

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](mailto:townsep@kerndhs.com) or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com).

### Ombudsman Corner

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.” — Voltaire

It is difficult to adequately express our appreciation for everything that you have done to support children and families during this stressful time. The effects of the COVID-19 outbreak has caused many changes to the way we navigate our daily lives. During this period full of challenges and uncertainty, you have continued to demonstrate your dedication to the children and families of this community and for this, we say THANK YOU!



Thank you for setting aside the stability and harmony of your family to welcome and love a child that is not your own. You have been a “first responder” in times of emergencies and crises for children placed in your home; a counselor, teacher/tutor, coach, activities director and role model. You have been flexible and supportive of the sometimes-daily changes to practice and policy due to COVID-19. We recognize the lengths you have gone through to protect the wellbeing of the children in your home and facilitating family interaction between children and their families.

Thank you for being our heroes and making a positive difference in the life of the children we serve in our community.

### Comfort Calls & COVID-19

In 2018, the Kern County Department of Human Services had introduced Quality Parenting Initiative’s Comfort Calls. These calls serve a purpose of connecting birth parents to their children within the first day or two of the child being placed with a resource family. It also provides a way for the resource parent and birth parent to connect and start the foundation of support and ongoing collaboration. Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, these Comfort Calls are more important than ever.

Comfort Calls do not take place of court ordered visits, but rather they serve to give the birth parents the reassurance that their children are safe by hearing from the

children directly and having an opportunity to talk to the resource parents. Comfort Calls can also give birth parents the opportunity to share information about their children with the resource parents. Discussing the child’s bedtime routine, what foods they like to eat, how to best soothe and comfort them is critical in helping the child adjust to living away from home. The COVID-19 Pandemic has provided its own set of challenges and has further added to the worry that birth parents already feel for their children and the frightened feeling children can experience, so these Comfort Calls can mean the world of difference in giving that peace of mind. For more information on how best to facilitate Comfort Calls, please contact the foster youth’s primary social worker.

# Melissa's Message

## Reunification Partners

I had the opportunity to attend this year's first virtual National Quality Parenting Initiative Conference via Zoom and I was inspired by the positive and supportive messages from the resource parents. One such message explored the idea of seeing resource parents as reunification partners. Over the years, the title for our caregivers has changed; from foster parents, to resource foster parents to what it is now, a resource family, but one thing has remained constant; you are all still partners in helping foster youth and birth parents reunify. The primary goal of the Kern County Department of Human Services is to reunify children and their families by supporting the WHOLE family. As resource parents, you have the opportunity to connect with not only the children, but with the birth parents as well. I have heard wonderful testimonials from social workers about how collaborative our resource parents are with birth parents and how encouraging resource parents are to the birth parents to be a part of the child's everyday life while being physically separated. We all understand the trauma that comes with being in the foster care system and by becoming a team with each other in support of the family; we can help the child through the trauma and help the family find their way back to each other.



## How Can I QPI Today?

The primary purpose of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) is to provide solution focused support to our resource parents, birth parents and foster youth. QPI is an integral part of how the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) collaborates with our partners, especially our resource families. KCDHS follows the below listed practices when working with our resource families, birth families and foster youth.

- Model honesty, transparency and respect with youth, resource families and birth parents
- Include resource families in permanency planning by having the resource parents share information about the youth they are caring for.
- Support connections and relationships between the youth and their resource parents. It can be an emotional process if the youth is moving out of the resource family home.
- Be responsive and flexible in providing ongoing support and needed services to resource families to prevent a disruption or crisis from happening before it is too late.
- Most of all, take every opportunity to acknowledge, support and thank resource families for providing quality care to foster youth in their home.

Through a collaborative process supported by QPI, we are all connected and increasingly supported!

## Dream Center

The Kern County Network for Children's Dream Center, Kern's one-stop resource center for foster youth up to age 25, is open and available to assist youth with: computer use, job search and employment assistance, CalFresh, Medi-Cal, Independent Living Skills, linkages to mental health and substance abuse treatment services, AB 12/ extended foster care, housing assistance, educational advocacy and support (all grades including college), assistance with enrolling in college and applying for financial aid, assistance with vocational training programs, assistance with obtaining their vital documents (e.g. birth certificate, social security card, and/or ID), and many more things. In addition to services, youth can receive free emergency food, clothing, hygiene items, baby items, snack bags, household items and cleaning supplies. Parenting youth and foster parents can also receive the following free COVID Relief items: toys, coloring books, books, cleaning supplies, emergency food, diapers and wipes. Dream Center hours of operation are 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. For questions or to receive more information, please call 661.636.4488. Should the Dream Center be required to close for any COVID-19 related reason, please visit the Dream Center's website at [www.kcnc.org](http://www.kcnc.org) or the Dream Center of Kern County Facebook page for contact information for staff and agency partners who will be working remotely.

# Bakersfield College Virtual Training & Support Group

Bakersfield College is dedicated to providing pre-service and annual training hours to all Kern County resource families and has moved all trainings to an online platform. Resource families will be able to connect online via Zoom for interactive, instructor-led trainings to fulfill their 8 hours of annual training. Please visit <https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/FKCE/schedules#ot> to visit the in-service training schedule and instructions on how to register for classes.

