

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... September is Suicide Prevention Month? While suicide prevention is important to address year-round, in 2008, the month of September was designated as National Suicide Prevention Month. It is a time for survivors, mental health advocates, prevention organizations and community members to collectively work to promote suicide prevention awareness. Following are a few facts from the CDC:

- Suicide rates have increased approximately 36% between 2000–2021. Suicide was responsible for 48,183 deaths in 2021. This equates to about one death every 11 minutes.
- Suicide impacts people of all ages, race/ethnic groups and economic status. Adults aged 35–64 account for 46.8% of all suicides in the United States. Adults aged 75 and older have one of the highest suicide rates totaling 20.3 per 100,000. Youth and young adults, ages 10–24 years account for 15% of all suicides. For more information and stats, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>.

Suicide is an urgent and growing public crisis. We all have a role to play in preventing the tragedy of suicide. How Can You Help?

- Be prepared for a crisis: If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text 988. You can also chat via the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988lifeline.org.
- Educate yourself and others by learning the warning signs and risk factors for suicide. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (<http://www.nami.org>) has helpful information and resources regarding suicide prevention.
- Get involved: Volunteer at a crisis hotline (or text line). Make a donation to an organization dedicated to the prevention of suicide and spreading awareness. Join a community walk or attend an event to show support.

Unusual Incident Report

Unusual Incident Report forms provide the caregiver with a method of documenting any incidents that the foster youth was involved in that caused any sort of injury to the child and/or were out of the ordinary. The importance of submitting this form cannot be stressed enough as it maintains the level of communication needed between caregivers and agency staff when caring for foster youth. Documenting incidents, no matter how big or small, can provide caregivers with a peace of mind that they are giving the best possible care to the foster youth in their homes. There is a new item added to the form that indicates if a foster youth has gone missing. Should you have a foster youth in your care that has gone missing or has run away, please be sure to immediately contact local law enforcement and the child's primary Social Service Worker. When completing the Unusual

Incident Report form, check the box "missing child report." The form then needs to be provided to the child's primary social worker AND your Resource Family Approval (RFA) Social Service Worker by telephone, e-mail, or fax within 24 hours or by the next business day following the event. Please refer to the Written Directives 11-06(b) for specific information that is required to be reported. Some other examples of when to fill out an unusual incident report are:

- The child scrapes his/her knees from falling while playing
- The child is scratched, bit, pinched or kicked by another child
- The child is bruised on the shins from being kicked while playing

To obtain an Unusual Incident Report form, please contact the child's primary social worker or your assigned RFA social worker.

Melissa's Message

The importance of being a caregiver to foster youth goes beyond providing the basic necessities; it is about immersing foster youth into your family dynamic and treating them as you would treat your own children. Supporting foster youth in this manner creates a balanced well-being and a harmonious and fulfilling family environment. Foster youth should not only feel welcomed into your family, but also feel that they are a part of it.



When foster youth feel a sense of belonging and support, many other aspects of their well-being begin to heal and grow. Emotional stability and security is one such aspect that is crucial for their mental and emotional development as it helps youth to overcome past traumas and builds a positive self-image.

Including foster youth in family decisions, activities and daily tasks can help alleviate any feelings of rejection or missing out. Trust and attachment also start to grow as foster youth feel that they are a genuine part of the family. Having a secure and trusted attachment is key to developing healthy relationships in their future. Being part of a healthy family can increase academic and social development for foster youth.

Encouraging youth and teaching positive homework and study habits supports educational achievements. Foster youth are also likely to engage in more extracurricular activities when they feel like a valued part of the family. When a resource family provides consistent discipline, guidance and support and exercises patience, foster youth are less likely to have intensive behavioral issues.

Consistency helps create boundaries and promotes emotional regulation. Behavior issues may still arise, but with a healthy family dynamic, it will be easier to identify the reason behind the behaviors and help the youth calm down. The role of resource parents is both challenging and rewarding. By treating foster youth as part of your family, resource parents can provide the love, stability, and support that these youth desperately need.

The benefits are profound and far-reaching, affecting the emotional, social, and academic development of the youth, and fostering long-term positive outcomes. Embracing foster youth as family not only transforms their lives but also enriches the lives of resource parents, creating a loving environment that houses many wonderful memories to reflect upon.

Family Urgent Response System

As a reminder, the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is here to help in after-hours situations that benefits both caregivers and current and former foster youth. 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>.



The Importance of Child Family Team Meetings

Child and Family Teams (CFT) are teams made up of caring and supportive formal and informal members of the child and family's life. Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM's) are held routinely and collaboratively throughout the case timeline to ensure the child and family have their voices heard and have access to supports and services needed to promote reunification and/or permanency. Each member of CFT plays an essential role in promoting successful outcomes for the child. As a resource parent, your involvement is vital in the CFTM process. You will be contacted by CFTM staff when meetings are needed to case plan, resolve concerns, explore specialized services, and for on-going check ins for youth in your home. Please make sure you are available to participate and check in/log in for meetings timely to help expedite the process. We understand some meetings are lengthy as there may be many aspects to a case to discuss and we understand as resource parents, you are very busy. If you have a conflict or only a short amount of time you can participate, please let the CFTM staff know and we will make every effort to excuse you early from a meeting, as it is not always required for you to participate for the entire meeting. Thank you so much for everything you do for the children of Kern County!

