

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, contact Emily Stewart at stewart@kerndhs.com or (661) 873-2303 or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email soinm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

Written by Ombudsperson Monique Hawkins

Flowers are blooming and the grass is green, which is a sure sign that spring is here. Before you know it, the days of summer will be upon us. Now is the time to make plans for Spring Break and to begin planning on how to keep your child(ren) engaged in learning and/or inspired to challenge themselves over the summer. There are many ways to do this, some of which are participating in club sport activities, attending local summer camps, including activity camps offered by the county and/or city. Have you ever wondered what activities you as the caregiver can allow the foster children to participate in? The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard may assist you in your planning efforts. According to the law, the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard is defined as:

“The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the state to participate in age or developmentally appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.”

As you begin to prepare keep the following in mind:

- Does this activity seem reasonable?
- Is the activity age or developmentally appropriate for the child?
- Is this activity consistent with the health, safety, and best interests of the child?
- Does this activity encourage the emotional, developmental, or cultural growth of the child?
- Is there anything based upon the child’s history to suggest that this activity would not be appropriate?

Remember the goal of the Reasonable Prudent Parent Standard is to help normalize the lives of foster children. For more information and resources on the reasonable and prudent parent standards, visit: <http://www.fosterfamilyhelp.ca.gov/PG3001.htm>

**SAVE THE
DATE**

The Kern County Department of Human Services’ (KCDHS) Annual Resource Parent Appreciation Event will be held on Thursday, May 11, 2023 from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. This event serves to thank our resource parents for their dedication and service in supporting our foster youth and their families. Attendees will be served dinner, take part in a training presentation and have the chance to win some prizes. During the event, three resource families and one community partner will also be honored for their support in bettering the lives of Kern’s foster youth. Be on the lookout for further details in the mail. We hope to see you there!

Melissa's Message

School of Origin

Should a foster youth be placed in your home, it is important to ensure that they can still attend their school of origin. The school of origin is the school in which the child is enrolled in at the time of the placement into foster care. It is important that the youth maintain their school of origin and that any conversations relating to the school or the youth's education should always include the educational rights holder. Changes in schooling (change of school or classes), should not be automatic.

Prior to accepting a placement, it is highly encouraged that resource parents ask questions regarding a youth's school of origin as it may not be in the same school district that the resource parent lives in. Resource parents can still accept youth who attend a school outside of their school district, but will either need to be willing to transport, discussing other transportation options with the youth's primary social worker or work with the school

district of origin's Foster Youth Education Liaison to arrange transportation. Resource parents can contact the foster youth's primary social worker to get a list of the school district education liaisons.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the school of origin not be overlooked and that maintaining the school of origin should be a deciding factor in determining if a resource parent will accept the foster youth in their home. By keeping a foster youth at their school of origin, it leads to better outcomes educationally and it means that they at least have one consistent thing to grasp onto in the midst of going through the foster care process.



Breakfast with Santa Recap

The Kern County Department of Human Services' (KCDHS) Breakfast with Santa event for 2022 was back in person and an overwhelming success! The event was held at Canyon Hills Church on December 10, 2022. Seventy-five resource parents and 227 children took part in the event. The theme for the event was a Winter Wonderland and the gym was sparkling with silver, white and blue festive decorations. Resource families were provided a hot breakfast, treat bags, snacks, and a gift for every child. Children took part in carnival style games and various holiday themed crafts. An opportunity drawing was held for resource parents to win prizes.

Resource families were greeted by Santa Clause who gave out candy canes and took photos with the children. KCDHS would like to thank Canyon Hills Church, Lowes, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Target and the Kern Partnership for Children and Families, Llamas Mexican Grill and Bolthouse Farms for their generous donations to the event. To all our resource families who participated and made 2022's Breakfast with Santa such a wonderful experience, we thank you for your endless dedication. We look forward to seeing you all at Breakfast with Santa 2023!



Awaiting Placement

The Kern County Department of Human Services values all our families and understands the frustrations that come with anxiously awaiting to take a foster youth into your care. 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. 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. Currently, we are in great need of families to care for youth that have complex needs; behavioral, medical or mental health related. This are our most vulnerable group and we encourage resource families to consider opening their homes to these youth.

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

- Evaluate the criteria for the age and gender. 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 have the ability to take placement of a special needs/medically fragile child, this could allow you to receive more calls for placement. 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 (time limited for up to 21 days) or respite care.
- Reach out to other Resource Families. Having additional support from other families that have experienced the frustration of waiting can provide much needed encouragement.

If you are open to conversations about changes to your preferences or criteria, you are encouraged to contact your RFA social worker. Help us ensure that every foster youth in care, has a loving family to help support them.

