

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Stephanie Soza (661) 873-2303 or email [sozas@kerndhs.com](mailto:sozas@kerndhs.com) or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com).

## Ombudsman Corner

On behalf of the Kern County Department of Human Services, I would like to express my gratitude to you for the love, support and dedication you have shown the children and youth of Kern County. As you enter into this New Year, I wish that you have a superb January, a dazzling February, a peaceful March, an anxiety free April, a sensational May, and joy that keeps going from June to November and then rounded off with an upbeat December. January 27 is National Wellness Day, so as you begin to make plans for new beginnings and resolutions for a healthier lifestyle consider the following:

- Take up a new hobby
- Incorporate daily walks into your schedule
- Eat healthy
- Set SMART goals
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Action oriented
  - Realistic
  - Time based
- Take the time to appreciate the good things in your life



May 2020 bring new happiness, new goals, new achievements and many new inspirations on your life. Contact Monique Hawkins, DHS Ombudsman/Program Director, at 661-631-6188.

## Independent Living Program Spotlight

The Kern County Department of Human Services has many supportive services available to assist Transition Aged Youth (TAY) ages 14 to 21 who are preparing to transition from the foster care system, and for young adults wanting to remain in Extended Foster Care or AB-12 as Non-Minor Dependents (NMD's). The Independent Living Program (ILP) is a federally funded program that provides support for youth in making a successful transition to adulthood by learning to provide for their own needs. This program provides the building blocks to move toward independence. The ILP Social Worker is a secondary social worker on the youth's case to focus on independent living skills, and to complete a Transition to Independent Living Plan (TILP) with goals that can be completed in six months. Examples of goals are; finish high school, raise grades, get a driving permit/license, get a job, etc. ILP classes are offered throughout the year and focus on education and vocational goals, post-secondary education opportunities, housing options after age eighteen, budgeting, health and sex education, parenting, and cooking classes. There may be incentives for youth participation. ILP also hosts various events throughout the year that further help the adulthood transition. For more information about ILP, caregivers and youth can visit The Dream Center at 1801 19th Street Bakersfield, CA 93301, call 661-636-4488 or visit the website <https://kern.org/kcnc/dream-center/>.

# Melissa's Message

## Social Media Mindfulness

How many times a day do you find yourself checking your social media accounts? How do you think that affects your daily life? You may be surprised of the effects of social media not only to your life but to your children's lives as well. Whenever we scroll through news feeds of others, we unknowingly start to compare our lives with others. This "comparing mind" can lead to negative thoughts about ourselves and what appears to be "lacking" in our own lives. This is especially true for teenagers because they are in that stage of peer-to-peer acceptance and wanting to fit in socially. Social media allows a person to be plugged in to social updates and interactions 24/7, thus putting the "comparing mind" into overdrive by triggering a variety of emotions (joy, resentment, jealousy, laughter, sadness, etc.). It is nearly impossible for someone not to have a reaction to the plethora of emotional content that floods social media.

It is important to note that when a positive or negative interaction takes

place online, it provides the same neurochemical rewards in the brain as if the interaction took place in person. For example, if our children are being ridiculed online or a picture/comment/post is ignored, they will feel the same emotions as they would if they were ridiculed or ignored in person. As parents and caregivers, we need to set an example for the children in our home on how to be more mindful of our feelings and reactions when we browse our social media accounts.

Here are a few tips on social media mindfulness:

- Bring awareness to your physical and emotional state right before viewing social media.
- Ask yourself what your intentions are to want to browse social media sites.
- Is there anything you are hoping to see or not see? Is it a way to connect or to distract?
- Take notice of how posts, pictures or comments make you feel.
  - o Identify the emotions.
  - o What response do you want to take (positive or negative)?



Becoming more mindful of how social media sites make you feel can assist you in making better decisions about how much you frequent those sites. As much as social media sites illicit a response to compare our lives to others, they can also show us our own updates and milestones that have been documented online, thus allowing us to feel a more positive response. As caregivers for foster youth, it is vital that we understand just how meaningful connections with these youth and the important people in their life are and how we can teach these youth to positively maintain those connections. To read the full article, please visit [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/before\\_you\\_scroll\\_try\\_this\\_mindful\\_social\\_media\\_practice](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/before_you_scroll_try_this_mindful_social_media_practice).

### **YES! Conference Save the Date**

The 5th annual Kern County Youth Empowering Success (YES) Conference will be held on March 6, 2020 at Bakersfield College. This event brings together foster youth, their caregivers and community agencies in their lives to address barriers foster youth experience and create solutions that will increase their success in school and transitioning to becoming young adults. Admission is FREE and all resource parents are encouraged to attend! Training hours will be credited to attendees. Be on the lookout for the registration flier via email or contact your assigned Resource Family Approval social worker for more information.

### **Breakfast with Santa 2019**

The Kern County Department of Human Services' annual holiday event Breakfast with Santa was held on December 14, 2019 at the Canyon Hills Church Gymnasium. Foster youth and their resource families enjoyed fun carnival style games, arts and crafts, good food and portraits with Santa Clause. The Department would like to offer a "Thank You" to International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Canyon Hills Church, Three Way Chevrolet, Llamas Mexican Grill and the Kern Partnership for Children and Families for their kind donations and/or volunteer services as well as their continuing partnership with Breakfast with Santa. We would especially like to thank our caregivers, and their families, for being a part of this event. We look forward to seeing you at Breakfast with Santa 2020!