Post Adoption Supportive Services

There are many resources that caregivers/adoptive parents have access to both before and after an adoption is finalized. These services allow for continued support for the family as they navigate this new chapter.

Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) is an entitlement program to provide financial and medical coverage to facilitate the adoption of children who otherwise would remain in long-term foster care. In order to acquire assistance from AAP, the request, eligibility determination and agreement must be completed before the adoption is finalized.

An AAP social worker is assigned to the adoptive youth and maintains contact with the family to provide support where needed.

Another helpful post adoption support is Resources, Education, Crisis, Counseling & Hope (REACH) services. REACH provides services to a family/child in need of support to stabilize an adopted child's home situation or help a family address or overcome barriers to permanency, which may include: case management, support groups, individual or family counseling, books about adoption to read or crisis intervention. The REACH program is coordinated through Aspiranet, a foster family agency contracted with the Department of Human Services. For more information about REACH, please visit <https://www.reachkerncounty.org/>.

Adoptive families also have access to Wraparound Services (WRAP) that follows a strengths-based, needs-driven



approach. WRAP build on individual and family strengths to help families achieve positive goals and improve well-being. WRAP sets up a child and family team and develops a service plan for meeting the specific needs of a family.

For an adoptive family to receive WRAP services the AAP social worker needs to be notified and certain requirements need to be met. For more information about WRAP services post adoptions, please contact your AAP social worker.

For post adoption inquiries specific to benefits, you can call the AAP phone line at 661-873-2423. If you are interested in learning more about post adoption supportive services, please reach out to the youth's primary social worker.


A Safer Ride for Kids: Hop, Skip, Drive

On June 18, 2024, the Board of Supervisors approved Kern County DHS' transportation agreement with Hop Skip Drive and Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS), which will enable many school age foster youth in Kern County to receive safe and reliable transportation to school.

Hop Skip Drive is a rideshare service created specifically for transporting kids 6 and up. The service will help ease transportation challenges many districts face due to school Bus driver shortages. An internal survey that was conducted by KCSOS found that the largest metro school districts on average transported 124 students per month by alternative means.

Across the U.S., 67% of schools rely on supplemental transportation to get children to their school of origin. Hop Skip Drive will start transporting Foster Youth to school in the fall of 2024. To ensure children's safety, the service uses a 15-point process such as extensive background checks and DMV record monitoring to vet its drivers known as CareDrivers. Hop Skip Drive also requires drivers to bring at least five years of child-care experience to their role as CareDrivers for kids.

For now, the service will primarily be used for transportation to school of origin for foster youth first entering into care or are experiencing placement disruptions. For more information, please contact the foster child's primary social service worker.



Opioid Overdose & Narcan

The opioid epidemic here in Kern County has unfortunately been on the rise in recent years. In 2022, hospital emergency rooms reported 675 opioid-related visits and Kern County Public Health reported 308 deaths related to opioid overdose in Kern County.

Additionally, an increase in deaths related to opioid drugs overdose were in individuals between 14 and 17 years of age. The Kern County Department of Human Services strives to equip all of our resource families with the knowledge and tools needed to prevent our foster youth and families that we serve from becoming a part of these devastating statistics.

The following are seven signs on how to spot an opioid overdose:

1. Deep snoring or wheezing
2. Blue or grayish skin tint, usually starting in the lips and fingertips
3. Pale, clammy skin
4. Not responding to stimulation
5. Pulse is faint
6. Breathing is slow and irregular or has stopped
7. Pinpoint pupils

Should a person be identified with having these symptoms, it is critical that they seek medical treatment promptly. If a person becomes unresponsive and you have reason to believe they are experiencing an overdose, Narcan (Naloxone HCl) can be administered. Narcan is a nasal spray medication used to reverse

an opioid overdose. Narcan is administered either through the nose or through an injectable into the outer thigh or other major muscle.

It is safe, easy to use, works promptly and is not addictive. Narcan has no effect if opioids are not in a person's system. The state of California has addressed the rise in Opioid overdose by issuing a standing order of giving out Narcan to the public free of charge. For information on the use of Narcan, how to use Narcan and where it is available, please visit www.narcannasal-spray.com or call 1-844-4NARCAN.

Adolescence is a critical time of exploration and finding one's identity within life, but it should not have to come with the risk of possible opioid exposure and/or overdose.

As caregivers of foster youth in these formative years, please have regular conversations about substance use, the risks and where they can seek help.

Being open with your youth and providing a safe space for them to talk could very well save their lives. If you are worried a foster youth is struggling with addiction, reach out to their primary Social Service Worker to discuss resources that may be available to them.

Data on Kern County Opioid Overdose provided by <https://kernpublichealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/MayNarcan2024.pdf>



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/