

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

Ombudsman Corner

Wow, can you believe Thanksgiving is almost here? Thanksgiving, is a day when family and friends come together to share a meal. In my family, we serve roasted turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, vegetables, cranberry sauce and plenty of desserts. We also watch parades and enjoy a little football, but more importantly, Thanksgiving is a day of reflection, a day where people across our nation, if not world, pause for a moment to count their blessings and to say thank you to those who have deeply touched their lives. During this season of Thanksgiving, I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for each of you. Thank you for opening up your homes and hearts to our children. Thank you for creating warm memories and making them feel comfortable during the holidays. Thank you for ensuring their needs are met and thank you for being their voice and an advocate on their behalf.

May your Thanksgiving be full of peace, love and joy.

What to Expect from Social Worker Face-to-Face Visits

When caring for a foster child, visits in the resource family home with their primary social worker are required. These visits can be unannounced without any prior notice in order to ensure the foster child's safety. A social worker's main goal in visiting a foster youth in the home is to make face-to-face contact and have conversations (if applicable to the child's age and development) about their wellbeing and how they are doing with the resource family. If a child is old enough, they should be having private conversations with their social worker that are not in the presence of the resource parent. Please understand that these conversations are in confidence of the child's personal information and as part of the child's team, we (agency staff and caregivers) should respect and protect a child's confidential information.

Resource parents are encouraged to talk with the social worker about what is working well and what any worries they have. Open communication is essential to maintain professional relationships for the stability of the placement and overall success of the child's wellbeing. Social workers will also discuss permanency plans with the resource parents; both assisting in supporting relationships between resource parents and birth parents in the reunification process and discussing legal guardianship and adoption for the child when reunification efforts are not successful. Face-to-face visits with the child's primary social worker are a productive means in keeping everyone on track with reunification and permanency efforts.

Breakfast with Santa 2022

Breakfast with Santa 2022 is fast approaching! This year's event is tentatively scheduled to occur on Saturday, December 10. Please be on the lookout for more information in the mail.

RSVP will be required. We can't wait to see you there!



Save the Date

Melissa's Message *The Meaning of QPI*

As a Kern County resource parent, you have likely heard the term Quality Parenting Initiative or QPI either in training or in discussions with social workers. QPI is a movement for foster care change, made up of a network of states, counties and private agencies committed to ensuring that all children in care have excellent parenting and lasting relationships so they can thrive and grow. QPI was started in Florida and California in 2008 and since has expanded to more than 80 jurisdictions across 10 states. The importance of what QPI embodies and how it has helped foster youth achieve success is why it is steadily growing across the U.S. and effecting change in the foster care system.

QPI is not just working to change policies and practices, but it is working to change the mindset. The mindset that children need consistent and effective parenting to thrive is what research demonstrates and what QPI emphasizes. Resources parents are a crucial piece that QPI relies on in creating a system that ensures excellent parents. The support that resource parents provide, not only to the children, but to birth families can make the greatest difference in the reunification process.

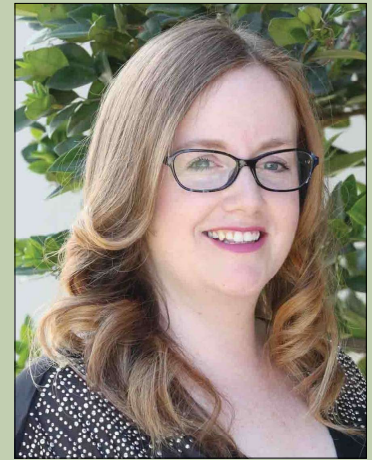
There are three core principles that QPI is based on:

- Consistent excellent parenting and meaningful rela-

tionships are the most important services we can provide to children and youth in foster care. Every policy, practice action and statement the system adopts should strengthen parenting skills and relationships.

- Research on child, youth and brain development and the effects of trauma not only demonstrates the importance of parenting and positive relationships but also provides guidance on how best to support them. Agency policy and practice should be informed by research.
- The individuals most affected by policies and practices are in the best position to design and implement change so that systems ensure excellent parenting and meaningful relationships for children who enter their care.

With these three principles in mind, we can be consistent in supporting our resource families, birth families and most importantly, our foster youth. For more information about QPI, visit <https://www.qpi4kids.org/>.



Reunification and Concurrent Planning

When a foster youth is first placed in your home, the main priorities that a resource parent has is the immediate needs of the youth and supporting them in their healing journey. But right from the start, a plan is set in place to bring that youth and their birth family back together. Resource parents are trained for this; during pre-approval training and throughout their post-approval trainings. Nevertheless, it is hard to see a child leave your home because a bond has formed. The Department of Human Services (DHS) commends our resource families for the care and support of foster youth AND also seeing the importance of reunification. Resource parents like you have welcomed many children into your heart and home, knowing that it may only be for a limited amount of time, but you all continue to do this willingly because you also share the goal of reunification.

With foster youth placements, the youth's primary social worker will have regular conversations with the resource family about concurrent planning. Concurrent planning allows the life of the case to follow two paths simultaneously. The first path being reunification with the birth family and the second being a permanency option for the foster youth (legal guardianship or adoption) with the resource family. There may arise situations where a foster youth is placed in your home, but there may also be relatives applying to take placement of the youth. Resource parents will be informed of any relatives applying for placement because this means that the youth may be placed with that relative. When appropriate, relative placement provides the youth with a sense of belonging and comfortability by being with family. Having a foster youth moved from your home to live with a relative is understandably hard, but it doesn't have to mean the end of a relationship with the child. If possible, we encourage resource families to continue being a support system to the family. By working together, we ensure that the foster youth's needs are met and that we help to create a stable environment for them to heal.

