

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

May is National Foster Care Month, a time to recognize that we can each play a part in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care. During this month, Child Welfare Agencies across the nation renew their commitment to ensuring a bright future for children and youth in foster care. It is also a time to celebrate resource parents, family members, mentors and other members of the community, who strive to make a difference in a child's life. To our Kern County resource (foster) and relative parents, there are no words that truly convey how much we appreciate all that you do for our most vulnerable population. You continually care for children and youth whose families are in crisis, providing them with support, love and stability. You are the calm and safe haven in the midst of a storm. We are thankful for your extended love and support to our children, youth and families.

During this month, we would like to celebrate YOU! On behalf of the Department of Human Services, I would like to say Thank You for your selflessness, generosity and thoughtfulness. You have helped make a meaningful difference in the lives of many children in our community.

SUMMER TRAVEL PLANS

With summer on the horizon, many families start to make vacation and travel plans. For our resource families, it is always encouraged that you take foster youth with you as it promotes a sense of belonging and helps build the relationship between youth and resource parent. There are however, rules that caregivers need to follow when it comes to traveling with foster youth. If you are planning to go out of state, a court order must be obtain in advance of your trip. As timelines with court tend to vary, please provide all details for out of state travel to the child's primary social worker as early as you can. Please note that it is at the discretion of the court to grant out of state travel.

Should your summer plans occur out of county, please provide the details with the child's social worker. Schedules for visits and other appointments will need to be taken into account and the birth parents will need to be notified. Resource parents will need to provide the address and contact number to the place that the foster youth will be staying to the primary social worker in the event that worker needs to contact the youth. The primary social worker will discuss any further protocol or needed information.

Summer is a time for fun; so get out there and explore, bond and create amazing memories!

FURS Hotline

Are you sometimes in need of after-hours support when caring for foster youth? Do you not know whom to call in the late hours of the night when faced with a difficult situation? The Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is here to help!

FURS is an inclusive statewide, regional and county system that provides collaborative and timely state level phone-based response and county level in-person/mobile response in times of emergency for resource parents and current and former foster youth. The goal of this system is to maintain stability in placements and assist in keeping the relationship between caregiver and youth intact. FURS offers a toll-free hotline that is available twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. Supportive counselors trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques operate the hotline.

Should callers feel the need for in-person support, the hotline can connect them to a local dispatch team to further access their needs. FURS is not an emergency hotline and should callers be in a life-threatening situation, they should call 911 or local law enforcement.

For more information about FURS, please visit <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/foster-care/furs>.



Melissa's Message

Thank You Resource Moms and Dads

The saying, "being a parent is the toughest job in the world" could not be any more accurate! There is no clocking in and out, taking breaks or lunch hours when being a parent, but if you were to ask a parent, they would tell you that it is the most rewarding and one of a kind experience.



Whether you have biological, foster and/or adoptive children: the around the clock care, support and love you provide for all the children in your home is deserving of our gratitude. Resource parents especially are deserving of our thanks due to their unwavering commitment to support our most vulnerable children. Not only do resource parents take in and care for foster youth in need, but also they become a vital support in helping birth parents reunify with their children.

Resource parents, we thank you for providing a safe and loving home. We thank you for ensuring foster youth stay connected to their families and those important people in their life. We thank you for being up at all hours of the night to be there and support a child in need. We thank you for transporting to visits, school events and appointments. We thank you for seeing a foster youth for who they are rather than their trauma. We thank you for advocating for their needs and being a champion for foster youth. Resource parents are like superheroes, with superhuman hearts to love and long arms to embrace every child in need.

With Mother's and Father's Day fast approaching, we would like to wish all the resource moms and dads and Happy Mother's and Father's Day and hope that on your special day, you are surrounded by the ones you love.

Resource Parent Appreciation Event

Our annual Resource Parent Appreciation Event is right around the corner, Thursday May 11, 2023. This event is hosted in honor of all our dedicated resource parents. If you haven't already, please register to attend. All approved resource parents were mailed an invitation with details on how to RSVP, but be mindful that space is limited. We hope to see you there!

Comfort Calls Can Support Families

As the resource parent community in Kern County continues to grow, it is important to introduce to our new resource families the value of Comfort Calls. You may have heard of this term before in your pre-service training and this article will provide more information about what Comfort Calls are and how best to utilize them. As a Quality Parent Initiative (QPI) tool, Comfort Calls are designed to help reduce significant stress and confusion that occurs for children and youth when they experience separation from their parents. It not only is stressful for the youth but also for the caregiver and the birth parent.

Resource parents can be equipped to physically care for the child, but will not know the personalized needs because each child is unique. This is where Comfort Calls come into effect. Linking resource parents to the birth parents during the first days of the child and birth parent being separated, can provide vital information about how to sooth the child, what they like

to eat, what hygiene products to use and most importantly, to establish an effective partnership between the two sets of parents.

