

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

Ombudsman Corner

Did you know October is National Book Month?

Created in 2003 by the National Book Foundation, National Book Month is a month-long celebration that focuses on the importance of reading, writing and literature. Its goal is to encourage all to read more often. An interesting article written by Catherine Winter, titled "Why You Should Read Every Day", lists 10 benefits of reading that over time, have been proven to aid the reader in one or more of the following ways:

- Mental Stimulation — When you read every day, you stimulate your mental activity
- Stress Reduction
- Expands One's Vocabulary
- Sharpens Memory
- Improves Analytical Thinking Skills
- Improves Focus and Concentration
- Enhances Writing Skills
- Provides an Escape — A peaceful getaway from the daily hustle and bustle of life
- Free Entertainment

In addition, National Book Month encourages families to enjoy new and old books together. Try reading aloud or discussing new works around the dinner table with family or friends. This supports family time, bonding and lasting friendships. So turn off your favorite streaming platform, grab a book, and join me in celebrating National Book Month.

Together, let us commit to setting time aside to read daily. <https://kerncountylibrary.org>

Can Respite Care Be a Good Fit For You?

Have you been approved but have not received any calls for placement? Do you still want to care for foster youth but perhaps on a temporary basis? Respite care can be a great option for you! Kern County has amazing resource parents who tirelessly care for our most vulnerable youth and to ensure that these families can continue to provide care, the Department of Human Services is calling out for respite care providers. Respite care is a short-term (less than 72 hours) of in-home or out of home support, which provides the following:

- A short but needed break for caregivers and foster youth
- A support for unplanned circumstances such as family emergencies
- A preservation method of keeping the foster youth in their current placement

Caring for foster youth can come with challenges, but when there is a support system in place, those challenges are easier to face. Respite care providers are essential for placement stability and with respite, foster youth may experience few placement changes, thus increasing their ability to heal and thrive. Any approved resource family is eligible to become a respite care provider. If you are interested in becoming a respite care provider, please contact your Resource Family Approval (RFA) social worker. Your RFA social worker will make a note on your approval and your name will be placed on the respite care provider list. It is also important to note that if you are interested in providing respite and also have knowledge and experience in caring for certain populations of foster youth (medically fragile, developmental or behavioral challenges), your help is greatly needed.

Let us all come together as a team to support each other in caring for Kern County Foster Youth!

Melissa's Message

What Does QPI Look Like

Kern County is proud to be a part of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) and the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) strives to support our caregivers, youth and birth families through this lens. QPI is more than just another acronym used within the Child Welfare System; it is a change in mindset, a movement for foster care change that is committed to ensuring all children in care are supported with excellent parenting and long lasting relationships.

Working through a QPI lens illustrates clear expectations of caregivers and clear communication of these expectations to everyone in the child's team. It also assists in aligning system policy and practice with these expectations.



So what does QPI look like in the day-to-day caring of foster youth? It is actually a very simple question to answer and likely something that every caregiver is already doing. Kern County caregivers are working through a QPI lens when:

- **Comfort Calls** are in place both at the time of initial placement and on-going while a foster youth is in care. That initial call from the resource parent to the birth parent bridges the gap of “separation” in parenting. It is a way for the caregiver to get important information about the child straight from the one person who knows the child the best, the birth parent. In turn, it can provide a sense of relief for the birth parent that their child is being cared for and that their knowledge of their child holds incredible weight and respect.

- **Active co-parenting** exists between the caregiver and birth parent. It is not uncommon for a foster youth to be “torn” between loyalties to the resource parent and their birth parent. It can often cause issues in the relationships and jeopardize placement stability. By co-parenting with the birth parents, resource parents can help maintain the same message of care and support to the child. Co-parenting can also help support the birth parent in areas of need they may need guidance with.

- **Maintaining relationships.** Undoubtedly, having a positive relationship with the foster youth and birth parent can play a role in the reunification process. Just as healthy relationships can help with placement stability, it can also help with reunification stability and greatly reducing the chance of the child re-entering foster care. Keeping supports in place and continuing contact with a birth family and youth, will only strengthen the success of the family and will create an environment where the child can grow and thrive.

Active and willing engagement between resource parents and birth parents is one of the cornerstones of the QPI message. When we can come together to provide excellent care and support to foster youth, we can change the outcomes for these youth and bring hope and success to the child welfare system.



FURS is a Great Resource

Just a reminder that the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is available to resource families and current and former foster youth.

This statewide hotline provides immediate, trauma informed support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year.

If you are in need of additional support, especially after hours, please call or text 1-833-939-FURS (3877) or go online to www.cal-furs.org.



Placement Stability and Preservation

The idea of caring for a youth that has experienced little to no support or stability in their home life is what drives caring people to become resource parents. Resource family homes are aimed to be a refuge in the midst of a chaotic time in a foster youth's life, but sometimes that refuge can unintentionally add to the trauma, thus leading to requests for 14 days notices and placement changes.

In order to preserve a placement and stop adding on to a youth's trauma, we must come together as a team to identify solutions and repair relationships.

Having a stable placement promotes emotional security, which is essential for youth to develop healthy relationships, trust and self-esteem.

The reduction of placement moves means that a youth can focus more on education, reaching developmental milestones and looking forward to and planning their future.