CSUB Admission Application is Now Open



Students in their senior year of high school have a lot on their minds. They may be playing sports, working on their driver's license, and taking college courses in a dual or concurrent enrollment program. Emotionally, it is a time of impending transition, as many turn 18, become legal adults, and move out on their own. It is tough to think about the future with so much going on.

That is why the CSUB Guardian Scholars Program encourages all transition-age youth to look at CSU Bakersfield as an answer to the question "What's next?" Our

beautiful campus can address all of the needs of transition-age students. CSUB offers on-campus housing in our modern residence halls, answering the question of "Where will I live?" As part of our housing package, we offer a meal plan with on-campus restaurants like Starbucks and Panda Express, answering the question of "What will I eat?"

We are a comprehensive four-year university offering Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees, and even Educational Doctorate degrees. Students do not have to transfer out to another school. In addition to the mainstream University experience, our Guardian Scholars Program wraps support

around college-bound foster youth, McKinney-Vento homeless youth, and unaccompanied minors between the ages of 17-24 by providing access and housing, maintaining a support network that promotes student academic success, and connecting students with their careers.

CSU Bakersfield is part of the 23-campus California State University system, and access to all those great

universities begins with a single application. Students can visit www.calstate.edu/apply or just search "Cal State Apply." They can create a username and profile, check the

boxes that indicate their foster youth/homeless youth status, fill out their personal information and high school coursework, and apply to any CSU in the system. Being independent, students should qualify for a fee waiver, granting free application to up to four universities—hopefully including CSUB!

It is vitally important for our efforts that students also apply for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at the same time, as this is the statewide access and retention program that houses Guardian Scholars. With EOP, we may grant University admission to qualified students who have not completed all of the CSU admission re-

quirements, which is great for students who moved a lot during high school. The EOP application is embedded in the CSU application—students just need to say "Yes" to the question "Do you want to apply to EOP?"

The CSU Undergraduate Admission Application is only open now through November 30th, so students should start their applications now. The Guardian Scholars staff begins working with students when they are still in high school to ensure their transition is smooth — helping them apply to the University, overcoming barriers to admission, moving them onto the campus early for the summer after high school graduation, and enrolling them in our EOP Summer Bridge to prepare them academically for college-level classes.

Finally, we have exciting news about state funding for Guardian Scholars programs. The California State Legislature and Governor Newsom approved a \$12 million budget line item to support foster youth programs in the CSU! This will mean greater access to educational counseling staff, improved access to year-round on-campus housing, and emergency funds to help cover unexpected expenses.

For more information about the Guardian Scholars Program at CSUB, please visit www.csub.edu/gsp or contact Miguel Cuate at 661-654-3215.



Services for Complex Needs Youth

Currently in Kern County, we have a need for the care of complex needs foster youth. A youth with complex needs may exhibit behavioral, medical and/or mental health challenges that require a more intensive need of care. There are not enough resource families who care for this group of foster youth and one of the reasons that may be is due in part to not knowing the services that are available to care of these youth. The Department of Human Services (DHS) and our community partners have created programs that specifically target the personalized care needed. These programs not only help to maintain placement stability, but also can offer the tools needed to help foster youth start to heal. Resource families are integrated in these programs as they provide the most care and support to the foster youth. Listed below are the programs that assist resource families in caring for complex needs youth.

- ISFC-Intensive Services Foster Care: in-home program with access to a professional team who meets on a weekly basis with the caregiver and youth. 24/7 access to crisis assistance and regular CFT meetings. This program is operated by Kern Bridges Youth Homes. Resource Parents are required to have additional training to meet the specific needs of the youth in this program. A higher level of care rate is also applied.
- TFCO-Treatment Foster Care Oregon: therapeutic program with the goal of reunification. In-home support and weekly meetings with assistance available 24/7/365. This program is operated by Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. Resource Parents are required to have additional training to meet the specific needs of the youth in this program. A higher level of care rate is also applied.
- Wraparound-family-centered in-home support program. Provides individualized case support services to meet the needs of each individual. This program models a strength based approach for the whole family. It is operated internally within DHS.
- FURS-Family Urgent Response System: 24/7 de-escalation and support hotline with in-person mobile response. Available for caregivers and foster youth to utilize. This program is state-wide but offers local support if needed.

If you would like more information about any of the resources listed, please contact Melissa Soin at (661) 873-2382. If you have a youth in your care would benefit from any of these resources and you would like to get them connected, contact the youth's primary social worker.

Advocating for Behavioral Health Services for Foster Youth

The Department of Human Services, in partnership with Behavioral Health and Recovery Services has established a hotline for caregivers to call to start a mental health screening for foster youth. Resource parents can now directly contact foster youth behavioral health services and request that a screening or assessment be conducted. As the primary caretaker, resource parents will likely be the first to see if there are worries that arise with a foster youth and therefore, should advocate for the youth.

The hotline operates from Monday to Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Be mindful that this hotline is not a 24 hour crisis number. If you would like to connect to a behavioral health screener concerning a foster youth in your care, please call (661) 868-7870 during regular business hours.

For 24/7 support including an in-person response use the call Cal-FURS at 1-833-939-3877.

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