KERN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF Human Services
Opportunity. Options. Empowerment.

Resource Family Connections

May-June 2019 Newsletter

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Stephanie Soza (661) 873-2303 or email sozas@kerndhs.com or Melissa Bodirsky at: (661) 873-2382 or email bodirsm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

It is hard to believe that a year has almost passed since my transition into the role of Ombudsman. I retrospect I must say that it has been a pleasure meeting new and reacquainting myself with experienced Resource Families. The love, encouragement and support that you all extend to the children and birth families of this community is immeasurable. In the recognition of Resource Family Appreciation Month, this poem is dedicated to you.

Making a Difference
Loren Eisley

One day a man was walking along the beach when he
Noticed a boy picking something up and gently
throwing it into the ocean.

Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?"
The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean.
The surf is up and the tide is going out.
If I don't throw them back, they will die."

"Son", the man said, "Don't you realize there are
miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish?"
"You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up
another starfish and threw it back into the surf.
Then smiling at the man, he said,
"I made a difference for that one."

THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

Melissa's Message

The Role of the Resource Family Specialist

I, Melissa Bodirsky, am the Resource Family Specialist for the Kern County Department of Human Services. I would like to take this opportunity to remind those of you who are already familiar with my role and let the new Kern County Resource Families know a little about me and how I can be of assistance. My main role is to serve as an advocate for our Kern County Resource Families. I am available to address placement concerns, to answer questions in regards to becoming a resource family and to connect resource families to services and events in our community. I am involved in recruitment and retention event committees as well as attend workshops that provide me the tools to further give support to Kern's Resource Families. I am also involved with implementing events that provide an outlet for resource families to collaborate and build support with each other.

As I am not a case carrying social worker, I have the availability to provide even more one on one time with resource families to answer questions and address concerns. I do work closely with the Resource Family Approval (RFA) social workers and can answer RFA related questions, such as giving information for training classes and the next steps in your process are as well as provide RFA forms.

Most importantly, I am here to listen. Before this position, I was a Family Services social worker and had worked alongside biological parents, resource parents and foster children. I do understand all the hard work involved in caring for our foster youth and if resource parents just need an ear, I am here to lend mine. I can be reached by phone at (661) 873-2382, by email at bodirsm@kerndhs.com or in person at 3711 Columbus St. Bakersfield, CA 93306.

I look forward to working with you!

Resource Family Friendly Business Partnership Coming Soon

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is excited to announce the Resource Family Friendly Business (RFFB) Partnership program coming soon! This program will be made available to all our resource families, licensed and relative and non-related extended family member homes. The RFFB program will collaborate with local businesses to offer our families a discount on goods or services. Once the RFFB program is ready to launch, families will be mailed a Member Card along with a list of participating businesses. A window cling of the RFFB logo will be displayed at each business to conveniently indicate their participation. With local business' support, DHS is proud to offer the RFFB program to show our families how much we appreciate them!

Partnership Agreement Reminder

At the beginning of your Resource Family Approval (RFA) process, your assigned RFA social worker provided you with the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) Partnership Agreement that you and your social worker read and signed. This partnership is a reminder to the caregiver and the agency to work collaboratively with the child and biological family that will ensure the best interests of the child are met. Being trauma informed and motivated to take advantage of additional trainings, caregivers can further support and nurture our foster youth. Additionally, the QPI Partnership Agreement states that caregivers should respect and support a child's ties to family and other significant relationships by assisting in facilitating appropriate visitation and other forms of communication. For more information regarding the QPI Partnership Agreement, please refer to your signed copy of the agreement or you can contact your assigned RFA social worker.

Resource Parent Appreciation Testimonies

During May, the Department of Human Services (DHS) devotes time to recognize our amazing resource families. You have opened your hearts and homes to youth in need and DHS would like to share some testimonies from our staff that have worked closely with our resource families. You may not hear "thank you" enough, but please know that all that you do for our foster youth is always appreciated.

From a Resource Family Approval Social Worker

One resource family that I work with are approved for 5 foster youth in their home. The mom is a stay at home mother with her adult daughters assisting her with the children. During my visit, the resource parents along with their adult children were all playing and taking care of all the foster youth. This felt like an entire family helping with the needs of the foster youth in home. The resource family originally became resource parents to assist siblings to stay together but recently was called upon to become a resource parent for their niece and nephews. In addition to providing for the children in their home, the family collects coupons for formula and baby items and gives them to other resource parents with infants.