Independent Living Program News

The Independent Living Program (ILP) is geared toward providing training, services and programs to assist current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency prior to and after leaving the foster care system, (up to their 21st birthday). Some of the services/assistance that ILP provides include employment counselors, life skills classes, high school senior workshops, introduction to the California Youth Connection (CYC) and incentives for ILP participation and/or obtaining good graded and a high school diploma.

ILP would like to welcome Edward Wilson to the ILP team. Edward Wilson is a new ILP social worker who is located at the Dream Center (1807 19th St. Bakersfield, CA 93301). Edward can be contacted at (661) 636-4972 or emailed at wilsoned@kerndhs.com. Please feel free to contact Edward with any ILP questions. The ILP has also collaborated with Foster Youth Services to provide assistance with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For assistance with the FAFSA, foster youth are encouraged to call Brian Johnson, Peer Support Specialist for the Foster and Homeless Educational Program at (661) 636-4984 or brjohnson@kern.org. Brian is also located at the Dream Center.

Starting in March on Tuesday evenings from 5 to 6:30 p.m., ILP will be hosting Living Skills classes and Tier I and Tier II classes (for high school juniors & seniors and emancipated youth). Once youth completed these classes and are given a successful recommendation, they are eligible for job placement through Career Resource Department. These classes are held at the Kern High School District, Career Resource Department at 2727 F Street, Bakersfield, CA 93302. To register for the Tier I and Tier II classes, call ILP Social Worker Maria Escalante at (661) 636-4954 or email at escalam@kerndhs.com.

On April 4, 2023, ILP youth will be able to tour the CSU Bakersfield campus from 4:30 to 6 p.m. This will provide youth with campus life information and give them the opportunity to see firsthand what CSU Bakersfield is all about. To RSVP, please call Robin Chambers ILP Supervisor at (661) 636-4971 or email chamber@kerndhs.com.

ILP will also host a fun Grilling 101 class on April 7, 2023 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Dream Center. Youth will learn the basics of grilling and how to grill safely. There will also be hands-on experience where youth help grill food that they can enjoy after. To RSVP, call ILP Social Worker Keith Hollins at (661) 636-4982 or email hollink@kerndhs.com.

Help Make Foster Youth College Dreams Come True!

Written by Kim Silva Research Associate, Foster and Homeless Youth Education Coordinating Program

Did you know that youth who are current or former foster youth are eligible for a variety of types of financial assistance to pay for college?

If a young person was in foster care for one day after their 13th birthday, they could be eligible to receive thousands of dollars in aid. This could not only pay for their tuition but also potentially put some money in their pockets to help ease the burden of balancing work and school responsibilities. Because foster youth are considered “independent students,” they don’t have to report any financial information about biological parents, foster parents, or guardians.

Unfortunately, financial aid for college is greatly underutilized by foster youth. According to the John Burton Foundation, only about half of foster youth who enrolled in community college received the Pell Grant even though almost all of them would qualify. That’s up to \$7,395 in lost financial support for each foster youth who didn’t file a FAFSA or didn’t file correctly.

That’s where Foster Youth Services at the Dream Center comes in. Our program offers current and former

Meet your College Navigator Brian Johnson

Being a student myself, I am happy to help students continue their education. I am here to make your journey as a student easier!



Things I can assist with:

- Fafsa
- Chafee Grants
- College Applications
- UC Applications
- CSU Applications
- Scholarships
- Transcripts
- Tutoring Services
- Linking w/ CalSoap Rep
- Connecting to Resources (programs)



Every Week @
1807 19th St
Mon, Wed, and
Thurs 8-10AM



More information:
Call 661-636-4977 or
Email brjohnson@kern.org

Kern County
Superintendent
of Schools
Office of Mary C. Barlow
...advocates for children



foster youth one-on-one assistance in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and registering for college or vocational schools with our Peer Support Specialist, Brian Johnson! In addition, Brian can assist your 12th grader with college planning, campus resources, and other challenges foster youth may face while attending college. Brian can also help eligible foster youth apply for

a Chafee Grant through the California Student Aid Commission, which accepts applications on a rolling basis and can provide up to an additional \$5,000 in aid.

FAFSA season is in full swing! Every year the FAFSA application goes live in October for the following academic year. That doesn’t mean that youth should wait to apply until right before school starts. The FAFSA has what’s called a priority deadline. This means that anyone who completes the FAFSA before the deadline gets priority to receive all eligible aid.

After this deadline, if funding runs out, you aren’t guaranteed to receive it. The priority deadline is typically March 2nd, so even though the 2023-24 school year seems far off, now is the time for youth to apply for aid and start their school planning!

Don’t let your youth go it alone! It’s very important that the information your youth enters on the FAFSA is accurate, so it’s best to take it slow and ask for help. They can contact Brian Johnson for help today at 661-636-4900 or by email at brjohnson@kern.org.

KERN COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES

KERN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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