

# Brief Historical Overview of the Kern County Network for Children

## Two initial motivations drove the formation of the Kern County Network for Children:

First the 1992 Report authored by Children Now, a nonpartisan organization for children, identified Kern County Children as being among those most at risk of:

- dropping - out of high school
- scoring low on 8th Grade Achievement Tests
- infant mortality
- teen pregnancy
- juvenile incarceration
- living in poverty

Local government agencies and the Kern County Board of Supervisors had to respond to the overwhelming public concern raised by the report. To address these deficiencies, the County of Kern charged a network of concerned individuals with identifying an effective means of improving children's services and strengthening families. Based on suggestions of this group and the support of legislation (SB 997-Chapter 1303 of 1989 and SB 786 - Chapter 9945 of 19921), the Kern County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution, establishing the Kern County *Children's* Network (named to be changed later to Kern County Network for Children).

A stated original goal of the Network was *"to attain the combined commitment of all Kern County families, communities, and government entities to help build and sustain healthy families."* The primary means of achieving this goal was to include the identification of strategies, and subsequent recommendations for action to service providers and the Board of Supervisors, regarding policy, service delivery systems, budget priorities, and legislation that would improve the way we approach helping families become stronger.

Since the Network's decisions and recommendations were to have a countywide impact, an essential key to its success was the inclusion of a diversified and committed membership of executive decision-makers.

Second the County of Kern was also facing a looming budget crisis. For the first time, pink slips and "golden handshakes" were becoming a reality. Public agencies were under scrutiny on how poorly our children were doing while at the same time dealing with a reduction in budget and staff. There was also great frustration between agencies' lack of coordination and collaboration to maximize efforts. Most services were located in Bakersfield, which often prevented families, especially those living in rural communities, from accessing them.

Additionally, agencies often operated in isolation, competing to serve the same populations and duplicating efforts. Programs were designed with the best interest of the implementing agency in mind, instead of how services best fit into the larger service delivery system. As a result, clients were often caught in-between. There were often long waits for services, and cross-training of staff was identified as a real need.

### **Original Mission, Philosophical Statement and Goals 1993**

#### **Original Mission Statement:**

“To attain the combined commitment of all Kern County families, communities, and government entities to help build and sustain healthy families.”

#### **Original Philosophical Statement:**

It is the belief of the KCNC that all children are valuable and that it is through the family and communities that children learn the skills to become productive and responsible members of society. All families and communities must be able to provide their children with the foundation to meet the challenges of growing up and becoming productive members of society. In order to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to deal effectively with the pressing problems of poverty, medical, mental and educational deficiencies, teen pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, runaways, gang violence, and delinquency, the KCNC intends to develop available, affordable and accessible services and resources throughout Kern County.

#### **Goals:**

- Strengthening families, thereby enriching the lives of our children
- Promoting family self-sufficiency
- Identifying the most critical children’s issues countywide, and developing strategies for addressing these issues
- Determining gaps and overlaps in services
- Sharing information about children’s services and recommending ways to make them more effective and efficient

#### **Original KCNC Executive Committee “Statement of Purpose”:**

The Executive Committee shall advise the members of the Network regarding matters of policy and procedure, perform such duties as the Network assigns and act for the Network, between Network meetings, as is necessary and appropriate, with the understanding that such action shall be subject to modification by a majority vote of the Network.

#### **Key attributes of the original KCNC Executive Committee:**

- Risk takers
- Searching for ways to do things outside the box
- Mutual bond and trust factor amongst them (they were looking to make partnerships that were new and exciting)
- Fiscally responsible. They looked at what they had and how they could maximize resources (e.g., Mental Health gave Human Services match money to draw down more child welfare money)

## Major KCNC Benchmarks Since 1992

- In September **1992**, the Kern County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the resolution establishing the Kern County Network for Children (KCNC).
- In March of **1993**, the KCNC successfully became a 501(c) (3)
- In **1993** the first Annual Children's Summit was held, and the Kern County Board of Supervisors proclaimed the week of March 22-26, 1993 as "Children's Awareness Week," culminating in the Summit. The inaugural Summit was a first step in development of the KCNC's initial action plan, based on small group discussions that took place at this event. During the afternoon session attendees participated in a brainstorming session that helped to identify what was of the most importance to them. An example of an issue that was revealed was the need for a comprehensive information system that led to the development of HelpLine. The Summit was also the first venue to bring folks together from a variety of disciplines to receive training. The networking that occurred was amazingly powerful, and for the first time for many, names became faces and soon developed into working partnerships.
- In November **1994**, the County of Kern entered into a Joint Powers Agreement with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office for the purpose of creating a Joint Power Authority to serve as the administrative agent for the KCNC.
- The Kern County Collaborative was formed in **1994** bringing together leadership, and front-line staff to meet on a monthly basis to share information and best practices as well as provide a venue to discuss ways to improve the services for children which was then reported to the KCNC Executive Board.
- In March **1994**, the KCNC, with the support of the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office, published the first "Conditions of Children in Kern County Report." This written report served as a comprehensive statistical report covering indicators of well-being of children in the field of education, social services, health, mental health, and juvenile justice. In **2000**, this report was changed to a web-based report that appears on the KCNC's web site so that information contained in this report is always current and technical assistance with data can be obtained easily from KCNC staff.
- In **1994** the Kern County *Interagency Consent and Authorization form* (common confidentiality form) was developed and adopted to help agencies share information and better serve families. By developing a single, comprehensive information release form for all agencies and schools, service providers can share the family history. Thus a) services from other agencies can be expedited upon intake; b) families seeking help are not required to tell their story repeatedly and c) service providers truly collaborate in helping children and families.

