

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

Ombudsman Corner

Summer vacation is in full swing and over the next few weeks the countdown for a new school year will begin. Transitioning from the freedom of unstructured and free days can lead to a period of time often characterized as chaotic or stressful for parents and children. The websites centerstone.org and www.thepragmaticparent.com offer the following tips to assist with falling back into the groove of attending a full day of school:

- Develop a bedtime routine during the summer break to help maintain balance and reduce stress. The bedtime routine will vary depending on the age and activity of your child, but everyone needs sleep, because it serves the body's reset button.
- Unplugging from technology and spending quality time with family and friends can help lessen stress and anxiety.
- Take time out of your hectic schedule to play and enjoy the freedom from time, rules, and responsibilities. Playtime has powerful benefit for children and adults by providing life balance.
- Prepare the night before to eliminate rushing around in the morning trying to pack backpacks and make lunches.
- Create a Drop Off and Pick Up zone. This is a designated area preferably near the door most frequently used, where everyone's school gear lives.

The start of a new school year does not have to be chaotic or stressful. With some planning, structure, and establishing a daily routine that works for your family preparing for the beginning of a new school year can be one of excitement and fun.

Resource Family Approval Reminders

Are you currently caring for younger aged foster youth? Are they always getting into things that they shouldn't be? For our foster youth who are at the age of exploring their environments with no awareness of what they may be getting into, it is important that their safety is our top priority.

Resource parents should take every precaution to store cleaning supplies and medications in areas that are inaccessible, such as above the refrigerator, in above-counter cabinets or in child-locked cabinets if they are at the child's level. These precautions also apply to older youth who have difficulties with safety awareness and/or who have challenges with substance use.

Should you have any questions regarding how to store cleaning supplies or medications, please contact your assigned Resource Family Approval (RFA) social worker.

Another important reminder is obtaining clearances for any new adults that are regularly present in your home. Anyone 18 years or older who moves into your home or who visits your home two or more times a month, shall be fingerprinted and cleared in order to maintain approval.

This is to ensure that all adults that a foster youth interacts with are safe and appropriate. Please contact your assigned RFA social worker for more information.

Melissa's Message

Are you familiar with the Educational Rights for foster youth? Foster youth often face many challenges when it relates to their education, thus the implementation of specific rights to ensure that all foster youth have access to receive a quality education. The Foster Youth Educational Rights are listed below; should you have any questions, please contact the foster youth's primary social worker.

1. Right to remain in their school of origin

- The school they attended when they first enter foster care
- The school most recently attended or
- Any school they attended in the last 15 months that they feel connected to
- Collaboration between the school district, caregiver and social worker/probation officer to develop a plan regarding transportation to and from school

2. Right to immediate enrollment in school

- A foster youth cannot be forced to attend a continuation school or other alternative education program
- Immediate enrollment and attendance even without the paperwork required to normally enroll
- The previous school must send over the youth's records to the new school
- Foster youth have the right to participate in any activities available at the new school

3. Right to partial credits for high school students

- If a school change happens during the school year, foster youth have the right to receive partial credits in classes they are passing even if they do not finish the class
- The new school must accept partial credits
- Youth have the right to enroll in the same or similar classes that they were previously enrolled in at their last school
- Youth cannot be forced to retake a class or part of a class that they have already completed with a passing grade

4. Graduation rights

- Foster youth can stay in school a 5th year to complete graduation requirements
- Under AB 167/216 foster youth who transfer schools after 10th grade who are behind on credits may be eligible to graduate

5. College rights

- Application fees waived
- Right to receive maximum amount of federal student aid and up to \$5,000 per year from the Chafee scholarship

6. School discipline rights

- Foster youth cannot be suspended for more than 5 days in a row or more than 20 days in a school year
- Youth have the right to be told why they are being suspended and the right to provide their version of events and evidence before the suspension happens
- The foster youth's attorney and social worker must be invited to a meeting before a suspension can be extended 5 days and the extension can only happen if expulsion is considered
- Foster youth's attorney and social worker must be notified if expulsion is being considered

7. Right to school records

- Foster youth have the right to access their school records if they are 16 years or older or have finished the 10th grade
- The social worker/ probation officer and educational rights holder can also access these records



League of Dreams

Founded in 2007, The League of Dreams' mission is to give every child a chance to play a sport by providing training, team camaraderie and competitive sporting opportunities to athletes with disabilities. For athletes with physical and developmental disabilities ranging in age from 5 to 22 years old, The League of Dreams offers a variety of sport activities such as baseball, basketball, fencing, cheerleading, gymnastics and yoga just to name a few. In order to enroll, participants need to be between the ages of 5 and 22, have a confirmed diagnosis and proof of diagnosis and verification that the diagnosis prevents them from participating in traditional sports.

The League of Dreams provides athletes with disabilities, an opportunity at doing what they love and are passionate about. Testimonials from families who have been a part of the League of Dreams have stated how it has been such a support to their athlete both on and off the field. To date, the League of Dreams has served over 600 athletes with disabilities in Kern County. For more information about The League of Dreams or to register an athlete, please visit their website www.ourleagueofdreams.com.

Resource Parent Appreciation Event

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) annual Resource Family Appreciation Dinner and Training was held on Thursday, May 2nd, 2024 at Hodel's Country Dining. Approximately 175 people attended this event, which seeks to honor those that open their hearts and their homes to Kern County's foster children.

