

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 or (661) 873-2303 or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email soinm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

Changes to the Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson

All County Letter (ACL) 22-34

In 1998, child welfare legislation established the Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO). The role of the OFCO was to independently review and respond to complaints regarding the care, placement, services, and rights of children in foster care. Recently, the Legislature passed Assembly Bill 317, which has made changes to several Welfare and Institution Code (WIC) Sections and to the OFCO that further clarifies its scope of authority to receive and respond to complaints regarding youth placed in foster care. I have highlighted a few of the major changes outlined in ACL 22-34:

WIC §16160 – defines foster care to include “voluntary placement; a placement into any unlicensed or provisionally licensed placement including with a family pending resource family approval; a placement of a youth by governmental entity in a residential facility or home subject to licensure, certification or approval by CDSS...”

WIC §16164 – further defines the responsibility of the OFCO to uphold confidential while exercising its duties, type of information that may be shared with complainant; and authority to utilize its discretion as to when to notify legal counsel for a child or NMD in in care of the investigation and the outcome.

WIC §16165 – clarifies that the authority of the OFCO is to meet with foster you, to access and inspect any [facility] premises under the control of a state or local agency or a contractor of a state or local agency and licensed/approved children’s residential facilities at any time, with or without prior notice; and access to records. In addition, under this code section, the OFCO has the authority to attend juvenile court hearings.

To read ACL 22-34 in its entirety, please click on this link: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2022/22-34.pdf?ver=2022-06-24-154119-157> or at [cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-and-notices](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-and-notices).

Melissa's Message

Complex Needs Youth Survey

There is a growing need in Kern County to find loving and caring homes for foster youth with complex needs. Complex needs can include medical, behavioral and mental health related challenges that foster youth unfortunately experience. During our annual resource parent appreciation event, that was held in May, we surveyed our resource families in attendance to gauge their level of willingness in caring for complex needs youth. The importance of this survey was to share the message that the Department of Human Services (DHS) is in great need of families to care for these youth and to provide information about the various services that DHS provides to help support these youth.

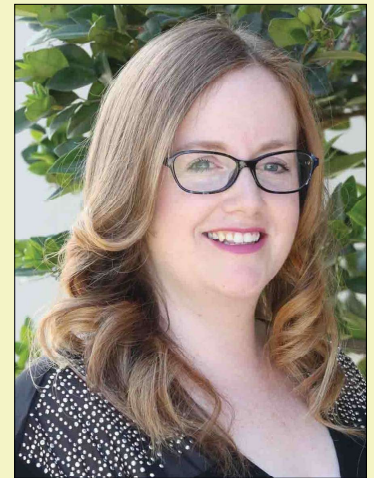
In gauging the level of willingness that resource families would consider caring for a foster youth with complex needs, it was surveyed that about 50% were within the range of willing to very willing. Within this 50%, it was identified that some of the resource families were already caring for this population of youth and would continue to do so. This is exactly the result that DHS is looking for and we are working to engage more with this percentage of resource families about caring for complex needs youth.

Resource parents were also surveyed about the services that DHS and/or our community partners provides to youth and families regarding specialized care. The importance of this question is to provide knowledge of what services are available to our resource families. Services that resource families identified awareness of were the Wraparound program, Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) and the Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO)

program. These three programs serve to provide in-home specialized support to foster youth and resource families, often on a weekly in-person basis.

The Wraparound program is provided internally through DHS, with the primary purpose of keeping foster youth in family-based environments and out of higher-level care (i.e. group homes). ISFC is a partner program with Kern Bridges that also provides intensive services that directly correlate to the specific needs of the youth in the program. With ISFC, resource parents are required to complete training that specializes in the youth's needs and are provided with an ISFC team. ISFC resource parents receive a higher foster care reimbursement rate and are considered professionals within the child's team. The TFCO program is coordinated through Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (KBRHS) and the primary goal is reunification for the foster youth and their parent, grandparent, adoptive parent, etc.) The TFCO program provides a team for the youth and resource family and program related training. Resource families who participate in the program do receive a higher foster care reimbursement rate.

For more information about services and supports provided to foster youth with complex needs, please contact Melissa Soin at (661) 873-2382.



Back to School Time

Remember Education Transportation Reimbursements for transporting a foster youth to their school of origin are available for each foster youth you are transporting. Please contact the youth's primary social worker for more information.