However, there are critical challenges with maintaining a stable placement that are often the reasons for 14 days notices and the inability to keep a youth in a resource family home. Three prime examples are the youth already having frequent moves, a lack of support for resource families to care for the youth and the youth having behavioral and emotional difficulties.

All these factors, when not properly addressed, will lead to placement instability, thus creating more stress for the youth and the inability to establish healthy relationships.

So what are the solutions? Firstly, as the youth's team, we need to identify and address the needs of a foster youth



as early as possible. Resource parents are likely the first to see any issues in behavior, medical problems or education related issues and therefore can voice and advocate for services for these youth.

Caregivers can directly call Foster Youth Behavioral Health Services at 661-868-7870 to make a referral for the youth in their care.

Secondly, for resource parents to identify the needs of these vulnerable youth, they need to be trained in trauma informed care and provided resources and support for topics such as positive discipline techniques and effective communication strategies.

Bakersfield College's Foster & Kinship Care Education program provides resource parents with in-depth training on these topics. To view the current schedule, please visit [https://](https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/FKCE/schedules#ot)

www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/FKCE/schedules#ot.

Lastly, the child's team (resource parents, birth parents, child welfare staff, schools, counselors and community agencies) needs to have collaborative partnerships. With clear channels of communication and joint problem solving, we can collectively help to address challenges and halt potential disruptions.

Having regular check-ins, whether that be in the form of CFTM's, calls, in-person meetings or emails will ensure that no one is out of the loop concerning the wellbeing of the youth.

Both foster youth and caregivers can request a CFTM with the primary social worker to address any issues. In order to preserve placements, we must identify the barriers and come together to find solutions.

Foster Youth Bill of Rights

As resource parents, knowing a foster youth's rights while they are in your care is of vital importance. Since you are providing their primary care, the Department of Human Services would like to give a reminder about foster youth rights in order to reduce any violations of these rights but also to encourage caregivers to support foster youth in advocating for themselves. Helping foster youth find their voice and navigate the foster care system will inevitably help them become success adults. It is the law that foster youth and resource parents are informed about foster youth rights. Below is a list of rights that all foster youth and probation youth are entitled to have.

- **Case Plan:** Youth have the right to help create their case plan and be updated about it least every 6 months. Youth 10 and older are to receive a copy of their case plan and have the right for their affiliated tribe (if applicable) to be involved as well.
- **Child & Family Team:** Youth can request a Child & Family Team Meeting (CFTM) to talk about their needs. CFTMs shall happen within 60 days of the youth entering care and continue CFTMs every 6 months. Youth have the right to a CFTM when there is a change in the case plan.
- **Family & Social Connections:** Youth have the right to contact parents, siblings, other family members, and friends unless otherwise ordered by a judge.
- **Preparing for Adulthood & Money Management:** Youth have a right to allowance, own bank accounts (unless the case plan says otherwise), to earn, save and manage their own money, learn job skills (age appropriate), enroll into the Independent Living Program (ILP) and obtain a credit report each year starting at 14.
- **Records:** Youth have the right to obtain a copy of medical, child welfare & juvenile court records until the age of 26.
- **Communication:** Youth have the right to personal phone, a computer and internet



access, the use of email, text messages or other electronic communication & to send and receive unopened mail. Rights are subject to change if there are safety concerns.

- **Personal Rights:** Youth have the right to enough clothes, healthy food, grooming supplies, a private place to keep their belongings & a caregiver who have specialized training on trauma. Foster youth have the right to attend or not attend religious services and activities, participate in cultural, racial, ethnic and social activities and have fair and equal access to foster care services.
- **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA):** If the youth is a member or could be a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe, they have the right to live in a home that maintains social and cultural standards of the tribe and their community. Youth have the right to contact their ICWA advocate or tribe, participate in traditional Native American religious practices, help in becoming a member of a tribe, and have protections for their tribal relationships in their case plan.
- **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression (SOGIE):** Youth have the right to live in a home based on their gender identity, be called by their chosen name and gender pronouns, see a medical professional or counselor who is gender affirming, have clothing, grooming and hygiene products that respect their gender identity and expression, & keep

their SOGIE information private.

- **Education:** Youth have the right to attend school every day, get help with school work, stay in their school of origin or enroll in a new school, get partial credits for classes with a passing grade, attend after school activities, have priority enrollment at CSUs and community colleges.
- **Sexual & Reproductive Health:** Youth have the right to get information about sexual health, to use or refuse services for birth control and other types of protection, youth 12 years and older can choose their own doctor and make decision about preventing, testing or treating STTs and HIV with adult permission.
- **Physical & Mental Health:** Youth have the right to keep medical records private, get gender affirming mental health treatment, see a doctor/dentist when they need to, refuse any medications, get help for alcohol/drug problems without permission & for youth 12 and older, make decisions with their doctor about treatment.
- **Court:** Youth have the right to be notified of court hearings, to attend hearings and talk to the judge, to request visits, hearings to allow or disallow certain people into the courtroom to protect privacy (at judge's discretion) & to request a lawyer separate from their parents or the county appointed lawyers.

For more information, visit www.fosteryouth-help.ca.gov.

KERN
COUNTY
HUMAN SERVICES

KERN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

100 E. California Ave., Bakersfield, Ca. 93307

PO Box 511, Bakersfield, Ca. 93302

Recruitment Phone (661) 631-6204

Resourcefamilies@kerndhs.com

Fax (661) 633-7077

www.co.kern.ca.us/dhs/FosterFamilyResources/