- In **1994** the KCNC provided encouragement and technical assistance in the development and application of our county's first Healthy Start sites. Schools started to think about the needs of their students outside the classroom and how meeting those needs would improve classroom performance. The KCNC introduced the schools to the Memorandum Of Understanding process and in order for county support each participating school was required to have a student assistance team. Healthy Start was the first opportunity for many schools to make the paradigm shift from classroom to community. This shift recognized that schools must play a role in helping address social issues faced by families so that children come to school ready to learn.
- In **1994** a public/private partnership, created through the KCNC, enabled the County Health Department to make lice medication from a private manufacturer available to parents through schools for less than \$2 per treatment. This was much less than the \$11 retail price parents were forced to pay previously. Impoverished families routinely could not afford the medication, and children were forced to miss school until treatment was completed. The partnership made treatment affordable, and this led to a significant increase in attendance rates. For example, the Lamont School District saw a 40% increase in their average daily attendance rates as a result of addressing the issue of head lice.
- The Neighborhood Partnership Projects began in **1994**. The Partnerships represented a significant attempt to do business in a unique way, without "new" money. Instead, communities had to rely on the reallocation, realignment, or redirection of existing funds. The Partnership Projects were a call to action aimed at neighborhood communities an invitation to take ownership of a local planning and empowerment process. It required communities to assess their needs; to develop a plan for addressing problems which must include investment by neighborhood residents and to make a commitment to participate in collecting, recording, and analyzing data. The Projects did not receive money. Instead, they received a commitment by government agencies to realign human resources and other materials to the process of planning and implementing local strategies for building safe, healthy communities. They served as the laboratories for learning to rethink traditional roles and to redeploy resources of public agencies in ways which are more accessible, useful, and effective to our target populations. Four communities were selected to participate, and their efforts continue today. These partnerships also became models for what are now twenty community collaboratives.
- In **1995** under the direction of the Kern County Board of Supervisors, KCNC began serving as the planning body and administrator for both Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention & Treatment (CAPIT) and Family Preservation & Support Program (FPSP) funding. KCNC ensures the Request For Proposals (RFP) and the services provided are integrated and use a collaborative approach throughout Kern County. The KCNC took the lead in encouraging agencies to design programs around what the community needs are based on input from community members and people receiving the services.

- In **1995** KCNC began assisting and encouraging the use of Multi Disciplinary Teams (MDT's) for Neighborhood Partnership sites, Healthy Start and other case management programs. The goals of the MDT are to share information, so families get the help they need and avoid fragmented or duplicative services. Throughout Kern County, MDT's now exist with participation from county agencies, schools, community-based organizations and law enforcement.
- In **1996/1997** KCNC assisted the Department of Human Services with a review of the Children's Emergency Response System after Kern County experienced seven child deaths in one year. This process involved many trustees and resulted in numerous recommendations that were adopted by the Department of Human Services. It also helped educate the community that issues such as abuse are far larger than any one agency can manage alone. This also led to the development of a "white paper" on this issue that explored patterns in the abuse and strategies to address this community wide issue.
- The **1997** publication of the ***Recipes for Community Success*** "cookbook" captured the many lessons learned by successful community-based collaboratives and has served as a tool in the expansion of the four original Neighborhood Partnership sites to the twenty local community-based collaboratives.
- In **1997** KCNC created a leadership development program to nurture Indigenous, grassroots leaders within local communities. The program targets a diverse cross-section of our community with the goal of teaching them to become more involved and empowered to create change in their own communities so that they may advocate for children and families, as well as their community's priority concerns. To date over two hundred diverse individuals have graduated from this program. Many graduates have moved into leadership positions within local agencies, putting their talents to use serving children and families.
- In **1997** KCNC embarked on the Priority Results efforts that identified two priority results and indicators for tracking success in achieving these results. Subcommittees were established and strategies to address each indicator were developed and shared with relevant stakeholders. The KCNC continues to track these indicators and many KCNC partners continue to develop programs that directly impact these two result areas.
- In **1998** KCNC partnered with KERO-TV (Channel 23) on the "Kids You Should Know" project that highlighted youth in the community making a difference. This was the start of an effort to increase partnerships with the business community. Another example is the ongoing partnership with the Sheraton Four Points Hotel that distributed furniture and beds to families in need.
- In **1998** KCNC help to organize and facilitate Kern County's first Homeless Collaborative looking at ways to better coordinate and integrate services for the

homeless in Kern by bringing together agencies and organization as well as the inviting the private sector to the table.

