

*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](mailto:stewart@kerndhs.com) or (661) 873-2303 or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com).*

## *Ombudsman Corner*

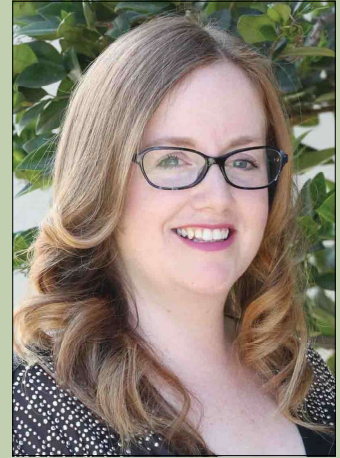
National Bullying Prevention Month (NBPM) is recognized in October each year; however, with recent media reports of bullying within our local school districts, it seems befitting to discuss ways to prevent bullying. NBPM was initially declared in October 2006. In 2010, a month long campaign seeking to unite and educate communities to raise awareness of bullying prevention was instituted by PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/nbpm/history.asp>).

What is bullying? The Centers for Disease Control describes bullying as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance, and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying can occur in multiple ways including physical assaults, such as tripping, shoving, hitting, or taking one's belongings. It can also occur verbally, such as name calling, threats of harm or taunting. Social exclusion via digital sources, email, text, social media, spreading rumors or public ridicule are also forms of bullying. Children may not readily report bullying; however, there are signs that your child may be experiencing bullying, which may include, reluctance to go to school, increased/decreased appetite, general worrying or sadness/depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The National Crime Prevention Council and Community-Matters.org offers the following suggestions of things that can be done if your child is being bullied:

- Teach kids to solve problems without using violence and praise them when they do.
- Give children positive feedback when they behave well to help build self-esteem.
- Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about school, social events, their classmates and any problems they may have.
- Modeling empathy, tolerance and respect in your actions and communication, you impart these values, and influence the attitudes and behaviors of your children.
- Monitor your child online – Cyberbullying is the fastest growing type of peer-on-peer mistreatment today.
- Understand your school's policies, rules and procedures regarding bullying vary greatly from district to district. Speak with school officials and your school board about what policies they have in place and what programs they have implemented to address bullying and cyberbullying.

# Melissa's Message

## Effective Collaboration



Our differences are what make us unique individuals, but they sometimes create clashes and disjointed relationships. Not everyone will get along on a personal level, but we are all in this together, working to make children's lives in foster care better. Asking for a new social worker is something that Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) would like to prevent because when a social worker is changed, it not only changes for the caregiver, but for the birth parents and children as well. Effective collaboration is working through the differences that each of us have and realizing we are all a part of the child and family's team. We must do what we can to rebuild relationships/partnerships to have successful outcomes. As part of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) core principles, meaningful relationships are the most important service we can provide to children in care and what better way to do that than to model what that looks like by working well together and collaborating effectively.

As caregivers work with child welfare staff, foster youth and other important professionals, collaboration can be a juggling act, and at times be difficult. Tension and frustration can unintentionally build up for both caregivers and social workers when a foundation of clear communication is not properly established. Becoming a caregiver for foster youth, you may have had an idea of what it would be like, but then experienced something completely different. For instance, wanting to adopt a child, but finding out that there is a reunification plan in place to reunite the child with their parents. Where effective collabo-

ration comes into play is the mutual understanding from both staff and caregivers that reunification is always the first goal. Social workers are required to discuss with resource parents concurrent planning; having the foster youth on two paths simultaneously, one being reunification and the other a permanent plan with the caregiver (legal guardianship or adoption). Having these conversations with the child's primary social worker can help to build a professional relationship and decrease any conflicts or issues with communication. It is highly encouraged to always keep the lines of communication open between resource parents and social workers. The feeling of a supportive environment works both ways; from caregiver to social worker and social worker to caregiver. We must work as a team, be a united front in order to ensure that each foster child we work with receives the best possible care.

KCDHS encourages all caregivers to have productive discussions regarding challenges with any agency staff. Having effective conversations with a child's social worker and their supervisor when a conflict arises, may help alleviate any challenges and any reason to request a change of social worker. Working out differences, coming to an understanding and maintaining the integrity of the team is what collaboration and partnership are all about.

## Save the Date for the YES! Conference

Each year, Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program hosts the Youth Empowering Success (YES!) Conference, a youth-driven conference for students who have experienced foster care. The annual event features national motivational speakers, interactive workshops, college and career exploration, and youth leadership programming. In the past, conferences have been well attended with as many as 250 youth. Our students come away with a sense of connection, purpose, and, most important of all...knowledge that so many in our community care about them!

We are excited to announce that after three long years, the 2023 YES! Conference will be in person again, and held on March 24, 2023 at Bakersfield College!

This event brings together foster youth, their caregivers and community partners to address barriers foster youth experience and create solutions that will increase their success in school and as they transition to becoming young adults. Admission is FREE and all resource parents are encouraged to attend! Training hours will be credited to attendees. Be on the lookout for the registration flier via email or contact your assigned Resource Family Approval social worker for more information.

# Human Trafficking Awareness

Written by Dr. Angela Look Child Welfare Supervisor

No one likes being taken advantage of or manipulated. That is exactly what is happening to some of our most vulnerable. According to the California Department of Social Services, the sexual exploitation of children is defined as a commercial sex act where anything of value is given to the child in exchange for the sexual act. Anything of value can include food or shelter, 'basic needs', or things like a position on the varsity basketball team, a much-coveted new purse, drugs, money or even the promise of a relationship. Exploitation and human trafficking looks many different ways depending on the child and circumstance.

