

**KERN COUNTY FOSTER FAMILIES AND VALUED, RESPECTED, SUPPORTED, AND SKILLED PARTNERS AND ADVOCATES WHO:**

- ★ Provide safe loving homes
- ★ Commit to the development and success of children and families
- ★ Encourage family connections and nurturing relationships
- ★ Maintain a lifelong connection to children whenever possible

FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN UPDATE

The Foster Care Ombudsman's role is to listen to your concerns, to document your complaints and suggestions, to remain neutral and objective and to keep information confidential.

Hello Everyone:

I wanted to take this opportunity to give you a brief update of what the Department of Human Services has been working on to help support and develop ALL our resource families.

Remember the QPI Survey Report in December's Newsletter? Well, DHS has taken steps to improve our Social Workers' response to your calls. If a social worker or other DHS person is not immediately available their phone message will alert you to their availability, how soon you should expect a return call and the name and phone number of his/her supervisor to contact, as needed. We hope this improves communication and provides you with contact alternatives. Please make sure to leave a message with your phone number so that your social worker or supervisor is aware of your calls.

We have taken steps to address your frustration at how long it takes to receive a MediCal card (temporary and permanent cards) for your foster child. On average you should not have to wait longer than two to seven days. Contact your child's social worker or Foster Care eligibility technician for assistance and DO NOT WAIT FOR AN EMERGENCY to happen.

We will review our performance in these areas over the next six-months. But that is just the start, we continue to seek interested volunteers for workgroups to address other areas you told us need improvement. We need your help to improve communication and team relationships between caregivers, biological parent and social workers that supports safety and stability for the foster children.

To support our licensed foster families and relative caregivers, in December, DHS and community partners sponsored a family breakfast event, "Winter Fun Under the Sun with Santa." Participants enjoyed a continental breakfast, games, activities, face painting and a picture with Santa. The event was a huge hit!! We busy planning ongoing training opportunities for 2014 including our annual May dinner and training event as a kick off to Foster Care Awareness Month. Caregivers will receive their invitation in April. We hope you can join us.

On another note, I wanted to inform you that we are again recruiting for a Foster Parent Coordinator. Our former Coordinator Christina Wanner accepted a permanent position at another Department. We wish her well in her new job. Please see announcements section if you are interested in applying.

Lastly, please take a moment to review the information provide inside Newsletter attachments. It was prepared with you in mind. Do not hesitate to provide me with your feedback.

Thank you for your dedication to Kern's Foster Children.

Margarita Soza, (661) 631-6698

ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR ALL CAREGIVERS

Recruitment for Foster Parent Coordinator (FPC):

Are you interested in a rewarding employment opportunity to work with and recruit resource families? If so, please apply NOW! The FPC serves as the link between caregivers and the Department and works closely with the Ombudsman. Duties include: provides informational updates to our caregivers; assists with support and retention efforts including those to our district caregivers; and is available to answer questions and resolve problems that may arise. The FPC also completes surveys, gathers data and completes data input and other duties as assigned. Please check County of Kern jobs website for application and qualifications.

Save the Date:

The annual celebration of National Foster Care month will be a dinner and training event on May 1, 2014; 5:30 to 9:30p.m. This event is sponsored by DHS and the Bakersfield College Foster and Kinship Care Educational Program. Resource caregivers from county foster homes, foster family agencies and kinship caregivers are invited. Space is limited so please RSVP when you receive your invitation in the mail. Invitations will be mailed in April.

Kinship Support Services Program:

Please review the attached portion of Henrietta Weill Memorial Child Guidance Clinic's (CGC) Fall 2013 Newsletter. CGC featured an article about the demands and needs of our relative caregivers. As you are aware, Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) is a service program specifically geared for caregivers with related children in their care. The child is not required to be a Court Dependent in Foster Care to qualify. Please call (661) 322-1021 for additional information.