Bakersfield College is also proud to announce an interactive support group called Caregiving Together. This support group offers resource families the opportunity to connect with one



another, share tips and advice and discuss important child welfare/foster care topics. This is a great resource to help resource families build their network of support! These meetings are held once a month via the online platform Zoom. Below are the remaining scheduled meetings for 2020:

- Friday September 11, 2020 (10am-11:30am)

- Thursday, October 8, 2020 (6pm-7:30pm)
- Friday, November 13, 2020 (10am-11:30am)
- Thursday, December 10, 2020 (6pm-7:30pm)

To register, please email [BCFKCE@bakersfieldcollege.edu](mailto:BCFKCE@bakersfieldcollege.edu) or call 661-395-4991.

## Kudos Korner

The Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) would like to acknowledge the dedication and kindness of three exceptional resource families, that despite the challenges of the Coronavirus Pandemic, they have given the upmost love and support to our foster children and their birth families. KCDHS is proud to be collaborating with these resource families in caring for Kern County's foster youth.

### Thoughtfulness in Tehachapi

One of KCDHS's Family Services Social Workers would like to give a special kudos to a resource family in Tehachapi that has been a wonderful reunification partner. This resource family not only accepts Kern County foster youth, but also takes youth from Los Angeles County. The social worker expressed gratitude for this family who is always willing to transport and monitor visits for the youth and their birth families. The foster youth that are cared for by this family are rewarded for their good grades and behavior which encourages the youth to continue on a positive path. Kudos

goes out to this resource family who really cares about the happiness of the children and who supports which ever path (reunification or permanency) that the birth family and child may be on.

### Reunification Influencer

A special kudos goes out to a resource parent who has played a major role in changing a mother and son's life. The child is autistic, active and had a history of getting out of the house if it was not secured with high locks and/or alarms. Fortunately, the child was placed with a resource parent familiar with autistic children and who engaged with the child's parent. The child's mother noted the one positive thing throughout this whole situation was her ability to meet this resource parent and that her son is in her care. The following is a direct quote from a Program Director who had an active role in providing information to the court.

*"The mother listens to her and she has acted as a mentor to the mother showing her how she can provide a more structured and disciplined method of care for the child. This resource parent said she has worked with many autistic children*

*in her time but this 8 year has been very challenging. She has provided the social worker with good feedback about the child and the mother, their relationship and the potential to work with them with the right plan. The birth mother hopes to continue to communicate with this resource parent once she gets her son back."*

### Establishing a Bond

The last kudos goes out to a special resource family who made the effort to nurture a bond between the foster child and a biological relative whom the child had not yet met. This resource family went above and beyond to establish that connection by inviting the relative to birthday parties, events out in the community, and family gatherings. This resource family was dedicated to this foster youth and understood the importance of that child knowing their biological family. After some time, the foster youth went to live with the relative and while this resource family was saddened as they had built a beautiful bond with the child, they knew this child would be loved. KCDHS would like to thank this resource family for their dedication and openness in supporting Kern County foster youth.



# Social Media

## Tips for Resource Parents & Caregivers

What are the risks? Youth in foster care may be particularly vulnerable to inappropriate contact, cyberbullying, or child predators. In addition, social networks and private messaging may aid the youth in communication with adults or family members who have been determined “off limits” by the child’s social worker. The following are some tips for resource parents about social media use and foster youth:

- Talk with your youth’s social worker. Ask about safety needs and concerns that may affect your youth’s use of social media and whether he or she had any past issues with social media use.
- Discuss social media with youth in your care. Ask how they use social media and private messaging and why it is important to them.
- Discuss with your Social Worker to determine and set house rules for what is okay and what is not. Rules will likely vary with the youth’s age and circumstance, but setting them early is important.
- Use privacy settings to help youth limit who can find them online, which posts or photos can be seen.
- Teach youth to keep personal information private.
- Advise youth in foster care not to post their full name, address, school name, phone number, or other identifying information.
- Be aware of online gaming risks. On-



- line games can be unsafe as players often interact with others on gaming platforms. Youth should avoid posting pictures of themselves or giving personal information while playing online games, and let them know that they can come to you if they are being bullied or harassed.
- Be aware of the kind of games your youth plays and discuss the risks.
- Monitor use. Know what type of social media your youth uses. Try to balance monitoring with privacy. Talk with your Social Worker to determine if an online monitoring program can be installed to also help you watch out for inappropriate use.
- Explain the need to be careful. Make sure youth understand that online, not everyone is who they say they are. Advise youth to avoid sharing intimate photos and messaging about sexual activity online.
- Discuss cyberbullying. Discuss consequences with youth about sending, forwarding, or responding to mean or embarrassing messages or pictures.

- Keep lines of communication open. Encourage youth to let you know if an exchange makes them uncomfortable, if someone is sending them inappropriate photos, or if anyone asks to meet them in person. Contact law enforcement in situations that warrant additional attention and notify the child’s social worker.
- Appreciate the youth’s participation in their online communities and show interest in their friends.
- When youth slip up and do not follow guidelines, approach the situation as a teachable moment and calmly work together on what to do next.

Always check with the agency you are working with to ensure you are in line with policies regarding on-line use, as well as keeping the child(ren) in your home safe.

For more information about this topic, visit [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) Social Media Tips for Parents and Caregivers.



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