- In **1999** KCNC published our county's first annual **Report Card**, a document that highlights some of the key data and indicators of child well being.
- In Winter of **2000** KCNC approached The California Endowment with a proposal to fund all twenty-one local collaboratives in an attempt to obtain private foundation funding, a break from the traditional government funding of our work. The California Endowment approved this two-year proposal and asked that their funding be used in conjunction with Proposition 10 funding.
- In Spring of **2000** KCNC brought together twenty-one local community-based collaboratives to jointly apply for Proposition 10 funding to better serve children ages 0-5 and build each of the collaborative's capacity to serve children and their families. KCNC brought together twenty-one local collaboratives (and therefore twenty-one different communities), twenty-one fiscal agents and twenty-one different sets of identified needs and goals under one umbrella. This is unique to Kern County and allows for a venue to help create improved policy and procedures in how we serve children.
- In Spring of **2000** KCNC helped to organize the first annual Leaders In Life Youth Conference, an event planned for youth by youth. Targeted for youth in grades 6-12, a planning committee of some forty youth works with an adult planning committee to plan all aspects of this conference. Over 1,100 youth from every corner of Kern County attended the Leaders In Life Youth Conference in **2005**.
- In Spring of **2002** KCNC reorganized its governance structure to include a 20-member Governing Board and a much larger Advisory Board, which was comprised of over one hundred children's advocates.
- In **2002** KCNC received the largest grant in Kern County from The California Endowment (TCE) of one million dollars. The TCE funding was distributed to the twenty-one collaboratives and allowed collaborative FRC staff to provide three specific direct services to families; screen all families for health insurance coverage and other needs; link families to needed services; provide case management for at-risk families with multiple needs or significant issues affecting children.
- January of **2003** KCNC and local collaboratives were awarded \$2.9 million in Prop. 10 funding for a third year of funding to support integrated services through local collaboratives.
- From **2001** to **2003** KCNC and local collaboratives have served a total of 74,778 individuals in 23,962 families with California Endowment and Proposition 10 funds. This represents 14,481 children ages 0-5 and 28,056 children ages 6-17 who have

been able to access services via Family Resource Centers located throughout Kern County.

- Homeless Quarters which grew out of the Homeless Collaborative in **2003** which was an effort to raise flexible funding for homeless services. Volunteers worked with stores, restaurants, and gas stations to place donation boxes at the counter. The money was then distributed to organizations that had gaps in services due to funding.
- In **2003** SB 163 Wraparound Services were implemented in Kern County. These services were planned and are being implemented through a partnership between the Kern County Network for Children; Kern County Departments of Human Services, Probation, Mental Health, and Public Health; Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office; and Aspira Foster and Family Services Agency. The philosophy of Wraparound services is a family-centered, community-oriented, culturally sensitive, strength-based, individualized alternative to sending foster children to or keeping them in group home placements. The goal of wraparound is to keep kids in their birth family, with relative caretakers, or a foster family, by providing intensive, comprehensive, and integrated treatment, intervention, and support services.
- In **2003** KCNC began to offer free monthly trainings to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to protect and enrich the lives of children in Kern County.
- In **2004** Kern County's Citizen Review Panel (CRP) was formed. This independent body of seventeen specially qualified community members, consumers, child advocates, and recognized professionals make recommendations on how to improve Child Protective Services, foster youth services, will serve as a forum for input into the state and local redesign of the Child Welfare System.
- In **2005** KCNC staff was charged with developing a local collaborative accreditation process for newly emerging and established community collaboratives in an effort to promote excellence and ongoing improvement, KCNC has developed an Accreditation helps to build commitment and foster a deeper understanding of community collaborative efforts among group members, area residents, service partners, funders, and policy makers. The annual accreditation process is also designed to promote a uniform child well-being agenda throughout the county. The goal of this process is to measurably improve outcomes for all children and their families. Seventeen collaboratives were accredited in 2005.
- Charged by the KCNC Governing Board, and as partner in the implementation of SB 636 Kern County Self Improvement Plan, in **2005** KCNC developed the first GIS map indicating where all substantiated child abuse cases over the past three years have occurred. A GIS Task Force had been formed to overlay information from a variety of sources with the goal of using the information as a prevention and intervention tool that will lead to informed policy decisions and understand of where we need to allocate our resources.

