

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

Happy Holidays

The Holiday Season is here. For most families this time of the year is magical, filled with joy, excitement and a special time for family fun and togetherness. For children in the foster care system holidays can be very difficult. Conflicting loyalties, missing their birth families and the thought of being in unfamiliar situations may be emotionally stressful. Add to that all the Center for Disease Control (CDC) COVID-19 guidelines regarding social distancing and gatherings; one may be of the mind not to celebrate the holidays. Do not throw in the towel yet!



In the article “Why Celebrating Holidays is Essential Even during the Coronavirus Pandemic,” Steele Marcoux states that celebrating things big and small come to mean more now than ever. “Finding daily moments of delight and celebrating them” will help us through these times of uncertainty. The article also states, “Keeping rituals and holidays special will create distinction from one day to the next, and help bolster morale for yourself and loved ones.” Below are a few additional suggestions to help your foster child cope and assist you with managing the holiday season:

- Talk about how your family celebrates the holidays. This gives children time to anticipate the upcoming activities
- Talk about your family’s specific customs and activities
- Allow the children to share their customs/traditions. Try to incorporate some of their traditions into your families
- Be mindful of religious differences
- Use the holidays as an opportunity to expose children to new ideas and information that will hopefully reinforce skills, knowledge and support their success in school

Lastly, remember it is okay that this year’s celebrations will look different.

Thank you for the commitment and love that you continue to provide to the children placed in your home.

Melissa's Message

During this holiday season Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) would like to extend our upmost appreciation to all Kern County resource families for their commitment in supporting children and families in need. Holidays can be triggering for foster youth as they are separated from biological family and family traditions. As resource families, you have opened your hearts and homes to these children and accepted them as part of your family. You have learned about their holiday traditions and incorporated them to give these youth a sense of comfort and belonging. You also understand the meaning of family during this special time of year by reaching out to biological relatives to maintain that connection the youth have with their family.



As resource parents you are a multifaceted part of caring for Kern County foster youth. You are seen as mothers, fathers, friends, family and most importantly during this pandemic, education supporters. You are unwavering in your dedication to love, support and help teach these children and for that; KCDHS cannot thank you enough! With the added task of supporting distance learning, you all have rose to the challenge and committed to making at-home learning as meaningful as possible. By creating classroom conducive environments and maintaining regular communication with the educators, resource parents are surpassing what it means to be a resource family!

As this uniquely challenging year comes to a close, KCDHS is in awe of how our resource families; when faced with unprecedented challenges, have adapted to change after change and still displayed their unbelievable support to children and families in need. It is with all the gratitude in the world that we say THANK YOU!

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” — John F. Kennedy

Caregiving Together Support Group

Bakersfield College would like to invite all caregivers of Kern County to attend “Caregiving Together.” This is a once a month virtual support group meeting for all resource parents in Kern County. This includes resource parents, relative caregivers and Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFM) caregivers. This is an English only meeting now but we will be offering a Spanish meeting soon. This meeting is intended for caregivers to have an opportunity to support one another and to exchange ideas with each other. We have a different topic each month that is open for discussion. Each caregiver will receive a one-hour training certificate for attending this meeting. All meetings are set up through Zoom and are moderated by Bakersfield College.



The Caregiving Together support group started in July with only three participants and with each passing month, the support group has grown! Topics that were discussed in previous meetings included visitations during COVID, milestones of children, behaviors of middle-aged children and internet safety. During each meeting, resource parents have the opportunity to provide input and ask questions to the group. This is a great way for resource parents to support one another!

Below are the last two meeting dates and topics for 2020

- November 13, 2020 10:00AM-11:30AM-Use of cell phones for children in care
- December 10, 2020 6:00PM-7:30PM-Self-harm in children

Bakersfield College is encouraging all resource families to participate in Caregiving Together. To receive the Zoom link, please register for the group by calling 661-395-4991 or email bckfce@bakersfieldcollege.edu.

Visitation Guidelines & Safety

As of July 1, 2020, in-person visitations for foster youth have resumed in accordance with new protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under these new guidelines, the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) has made every effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children, biological parents, resource parents and agency staff. If you are caring for a foster youth who receives court ordered in-person visits, read the advisements below to prepare you and the foster youth for these visits.

