

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

Awareness Month. This month is used to “reach out to those affected by suicide, raise awareness and connect individuals with suicidal ideation to treatment services...to ensure that individuals, friends and families have access to the resources they need to discuss suicide prevention.” (www.nami.org)

Suicidal thoughts can affect anyone regardless of age, gender or background. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), suicides have increased by 35% since 1999. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) reports that suicide was the second cause of death for persons 10-14, 15-19, and 20-24. Although a topic that is often not discussed due to shame and stigma, it is one that affects everyone, not just the victim. So, despite how frightening and difficult it may be if someone we know talks about suicidal thoughts, it is a conversation that needs to be had and a topic that must be discussed.

Katie Hurley, LCSW (<https://www.psychom.net/author/katie-hurley-lcsw>) offers the following behaviors to look for in children and teens:

- Changes in baseline behavior, such as sleeping habits, eating habits, withdrawing from family and friends
- Changes at school; drop in academic performance; decrease interaction with others; loss of interest in normal daily activities
- Preoccupation with death
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Writings or drawings about death or suicide
- Significant changes in mood

For more information on Suicide Prevention and how you can help to spread awareness, visit www.nami.org. If you or someone you know is in a crisis, you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or call 911 immediately.



Kern County REACH Program

Hello Kern County Resource Families!

Have you adopted a child through Kern County Department of Human Services, or hope to do so in the future? Then the REACH Adoption Services program may be for you! The REACH program is a free program for families who have adopted or are interested in adoption.

Kern County and Aspiranet partnered together to create REACH, which stands for Resources, Education, Advocacy, Crisis Intervention and Hope. Our mission is to strengthen and empower pre and post adoptive families, provide adoption information, education and support, and help parents access adoption resources. The REACH program offers training on adoption related topics, education and information, support groups, crisis intervention and support counseling. We also offer individualized family services for families in need of increased support.

REACH social workers are trained and experienced in crisis intervention and adoption. Families and children in need receive crisis intervention support, links to appropriate services, and support to stabilize the family. Families not in need of increased services at this time can sign up for our quarterly newsletter, which covers adoption and parenting related topics. We also send out emails approximately one time per week regarding trainings and support groups.

For more information on the REACH program, or to sign up for our email list, please see our website at www.reach-kerncounty.org. You may also contact Carrie Ontiveros, REACH supervisor, at (661)323-1233 x0.

Melissa's Message

Disaster Preparedness

Disasters and emergencies can occur any time and often catch us completely off guard. Having a plan in place can ease the stress of dealing with highly anxious situations and can mean the difference between life and death. As you worked to become an approved resource family, you all have provided your Resource Family Approval social worker with an emergency plan for your family.



This plan included emergency contact numbers, where electrical and water valves are located in your home for purposes of manual shut off, a floorplan drawing of your home that indicates where all the exits (doors and windows) are located and a meeting location outside your home where all occupants are to meet. This emergency plan should be easily accessible in your home, updated as needed and periodically reviewed with your household to ensure everyone's safety and well-being.

Along with creating a plan of your own, there are also technological tools to assist in being prepared for an emergency. The American Red Cross has created an emergency app for smart phones and tablets that families can utilize for severe weather and natural and manmade hazards. The Emergency-American Red Cross app is available on both Android and iOS devices and with this app, you can:

- Monitor the people and places you care about with local alerts for severe weather and hazards, including earthquakes, floods, thunderstorms and wildfires
- Access a map of open Red Cross shelters
- Get a step by step tutorial of how to make a family emergency plan
- Use alerts to let others know you are safe

It is also important to keep contact information updated for a foster youth's primary social worker, as they will need to be notified of the youth's safety during any emergency or disaster. Most social workers are equipped with a county issued cell phone. Both resource parents and appropriately aged foster youth should have access to that number. For additional disaster preparedness information, please visit www.redcross.org or www.ready.gov.

Foster Youth & Cell Phone Use

As technology unfolds into our daily lives more and more, it is crucial that we as child welfare staff and caregivers help foster children navigate the use of cell phones in a safe way. Being involved in extra-curricular and social activities are a part of a foster youth's personal rights and it is important we provide normalcy for our foster youth to help lessen the trauma of being in foster care. As studies have shown, normalcy supports the youth in care to achieve permanency-lifelong connections with committed and caring adults. Since the use of cell phones is a foster youth's right, sometimes it can be a fine line for resource parents to tread. Resource parents should use reasonable and prudent parenting in providing care and supervision to foster youth, especially when it comes to cell phone use.



what is expected of them and establishes an understanding between the youth and caregiver about respecting boundaries and building trust.