Birth parents also gain a sense of relief in knowing who is caring for their children and being able to provide information about the child that only they as the parent would know. This reduction in stress for the birth parent may allow them to focus on their path to reuniting with their child. The sooner a co-parenting relationship is set up between the resource parent and birth parent, the better the outcome for the child to remain in a stable environment.

The child's primary social worker should initially set up Comfort Calls. Resource parents can provide an alternate number such as a Google number if they do not want to share a home or cell phone number. Please remember that birth parents have a right to contact their children, thus a telephone number to where the youth

is placed, will be given to them. A schedule of when to call should also be set up prior, keeping in mind both the resource parents' and birth parents' schedules. Resource parents are not allowed to listen to calls between youth and birth parents by use of a separate line or extension but are expected to provide supervision utilizing prudent parent standards. Resource parents can end a comfort call at any time if they determine the child's wellbeing is at risk.

Other things to consider are:

- Duration of the call (keeping in mind child's age and ability to talk on the phone)
- Frequency of calls
- Gauging a child's interest (may not want to talk)
- Best interest of the child (consider the child's bond and behaviors as they relate to the comfort calls)

To set up Comfort Calls, please contact the foster youth's primary social worker.

Learning Opportunities on the QPI Website

Do you know about the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) website? www.qpi4kids.org is a great resource to learn more about QPI principles and how to apply it in your work with foster care. As QPI is a national movement, you can access news shared by other QPI sites and learn about how different states and counties are incorporating QPI into their work. Qpi4kids is for all partners in the foster care system, whether you are a resource parent, adoptive parent, birth parent, current or former foster youth, social worker, teacher, mentor or judge! Everyone can benefit from the resources on the QPI site. Another awesome feature is viewing the biographies of the "Voices of QPI." Readers can browse the advocates across many QPI sites and learn more the work they do to ensure excellent parenting.



Most importantly, you can sign up for the QPI newsletter and have all QPI related news, including registration for online webinars sent right to your email.

Helping to Find Respite Care

Have you heard about respite care or ever thought about becoming a respite care provider? Great news--as an approved Resource Family Home, you already meet the qualifications to provide respite care! Respite care provides prearranged temporary childcare for the child's caregiver when they are in need of support in caring for the child. A respite care provider must have the willingness and ability to provide care and supervision to a child, taking into consideration the age, maturity, behavioral tendencies, mental and physical health, medications abilities and limitations and developmental level of the child. Respite care can assist with example situations such as:

- Child's caretaker needing to travel out of county or state
- Occasional short-term babysitting needs
- Support in maintaining placement

Three Types of Respite Care:

- **Alternative Care:** Occurs in the child's placement home, care can be for 24 hours or longer
- **Out of Home Respite:** Occurs outside the child's placement home and care can be for 24 hours or longer, but not to exceed 72 hours at a time. Anything longer than 72 hours is considered a placement change.

- **Occasional Short-term babysitting:** Can occur in or out of the child's placement home and care is for less than 24 consecutive hours. Please note that ongoing/daily childcare is NOT considered respite care.

Eligibility:

- Foster children who are eligible to receive the Specialized Care Incentives and Assistance Program (SCIAP) funds for health or behavioral problems and who are placed with relatives, non-relative extended family members (NREFM), non-related legal guardians or non-related County RFA caregivers are eligible for respite care.
- Children who are ineligible for SCIAP funds may be eligible for respite care in the event of an emergency and with an Assistant Director's approval.

Rate of Pay:

- Regular respite care rate is \$3/hour per child, with a \$36 cap per child per day.
- Enhanced respite care rate is \$5/hour per child, with a \$60 cap per child per day
- An enhanced rate is given for care of children with a level 2 or higher Specialized Care Increment (SCI). An SCI rate should already be in place

in the child's placement home that is based on documentation of behaviors and need for a more specialized care.

- There is an overall cap of \$156 per 24-hour period regardless of the number of children being cared for and if there are both regular and enhanced care occurring simultaneously.
- Respite care is limited to 7 or 12 days per fiscal year (July 1 to June 30) depending on if the child receives an SCI or not.

Payment Process:

- Requests for respite are to be made in advance by the child's caretaker to the primary social worker.
- Payment is made directly to the respite care provider.
- Child's caregiver obtains required forms from primary social worker and submits completed forms once respite care has been provided.
- Payment is typically processed 4 weeks from the time the forms are submitted by the primary social worker to the SCIAP coordinator.
- Respite care can be a good option for Resource Families who are looking to provide care on a short term, occasional basis. If you are interested in becoming a respite care provider, please contact your RFA social worker.

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