Complaint Investigation Process

Caring for foster youth can be a very rewarding experience; not only are you providing a loving home to a youth in need, but also you are making a difference in the outcome of their lives. Resource parents have the biggest hearts and put forth their best effort, but there are times when a situation arises and a complaint/allegation is filed on the family. Complaints are not uncommon and as a partner in caring for foster youth, resource parents should understand how the complaint investigation process works and what rights you have in the process. Just because a complaint is filed, does not necessarily mean your approval will be revoked or that you cannot continue fostering children. Each complaint is investigated thoroughly and where possible, issues are mitigated. Below is a snapshot of the steps in the investigation process

1. A complaint is received, through in-person, phone, email, fax or letter by anyone.
2. The complaint is assigned to a county Licensing Representative (LR).
3. The file is reviewed, an attempt to contact the complainant is conducted and a plan is made.
4. An initial inspection is conducted during an unannounced visit to the caregiver's home. This is to happen within 10 days of the file date. The LR will identify themselves and explain the purpose of the inspection. Interviews with persons in the home as well as a tour of the home may be requested. An exit interview is completed before the LR leaves the home that outlines the next steps.
5. Interviews with persons who have knowledge of the allegation are conducted.
6. Evidence is reviewed that may be pertinent to the investigation.
7. A determination is made with one

of three possible conclusions:

- a. Unfounded—the allegation is false, could not have happened and/or is without a reasonable basis
 - b. Inconclusive—although the allegation may have happened or is valid, there is not a preponderance of the evidence to prove that the alleged violation occurred.
 - c. Substantiated—the allegation is valid because of preponderance of evidence to prove the violation occurred.
8. The findings are delivered to the resource parent, typically done so in person.

Any allegations that are substantiated are accompanied by a citation, which is a notice of deficiency for a violation or statute. The LR should clearly state all violations with the caregiver and develop a Plan of Correction of how the caregiver will bring their home into compliance within a reasonable amount of time.

Having a complaint or allegation placed on your home can be difficult, but please understand that the investigation is not to pass judgements of character on you or anyone in the home. All investigations are done with the upmost respect and fairness. Collaborative efforts will be made between agency staff and resource parents to come to an amenable resolution.

As a resource parent, you also have the right to know the allegations as soon as possible and what regulation it may be violating if it will not hinder the investigation. You also have the right to appeal any determination or citation. For more information, please visit <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/PUB501.pdf>.

Transportation to Visits

Teamwork is what makes for successful outcomes and in the world of foster care, being a team player aids in the stability of out of home care, strengthening of relationships and even reunification. As resource parents, you are a vital part of the child and family team. You are the main caregiver to our vulnerable children and provide a safe haven for them to recover and heal. As a Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) county, Kern resource parents are expected to assist in the care of foster youth, including the transportation of the foster youth to visits. Transporting a foster youth to visits is more than just meeting a court ordered requirement for the youth to maintain contact with parents and siblings, but it provides opportunities to engage with the birth family and to demonstrate the importance of family friendly and child centered approach that QPI emphasizes. It is understandable that situations may arise where resource parents have barriers in assisting with transportation, but any means to provide transportation is greatly appreciated by the social workers you work with. Resource families are encouraged to keep efficient communication with a foster youth's social worker, especially in regards to transportation arrangements. Please contact the youth's primary social worker regarding questions about transportation.

Holiday Cottage

The Holiday Cottage – 35 years of caring

2022 marks the 35th year the Kern County Department of Human Services (KC-DHS) has joined forces with our community to ensure children in county foster homes receive a gift during the Christmas season.

The global pandemic did not stop KCDHS from coming up with creative ways to continue the important tradition of fulfilling a child's wish. The virtual Holiday Cottage provided a path for our very generous Kern County friends, to send funds through the Kern Partnership for Children & Families www.kernpartnership.com, a non-profit, whose purpose is to help children in foster care. This new process enabled us to purchase specific wish requests for each and every child participating. All 900 gifts were distributed to Resource Families via a drive thru gift pick up that lasted two weeks.

This year, we hope to increase our giving, as we provide new ways for our community to connect. The Department will share the child's first name and wish request on our website www.kcdhs.org allowing our community to then choose a child's wish, and have it sent directly to our department to provide to the resource family. We invite you to join us in our efforts. Thank you for your commitment to children in foster care in Kern County. They deserve the best!

Unusual Incident Report

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 and/or were out of the ordinary. The report needs to be provided to the RFA social worker and to the placement social worker by telephone, e-mail, or fax within 24 hours or by the next business day following the event. Please refer to the Written Directives 11-06(b) for specific information that is required to be reported. Some examples of when to fill out an unusual incident report are:

- The child scrapes his/her knees from falling while playing
- The child is scratched, bit, pinched or kicked by another child
- The child is bruised on the shins from being kicked while playing
- When a child runs away
- Truancy

To obtain a fillable Unusual Incident Report form, please visit <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/LIC624>. PDF or contact the foster youth's primary social worker or your assigned RFA social worker.

Save the Date *Breakfast with Santa 2022*

The Kern County Department of Human Services is excited to announce that our annual Breakfast with Santa Event will be held on Saturday December 10, 2022. Be on the lookout for more information coming soon! We can't wait to share the holiday spirit with you!



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/

