

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 bodirms@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

On behalf of the Department, I would like to say HAPPY NEW YEAR and THANK YOU for your dedication to the children and youth of Kern County. I hope your holidays were filled with the joy of being surrounded by family and friends.

For most, the month of February is known for Valentine's Day, the month of "Love." Did you know that February is also known as Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month? The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines Teen Dating Violence also known as TDV as a type of intimate partner violence that occurs between two people in a close relationship. TDV affects millions of teens each year. Data from CDC states that "nearly 1 in 9 female teens and approximately 1 in 13 male teens report having experienced physical dating violence last year." According to the Domestic Violence Awareness project approximately 1.5 million high school students in the United States experience physical abuse from a dating partner. Many do not report the abuse or unhealthy relationships because they are afraid to tell family and friends.

The CDC lists four types of behavior associated with TDV:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Stalking
- Psychological aggression

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month is a national effort to raise awareness about dating abuse, promote programs that support young people, and encourage communities to prevent this form of abuse with the goal of decreasing the prevalence of dating violence among young people. For conversation starters and resources visit youth.gov, loveisrespect.org, breakthecycle.org, and CDC.org.

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



Melissa's Message

For our approved resource families, it can be a struggle waiting to receive a call for a placement. The Department of Human Services values all our families and understands your frustrations when all you want is to take placement and give a foster child a safe and loving home. It is not guaranteed that an approved resource family will have a child placed, but it is always the intention that our approved families are made available to our placement social workers. Your Resource Family Approval (RFA) social worker provides a "family flier" about your family to the placement social workers so that they can view the parameters of your approval and determine if your family is in the best interest of the child or children they need to place. Please understand there are many factors that a placement social worker considers with regard to placement decisions. School of origin for the child (if they are of school age) is a main priority as it keeps the child in a familiar environment through this traumatic time. Also, consider that sibling groups are often challenging to place as we seek to keep siblings together.

Here are some helpful tips to consider while waiting for placement:

- Evaluate the criteria for the age and gender of the children you are willing to have placed. If your criteria is broad, you will have a better chance of receiving placement calls; for example, expanding your age range from 0-3 years to 0-10 years or taking either gender. If you are willing to change any criteria, please contact your RFA social worker.
- If you have the ability to take placement of a special needs/medically fragile child, this could allow you to receive more calls for place-



ment. This should be discussed with your RFA social worker as it may require additional training.

- Take emergency placements or become a respite care provider. These two types of care are short term but will provide you the experience of having foster youth in your home. Please contact your RFA social worker if you are open to emergency placement or respite care.
- Reach out to other Resource Families. Just about every approved resource family has had to wait for placement at one point or another and it is likely that they can offer more insight into the process of taking placement of a foster youth. Having additional support from other families that have experienced the frustration of waiting can provide much needed encouragement.

Waiting for a placement can be very difficult and the Department of Human Services would like to give our continual gratitude to our resource families for their patience, motivation, dedication and willingness to care for Kern County's foster youth.

Transitional Age Youth Services (TAY)

Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (KBHRS) provides a range of programs and services designed for Transitional Age Youth (TAY) who reside in Kern County. These youth are between the ages of 16 to 25 and can receive assistance in counseling, obtaining needed medication, assistance with medical/dental/vision services, support with educational opportunities, finding employment and or vocational training and other services pertaining to the health and well-being of the youth. Each youth enrolled in TAY will participate in creating a plan that is focused on their individualized needs and goals. The youth will also receive behavioral health services that are tailored and consistent to their needs.

Who is eligible?

The TAY team focuses their outreach to un-served youth ages 16-25 including;

- Emancipated youth
- Youth struggling with mental illness and/or substance abuse
- Homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Youth aging out of the system (Child welfare, juvenile justice or children's mental health)
- Youth experiencing their first episode of major mental illness

For youth to be considered for TAY services, a referral must be submitted to the Kern Behavioral Health TAY team. If you feel a youth in your home could benefit from TAY services, please contact the youth's primary social worker.



Foster Youth Takes Flight

By Heidi Carter-Escudero

April Price felt lucky growing up in her resource home. She had been granted legal guardian to her foster mom, and for five years in her placement, she came to know other foster children that had not been so “lucky.”

“I would meet other kids and they would be on like their 20 or 30 placement and I would be like – ‘whoa, what?’”

But at 17, April experienced the trauma of losing that stable placement.

“I own that I was no longer the perfect child, but to just be put out like that – it really hurt me.”