DO YOU KNOW OF FAMILIES INTERESTED IN BECOMING FOSTER PARENTS?

If you have friends or family that may be interested in finding out more about becoming foster parents, please invite them to come to one of our orientations. Orientations are held at the Department of Human Services Partnership Building, 100 E. California, from 5:30-7:30pm. There is no commitment necessary to attend. Have your friends and family call the Recruitment line at 631-6204 for additional information. **Orientations are held:**

- English: Second and Fourth Thursdays, monthly
- Spanish: Third Thursday, monthly

LICENSED FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED FOR SPECIALTY

The Department is actively recruiting county licensed foster parents to meet the growing needs of our foster children. Please contact your Licensing Program Analyst if you have room

in your home and a heart to care for and love children who

- Need Emergency Foster Home placement
- Are Medically fragile or have specialized medical needs
- Have severe emotional/behavioral challenges
- Qualify for MTFC
- Are part of a large sibling groups
- Are pregnant or parenting teens
- Are AB12 youth
- Are victims of human trafficking.

Specialized training and support will be provided, as needed.

MOVING? OR, RECENTLY MOVED?

Relatives and Non-related Extended Family Members MUST report new address information to the child social worker immediately upon moving, or preferably, prior to the move. A delay may adversely affect home approval and foster care payment eligibility.

Licensed Foster Parents must report ALL change of address to Licensing as soon as possible. Failure to do so can lead to violation of Title 22, Operation without a License 89206, and you could be cited. Not reporting can also lead to possible removal of children if the home does not pass the home inspection visit and may also result in a delay in foster care payment. Our goal is to assure you are provided with current and accurate information about our services and point of contact numbers.

MARCH is Social Worker Appreciation Month

Take a moment to thank your social worker

APRIL is Child Abuse Awareness Month

Participate in the many community activities planned to bring awareness

MAY is National Foster Care Month

Bring awareness of the need for loving caregivers

PLAIN TALK ON LICENSING

An advice column for Resource Families

Foster Family Home Smoke Free Requirement:

Effective January 1, 2014 a licensed caregiver is prohibited from smoking or permitting any other person from smoking inside of the home, and when a child is present, on the outdoor grounds of the home. If a LPA determines a caregiver has violated this smoking prohibition, the LPA shall cite the caregiver for a violation of subdivision (b) of Section 1530.7 of the Health and Safety Code. Please contact your LPA for questions.

Effective Immediately:

NEW INFORMATION REGARDING CE TESTS:

Due to the increased costs of purchasing and mailing of CE Tests for licensed FFH caregivers, the tests will no longer be mailed with the quarterly Newsletters beginning 2014. CE Tests will be provided upon request. Please contact your Licensing Program Analyst (LPA) directly.

Are you a licensed foster parent with a desire to adopt?

Are you still waiting for that call for a placeman? If you are, you are not alone. At present the Department has 267 licensed foster home and over one third of licensed foster homes have reported to their Licensing Program Analyst an interest only for children available for adoption. Let me offer a few suggestions to improve your opportunity to receive a child that may become available for adoptions.

- Adoption and Permanency Planning Orientation. Orientations are held the third Wednesday of the month at the Kinship Center, Wilson road at 6pm. Call 868-8900 to register.
- Once you have attended Adoption Orientation you can be referred to start the Adoption Home Study process.
- Open your heart and your home to a foster child while his/her family receives Family Reunification Services. Remember that the Department's primary goal is Reunification; however if Reunification fails, the child's caregiver is generally given first choice to commit to Adoptions.

Won't you take a chance to fall in love with a child and be the best parent ever, even if it is for a short time?

NOTE FROM RDS:

The Resource, Development and Support (RDS) committee's goal is to make this newsletter something that ALL foster caregivers find informative, interesting and useful. If you are interested in submitting an article, or have suggestions on making the newsletter better, please contact Margarita Soza at 661-631-6698 or email at sozam@co.kern.ca.us.

