

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Cherie Linde at: (661) 873-2327 or email lindec@kerndhs.com or Melissa Bodirsky at: (661) 873-2382 or email bodirsm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

As the new school year is upon us. Have you begun making plans on how to keep your child(ren) engaged in learning and/or inspired to challenge themselves by participating in extracurricular activities such as choir, sports or student government? Are you wondering what activities you as the caregiver can allow foster children within your care to participate in? The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard may assist you in your planning efforts. According to WIC 362.05 and California Department of Social Services All County Letter No. 16-31, the reasonable and prudent parent standard is defined as:

"The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the state to participate in age or developmentally appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities."

As you begin to prepare for the new school year, keep the following in mind:

- Does this activity seem reasonable?
- Is the activity age or developmentally appropriate for the child?
- Is this activity consistent with the health, safety, and best interests of the child?
- Does this activity encourage the emotional, developmental, or cultural growth of the child?
- Is there anything based upon the child's history to suggest that this activity would not be appropriate?

Remember the goal of the reasonable and prudent parent standard is to help normalize the lives of foster children. For more information and resources on the reasonable and prudent parent standard, visit: <http://www.fosterfamilyhelp.ca.gov/PG3001.htm>.

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



Introducing Our New RFA Social Worker

The Department of Human Services would like to welcome Resource Family Approval Social Worker Estephanie Manzo-Armenta who will be working with our placement homes that care for at risk youth including commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) and runaway foster youth. This special group of youth are in great need of resource homes that can care for them and provide them with a stable place to heal. If you are interested in opening your home and heart to these youth, please contact Estephanie Manzo-Armenta at (661) 873-2312.

Resource Family Appreciation Dinner

The 10th Annual Resource Family Appreciation dinner was held on May 3rd at Hodel's. Approximately 200 people attended this event which seeks to honor our Kern County resource families and the tremendous work they do for our abused and neglected children. Mark Anthony Garrett, author of *Teachers are Heroes: 7 Success Principles for Transformational Teaching* was the guest speaker for the evening. Mr. Garrett's inspirational story of his time in foster care, his struggles and hardships and ultimately his guiding light; a third grade teacher who encouraged him to see the significance within resonated with the dedicated hearts in the audience.

As well as being an author, Mr. Garrett is a motivational speaker that has dedicated his life to helping troubled youth and adults overcome the negative challenges within their own lives. In addition to Mr. Garrett's speech, 3 resource/foster families were honored for their outstanding efforts, including retired foster parent Betty Nieto who dedicated 29 years to helping Kern County's foster children. We hope everyone enjoyed the event and we look forward to hosting you again next year!



Melissa's Message

Water Safety

With the increase in hot weather comes the increase in swimming pool use and it is vital that children be protected in and around the water. Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death among young children so it is imperative that all caregivers know how to protect the children in their care and give them a fun and safe swimming experience. Please make sure to supervise children in and around bodies of water. Educate your children on water safety and provide them with the necessary swimming aids, such as inflatable inner tubes, arm floatation devices and life vests based on the child's developmental age and swimming skill level. Introduce babies, starting at 6 months to a swimming experience slowly and always use waterproof diapers. Lastly, please ensure that your CPR training is up to date and that you talk with your children about how to be safe in the water. Be safe, stay cool and have fun!



A Big Thank You to Ikea and Dollar General

The Department of Human Services would like to extend a huge thank you to our community partners Ikea and Dollar General for graciously donating items such as household supplies, backpacks, duffle bags, toys and clothes to assist our foster children and families. All the donations help ensure that a child's needs are met when moving to a new placement home. Once again, thank you Ikea and Dollar General!

The Role of the CASA Worker

The Court Appointed Special Advocate or CASA program was established in Kern County in 1993 to provide advocacy to abused children. The CASA program gives extensive training to its volunteers in order for the CASA worker to provide accurate and detailed information to the court on behalf of the child. CASA workers are mandated reporters and therefore are required by law to report any suspected abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services.

The primary role of the CASA worker is to provide strength-based resources, social support for the child and monitor the child's case plan in order to advocate for the child's needs. The CASA worker is to see the child on a regular basis, primarily in their placement home, but can also take the child out to community events with the caregiver's permission. Another role that a CASA worker plays is building a working relationship with the caregiver. This working relationship is built on the common goal of the best interest of the child. Furthermore, the CASA worker is expected to write a court report for the judge that details the worker's independent observations of the child and all related parties. A CASA worker may or may not recommend case plan changes or additional services for the child. The ultimate goal for CASA is permanency for each dependent child.

For more information about the CASA program, please contact (661) 631-2272.

Unusual Incident Reports

Unusual Incident Report forms are a required form given to all resource parents when a foster youth is placed in the home. This form provides the caregiver with a method of documenting any incidents that the foster youth was involved in that caused any sort of injury to the child. Some examples of when to fill out an unusual incident report are:

- The child scrapes his/her knees from falling while playing.
- The child gets scratched, bit, pinched or kicked by another child.
- The child gets bruised on the shins from being kicked while playing soccer.

However the incident occurs, an Unusual Incident Report needs to be completed and given to the child's primary social worker. It is also important for caregivers to make contact with both the child's primary Social Worker and also their Resource Family Approval Social Worker to notify them of the incident and to ensure open communication. To obtain an Unusual Incident Report form, please contact the child's primary Social Worker.

My Journey Binders for Foster Youth

"Follow Me" binders have been updated! They are now "My Journey" binders and have added information for resource families and the child who is in care. New information has been added to the front of the binders to include:

- Foster Child Information fact sheet – important for passing on vital information!
- Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care form – updated!
- Appointment sheet – to track all medical and dental appointments
- Monthly Medication Record – to track any and all medications
- A schedule for recommended preventative pediatric health care and various other forms for duplication and use
- Plus, the inserts and items to organize and keep the child's memorabilia, awards, report cards, pictures and anything else that should follow a child to their home!

Please ask the assigned social worker for this binder OR remember to ask for one at the Jamison Center at the time of placement.

Dream Center Services

Have you heard about the new Dream Center location? At 1801 19th St, the Dream Center is a one stop shop for foster youth, non-minor dependents and former foster youth from age 12 to 24 to receive services such as:

- Bus passes
- Job searching and job applications
- Resume assistance
- Access to shower facilities
- Washer and Dryer usage
- Snack bags
- ILP (Independent Living Program) classes

The Dream Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information contact (661) 636-4987 or come into the center during business hours.

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