

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

Each year throughout the month of May, National Foster Care Month is celebrated. During this month, Child Welfare agencies, community partners, and local and state jurisdictions take the time to raise awareness to the experiences of children and youth in the Child Welfare System. It is also the time to recognize the invaluable role and contributions of the families who foster and the role that we as individuals have in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care.

What is foster care? The Child Welfare Information Gateway describes foster care (also known as out-of-home care) as “a temporary service provided by States for children who cannot live with their families.

Children in foster care may live with relatives or with unrelated resource parents (also known as foster parents).” Resource parents play a vital role in the children’s or youth’s healing process by providing stability, care and also providing support to parents as they seek to reunify with their children or youth. Every child deserves the opportunity for a bright future, thus we say thank to our Resource Families. On behalf of the Department of Human Services, I would like acknowledge that:

Your job is not easy. A lot is asked of you, of your time, of your resources, of your heart. Often there are more questions than answers. The responsibility is immense.

Please know that your hard work, dedication and commitment has not gone unnoticed. It is an honor to partner with you in this endeavor. Thank you for giving of your hearts and your homes to the children.



Temporary Benefits Identification and Medi-Cal Cards

As a reminder, please ensure that the Benefits Identification Cards (BIC) or the plastic Medi-Cal cards remain with the youth during their time in foster care. If a youth is transitioning to another resource family home, the previous resource family will ensure that the youth’s medical information and documents are handed over to the new caregiver. A BIC (paper document) is given to a caregiver at the time of first placement, especially if the youth is just entering foster care. The BIC serves to temporarily identify the child’s medical insurance until their insurance card is provided. A plastic Medi-Cal card will then be issued for the youth and mailed to the address the youth is currently in at the time. Having either the BIC or Medi-Cal card can make doctor and dentist appointments run smoother. If you are receiving a foster youth into your home, please ask their primary social worker about the Medi-Cal or BIC cards so that you are able to set up the required medical and dental appointments without delay. If you are caring for a foster youth who does not have a Medi-Cal or BIC card, please contact their social worker or the Foster Care Eligibility line at 661-873-2800.

Melissa's Message

A Passion for Caring

I recently had the opportunity to speak with a resource parent about her passion for helping foster youth. Mrs. M has been a resource parent for over five years which started by caring for a relative who was placed into the foster care system. Mrs. M has since adopted that relative child. She explained that she had not really given much thought into becoming a foster/resource parent until she had taken in her nephew. It was then that her passion for helping had started to grow. Mrs. M explained that she wanted to be “a voice” for the children who were not able to speak for themselves. She has been an advocate for children, especially infants with special medical needs. Infants who are born positive of drugs or alcohol in their system require special care and Mrs. M has stepped into that role confidently. She has taken the time to research various methods of caring for these children and collaborated with healthcare professionals to receive the most effective treatments.



Mrs. M also takes a Quality Parenting Initiative approach with each foster youth she takes into her home. “From the moment that kid comes into my home, they are family,” she happily expressed. Mrs. M understands the importance of having a child-centered focus and doing what is best for him/her. She also has successfully worked with biological parents to help reunify them with their children. It can be hard to comprehend why children are placed into foster care and unfortunately, biological parents can be viewed in a negative light, but if we can help support the whole family unit, reunification can become more tangible than we realize. Mrs. M has done just that, she has worked well with biological parents and other relatives to help that child maintain that connection. That positive working relationship has also helped Mrs. M keep in contact with a foster youth who was once in her home, but now lives with a biological grandmother and Mrs. M stated that she enjoys that continued connection.

Lastly, I asked Mrs. M what she would tell others who are considering becoming resource parents, “it’s a lot of hard work and you need to go into this [foster care] wholeheartedly.” She then went on to say that, there will be moments of heartbreak, but that it will be worth it because you would have given a child a place of safety and security in your home no matter how long they were with you. Mrs. M told me that she fondly looks back on the beautiful memories she was lucky enough to have with all the children she has cared for. She looks forward to continuing her journey of being resource parent and the Kern County Department of Human Services is appreciative of all Mrs. M’s hard work and dedication to Kern’s foster youth.

FUN IN THE SUN

Water Safety Tips

Summertime often coincides with having fun at the beach, pool and lake and while we tend to highlight on the fun of it all, we need to stay alert to the dangers that water activities can pose. According to statistics, drowning is the leading cause of death in children ages one to four. As caregivers, you can help lessen that statistic by following these simple tips.

- Closely monitor children around all bodies of water at all times.
- Incorporating bathroom breaks and diaper checks to help prevent water illnesses caused by germs and chemicals.
- Wearing life jackets, especially on water vehicles and wherever there are strong currents present.
- Keep up to date with your CPR certification.
- Ensure your pool area is secure and not easily accessible to young children. Please follow Resource Family Approval Written Directives concerning gates/fencing around pools and/or alarm systems for all doors and windows leading directly to the pool area.



Following these tips can help ensure that your summertime by the pool or any body of water is a fun and memorable experience for everyone.