April says after that, she bounced through five placements and settled at a home she thought would let her stay, even after she turned 18.

“It seemed like they wanted to work something out, where I would be paying them to stay, but then it was like — goodbye. I couldn’t believe what was happening to me.”

But, April was already determined to succeed — with or without a family to be there backing her up.

YES! Conference

The fourth annual Youth Empowering Success! (YES!) Conference will be held on March 8, 2019 at Bakersfield College. Foster youth, caregivers and community agencies participate in this event to support Kern County’s foster youth. This full day conference addresses barriers that foster youth face and create solutions that will increase their success in school and in becoming young adults.

“I wanted to learn how to fly the first time I stepped into a flight simulator,” April says, after getting to test her simulated wings as part of a High School career day. “I was immediately in love!”

She was accepted into the California Aeronautical University in Bakersfield, California, and soon after, she earned her pilots wings.

Fortunately, she was able to arrange to live on campus, but as she was moving into the dorms, she noticed she didn’t have the right stuff.

“I noticed other kids moving in with refrigerators and dressers, and personal items that I simply didn’t have. And of course, I didn’t have a parent or family to turn to and say – hey, can you help me with this?”

Although April works two jobs, all of her money was dedicated to paying for school. Fortunately, through the Kern Partnership for Children and Families, she received a scholarship for \$845, a new tablet, and a backpack meant to take her places.

“I love that back-pack – I take it with me everywhere I go, and it’s perfect for flying and stores my laptop safely.”

“I can’t tell you how happy it makes me to be here and to be fulfilling my dreams and my life. I love it so much,” Price said.

“Coming from like absolutely nothing. Going in with just the clothes on my back, literally, I can just say that, I’ve come so far,” Price said.

When April finishes college, she will have earned her Bachelor’s degree and commercial pilot’s license.

Human Trafficking Awareness

Did you know that human trafficking is not just a global problem? Human trafficking is considered modern day slavery and our children in Kern County are being trafficked. One form of human trafficking is known as Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). CSEC is a commercial transaction that involves the sexual exploitation of a child. Often victims of human trafficking enter the life between 12-14 years old and a pimp recruits 1 out of 3 teens within 48 to 72 hours of running away from home.

Did you know the average life expectancy of a person being trafficked is 7 years and human trafficking is a \$150 billion dollar business in the United States? This is a difficult conversation to discuss, but awareness is essential. Many victims of human trafficking come from homes where abuse and neglect are prevalent.

The Kern County Department of Human Services has a CSEC Unit comprised of social workers who investigate allegations of human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation. The unit also provides supportive services, prevention education training, on-going case management services and looks for dependent children on runaway status.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month. During the month, events are held around Bakersfield to raise awareness about the seriousness of human trafficking. To learn more about the upcoming public awareness events visit the Kern Coalition Against Human Trafficking (KCAHT) website at <http://kcaht.org>.

If you see something, please say something. To report suspected child abuse or neglect you can call the child abuse hotline at 661-631-6011, or you can contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-3737-888. As caregivers you have already opened your home to children in need of love and support, if you are interested in extending your home to children who have been victims of human trafficking, please contact your Resource Family Approval social worker.

Healthy Sexual Development

Foster youth have the right to make their own decisions about their sexual and reproductive health but they also are in need guidance to make an informed and safe decision that is best for them. The Department of Human Services encourages our resource families to be open and well informed when it comes to “the sex talk” with their foster youth. It is not about making a decision for them or persuading them to remain abstinent, but to educate them about being safe and healthy. Having an open and honest conversation about sexual and reproductive health with your older youth can create a positive channel of communication to allow the youth to feel supported in the decisions they make. For more information and resources on sexual and reproductive rights and development, visit <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Foster-Care/Healthy-Sexual-Development-Project/Resources-for-Youth>.

Breakfast with Santa 2018

The Department of Human Services’s annual holiday event Breakfast with Santa was held on December 1, 2018 at the Canyon Hills City Center. Foster youth and their resource families enjoyed fun carnival style games, arts and crafts, good food and portraits with Santa Clause. The Department would like to offer a huge “Thank You” to Lowes, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Target, Kern Federal Credit Union, Canyon Hills Church, Edwards Air Force Base, and the Kern Partnership for Children and Families for their kind donations and/or volunteer services. We would especially like to thank our caregivers, and their families, for being a part of this event. We look forward to seeing you at Breakfast with Santa 2019!



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