

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

Ombudsman Corner

As we enter into the season of reflection, giving and thankfulness, I would like to express a sincere thank you to all resource families. Thank you for opening the doors of your homes and hearts to the most vulnerable members of our community; our children. Thank you for your efforts to maintain and strengthen the family ties, working with birth parents, transporting to visits and helping the children to work through their emotions caused by loyalty conflicts. Your ability, commitment and determination to parent children in spite of the most challenging circumstances is remarkable. Thank you for being a part of a team, working closely with social workers and service providers to ensure the wellbeing of our children.



Dr. Rita F. Pierson, educational trainer and consultant, motivational speaker/teacher, author and human resource developer said it best when she said:

"Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be."

You have been and are that champion.

Happy Thanksgiving

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

Melissa's Message

The Importance of Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships can often be one of the longest relationships a person may have in their lifetime. Quite often, no other relationship is as important to our youth in foster care and it is because of that bond that we, as child welfare professionals, work diligently to maintain those sibling connections. Relationships with siblings can provide the youth with continuity throughout their lifetime and can help with navigating social and cognitive challenges that they may face in life.

Studies have shown that preserving ties with siblings helps to buffer the negative effects of maltreatment and removal from the family home that our foster youth experience. Other examples of positive outcomes when siblings stay connected are exhibiting less internalizing behaviors, protective factors for mental health, improvement of school performance and a tendency

to show more of a connection with the caregiver.

When a sibling group comes into the foster care system, the social workers' first priority is to try to locate a family that can accommodate all the children if it is in the children's best interest to remain together. That task can prove challenging due to factors such as; large sibling groups, differences in the needs of the children, entering into foster care at different times and the lack of families that can care for sibling groups. When siblings cannot be placed together, social workers ensures they are still connected by sibling visitations and if age appropriate, siblings may choose to stay connected telephonically and/or through social media.

As the holidays approach, sibling connections can be much more mean-



ingful then ever and we encourage all our resource families to help in maintaining those connections. Helping a youth to buy/make gifts for their siblings, taking photos together and assisting youth with any of their holiday traditions with their siblings are just some examples of ensuring that connection remains.

If you are considering opening your home to a sibling placement, please contact your assigned Resource Family Approval social worker.

Medically Fragile Training

A percentage of our youth in foster care have medical needs that require specialized care. All resource families that have an interest in caring for our medically fragile foster youth are required to take medically fragile training courses as well as additional training specifically designated for the medically fragile youth placed in their home. A medically fragile foster youth will be assigned a Public Health Nurse (PHN). The PHN can assist in coordinating proper training for the resource family. For more information on medically fragile training or about becoming a medically fragile home, please contact your assigned Resource Family social worker.



Clothing Allowance for Foster Youth

As resource parents, you have likely experienced receiving a foster youth in your home that may not have enough clothing to last them a few days or that the clothes may be too small in size. The initial clothing allowance will be manually dispersed in conjunction with the first non-emergency foster care payment by the Foster Care Human Service Technician assigned. Annual clothing allowances are automatically issued by the state for each foster child during the month of August. For more information about clothing allowances, please contact the youth's primary social worker.

A Tribute to Our Resource Family Friendly Business Partners

As 2019 comes to a close, the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) would like to thank all our Resource Family Friendly Business (RFFB) partners that are providing discounts on goods and services to our resource families and foster youth.

As most of you may be aware, the RFFB program launched in July 2019 with 10 business partners and since its launch, RFFB has doubled our business list! The RFFB partners have opened their hearts and businesses in helping to support resource families who care for our foster youth. KCDHS is truly grateful for the support these businesses have shown and we are eager to make 2020 an even better year for the RFFB!

Participating Businesses:

American Kids Sports Center, Body Xchange Fitness & Sports Clubs, Cataldo's Pizza, Covenant Coffee, Darrell's Automotive, Don Perico Mexican Grill & Bar, Fresco Mexican Grill, Jersey Mike's Subs, Le Mirage Salon, Max Muscle Nutrition, Papa John's Pizza, Respawn, Rig City Coffee Roasters, Rio Bravo Jiu-Jitsu, Stopest Pest Control, Tacos La Villa Mexican Grill, Valley Children's Ice Center of Bakersfield, Wendy's and West Coast Barber Shop.

