

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Pam Townsend at 661-873-2339 and her email is [townsep@kerndhs.com](mailto:townsep@kerndhs.com) or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com).

## Ombudsman Corner

As we enter into 2021, I would like to first say Happy New Year! I would also like to take a moment to welcome the new caregivers and provide everyone with a recap about the services offered through the Kern County Department of Human Services, Ombudsman's Office. This is my second year serving as our agency's Ombudsman and my job is to assist in the resolution of complaints and concerns that arise.



As Ombudsman, my objective is to:

- Serve as an impartial and confidential resource
- Listen to your concerns
- Document your complaints/concerns
- Gather all relevant information regarding the matter
- Remain neutral and objective and keep information confidential
- Formulate possible resolutions
- Make recommendations to the Department of Human Services, Child Protective Services Bureau
- Give feedback on actions and recommendations to every complainant received

*Who Qualifies For This Resource?*

Any foster child/youth, resource parent, relative caretaker, adoptive parent, or non-relative legal guardian receiving services from Child Protective Services.

*Is there a cost?*

No, these services are free.

Please do not hesitate to contact me as I'm interested in listening to your ideas of how to improve the services provided to the families and children in Kern County. Thank you for your dedication and love towards the children placed in your homes.

*May every day of the New Year glow with good cheer and happiness for you and your family.*

*Happy New Year*

*Monique Hawkins, Ombudsman*

# Melissa's Message

I would like to take this opportunity to remind those of you who are already familiar with my role and let new Kern County resource families know a little about me and how I can be of assistance. I, Melissa Soin am the Resource Family Specialist for the Kern County Department of Human Services. 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 or by email at [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com). I look forward to working with you!

## Introducing...

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am Maria Bermudez, the recently appointed Assistant Director over Child Protective Services (CPS) in Kern County. I have worked in CPS for more than 23 years in various positions including group counselor, social service worker, supervisor, and manager. I have also served as the Foster Parent Ombudsman. I am excited for this new leadership opportunity to serve you and the children and families of our community.

I would also like to express my gratitude to each of you that help our children and youth thrive. During these challenging times, I continue to hear amazing stories and examples of how our resources families have stepped up to meet the challenges. Your dedication to our children and community has been inspiring.

Resource families are invaluable partners in fulfilling our Department's Core Purpose of caring for and enriching the lives of children, families and individuals in our community. Thank you for all that you do each day. I look forward to working with you.

## Unusual Incident Reports

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 an Unusual Incident Report form, please contact the child's primary social worker or your assigned resource family approval social worker.

# Extended Foster Youth Services

In October 2020, the California Department of Social Services released an All County Letter (ACL 20-117) based on the passing of Senate Bill 115 (SB115), stating that assistance for young adults who were in extended foster care could continue services upon turning twenty-one years of age on or after April 17, 2020. This extension is due to the impacts that COVID-19 has had on our non-minor dependent foster youth and the challenges they faced during this difficult time. Young adults who were in Extended Foster Care when they reached their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on or after April 17, 2020 were contacted by county staff and offered to resume the assistance payments and services.

Under Welfare and Institutions Code sections 303 and 450, non-minor dependent and transition court jurisdiction both terminate when a youth turns twenty-one, however, youth can still gain access to the extended assistance payments and case management support regardless of the jurisdiction termination. Young adults who choose to resume this extended assistance program will still remain in contact with caseworkers on a monthly basis, but these contact visits may occur

through other remote methods such as emails, texts, phone calls or video conferencing. In-person contact will also be attempted on quarterly basis at minimum. Lack of contact from the young adult with their caseworker is not considered a reason to discontinue assistance. SB 115 also allows a young adult receiving this assistance to reside in any type of eligible foster care placement as a client or to receive a payment equivalent to the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) rate.

As part of the extended foster youth services, caseworkers will continue to offer referrals to the following support services:

- CalWORKS
- CalFresh
- Employment support
- Infant supplement benefits
- Postsecondary education
  - Financial aid and campus support programs

This continued assistance is effective from April 17, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

## Clothing Allowance & Clothing Inventory Form

As resource parents, you have likely experienced receiving a foster youth in your home that may not have enough clothing to last them a few days or that the clothes may be ill fitting. All foster youth are entitled to a clothing allowance on a yearly basis. The initial clothing allowance will be manually dispersed in conjunction with the first non-emergency foster care payment by the Foster Care Human Service Technician assigned. Annual clothing allowances are automatically issued by the state for each foster child during the month of August. For more information about clothing allowances, please contact the youth's primary social worker.

