

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

Ombudsman Corner

Did you know that the National Love Our Children Day is observed the first Saturday of April in conjunction with the National Child Abuse Prevention Month?

In 2004, Love Our Children USA established the National Love Our Children Day. The goal of Love Our Children USA is “keeping children safe and strengthening families. Love, protection and respect are key to ensuring children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.”

In addition to focusing on prevention of child abuse and violence against children, National Love Our Children Day is a day to honor and celebrate children and emphasize every child’s need for love.

Below are a few suggestions on how to observe National Love Our Children Day:

- Shower them with affection.
- Spend quality time with them.
- Express interest in their life by talking with them and more importantly listening.
- Tell them that you love them.
- Educate yourself and others on recognizing the signs of child abuse and neglect.
- Report your concerns to KCDHS Hotline (661) 631-601.

You can go to <http://www.loveourchildrenusa.org> for more resources and information about Love Our Children Day.

Resource Parent Appreciation Event

This year’s Resource Parent Appreciation event will be held on Thursday May 9, 2024.

This event is opened to all approved Kern County Resource Parents.

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

Hello, I am Melissa Soin, your Resource Family Approval (RFA) Specialist. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to new resource families and to reacquaint my roles and responsibilities with our established resource families.



My main role is to serve as an advocate for Kern County Resource Families by answering questions you may have with regard to RFA, placement or the foster care process.

I can also aid in troubleshooting placement concerns and assist in connecting families to resources that may be of help in caring for foster youth. I am involved in recruitment and retention event committees as well as attend workshops that provide me the tools to further support resource families.

I am also involved with implementing events and programs that provide an outlet for resource families to collaborate and build support with each other.

One of my main roles is as Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) Champion for Kern County Department of Human Services. This is a role that I have immersed myself in happily because it promotes positive relationships and collabora-

tion between resource parents, birth parents and agency staff.

The key to successful outcomes for foster youth is creating and maintaining a cohesive team for the child and birth family.

Above all, I am here to listen. Going through the RFA process can become overwhelming and most certainly, taking a foster child into your home can be stressful, but the good news is you are not alone.

The old adage, "it takes a village to raise a child" has never been truer than when caring for a foster child.

for a foster child.

As the caregiver, you have the support of the child's team, a team consisting of their birth parents, relatives, social workers, teachers, healthcare providers and other professionals that seek the best care for the youth.

If you are ever in need of someone to listen, please do not hesitate to call me at (661) 873-2382, email me at soinm@kerndhs.com or see me in person at 3711 Columbus St. Bakersfield, CA 93306.

I look forward to working with you!

Challenges of Fostering Teenagers



Opening your home and heart to a foster child is an act of profound generosity, but when those kids are teenagers, navigating the emotional storms and developmental complexities of adolescence alongside their past traumas, the challenge takes on a new dimension. Caring for foster youth teens can be like weaving a fragile tapestry, demanding patience, resilience, and a deep understanding of the threads that bind their lived experiences.

Many foster teens enter a resource family home carrying the burden of loss of their family and the normalcy they have been accustomed to. Their futures may seem uncertain and questions of "when can I go back home" play on repeat in their minds.

This anxious uncertainty can manifest in anger, withdrawal or even self-destructive behavior. Even the most experienced and dedicated resource

parents would have a difficult time. Without the proper training to recognize the triggers and manifestations of trauma, resource parents will always have a challenging experience in caring for these youth.

By providing reliable support and advocating for professional help, resource parents can help foster youth start to heal and build trust. Being aware that trust is earned from mutual respect and encouragement and that it is not gained quickly, will show the youth that you are a safe person and have created a safe space in which they can slowly take down their defensive walls and start to build healthy relationships.

Adolescence already has its challenges without adding the trauma of being in the foster care system. With youth navigating their own identities, coping with peer pressure, academic struggles and the growing desire for indepen-

dence, it is a challenge in its own right to care for a teenager.