From an Emergency Response Social Worker

I would like to mention an amazing family that I had the pleasure of meeting. The resource parents were amazing when dealing with their foster daughter. I received a referral in which there was an accusation made by the foster youth against the resource mom that resulted in the youth stating she did not want to go back home. I met with the youth, who appeared distraught and was afraid to return home because her siblings would tease her and not accept her. I met with the resource mom who understood the child's feelings, but denied the accusation made against her. The resource mom suggested we meet with the youth's counselor to try to sort things out because she wanted the foster youth back home. At the counselor's office, the child chose to speak to her resource mom in private and in doing so, expressed remorse for lying and took back her accusation against the resource mom. The resource mom showed amazing love and acceptance for her foster daughter which just broke down the youth's fears. I think each time we show a child true love and acceptance; it breaks the bondages of the abuse they have faced in the past. I just wanted them to know that this family much appreciated and that this was the best success story I have had all year!

YES! Conference

The fourth annual Youth Empowering Success (YES!) Conference occurred on March 8, 2019 at Bakersfield College. A total of 296 attendees; including agency staff, caregivers, juvenile court judges and volunteers, showed their support for our foster youth. This year's keynote speaker was Tahlua Goosby. A former foster youth and social worker, Tahlua is now a youth advocate for the Kern Superintendent of Schools and gave an inspiring message about never giving up and having a positive support system. Her enthusiasm and rapport with the youth in the audience was electric and her speech resonated in the hearts of the adults that work and care for foster youth. The overall theme of the conference was mentorship and how having one positive person in a foster youth's life can change it exponentially.

Working Together
A Reunification Story

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) main goal is to reunify our foster children with their biological families. Resource families play a vital role with reunification in that establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the biological parents can further support their success in completing their case plans and getting their children back in their care. Having a positive relationship with the biological parents can also serve to maintain placement stability as it demonstrates teamwork and what is in the best interest of the foster youth. One resource parent had a positive impact and was able to see her foster youth reunify with their biological mother; below is her story.

"We've actually only had one case where the child was reunified from our home. Others went to family/friends of the family. In the case where kids were returned home, we had a sibling set of 2, both under 2 years old. They were reunified within the first week. I talked to mom on the phone in the time we had them and she was distraught that her kids had been removed and was willing to do whatever she needed to prove they were safe with her. I encouraged her to get things done quickly and give the Department and her attorney any and everything they needed to move forward.

When I got the call the kids were going home, the first text went to mom, congratulating her. I knew she was a great mom. I met up with her at the Department to exchange the kids and their stuff and both babies were so excited to see mom! I gave her bags and bags of stuff we had acquired in that week (along with extra diapers for both kids and new clothes) and then realized she was planning to get on the bus to get home. She had both little ones to carry and all their stuff and I knew that wasn't going to be easy for her. I offered to give her a ride home and she happily and very thankfully accepted. On the ride home, she told me about herself and her family and the circumstances that got her to where she was. She was a young mother, working hard to provide for her kids, but with very little support or positive role models. I instantly felt connected to her and helped her up to her apartment and was excited to see the chalk writing on her sidewalks where she had been working with her kids on letters and colors. At her apartment, I made sure she had my phone number and told her to call me or text anytime she needed help, had questions, felt overwhelmed, or just wanted to say hi.

A few days later I heard from her, thanking me again for taking care of her kids when she couldn't. From there, we built a relationship and I frequently check in with her to see how things are going. When she found out she was pregnant with her newest bundle, she texted me the baby's gender and I knew she needed some "me" time before baby was born. I asked if we could babysit the kids while she went out for a nice dinner with a friend. She had a doctor's appointment and asked if I could watch the kids. We ended up keeping them overnight and I gave her a gift card for dinner. She was so thankful for the time to sleep in, take a shower alone, and dine on adult food with adult conversation.

The kids reunified about a year ago and we still keep in touch and help when we can. Each time I watch the kids, I bring diapers for the kids, just to help out. Building a relationship with the family not only ensures the kids have a village who love them, but also keeps us in touch with the kids after they reunify. Many of the families we have encountered just need some positive support from a village. Although it's always sad when the kids we've bonded with leave, it's very gratifying to see them go home to parents who have worked hard to get them back. The best is when we can now be a part of their journey going forward."

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