we look forward to any future
collaborations!

TO THE KERN COUNTY STAFF
We are thankful to all our dedi-
cated staff who work tirelessly for
our Kern County families and
foster youth. All your hard work
is appreciated and it shows the
abundance of dedication you all
have to keeping Kern families
safe, healthy and self-sufficient.

*"I am very pleased with the Department
and all of the social workers that I worked
with. All four of the social workers that I
have worked with are very helpful and
understanding. Everybody that has been
with us has been wonderful, full of infor-*

*mation, was able to give us the answers we
seek or get the answers for us when they did
not know themselves. When I first got the
girls, they could not talk and I was at a loss
of how to communicate with them. Their
social worker was quick to get them the ser-
vices they needed like counseling. Everyone
has been wonderful." — Resource Parent*

*"I am thankful for all the hard work and
patience that my social workers have with
me and the children that I care for. I am
always able to get in contact with them
anytime I have questions. I appreciate the
flexibility for arranging visits and appoint-
ments and understand that I am not the
only resource parent that they work with
so the fact that my schedule can be worked
with means a lot." — Resource Parent*

REACH Adoption Program

Aspirant's Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Inter-
vention Hope (REACH) program is aimed to sup-
port and enrich the lives of adopted children and families
in Kern County. Families who are considering adoption,
going through the adoption process or who have already
adopted can benefit from the support, case management
and crisis counseling services free of charge. REACH staff
members provide education about the adoption process,
including training and support groups and promotes advo-
cacy for families and children who have been touched by
adoption.

Below is a brief questionnaire answered by a Resource
Family who is currently receiving REACH services.

How did you find out about the REACH program?

We are adopting 3 great grandchildren and were referred
to this program.

**What services did your family receive that were helpful
in providing you the assistance and tools to help guide
your adoption path?** They have once a month a support
group for parents who are in the process or who have
already adopted. Patti Kasper runs the support group and
shares information on how to work with children who have
been traumatized. I wish the support group was more often
than once a month, but I do really look forward to it. I am

able to connect with other parents who are going through
the same process and that helps to not feel alone.

How far along in the adoption process are you?

We have the adoption hearing in October.

What advice or comments about the REACH program would you give to a resource family looking into adop-

tion? I was always under the impression that after the
adoption, I would be on my own and have to rely on myself
but I found out that REACH would be there even after
the adoption to continue to support the family. I am glad
to hear that because these children (her great grandchil-
dren) will need continued support as they grow up and face
various situations in their lives. I also want to mention the
Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) DVDs that I
viewed with the REACH staff. These DVD's are not given
to the families individually, but I took it upon myself to buy
the DVDs. They are very informative and I would suggest
anyone who is adopting to invest in them, although they
are pricey. The DVDs come in two sets that include lecture
style topics such as working with trauma and children.
They are a wonderful resource to have and I watch them
continuously so that I can absorb the information to better
help my great grandchildren.

If you are considering adoption and are interested in the
REACH program, please contact the REACH team at
(661) 323-1233.

Quality Parenting Initiative

The Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) is an approach to strengthening foster care and refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system. Both the caregiver's parenting skills and the system's policies and practices should be based on child development research, information and tools. The key elements of QPI are:

1. Defining the expectations of caregivers,
2. Clearly communicating expectations to staff, caregivers and other stakeholders, and
3. Aligning system policy and practice with those expectations

Kern County takes pride in being a QPI county and we work in collaboration with our caregivers to provide the best possible care to our foster youth. A QPI Partnership Agreement is given to applicants going through the RFA process to establish a collaborative relationship as they become approved Resource Families. This agreement highlights the caregivers' expectations as well as the agency's expectation in building working relationships together. It also emphasizes the importance of supporting youth and families.

This year, the QPI California Statewide Conference was held on September 13 and 14. Agency representatives, community partners, resource parents, biological parents and foster/adoptive youth came together to collaborate and share ideas on how their counties are implementing QPI. Representatives from Kern County attended and actively participated in an informal breakout sessions on the topics of Comfort Calls and to share about the partnerships between the department and educational providers. Our county representatives came back with a renewed vigor about new QPI ideas and how best to support our families. For more information about QPI, visit <http://www.qpicalifornia.org/index.shtml>.

Behavioral Health Services

Resource parents are required to discuss any issues relating to the foster youth in their home with the youth's primary social worker, especially when it relates to the child's mental health well-being. It has then been the social worker's role to refer a child for behavioral health services. NOW, a resource parent can refer a foster youth for behavioral health services directly! As a resource parent, you spend the most time with the child (ren) in your care and are more aware of what behaviors the child(ren) express that may require intervention. To refer a foster youth for behavioral health services, all you need to do is call the newly established REFERRAL HOTLINE at 661-868-7870! You can leave a message on this line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and a mental health professional will initiate a referral for the child the next business day. Please keep in communication with the child's primary social worker to ensure that the child is receiving the right services for their needs. Collaboration between social workers, resource families and community partners such as KBHRS safeguards a foster youth's best interest and well-being.

Annual Training Reminder

Once a resource family is approved, they are responsible for maintaining eight (8) hours of training each year to keep their approval up to date. Families are encouraged to earn the required eight (8) hours of training within an adequate amount of time as to not delay the annual update of the home. To acquire a list of annual training classes, dates and times, please visit the Bakersfield College website at <https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/FKCE/schedules> and select the "on going training" link. If you have any questions regarding annual training, please contact your assigned Resource Family Approval Social Worker.



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