

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Pam Townsend at 661-873-2339 and her email is townsep@kerndhs.com or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email soinm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

The month of May observes over 35 National observances and one of the more important ones is known as National Foster Care Month. In 1998, with the encouragement of the National Foster Care Association, Senator Strom Thurmond introduced a resolution to proclaim the month of May as National Foster Care Month. This same year, President Ronald Reagan issued the first presidential proclamation establishing May as National Foster Care Month.

During this month, time is set aside to honor and acknowledge resource parents, family members, and other members of the community who have dedicated their lives to caring for and supporting children in foster care. On behalf of the Kern County Department of Human Services, I would like to wholeheartedly reiterate the words of an unknown author:

Thank you for the inspirational risks you take in opening your hearts and homes to children of all ages...for persevering through tough times and crisis... and for rejoicing with us when the healing process begins.

We applaud your visions of change and your uncanny ability to see the potential in every child – which both lead us to joyfully celebrate when together, we have made a difference in a child's life.

We thank you for your commitment to being there for the kids, whether for a day or a year or a lifetime and for your partnership with our staff who depend so much on your tireless energy.

You give hope to the future. Thank you for giving kids peace! — (Author unknown)



Melissa's Message

Pre-Placement Questions

Whether it is your first placement call or the tenth, making sure that you are asking questions about the foster youth that may be placed in your home is essential to ensuring that the placement starts off well and can be maintained. As resource families, you understand the importance of keeping a placement stable and assuring the youth that there is a place for them in your family, but please also understand that our youth have been through so much trauma and it is okay to ask informative questions before accepting a placement and to even decline a placement if you feel the youth would not be compatible with your family. It is important to note that the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) may not have all the information regarding a youth at the time of placement; for example behavioral issues that arise after the youth has been in foster care for some time. Communication with the child's social worker is vital and through that partnership, KCDHS can support you and the youth through that difficult period. KCDHS has created a Pre-Placement Questionnaire that is available to all our resource families which provides placement specific questions to help educate the family about a foster youth.



Here are some examples of important questions to ask:

1. What are the child's strengths, interests and activities?
2. What school does the child want to attend?
3. Does the youth have any medical concerns or is currently taking medication?
4. Does the youth have visitation with birth parents? If so, what is the visitation schedule?
5. Does the youth have siblings and how do they stay connected with each other?
6. Does the youth have any behavioral issues or other special needs? (pregnant, biting, hitting, runs away, uses drugs, sexually acts out, suicidal)

As a resource parent, you will be asked to sign a form called Assessment Information for Foster Parent or Group Home (KCDHS 358) upon accepting placement. This form will also provide you with information regarding the youth's background, health, education and the case plan. You are encouraged to ask questions or to have the primary social worker review this form with you. The KCDHS 358 form serves as a baseline of information that is known about the youth and KCDHS will work with you in providing up to date information of the youth as it is received. To obtain a copy of the Pre-Placement Questionnaire please contact your assigned Resource Family Approval social worker.

Kudos Korner *Supporting Resilience*

This Kudos Korner is dedicated to a resource family who became a foundation of support for a foster youth who had experienced perceivably impossible obstacles. The resource family opened their hearts and home and through love and encouragement, they were able to witness the flourishing resilience of this youth. One of the resource parents even reached out to the Resource Family Approval social worker to boast about this foster youth's accomplishments in finishing high school with an impressive GPA score and also about her acceptance into two prestigious colleges! It was evident how proud this resource parent was, but humbly he placed all the praise on the youth for her hard work and dedication to a successful future. The Kern County Department of Human Services would like to thank this resource family for their dedication and support to this foster youth and in helping to propel her into a successful future!




YES Conference


The fifth annual Youth Empowering Success (YES!) Conference occurred on March 6, 2020 at Bakersfield College. A total of 238 attendees; including agency staff, caregivers, juvenile court judges, foster youth and volunteers, showed their support for our foster youth. This year's keynote speaker was country singer and author Jimmy Wayne. A former foster youth, Jimmy Wayne gave an inspiring message about what it meant to be self-sufficient and taking steps toward being successful and independent as these youth transition to adulthood. The foster youth also got opportunities to get hands-on experience through Career Technical Education modules for various occupations like EMT, business, robotics, culinary, nursing and many more! The overall theme of the conference was "focus on my future" and how adults can empower youth to reach and achieve their dreams.



FKCE: Reconnecting with Teens Conference

On January 31, 2020 Bakersfield College hosted the Reconnecting with Teens conference at the Bakersfield's Marriott Hotel. Through the Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) Program, Bakersfield College provides training and support to over 1,800 resource families in Kern County on an annual basis. California State Ombudsperson Rochelle Trochtenberg was the guest speaker and spoke about the importance of supporting our older youth as she is a former foster youth herself. Resource parents who attended the event learned strategies on how to better support older youth as they transition to adulthood. Along with the keynote speaker presentation, families also participated in breakout sessions. The Kern County Department of Human Services would like to thank the FKCE program and staff for their effort and hard work in continually supporting Kern County's resource families! For up to date information about trainings and conferences hosted by FKCE, please visit <https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/FKCE>.







Summer Safety Tips

As we prepare for warm months ahead and plan for all the fun summer activities, let us be proactive in making sure our children are safe and happy. Centers for Disease Control lists the following tips on water safety, being sun smart and being safe at home, work and play.

Water Safety

- Closely monitor children around bodies of water at all times to prevent drowning
- Prevent water illnesses that are caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in by incorporating bathroom breaks and diaper checks every hour. Also change diapers away from the swim area
- Wearing life jackets when participating in boating activities

Sun Smart

- Whenever possible, seek shade to limit exposure to harmful UV rays
- Make use of long-sleeved shirts and pants if possible to protect skin
- Wear hats and sunglasses to protect the head, face and eyes
- Always use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 and apply sunscreen thirty minutes prior to going outdoors

Safety at Home, Work and Play

- Educate your children about playground rules and equipment and ensure the equipment is right for their age and developmental level
- Have a fire prevention plan in place at home. Teach your children how to properly use kitchen appliances like the microwave and have a safety evacuation plan
- For teens who are permitted to work, educate them on safety and health in the workplace

For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/features/kidssafety/index.html>.

Resource Family Friendly Business Update

The Resource Family Friendly Business Partnership is a FREE program available to all Kern County resource families that provides discounts on goods and/or services from participating local businesses. Resource families will receive a discount card in the mail along with a printed directory of the businesses who have offered a discount. This



program was created to help support our resource families who support our foster youth. When the program launched in July 2019, ten businesses were listed on the directory, now we have more than twenty!

A special shout out to our newest participating businesses:

- Camelot Park Bakersfield
- Damsel in Defense Independent Vendor Sylvia Tafoya
- Golden Empire Youth Tackle Football Inc.

Resource families, be on the lookout for a survey in your email about the RFFB program. We would love to hear your feedback and ways to make the RFFB program even better!

For more information, contact Melissa Soin at 661-873-2382.



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/