- **Screening Questions** — you will be contacted by the Visitation Monitor (youth's primary social worker or a Human Service Aide) who will ask you the following questions:
 - Is anyone in your household experiencing any COVID-19 related symptoms (fever, shortness of breath, muscle pains, etc.)?
 - Has anyone in your household tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
 - Has anyone in your household been exposed to someone having COVID-19?
 - Please note that if you answer yes to any of these questions, the visit will be canceled and rescheduled. You will also be advised to consult your health care provider and the person experiencing symptoms should self-isolate for at least 14 days. In-person visits will resume only after 3 days without symptoms or a fever.
- **Beginning of the Visit** — when you bring the youth to the destination of the in-person visit, please remain in the car and notify the Visitation Monitor via text or call. Youth ages three and up must wear a face mask during the visit. The Visitation Monitor will come escort the youth from your vehicle to maintain safety protocol. Contactless thermometers will be used to take temperatures of the visiting participants and any temperature 100.4 or higher will result in the cancellation of the visit. All participants will be provided with any required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) before the visit is to begin.
- **During the Visit** — parents will only be allowed to bring food or snacks to the visit unless the visit is 2 hours or less, but discretion is left solely to the Visitation Monitor. Masks are expected to be worn throughout the visit for participants 3 years and older. During eating periods, participants should maintain physical distancing. If these guidelines cannot be followed, the Visitation Monitor and their supervisor have the authority to cancel the visit.
- **End of Visit** — Once the visit has finished, all participants will sanitize or wash their hands and belongings. The Visitation Monitor will then escort the children back to your vehicle.

Through these defined guidelines, KCDHS can safely allow and encourage in-person visits because we understand the importance of how in-person visitations can have a positive impact for these children. If you have any questions regarding in-person visits, contact the foster child's primary social worker.

Child & Family Team Meetings

A Child and Family Team meeting (CFTM) is an important aspect of collaboration with the team to discuss such factors as placement change, placement stability, the need for additional support/services and other topics related to the well-being of the child and the family's progress. A CFTM can also be scheduled prior to court hearings to gather collective recommendations that should be made for court. As a resource family who is caring for the foster youth, your input at a CFTM is immensely valuable! You are a vital part of the child and family team and are encouraged to ask questions, express concerns and to hear about resources available to you to help meet the youth's needs. Below are some tips to participating successfully in a CFTM.

1. Having a private, quiet space to discuss confidential information and protect your and the foster youth's privacy
2. Video conferencing is a great way to connect with the team and see each other's faces. CFTM's are held on Microsoft Teams that can be accessed on a smart phone or computer
3. Limiting distractions can lead to better communication between the team
4. Being prepared with information that you want to share with the team (appointment dates/times, updates from previous appointments, etc.)

A copy of the meeting notes taken by the CFTM facilitator will be sent to you after the meeting. The notes will include an action plan that details the decisions that were made and the next steps for the child and family going forward. If you have more questions regarding CFTMs, please contact either Social Service Supervisor Loy Anne Sarazin at (661) 556-0369 or via email at sarazil@kerndhs.com or Resource Family Specialist Melissa Sojin at (661) 556-0463 or via email at sojinm@kerndhs.com.

Biennial RFA Update

Effective July 1, 2020, the California legislation passed Assembly Bill 79 (AB 79), which amended the timeline of continued approval from every one year to every two years (biennial) for resource families who were approved after July 1, 2020. Please note that if you were approved before July 2020, your update is still expected to be completed within a year's timeframe unless you were granted an extension. After your annual update is completed, your approval will then be updated every two years unless a significant change has occurred to need the update sooner.

Resource parents are still required to keep their post approval annual training requirements up to date. Resource families will need to complete at least sixteen hours of training by their two-year update; designating at least eight hours of training per year. Please also ensure that your CPR certification is up to date every two years. A lack of completion of the training hours would mean that a family is out of compliance with the Written Directives and may be subject to rescission of their approval.

Your assigned Resource Family Approval (RFA) Social Worker will remain in contact with you to give reminders of the training requirement and provide you with information of your options to access the training. It is also encouraged that resource families take into consideration the needs of the child (ren) in their care when deciding on training topics.

For more information about the biennial post approval update, please contact your assigned social worker. If you are unsure who your assigned social worker is, please contact Resource Family Specialist Melissa Soin at 661-556-0463 or email soinm@kerndhs.com.

National Adoption Awareness Month

Each year, November is recognized as National Adoption Awareness Month by Presidential Proclamation and by Proclamation from the Kern County Board of Supervisors. The national observance is designed to focus on adoption of children currently in foster care.

For the last 17 years, the Department of Human Services, the Kern County Superior Courts and many of our local partners, have held a major celebration for local families who are finalizing their adoption of children through foster care. Since we cannot gather in person this year, we decided to celebrate virtually.

Throughout the month of November, we will share the stories of special families who have walked through the journey of adopting a child through foster care. Stay tuned and join us in November on our website www.kcdhs.org, our social media sites, (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and local news stations.

Holiday Cottage 2020



The Kern County Department of Human Services is dedicated to fulfilling the wishes of Kern's foster youth during this holiday season. An exciting change is coming to Holiday Cottage 2020! This year, the Holiday Cottage will go virtual to ensure that foster youth receive holiday gifts in a safe manner. All resource family homes in Kern County with a placement of a child through foster care would have received a Holiday Cottage wish form in the mail in October. Please fill out the wish form with your foster youth and send it back in the provided envelope. For questions or comments regarding Holiday Cottage, email kcholidaycottage@kerndhs.com.

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