

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 or Melissa Bodirsky at: (661) 873-2382 or email bodirsm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

DID YOU KNOW ... A few facts about the month of August.

August is the **8th month of the year in the Gregorian calendar**. It has 31 days, the same number of days as July, and is named after the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar in 8 BC.

According to the National Day Calendar [nationaldaycalendar.com] there are over 20 awareness themes recognized in the month of August and below are just a few:

National Wellness Month – was founded in 2018 by Live Love Spa. The goal is to focus on self-care, managing stress and promoting healthy routines. Individuals are encouraged to create wholesome habits in their lifestyle all month long.

National Immunization Month – was founded by the National Public Health Information Coalition to highlight the importance of vaccination for people of all ages. It is also the beginning of back-to-school preparations and a good time to make sure children are properly vaccinated before heading back to school.

National Back to School Month – has been observed since the 1960's. It is busy time, full of excitement as parents, teachers and students prepare for the new school year.

National Happiness Month – the Secret Society of Happy People started celebrating happiness with “Admit You’re Happy” on August 8, 1999. Happiness is all about the quality of your thoughts. It is not a destination but a life-long pursuit. People are encouraged to enjoy everything and anything that make you happy. Remember the words of Abraham Lincoln,

**FOLKS ARE USUALLY ABOUT AS HAPPY
AS THEY MAKE THEIR MINDS UP TO BE.**

Contact Monique Hawkins, DHS Ombudsman/Program Director, at 661-631-6188.



Melissa's Message

Who do I contact? Why are there so many social workers involved with the child I'm caring for?

These may be questions you often ask yourself. When a foster youth is placed in your home, every social worker involved with the child's case is introducing themselves to you. It can be overwhelming to remember each social worker's tasks and how it relates to you as the resource parent. I am here to help! Below is a list of the Child Protective Services (CPS) programs and their roles as it pertains to resource families and foster youth.



Family Services/Adoptions Social Worker

- Child's primary social worker (arranges visits and makes monthly contact with the child & you)
- Works with biological parents toward reunification/permanency for the youth
- Assesses the child's needs and coordinates services (i.e. health and education) Facilitates placement decision through teaming

Court Services Social Worker

- Represents the Department at court hearings
- Works in partnership with Family Services/Adoptions to set recommendations for the child's case and write court reports

Resource Family Approval Social Worker

- Works with applicant to obtain approval to become an approved resource family (home inspection, family evaluation interviews and exemptions)
- Can assist with questions about your home, capacity, background checks and training classes
- Maintains the case of the resource family and completes the annual renewals

Family Finding & Engagement Social Worker

- Contacts family members of the child with the intent of helping to maintain a familial bond and/or find a relative interested in placement
- Refers relatives to the placement social worker for visits with the child, sending care packages to the child and refers relatives to the RFA program for assessment t

Each program plays an important role in providing the best possible outcome for a foster child's case. With this list, you will be able to better understand the assigned job duties of each social worker that you work with and how to navigate the CPS system.

New and Improved Website is in the Works!

The Kern County Department of Human Services website will be undergoing a transformation to an improved website over the next several months with a goal of creating a more customer friendly online presence. On May 6, 2019, the website was temporarily upgraded to include current information until the permanent website is completed. A Resources tab has been created to provide the community with access to self-service resources and information. Please visit www.kerncounty.com/dhs to see the changes and stay tuned as our permanent site should be completed by the end of the year.

Independent Living Program Graduate Dinner

On April 25, 2019 the Department of Human Services (DHS) hosted the Independent Living Program (ILP) Graduation Dinner for foster youth. A total of 94 ILP foster youth are set to graduate this year. The dinner took place at Coconut Joe's Beach Club with graduates, their friends, loved ones and community partners in attendance. Bakersfield College collaborated with DHS for this event. DHS executive staff including Director Dena Murphy, Chief Deputy Director Cindy Uetz and Program Director Jill Christopher also attended to honor the graduating youth. Emancipated youth gave inspirational speeches. Awards for ILP and Probation Shining Stars were given out to exceptional youth. Other awards given out for the highest grade point averages and most active in ILP. Graduating youth had the opportunity to win prizes such as sports bags, gift cards, and laptops. In addition, each ILP youth received household items, such as silverware and small appliances from the Kaiser Grant. The ILP Graduation Dinner was an overall success that recognized foster youth who are beating the odds and achieving greatness.



Resource Parent Appreciation Dinner

The 11th Annual Resource Family Appreciation dinner was held on May 2nd at Salty's Banquet & Event Center, which seeks to honor our Kern County resource families and the tremendous work they do for our foster children. Dr. Jaiya John, author of *Legendary: A Tribute to Those Who Honorably Serve Devalued Children* and many other noteworthy works was the keynote speaker for the dinner. Dr. John was born into the foster care system and through his experiences; he was able to connect and offer valuable insight into the hearts and minds of the foster youth. As well as being an author, Dr. John is a motivational speaker, author, poet and humanitarian who has dedicated his time to speaking on behalf of devalued children everywhere. In addition to Dr. John's inspirational speech, three resource families and one business partner were honored for their outstanding efforts; including Bank of the Sierra for their vital role in establishing the Operation Fresh Start Program that assists our relatives & non-related extended family members. We hope everyone enjoyed the event and we look forward to hosting you again next year!