Eric Simpson, founder and executive director of Hopester Inc. and adoptive parent, was the keynote speaker for the event. Mr. Simpson was accompanied by a panel of young adults with lived experience in the world of foster care.

The evening presentation was filled with messages of hope and connection for foster youth. The panelists shared heartfelt stories of their experiences in an effort to motivate resource parents to continue to advocate for the foster



youth in their care and be a support system for them. In addition to the presentation and panel, three families were honored for their outstanding efforts and one community partner was honored for their continued partnership with DHS.



We hope everyone enjoyed the event and we look forward to hosting you again next year.

QPI-Partnership Agreement

As a Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) county, all Kern resource parents sign an agreement that details the expectations of caregivers and staff in promoting excellent parenting and efficient partnerships.

Resource parents and Resource Family Approval (RFA) social workers sign the QPI Partnership Agreement when completing the RFA process and on-going during the biennial updates.

The main reason for renewing this agreement is to ensure that caregivers understand and adhere to the following expectations:

- Caregivers and Agency Staff work together as respected partners

- Nurturing Children and Youth
- Supporting Families
- Strengthening Communities

Likewise, a resource family's assigned RFA social worker will also agree to and sign the QPI Partnership Agreement. Ensuring that resource families are supported in meeting the expectations listed in the QPI Partnership Agreement may be the difference in creating better outcomes and success for Kern County foster youth.

If you have any questions regarding the QPI Partnership Agreement, please contact your assigned RFA social worker.

School of Origin

Keeping a foster youth enrolled in their school of origin is an important factor in helping them maintain a sense of normalcy as they enter into the foster care system.

A youth's school of origin can be the school that they were last enrolled in or a school that they had previously attended that they would like to attend again.

Attending their school of origin is a foster youth's educational right and we must do all we can to keep their rights intact.

It may appear easier to enroll a youth in the school that is closest to the caregiver's home, but we must remember that changing schools can add to the trauma they are already experiencing.

These youth are already in an unfamiliar home; coping with not seeing their loved ones every day, let us help keep them in the schools in which they have made connections and are possibly doing well academically.

If there are challenges with transporting the youth to their school of origin, please contact the primary social worker and discuss what transportation options can be made. It is also important to note that caregivers can ask what a youth's school of origin in before accepting them into their home.

It is vital that foster youth are placed in environments that they can thrive in, including being able to attend their school of choice.

Clothing Allowance for Foster Youth

Youth who enter into the foster care system typically do not have many of their personal items accompany them, most notably their clothing. If the youth do have their own clothing, chances are they are ill fitting or not enough to keep them clothed throughout a week's time. As Resource parents, you are required to provide age appropriate clothing for youth in your care; monthly payments cover this ongoing need.



Foster Care Human Service Technician assigned. Annual clothing allowances are automatically issued by the state for each foster child during the month of August, which is just in time to meet the budget demand for back to school clothes.

Having appropriately fitting clothing at the start of a new school year, can help boost a youth's confidence, help them get

into a good mindset and worry less on appearance and more on school studies. Clothing can be a sense of armor and security for many youth, not to mention it can help them express their sense of self, so let us help set them up for success!

However, there is also an additional annual resource set in place to help. All foster youth are entitled to a clothing allowance on a yearly basis.

The initial clothing allowance will be dispersed in conjunction with the first non-emergency foster care payment by the

For more information about clothing allowances, please contact the youth's primary social worker.

Bakersfield American Indian Health Project

The Bakersfield American Indian Health Project (BAIHP) is an organization that provides resources and services to Native American tribes and their members here in Kern County.

Established in 1997, BAIHP is an outreach and referral center for a client population of over 220 tribes. BAIHP provides a variety of services such as transportation, medical case management, youth prevention program, nutrition and behavioral health resources.

The Department of Human Services works in partnership with a BAIHP advocate, ensuring that Native American families involved with Child Protective Services (CPS), have access to resources that BAIHP offers.

Please visit the BAIHP website at <https://www.bakersfieldaihp.org/> to learn more about the services they offer.

Purple Ribbon Month

The Kern County Department of Human Services, along with First Five Kern, the Kern County Fire Department, Kern County Sheriff's Department, Bakersfield Police Department, and the California Highway Patrol, are launching "Purple Ribbon Month" once again in memory of Kaitlyn Marie Russell. The law was named after Kaitlyn Marie Russell, a 6-month-old who died on August 15, 2000, after being

left in a hot van by her caregiver. In 2001, Kaitlyn's Law was passed, making it illegal to leave children under the age of six unattended in a vehicle without the supervision of someone who is at least 12 years old.

Kern County has designated the month of July as Purple Ribbon Month in memory of Kaitlyn and all the children who have died due to preventable injuries in and around

cars. This month serves as an occasion to raise public awareness about the hazards of leaving children unattended in or near motor vehicles. To follow the Purple Ribbon Month Campaign, please visit our social media platforms @KernCountyDHS and our website www.kcdhs.org. Remember to #LookBeforeYouLock to help make Kern County a safer place for children and families. Let's all do our part!

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

Fax (661) 633-7077

www.co.kern.ca.us/dhs/FosterFamilyResources/