- In **2006** KCNC become the administrative agent for the Foster Youth Services (FYS) Program in Kern County. FYS is a non-competitive grant offered by the California Department of Education. The FYS Program is designed to serve the educational, psychological, medical, and transitional needs of participating group home children throughout Kern County. KCNC also accepted the responsibilities of the coordination of County AB490 Liaison activities to ensure the rights related to the education of dependents and wards in foster care.
- In **2006** the Kern County Department of Human Services, KCNC and four of our local Family Resource Centers began a ground-breaking pilot to ensure child safety by expanding the ability of our community and social service agencies to respond to reports of child abuse and neglect called Differential Response. This innovative approach involving Child Protective Services (CPS) working hand in hand with the community to intervene in the lives of children and families before further problems develop.
- In **2006** KCNC became the fiscal home for Get Moving Kern: Healthy Eating and Active Living (GMK) coalition. GMK was successful in receiving a California Endowment Grant to address the health disparities in Kern County in the area of obesity prevention through nutrition and physical activity education, promotion and systems change.
- In **2007** an RFP for funding and a plan was developed by KCNC and DHS to implement Countywide Differential Response (DR) services serve families who have been referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) for suspected abuse. By helping families improve child safety and well-being, DR aims to keep families out of the system; and reduce the number of Kern County children who are victims of substantiated abuse and/or experience the recurrence of maltreatment. DR services utilize an evidence-based assessment tool, and provides home visiting, case management, information and referral, and a range of supportive services.
- In **2007** we began funding Parenting education services that target families at-risk of experiencing child abuse and/or neglect. These services use practical as opposed to theoretical approaches and meet the WIC requirements for family's court ordered to receive them.
- In **2008** KCNC working with agency and community partners established and opened the Dream Center which is a safe place for foster youth, emancipated youth to receive social and educational services, socialize, as well as serve as respite for some of the youth that do not have a safe and stable living environment. Staff from DHS were out stationed at the Center with KCNC Staff. We also had Probation Officers and Behavioral Health staff spend time at the Center seeing their clients.
- In **2010** KCNC's Child Advocacy Committee called Kern Cares, was formed. Kern Cares utilized child death and safety data, and community needs information to develop Kern Cares annual calendar of prevention campaigns. Local media outlets



promoted our monthly campaign themes and trainings were provided based on the monthly theme as well.

- In **2012** KCNC helped to establish the Kern County Veterans Collaborative whose goal is to ensure that the needs of veterans and their families are addressed by coordinating services and outreach through partnerships and collaboration. The Collaborative assists veterans in becoming their own advocates to improving the quality of life for themselves and their families.
- In **2015** KCNC moved Foster Youth Services (FYS) Program in Kern County back to KCSOS to serve as the administrative agent.
- In **2018** the Dream Center relocated to two buildings expanding our full-time on-site staff housing staff from KCNC, Probation, DHS, Behavioral Health and KCSOS with staff from other agency's rotating through the facility which includes Department of Rehabilitation and Bakersfield College. We also gained the ability to provide showers, laundry, a mobile health clinic as well as cooking classes and many other life skill courses to serve over two hundred youth visits per week of foster youth and emancipated youth.
- In **2019** KCNC staff at the Dream Center began providing services and supports are provided to unaccompanied youth, ages 18-24, who are homeless. Youth are provided with outreach services, resource information and referrals, access to housing assistance, financial assistance with move in costs when approved for a rental unit, and case management services, support, and advocacy so they can successfully maintain their housing and provide guidance. The Youth Advisory Board was formed made up of youth with lived experience to provide guidance to us in ways best to outreach to the homeless population. We also hired our first Peer Support Specialist to work with our youth and share their journey to stability and independence.
- In **2022** the Parent Advisory Board (PAB) was formed. PAB members share their experience and expertise in child abuse prevention and family strengthening by providing advice and suggestion to the Kern County Network for Children, Kern's Child Abuse Prevention Council, and partnering agencies/organizations who are committed to improving outcomes for children and families throughout Kern County.
- In **2023** KCNC reorganized its governance structure to include a 21-member Governing Board.
- In **2023** KCNC assisted in the planning and moving forward with the implementation of our County's Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). FFPSA will further our effort to transform from a child protection and foster care system to a child well-being system. The Title IV-E Prevention program was a shift in the old paradigm, changing from a focus on reaction to a focus on prevention and early intervention with the goal of reducing incidences of abuse and neglect, decreasing entries into

foster care, reducing disproportionality, addressing systemic and historical traumas, promoting the social determinants of health, and improving the lives of children, youth, and families.

- In **2023** The Parents As Teachers (PAT) evidence-based home visiting model was implemented county-wide. PAT is a comprehensive home-visiting, parent education model used by PAT Affiliates. The model provides services to families with children ages prenatal through kindergarten.