It is important for resource parents and/or youth ten years and older complete a clothing inventory form. A clothing inventory form is required to be completed at time of placement, every three months during placement and also when the child leaves your home. Documenting the belongings of each foster youth in your care ensures that those belongings are not lost and remain with the child. Sentimental items such as baby blankets, stuffed animals or photos may be the only thing these youth have that remind them of home and it is our responsibility to make certain that those items stay with them to provide the youth with a level of comfort when adjusting to new environments.

For questions regarding the clothing allowance or if you are in need of clothing inventory forms, please contact the foster youth's primary social worker.

Clothing and Personal Property Inventory																							
Child's Name: _____	Case #:	Date: _____																					
Date Placed: _____	Date Removed: _____																						
<b>Clothing:</b> (✓ all that apply)	<b>Condition When Placed</b>	<b>Condition When Removed</b>																					
	(Put # of items in appropriate boxes)	(Put # of items in appropriate boxes)																					
<input type="checkbox"/> Undershorts	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
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<input type="checkbox"/> Shorts	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
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<input type="checkbox"/> Dresses	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Socks	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Shoes	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sneakers	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweats/jackets	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweatshirts/pants	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Thermal underwear	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hats	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Infant jumpsuit	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor	Good Fair Poor																		
(Describe): _____																							
<b>Jewelry:</b>																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Watch _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Brooch/Pinset _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Necklace _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Earrings _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____																							
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<b>Personal Items:</b>																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Blankets _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Stuffed _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Stereo System/Boom Box _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Sports Equipment _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Musical Instruments _____																							
<input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Games (Xbox, PS) _____																							
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# Human Trafficking Awareness

Human trafficking does not often look like the picture we have been provided in movies such as *Taken*. Human trafficking in America, which is taking place in our backyards, instead, often looks like a “boyfriend” who makes a victim believe they are in a relationship and he cares about him/her; once the connection is made, then this “boyfriend” uses that to coerce the victim into the life of human trafficking.

Alternatively, it can look like a smooth talking man who lures victims into human trafficking with false promises, often targeting vulnerabilities such as poverty or insecurity. These characteristics of a trafficker, combined with the fact that the average age of entry into the life of commercial sex is 12-14 years, should make us all recognize the reality that children are vulnerable simply by being children. Any child can be the target of a trafficker.

Within Kern County in the last three years, nearly 300 investigations of ex-

ploitation/ trafficking have taken place and approximately 250 children have been identified as victims of exploitation and/or trafficking. Sadly, we know the actual numbers of victims are much higher. Unfortunately, Kern County is a prime target for traffickers due to our location and demographic. Close access to several hubs for human trafficking, Los Angeles, the Bay Area and Las Vegas, ensure traffickers can easily locate a victim here and quickly escape to these locations. Further, the high rates of poverty in Kern County increase the vulnerability for children; false promises of money or desired items, such as shoes or clothing, appeals to a child’s natural desire for such things and makes them susceptible. If we consider feeling insecure as an adolescent or being raised in poverty as risk factors, how many of us could have fallen prey to a trafficker as a child?

Unfortunately, the current circumstances of Covid-19 and the increase of technology use by children has heightened

these concerns. At any moment, there are 750,000 predators on-line looking for their next victim. Video games, social media sites and many applications used by our children are prime areas traffickers frequent. If children are present, traffickers are also.

What should we do with this information? Internet safety, the use of parental controls and checking on the social media/applications of your children is a first step. Educating our children, in age appropriate ways, as to the dangers that are an ever-present reality for them is vital. Gaining awareness about human trafficking is also essential, so that you see warning signs in your children and/or consider placement of a trafficking victim. Lastly, we must all ensure, if something of concern is seen, we must take the time to report it to law enforcement or the CPS hotline at 661-631-6011. If you are interested in extending your home to children who have been victims of human trafficking, please contact your Resource Family Approval social worker.

## Coming Soon...Family Urgent Response System (FURS)

The Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is an inclusive statewide, regional and county system that provides collaborative and timely state level phone-based response and county level in-person/mobile response in times of emergency for resource parents and current and former foster youth. The goal of this system is to maintain stability in placements and assist in keeping the relationship between caregiver and youth intact. FURS will offer a toll-free hotline that will be available twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. Supportive counselors trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques will operate the hotline. Callers can choose whether to connect to further support in their county or decline if they feel they have received the assistance needed over the phone through the statewide hotline. For more information about FURS, please visit <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/foster-care/furs>.



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