

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, contact Emily Stewart at [steware@kerndhs.com](mailto:steware@kerndhs.com) or (661) 873-2303 or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com).

## Ombudsman Corner

On behalf of the Department, I would like to say HAPPY NEW YEAR and THANK YOU for your dedication to the children and youth of Kern County. I hope your holidays were filled with the joy of being surrounded by family and friends. As we enter into this New Year, I would like to introduce myself to our new resource families and remind our seasoned ones of services offered through the Ombudsman Office. My name is Monique Hawkins, and as the Ombudsman, my objective is to:

- Listen to your concerns
- Document your complaints/concerns
- Gather all relevant information regarding the matter
- Remain neutral and objective and keeps information confidential
- Formulate possible resolutions
- Makes recommendations to the Department of Human Services
- Provide feedback on actions and recommendations to every complainant



In addition, I am interested in listening your ideas of how to improve the services provided to the families and children in Kern County. Your dedication and love towards the children placed in your homes is greatly appreciated. The role that you play in working with the Department of Human Services to keep our children safe, supporting family reunification and preparing them for independence is indispensable.

## 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. The Spanish-speaking group meets on the 1st Wednesday of each month and the English-speaking group meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Groups are held from 6PM to 7:30PM. This group 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.

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! Other activities include games like jeopardy and bingo to give a fun spin on the topics being discussed during the group meeting. 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 [bcfkce@bakersfieldcollege.edu](mailto:bcfkce@bakersfieldcollege.edu).



## Family Movie Nights Resume

Exciting news for foster youth and their birth families! Movie Nights have resumed in partnership with the Boys and Girl Club here in Bakersfield! The Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) would like to give a special thank you to our resource parents who transport youth to and from these special family events and recognizing how important they are to youth and their families. These special events provide a sense of normalcy and quality time that is instrumental in the reunification process. As a Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) county, it is imperative that the whole team works together in providing care for the foster youth and giving support to birth families, and Kern's resource parents are doing just that! Resource parents help in making events like Movie Night happen and successful. Thank you for all you do for Kern County foster youth!

## FURS Reminder

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](http://www.cal-furs.org).

## Melissa's Message

Hello, I am Melissa Soin, your Resource Family Approval (RFA) Specialist. As it is the beginning of a new year, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to new RFA families and to reacquaint my roles and responsibilities with our established RFA families. My main role is to serve as an advocate for Kern County Resource Families by answering questions you may have with regard to RFA, placement or the foster care process. I can also aid in troubleshooting placement concerns and assist in connecting families to resources that may be of help in caring for foster youth. I am involved in recruitment and retention event committees as well as attend workshops that provide me the tools to further support resource families. I am also involved with implementing events and programs that provide an outlet for resource families to collaborate and build support with each other.



Since my role does not require me to have a caseload, I have the availability to provide more one on one time with resource families to answer questions and address concerns. I can also assist with RFA specific needs, such as answering approval process questions, providing resources to access the required trainings and distributing RFA documents.

Above all, I am here to listen. Going through the RFA process can become overwhelming and most certainly, taking a foster child into your home can be stressful, but the good news is you are not alone. The old adage, "it takes a village to raise a child" has never been truer than when caring for a foster child. As the caregiver, you have the support of the child's team, a team consisting of their birth parents, relatives, social workers, teachers, healthcare providers and other professionals that seek the best care for the youth. If you are ever in need of someone to listen, please do not hesitate to call me at (661) 873-2382, email me at [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com) or see me in person at 3711 Columbus St. Bakersfield, CA 93306.

I look forward to working with you and may the New Year find you happy and healthy.

# Human Trafficking Awareness

Imagine for a moment that you are a 15-year old girl who is invited to “party” in Los Angeles by a friend at school. It sounds exciting, your friend says that you will have a good time and you want to have fun, so you go; however, when you arrive, you are at a hotel and you quickly learn that you are expected to have sex with several men before you are allowed to be taken home.

Or what if you were a teenage boy who sees a flyer for a job where you could make \$100 in one day. It sounds amazing and your mother cannot afford to buy you the shoes that you want, so you call the number. You show up to “work,” are taken in a van to another city and told you have to sell a certain amount of chocolates door-to-door before you can return to the van.

Or imagine that you are a 12-year old girl who meets a really nice “boy” online. You have always felt ugly and as if no one notices you, so when he begins to tell you how beautiful you are, it sounds so wonderful and you begin to fall in love with him. When he asks you for pictures, you think nothing of it and send him a picture. When he asks you for nude pictures, you feel uncomfortable but want him to like you, so you send those as well. When he asks you to meet him in person, you love him and want to meet, so you agree to meet him.