Safe Sleep Best Practices

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than 3,500 babies in the U.S. perish suddenly and unexpectedly every year while sleeping, with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) often being the cause. To prevent the risk of SIDS and other sleep related infant fatalities; please view the best practices for safe sleep below:

- Infants 12 months or younger must be placed on their backs when sleeping
- No loose articles or objects inside the crib
- Crib mattresses must be firm and include a tight fitting sheet
- The crib must have the proper guard rails

Keeping Teens Safe

In an article in *Psychology Today*, Dr. Raychelle Cas-sada Lohmann, brings to light the highly risky activities that teens today can engage in. Dr. Lohmann explains the importance of knowing what our teens may become introduced to, knowing the lingo that teens use and recognizing the warning signs of such deadly games. Games/activities that teens may engage in are:

- Choking Game also known as Passout, Blackout and Roulette. The purpose is to cut off blood flow to the brain that results in lightheadedness and a euphoric feeling
 - A teen often submits to being choked by another person, but this game can also be played alone where the risk of death is far greater
 - Warning signs include blood shot eyes, excessive need for privacy, frequent headaches and marks around the neck
- Huffing also known as Sniffing, Boppers and Head Cleaner. The purpose is to cause lightheadedness and euphoria by inhaling chemical vapors
 - There are 3 types of inhalants that teens inhale: volatile solvents like glue, paint thinner and gasoline; aerosols like hair spray, spray paint and oil cooking spray; and gases like room deodorizers, propane and butane lighters
 - Warning signs include slurred speech, chemical odors and sores around mouth and nose
- Car Surfing or Ghost Riding or Skitching. The purpose of this game is thrill seeking that produces a rush of excitement
 - A teen will ride on the exterior of a moving car that someone else is driving. Ghost Riding is when the driver gets out of the moving vehicle to dance beside it while the car is still moving. Skitching is when a person is pulled from behind the car on something such as a skateboard or bike
 - Car surfing has produced 58 fatalities and 41 non-fatal injuries from 1990 to 2008
 - Be aware of whom your teens are spending time with and who has access to a vehicle

It is important to talk with your teen about the fine line that separates danger and risk. Healthy risk taking helps us to learn life lessons and establishes parameters of what is right from wrong. Teens can gain self-confidence from taking on challenges but they also must learn that some risks can be irreversible and life taking.

Written Directives Updates

On April 11, 2019, the state of California released Written Directives 6.0 for the Resource Family Approval (RFA) program. Listed below are some of the important changes that pertain to approved resource family homes.

- Annual Dates-If a resource family has a significant change in circumstance, (i.e. adoption or relocation) the annual renewal date will change to the new date of reassessment. However, the annual training due date will remain the initial approval date.
- Inactive Status- A resource family may be placed on inactive status upon written or verbal notification by the family that is to include the following information:
 - Date inactive status will begin
 - Reason for request of inactive status
 - Anticipated date inactive status will end
 - Resource families may not be placed on inactive status if there is a child or non-minor dependent (foster youth) placed in the home
 - The period of inactive status may not exceed two years
 - A resource family must provide 30 calendar day notice to the County to end inactive status and the family will be subject to an approval update
 - If there are conditions placed on a Resource Family's approval, such as completing annual training hours (i.e. completion of training hours), the conditions shall be suspended during a period of inactive status
- Forfeiture of Resource Family Approval
 - A resource family approval shall be forfeited by operation of law when any of the following occurs:
 - Approval is surrendered to the County
 - Resource family is convicted of offense which cannot be granted a criminal record exemption
 - The sole resource parent dies
 - Resource family abandons approved home; the family no longer accepts responsibility of the home
 - RFA staff are unable to locate whereabouts of resource family
 - A resource family has 30 calendar days to cooperate with an update from the date of the written notice provided by the County
 - Outdoor Activity Space
 - A resource family shall ensure that swimming pools, fixed in-place wading pools, hot tubs, spas or similar bodies of water are inaccessible if he or she accepts placement of any of the following individuals:
 - Children under ten years old
 - Children or non-minor dependents who are developmentally, mentally or physically disabled
 - A minor or non-minor dependent parent's child who is under ten years old or has a developmental, mental or physical disability
 - Inaccessibility of the body of water should be obtained by at least one of the following safety features:
 - An enclosed structure around the entire body of water that does not visually block the view of the pool, which meets Health and Safety Code section 115921 and is installed and maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications
 - An approved safety pool cover that meets the American Society for Testing and Materials specifications

For more information on the Written Directives 6.0 updates, please contact your assigned RFA social worker.



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