## First Annual *B There* Event

On October 5, 2019, the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) in collaboration with Bakersfield College hosted an event catered to resource families interested in caring for older foster youth. *B There: Fostering Permanency and Independence* encouraged resource families to come together and share their stories, tips and advice on receiving older foster youth into their family and even providing permanency and loving families for them. Thirty-six resource parents attended the full day event and had the opportunity to sit in on a peer-to-peer panel of two fellow resource parents who shared their challenges and successes of raising teenage foster youth, to attend a resource vendor fair and to receive up-to-date information from Peer Support Workers regarding college, scholarships and the youth experience as growing teenagers entering as developing adults. The message from the Peer Support Workers emphasized how important it is for our resource families to be there for older youth during their journey to adulthood. The day ended with the wise words of motivational speaker Mark Anthony Garrett who inspired the audience to be champions for their children. The *B There* event was in conjunction with the Independent Living Program's *Independent City* event that gives teenage foster youth tools to become responsible young adults. It also provided the foster youth with resources on college, vocational and other career paths.



## Independent City 2019

Independent City is a daylong annual event held at Bakersfield College (BC), which offers current foster youth the opportunity to learn about the realities of daily life once they emancipate. This year's event was held on October 5, 2019. Having the event at BC exposes youth to the BC Campus, providing them with information and insight on obtaining higher education. At this event, the youth learned to budget, pay bills and complete rental/utility applications. This year's motivational speaker was Mark Anthony Garrett. The event also included a current/former foster youth panel who discussed their experiences in foster care and gave the attending youth a lot of good insight and advice. In addition, Job Developers from Cal-WORKS provided an interactive employment readiness presentation. Tahlua Goosby from Foster Youth Services, facilitated an Employment Fashion show which showed the youth the "do's and don'ts" of dressing for an interview. In addition, a resource/vendor fair allowed community partners to share their programs with the youth.

This year we had 94 youth in attendance (79 were Foster youth and 15 were Peer Support Workers from the schools). Through contributions from KCDHS (Independent Living Program), the Kern Partnership for Children and Families, Probation Department, Kern Superintendent of Schools, Bakersfield College, and other community partners, there were a number of items raffled out at this event. The items raffled included two laptop/prINTER bundles, a television, household items, telephone accessories and numerous gift cards.

For the first time, this year's Independent City, whose theme is "Be Independent," was held simultaneously with the resource family caregivers event whose theme was "Be There," which emphasized the importance of permanency and connections in caring for an older youth.

The youth had a great time and the event was a success!

# Human Trafficking Awareness

Anyone can be a human trafficking victim, even a child. Since 2015 over 5,000 youth in California have been identified as at-risk of or a victim of commercial sexual exploitation. In 2014, Senate Bill 855 was enacted and clarified that commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) may be served by child welfare agencies and allowed for child welfare agencies to create collaborative responses to serving victims. This legislation resulted in Kern County having an increased identification of minor human trafficking victims both sexual exploitation and labor trafficking.

Youth in the foster care system are at a higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking. Some signs indicating that a youth may be a human trafficking victim can include frequently missing school, unexplained absences, frequently running away from home, drug addiction, sudden changes in personal hygiene and attire, making reference to frequent travel out of town, bruising or other signs of physical trauma, depression, anxiety or fear. The list of signs above is not exhaustive and only highlights some of the possible indicators. For more information on recognizing the signs of a human trafficking victim, visit [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)

The California Department of Social Services Child Trafficking Response Unit is in the process of developing best practice guidance for caregivers on how harm reduction principles can be utilized when caring for a commercially sexually exploited youth. Harm reduction refers to strategies that can be used to reduce negative behaviors and encourage positive changes.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month. As caregivers, you have already opened your home to children in need of love and support, if you are interested in extending your home to children who have been victims of human trafficking, please contact your Resource Family Approval (RFA) Social Worker. To report suspected child abuse or neglect you can call the child abuse hotline at 661-631-6011, or you can contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-3737-888.

If you are interested in learning more about human trafficking and CSEC, there is an online training course provided by *Foster Parent College* titled "Understanding Sex Trafficking." To enroll in this course, please contact your RFA social worker to register.

## Permanency Options

Resource families often are confused about permanency options for the children in their care. The Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) has a chart that can assist you in determining what benefits a child is entitled to called "What Am I Eligible For?" For example, did you know that a youth adopted on, or after, their 16th birthday is eligible for Adoption Assistance Payments through age 21, Independent Living Services, AB 12 and the Chafee Grant? Or that a child who is in legal guardianship with a relative, within the 5th degree, can receive Medi-Cal through age 21 and can mark "independent" on their FAFSA application if they were in foster care on, or after, age 13?

There are many benefits available to children who achieve permanency through adoption or legal guardianship. To learn more, please talk to your child's social worker and ask for more information. You can also contact DHS at the Columbus Center by calling (661) 873-2301 and asking to speak to the Adoption Social Worker of the Day.



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/](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/dhs/FosterFamilyResources/)