These are but a few examples of how human trafficking can happen. Every situation is different; the precursors, the vulnerabilities, the circumstances and the outcomes all vary, but the reality is human trafficking is a horror many children in our country and county



face. In 2020, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children assisted with 17,000 reports of child sex trafficking in the United States. In just 2021 alone, there were approximately 100 investigations of alleged exploitation/human trafficking of children in Kern County. Unfortunately, we also know that although these numbers are alarming, they are only a small portion of those being victimized.

Reading these examples and seeing these statistics may feel understandably overwhelming. However, unless we recognize this is going on and learn how we can help combat it, the problem will persist and the statistics will only worsen. The children in our community need us all! No child, or adult for that matter, should be coerced into sex or labor trafficking.

So, the next question may be, what can I do? You are doing the first step right now; you are becoming more aware! I implore you to continue to grow in your education and awareness of this problem. There are outstanding resources available, books and research written by and with survivors; in addition, I encourage you to participate in the community-wide viewing of

California’s Forgotten Children documentary and panel discussion at the end of the month. Then, take the next step and learn what community resources are available, in case you should need them or if you want to find ways you can get involved. Kern County has many amazing organizations who serve and assist this population, to name a few: the Kern Coalition Against Human Trafficking (KCAHT), the Department of Human Services, Freedom Won, City Serve, and the newly opened shelter for adult female human trafficking victims in Kern County, The Harvest House. You may not be called to be a detective working to arrest traffickers, equipped to serve as an advocate who works alongside a survivor when he/she is discovered in a hotel room or have the desire to be a social worker who works with foster youth who have been trafficked/exploited. That is okay, you can still play a part in the solution!

Instead, perhaps you can be the citizen who learns the signs of trafficking and when you see something questionable on the street corner, you call law enforcement. Or what if you can open your home as a resource parent for a youth in foster care who has also survived trafficking/exploitation. Or maybe you are a business owner who can help provide jobs to survivors who need safe and viable employment. Or possibly you are a concerned citizen who can help provide resources to agencies who are actively and ethically working with survivors. We all have a part to play in the solution; find yours and please help us combat human trafficking for all our children in Kern County.



# Intensive Services Foster Care

The need for our foster youth to have access to specialized care in a family-based environment is what the Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) program is all about. ISFC program is open to resource families who would like to care for foster youth who require intensive treatment and behavioral supports. Being an ISFC resource parent requires a significant commitment of time, involvement and responsibility that includes participating as an integral part of the youth's team. It is important that ISFC resource parents have the ability to meet the individual needs of youth in the program and can support youth who may have the following behaviors:

- Adjudicated violent offenses
- Aggressive or assaultive
- Runaway
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)
- Eating disorders
- Severe mental health issue
- Special health care needs

These are just some examples of behaviors that youth are referred to the ISFC program for and by being transparent about these behaviors with our ISFC resource parents; we can work collaboratively for the best interest of the youth. As ISFC

## YES Conference 2022

Please join us for the 7th annual Youth Empowering Success Conference on Friday March 25, 2022. The conference will be held virtually for foster youth and all the caring adults in their life. Training credit will be available for all resource parents who attend. Registration is coming soon!



is a comprehensive program, resource parents are required to take pre-placement and ongoing training classes to be an ISFC resource family. For pre-placement, resource families will need to complete 40 hours of training classes focused on trauma informed care, behavior de-escalation and CPR and first aid.

For ongoing training, resource parents are required to attend 12 hours of training annually. Kern Bridges Youth Homes will be providing the training and support for all resource families that are interested in becoming ISFC trained.

ISFC resource parents will have the support of the ISFC team; including professional and para-professional services that meet the youth and family's needs. Formal and informal Child Family Team

Meetings (CFTMs) will encourage effective collaboration in case plan implementation. ISFC resource parents will also have access to 24-hour crisis assistance in which they can contact the ISFC team during non-business hours.

Further, ISFC resource parents will receive a higher reimbursement rate that reflects the intensive services they are providing to the youth in their care. Resource parents play a profoundly significant role in the ISFC program and thus are afforded the respect of professional therapeutic parents due to the challenges they will encounter when working with these youth.

For more information on becoming an ISFC resource parent, please contact Kern Bridges ISFC Director Carrie Wombacher at (661) 396-2352.



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