Some examples of setting parameters are:

- No cell phone use during meals or therapeutic activities
- Not using a cell phone for illegal activity
- Not sharing photos, videos and/or recording if other youth without explicit permission
- Not contacting individuals who are on the youth's "no contact list"
- Not using a cell phone after 10 p.m. when a youth should be sleeping (especially on school nights)

If a foster youth comes into your home with their own cell phone, they are certainly entitled to use it, however, as a resource parent, you can discuss with the youth and their social worker about house rules in regards to using the phone. Having parameters can help the youth understand

As long as the use of a cell phone is age and developmentally appropriate for the youth, having a way of connecting to their community of loved ones and friends can help a foster youth maintain their sense of normalcy and lessen the trauma of being physically separated from their family. If you have any questions regarding cell phone use for foster youth, please contact the foster youth's primary social worker.

Resource Parents: The Heart of the Kern-TFCO Model

Kern County Treatment Foster Care Oregon (KCTFCO) needs Resource Parents.

Seeds are planted with YOU!

KCTFCO resource parents are unique. They are selfless, caring individuals, willing to give of themselves for the benefit of youth and society.

The KCTFCO model depends on resource parents who envision a better life for youth and have the determination to help change the trajectory of the lives of these youths.

KCTFCO resource families are an integral part of a collaborative team and receive a special care increment. To learn how you can become a KCTFCO resource parent, contact Heather Garcia at 661-868-8358.



Advocating for Foster Youth's Mental Health

It comes as no surprise that youth in foster care experience trauma and often require professional intervention to help them develop healthy coping skills. As resource parents, you are a vital part in advocating for a youth's mental health as you are the first to witness the ramifications of their trauma. The Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) encourages you to collaborate with both social workers and a mental health system of care in seeking the appropriate help for youth in your care. Quite often youth do not have the voice to express their needs or perhaps, not even understand what those needs may be, but as resource parents, you can stand alongside these youth and be that voice.

Here are some ways in which you can advocate for a foster youth:

- Have clear and open dialogue with the foster youth. Providing youth with a safe space to discuss their feelings can help them feel more comfortable to opening up.
- Have regular conversations with the youth's social worker and/or therapist about any behaviors. Since resource parents are the primary caretakers for youth, they often are the first to witness any signs that a foster youth may need supportive services.
- Call the Foster Youth Behavioral Health Services Referral Hotline at 661-868-7870. Resource parents can make a referral for screenings and assessments directly to KBHRS to expedite the process.

If you are currently caring for a foster youth in need of additional supportive services, please contact KBHRS to start an assessment and communicate those needs to the primary social worker. Only as a team can we help to heal these youth.

Providing a Safe Place for Trafficked/Exploited Foster Youth

It is hard to imagine that children from our own community are placed in situations where they are exploited, tricked, coerced and eventually forced to engage in sexual acts or forced labor that they never wanted or intended to engage in. What is even more unfathomable is that an adult would pay for such acts from anyone, let alone a child. Unfortunately, this is a part of life we all wish did not exist, but nevertheless, is very real and happening around us every day.

After identifying these young victims of human trafficking/exploitation and bringing them into the foster care system, we are challenged in finding dedicated and loving families to help these youth start the healing process. You see, although many people "care" there are not enough who truly understand what it means to care for a youth who has experienced such a trauma as human trafficking/exploitation.

In Kern County, we need our Resource Families to consider getting involved with this population of children who did not choose to be trafficked/exploited. Some ran away from desperate lives at home. Others needed help and trusted the wrong person. All of them need someone who will say to them, "there is hope, your life has purpose, you are more than what has happened to you and with help, and it's going to get better."

If you think you might be that person, please contact your assigned Resource Family Approval social worker to discuss changing your preferences. We will do all we can to support and help you as you care for these youth.

REMINDER: FURS Hotline
Just a friendly reminder that the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is available to resource families as well as current and former foster youth. This statewide hotline provides immediate, trauma-informed support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. If you are in need of additional support, please call or text 1-833-939 FURS (3877) or go online to www.cal-furs.org.

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/