Business locations and discounts can be found at <https://www.kcdhs.org/MyRFFB/>.

For questions regarding the RFFB Partnership program, please contact Resource Family Specialist Melissa Soin at 661-873-2382.



Getting the Most from Child Family Team Meetings

A Child Family Team Meeting (CFTM) plays a vital role in maintaining stability in placement and providing an inclusive team-building element in the reunification/permanency case plan. CFTMs encourage all participants to have a voice in what is best for the child. The following are key components of a successful CFTM:

- Trained Facilitators
- Scheduled meetings are confirmed in advance
- Resource parents are invited & encouraged to attend
 - An explanation of their role in the CFTM is important to give caregivers in advance
- When appropriate, the child is invited and supported to share her/his thoughts
 - Allowing the youth to step out of the meeting if the topic may negatively affect the youth.
- Biological parents are encouraged to attend
- Emphasize the importance of respect in communication

As resource parents, you are instrumental in ensuring the well-being of our foster youth and by participating in a CFTM, you give a voice to how the child is doing in your home. You also may be an advocate for the youth if they do not feel comfortable enough to attend themselves. Resource Parents can also request a CFTM if they feel the need to collaborate with the Child Family Team (CFT) about placement issues. For more information regarding CFTMs, contact your foster youth's primary social worker.

Breakfast with Santa

On Saturday December 14, 2019, Kern County Department of Human Services will be hosting our annual "Breakfast with Santa" for our foster youth and their caregivers. The event will feature games, prizes, food, raffles and best of all, a photo with Santa. Please be on the lookout for your invitation in the mail. We look forward to seeing you there!

Holiday Cottage

Thirty-two years ago, the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) recognized that children living in foster care during the holidays needed special attention. It was then that the Holiday Cottage was established by KCDHS to fulfill the wishes of children living in foster care.

This year, more than one thousand children living in Kern County resource families and group homes received letters, asking them what they hoped for during the holidays.

When the 32nd Annual Holiday Cottage opens its doors on Monday, December 2, 2019, these wishes will be placed with the child's first name and age on the trees that line the walls of the cottage. During the 14 days, we will be located

at a space in the Rosedale Village. Volunteers, representing local community groups, will be there to greet members of our generous community and assist them in selecting a wish to fill. The gift is then purchased by those local individuals and families and returned to the cottage unwrapped. These gifts are delivered directly to the child in time for the holidays. The spirit of generosity fills the Holiday Cottage.

Children come into foster care through no fault of their own. They have been abused or neglected and range in age from newborn to 21 years of age. Some are brothers and sisters; some have physical, mental or emotional disabilities; and most have suffered the trauma of being separated from their families. DHS and our community have come together to make sure children living in foster care can celebrate during this time of year.



California Youth Connection

Celebrating thirty years, the California Youth Connection (CYC) is a youth-led organization that develops leaders who work toward empowering each other and their communities in transforming the foster care system with legislative, policy and practice changes. Foster youth ages 14-24 can become members of CYC. Becoming a member helps to build leadership skills and supportive relationships through one-on-one mentoring, specialized training and opportunities to speak to policymakers, child welfare professionals, other foster youth and the general public about foster care reform. CYC also has volunteer supporters that collaborate with the youth members in chapter and advisory board meetings, conferences and local work groups. For more information about CYC, visit <https://calyouthconn.org>.

Medi-Cal Reminder

Foster children have medical coverage through California's Medi-Cal Program. When they come into care, you may receive a temporary paper copy of the Benefits Identification Card (BIC) as you receive placement of them. If you do not receive it, you can ask the social worker for the child's nine digit Client Identification Number (CIN). Any medical or behavioral health provider can run this CIN in their system and determine that the child is covered by Medi-Cal even if you do not have the card or paper document. After a few weeks, you should receive their Medi-Cal card in the mail. Should the child move to another home, please ensure the temporary BIC, CIN and/or Medi-Cal card are included in the child's belongings to be given to their new caregiver. For more information, please contact the foster youth's primary social worker.



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