In 2020, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received 21.7 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation on their

CyberTip line! In 2019, a statewide survey in Minnesota found that 1.4% of 9th and 11th graders reported having exchanged sex for something of value; if the same statistic were applied to Kern County that would equate to nearly 600 high schoolers in our schools being exploited! California is consistently one of the leading states for prevalence of human trafficking victims. In Kern County alone, in just 2022, Child Protective Services (CPS) received calls with concern of approximately 150 children being exploited/trafficked. Unfortunately, the reality is the number of victims is far beyond those reported to CPS.

Since 2012, the Kern Coalition Against Human Trafficking (KCAHT) has been working to raise awareness about this problem in our community. Since October of 2018, the Department of

Human Services/CPS has had a specialized unit that works with children who have been victims of or who are at high-risk for exploitation. Additionally, in January of 2022, Kern County initiated a Human Trafficking Taskforce that includes CPS, the Kern County Probation Department, the District Attorney's Office and multiple law enforcement jurisdictions (both local and federal). By working collaboratively, we are seeing more victims identified and services obtained for them, while perpetrators are prosecuted and safety is increased for us all.

There is still much work to be done and we all have a part to play in the safety of our children and community. Human trafficking IS happening OUR community. Please find a way to help be part of the solution; it truly can save a life.

## *The Importance of Reporting for Resource Family Approval (RFA) Homes*

Written by Kerry Chea RFA Social Worker

Opening your home to children and youth experiencing foster care is a big responsibility done with a lot of love. As a resource family, it is important to ensure the safety and protection of everyone in the home. One way to ensure everyone is safe is through reporting. Whether it is a change in the household, or an injury/illness that requires emergency medical or mental health treatment or hospitalization, each one needs to be reported. Moreover, you must report suspected physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, serious bodily injury, risk of death or serious bodily injury, or death of a child or non-minor dependent. No matter how big or small, you must report any unusual event, injury, trauma, and illness. Reporting regular childhood bumps and bruises proactively provides transparency and can alleviate suspicion when noticed during visitation or at school.

Not only will reporting incidents help ensure the safety of members of your household, but it is also a requirement in the Written Directives, Version 8.0-SECTION 11-06: Reporting Requirements. The Re-

source Family's home shall make a report to an RFA social worker and the placement social worker when an emergency occurs or a change in the composition of a Resource family household, including adults and children in the Resource Family's home occurs. Refer to the Written Directives, Version 8.0, and SECTION 11-06: Reporting Requirements, for full details in regards to the requirements.

How do I report? RFA families are required to report by completing the Resource Family/Unusual Incident or Injury Report form, in addition to calling the RFA social worker and placement social worker within 24 hours of the event. If you completed the report by telephone and did not include the required written report, you will need to complete and submit one within 7 days of occurrence.

Important Reminder: It is better to report than not report, to ensure the safety and protection of everyone in the Resource Family Approval (RFA) Home(s).

# Kudos Korner

With the start of the New Year, Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) would like to give kudos to one amazing resource family. The following kudos is written by Resource Family Approval (RFA) Social Worker Angie Valdez who is this family's assigned RFA social worker. Angie has worked with this family since they started the RFA process and has witnessed the fantastic work they do with the foster youth they care for.

Aura Chavarria & Alfredo Rincon are resource parents with heart. Aura & Alfredo started their RFA journey opening their home to one child since they wanted to make sure they would be able to provide the proper care for them. Aura and Alfredo always communicate with their social workers, asking questions or expressing their concerns. Aura & Alfredo comply with annual training requirements and then go above and beyond to take extra trainings in order to better equip themselves for the children they accept placement of. At this time, they have opened their home to more children by increasing their capacity as they want to make a difference in the lives of as many children as they can.

During a recent home inspection, the

## Events in Kern County

- On January 17, 2023, the movie, *Wake Up*, will be playing at the Fox Theatre at 6:00pm. Everyone is encouraged to come to this free community event. This movie highlights the dangers of human trafficking and exploitation.
- On January 28, 2023, there will be a 5K run to raise awareness and funds for the Human Trafficking Task-force. To sign up, please visit <https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Bakersfield/RaceAgainstTrafficking>

RFA worker noticed the structure and routine involved in how the home is run. The children come from school, take off their shoes, put their backpack away, and change into comfortable clothes. They grab a snack and begin working on their homework. Aura shared that the children get their homework done in order to have the rest of the time to play and relax. Aura was asked if it was easy to have this routine. Aura indicated that it was not easy, and that it takes a lot of patience, understanding and

not giving up. Aura shared that she knows that children placed in the home come from difficult situations and that they need love, patience and a lot of understanding. Aura shared that she would love to adopt a child however, the children she has had in her home have reunified with their parents. Aura indicated that even though she would love to adopt, she supports reunification fully. The Rincon's indicated that they feel great when parents are able to take control of their lives. The resource family keeps photos of the biological parents in the children's room and Aura helps kids create and give gifts to the parents. She also has plenty of toys and clothes for the children placed in her home. This family makes sure to make the children feel at home.

The Rincon family celebrates the children's birthdays and promotes positivity in the kids' lives with rewards and activities that promote self-esteem. The family uses prudent parenting standards to provide the children with the best experience while in their care. Aura and Alfredo indicated that the children in their care are their main priority and will be treated as such and hopefully one day they will be able to adopt, but in the meantime, they support reunification 100 percent.

**KERN**  
COUNTY  
HUMAN SERVICES

## 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](mailto:Resourcefamilies@kerndhs.com)

Fax (661) 633-7077

[www.co.kern.ca.us/dhs/FosterFamilyResources/](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/dhs/FosterFamilyResources/)