For resource parents caring for foster teens, it means striking a balance between nurturing and setting boundaries, often needing to adapt and demonstrate patience.

Although it may seem that there are many challenges in caring for foster teens, the rewards are immense. Witnessing their resilience, their triumphs and their transformation into confident individuals can be a humbling and heartwarming experience. The bond that resource parents can create with their teens can often be the most profound and long lasting in that teen's life.

If you are considering caring for a teenage foster youth and would like to change your preferences, please contact your assigned Resource Family Approval Social Worker.

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, please call or text 1-833-939 FURS (3877).

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>.



Building Blocks

Entering into adulthood can be overwhelming for most young adults. It is a period in life with so many questions and without the proper resources; many young adults struggle to get the right answers.

For young adults who are still in the foster care system as non-minor dependents or youth 18-21 who were previously in foster care, Building Blocks is a great resource that can provide housing and skills to grow into a healthy and successful adult. In collaboration with Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS), the Housing Authority of Kern (HACK) and Covenant Community Services Inc., Building Blocks is a comprehensive on-site program that teaches young adults how to pursue educational, employment

and personal goals, get acclimated to the community, develop and maintain a budget and enhance daily living skills.

Requirements for this program include:

- At least 18 years of age
- Placed in out-of-home foster care between 16th & 19th birthday
- Full-time or part-time employment
- Participating youth may attend school to either obtain their high school diploma or attend college

Benefits of Building Blocks:

- Once a participant completes the program, they are given a section 8 voucher to acquire housing in the community
- Low rent based upon income
- Case management and mentoring services

- Fully furnished apartments
- Life skills training
- Learn independence and interdependence

Building Blocks is a great resource for young adults in the foster care system to gain independence and set them on the path for success as they navigate adulthood. To be considered for admission, applicants need to complete a Transitional Housing Application obtained from the Independent Living Program (ILP) Staff. Applications are available at the Dream Center located at 1801 19th Street Bakersfield, CA 93301.

For more information, please contact an ILP supervisor or Transitional Housing Coordinator at (661) 636-4488.

Foster Youth Education in California (AB740)

Students in foster care need our help! Foster youth are one of the most vulnerable and academically at-risk groups enrolled in California schools. The California Department of Education (CDE) who monitors the educational outcomes for foster youth found foster youth for the 2021 – 2022 academic year had a higher percentage of absenteeism, higher suspension and drop-out rates, and lower school stability and graduation rates.

However, there are ways we as a community can help children and youth in foster care achieve the educational outcomes they deserve. By staying informed and advocating for their rights, you can make a difference. Assembly Bill (AB) 740 is a new bill that passed and became effective January 1, 2023. It requires school districts to provide

a written notice to inform foster children, educational rights holder, attorney, county social worker, and tribal social worker (when applicable) when a student has received a formal disciplinary action such as a:

- Suspension notice
- Expulsion notice
- Manifestation notice
- Involuntary transfer

The bill ensures resource families and experienced advocates are working together to ensure the foster youth's needs in school and the classroom are met and that that disciplinary actions take the foster youth's academic, mental, and emotional needs into consideration. Excluding vulnerable foster youth from the classroom fuels a cycle of negative academic outcomes and causes lasting harm.

Previous law required schools to notify a student's parent or guardian regarding suspensions, expulsions, and changes in placements. Foster parents however may not always have all the information or resources to advocate for their foster youth especially for children in group or transitional settings. Having a trained legal advocate notified in these circumstances will help ensure that foster students are not suspended unnecessarily or unduly. This bill extends requirements for parental notification of student's involuntary transfer to a continuation school, suspension, or expulsion, in the case of a foster child, to the foster child's attorney and county social worker. When there is impending disciplinary action for your foster youth, you are encouraged to reach out to your county social worker, or education liaison to help advocate for your foster youth. You do not have to navigate this stressful process alone.

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