Celebrating Moms and Dads

May and June are the months to celebrate all the moms and dads in our lives that love, care and guide us. Whether you are a parent, resource parent, adoptive parent, or a mother/father figure to a child, it is time to celebrate you! There is nothing stronger than the love between a parent and child and although that love can come with its challenges; it always remains. Moms and dads are there to be our cheerleaders and coaches on the sidelines and a shoulder to cry on. Through our successes and mistakes, they are always behind us, encouraging us to try harder, never give up and most importantly, to be ourselves.

Let the poems below be a tribute to all the moms and dads who work tirelessly and love unconditionally. Happy Mother's and Father's Day!

* * *

*I Love You Mom!
Mom's smiles can brighten any moment,
Mom's hugs put joy in all our days,
Mom's love will stay with us forever
and touch our lives in precious ways...
The values you've taught,
the care you've given,
and the wonderful love you've shown,
have enriched my life
in more ways than I can count.
I Love you Mom!*

-Anonymous

* * *

*Thanks For All You've Done
Happy Father's Day, Dad.
Thank you for all you have done.
If there was an award for the best father ever,
Then I'm sure you would have won.
You've been my support
Through good time and bad,
I feel lucky indeed
To have you as my dad!*

-Anonymous

FURS Has Launched!

The Family Urgent Response System (FURS) went into effect on March 1, 2021. FURS is a 24/7/365 statewide hotline that is accessible to current and former foster youth and their caregivers. The hotline provides immediate, trauma-informed support by caring and trained professionals, no matter how big or small the situation is. Callers can receive support through the statewide hotline or choose to be connected to their County-based Mobile Response and Stabilization team. For Kern County, Aspiranet has been chosen to provide county-based support. Aspiranet will work closely with the Kern County Department of Human Services if they are asked to provide support to a Kern County foster youth.

As a reminder, the goal of FURS is to assist in the following:

- Prevent placement disruptions and help maintain foster youth/caregiver relationships
- Reduce the need for 911 calls or law enforcement involvement
- Reduce hospitalizations and placement into congregate care
- Promote healing
- Provide a safe and judgement-free space to talk

To reach the FURS hotline, caregivers and youth can call or text 1-833-939-FURS (3877) or go online to www.cal-furs.org.

My Journey Binders for Foster Youth

As you are receiving placements of foster youth in your home, please ensure that each child has a My Journey binder. This binder will help you keep track of their education and medical records as well as other important items to the child, such as artwork, photos and other personal effects. These binders are a part of our Quality Parenting Initiative effort to maintain important information for the foster youth during their time in the foster care system. Often times, children in foster care have multiple placements and the My Journey binders serve as a tool to keep important information accessible to their caregivers and social workers. Please contact the foster youth's primary social worker or your resource family approval social worker to obtain a My Journey binder a foster youth in your care.

Social Media Awareness & Safety

Now that the school year is nearing the end, social media presence will likely double during the summertime and there is no doubt that teens and young adults will be posting their summer hashtags and their many adventures online. It is important for caregivers to stay vigilant of their youth's online presence and not only learn themselves, but also teach their children how to be safe online. According to the Pew Research Center, 95% of teens have access to a smartphone with 45% of teens describing their online presence as "almost constantly." You would be hard-pressed to find a teen without a cell phone these days as it appears that their mobile devices are always within reach. Teens are not the only group that seems to be accessing the internet constantly either. A 2016 Children's Internet Usage Study found that about two thirds of 4th to 8th graders have access to phones or tablets and almost half of that population have a computer in their rooms.

When it comes to explaining internet safety to your children, we need to understand the dangers and risks for ourselves. It requires a bit of research, but if you keep up-to-date with the latest technologies, apps and social media trends, you will be better equipped to talk to your kids and prepare them on what to expect online. The internet can be an overwhelming experience, which is why we must talk to our children



about the dangers that it poses, such as inappropriate websites, malware (viruses) that can be downloaded onto devices, frauds/scams and sexual predators. By having these open conversations with our children and explaining that you want to keep them safe online, we create a space for our kids to feel comfortable enough to talk to us if/when they should experience any online encounters that pose a danger.

Prudent Parenting with foster youth is essential with internet safety. While foster youth have a right to a cell phone and other devices, you as the caregiver can create house rules that help keep them safe. Here are some examples of what you can do:

- Keep the computer/tablet in a common area in your home to monitor activity.
- Be informed of all the electronic devices that your youth uses to access the internet.
- Create an online safety contract

with the youth that will help start a conversation about online risks and setting boundaries.

- Watch for changes in the youth's behavior that may indicate cyberbullying or inappropriate contact
- Ensure that no child under 13 years old has a social media account as it is against the law under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule.
- Keep open communication with your youth; be honest about the potential dangers and talk about what cyberbullying/inappropriate behavior may look like online.

While it is not possible to keep kids 100% offline and away from the risks that the internet poses, we can all do our part to ensure we teach our children to be safe online and to talk to us when they do not feel safe.

This information was provided by <https://www.consumernotice.org/data-protection/internet-safety-for-kids/>.

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