

## **1999-2000 At A Glance**

### **A Strong Foundation**

The period from 1999 through 2000 was one of extraordinary growth for Casey Family Services. We continued to provide essential services to children and families based on our belief that children grow best within a stable, nurturing family setting.

At the same time we have redoubled our commitment to improving practice and policy by expanding our capacity to develop, evaluate and replicate innovative models and to offer technical assistance to others. With this strong base, we enter the new century prepared to play a key role in reshaping the nation's response to the needs of America's most vulnerable families and children.

In accordance with the 1998-2002 Casey Family Services Five-Year Plan, the areas of program emphasis are Post-Adoption Services, Transitioning Foster Care Youth to Adulthood and Treatment Foster Care. In light of the current increase in adoptions and our own understanding about what can make those adoptions successful, Post-Adoption Services continues to be an especially important focus.

Casey Family Services provides a wide range of other kinds of assistance and supports for vulnerable children and families. These include family preservation and reunification, as well as outreach to teen parents, young families and families affected by HIV/AIDS. Casey Family Services is also an active participant in Making Connections: Neighborhood Transformation/ Family Development (NTFD). This national initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to revitalize troubled neighborhoods includes three cities where Casey Family Services operates: Baltimore, Maryland; Hartford, Connecticut; and Providence, Rhode Island.

Exciting new models and partnerships begun in 2000 will gain ground in 2001. These include a computer pilot program for foster children and families in Bridgeport, Connecticut; a model Probate Court project to improve the quality and speed of child custody decisions in Connecticut; and a promising partnership with UPS to extend its "Classrooms to Career" program to transitioning foster children in New England. We also expect more of our divisions to become actively engaged in NTFD as the community-building work in rural areas. With the expansion of NTFD into the rural sector, we extend our work related to this important initiative to all divisions of the agency. Promising demonstration projects are a computer pilot initiative, Family Connections, a program of assistance to families affected by HIV/AIDS, and Family Resource Centers.

An innovative pilot project to assist foster children with gaining skills and knowledge in the use of computers is well underway in Bridgeport. The project is in response to the significant challenges facing foster children preparing for independence. To compete in the job market or post-secondary school, youth increasingly need to possess working and practical knowledge of computer skills

and systems. This pilot will provide a computer in each foster home, as well as training and follow-up. To date, Casey's research department has completed a needs assessment survey. In addition, a Computer Pilot Committee made up of foster parents, Casey staff and staff of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Technical Assistance and Resource Center (TARC), has completed a draft proposal for the project, initiated a search for a project director and defined distinct project components.

To advance our goal of influencing policy and practice on the broadest level possible, we will add key positions in the divisions and within administration. These positions will allow us to better refine our program focus, more effectively document and share our experience and knowledge with others, and more consistently and powerfully improve systems and policy across the nation.

Also in 2001, we will launch The Casey Institute, a formal in-house technical assistance group. Closely associated with the Foundation's Technical Assistance Resource Center, the practice-focused group will serve as the umbrella under which our technical assistance activities across programs will be coordinated and managed.

With this broader and stronger infrastructure, we expect to leverage the considerable progress made in 2000. Significant activities in 2000 included the convening of a major national conference on Post-Adoption Services in Washington, D.C., a regional forum on transition with the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors, and groundbreaking work in collaboration with state agencies throughout New England. In addition, our division staff has presented their work at national and state conferences, while others have traveled across the country to offer technical assistance and training to families and child welfare practitioners. Enhancing our direct service to children, the installation in 2000 of the Case Management Information System has improved our ability to both track our services to children and families as well as measure the impact of our work. The system is expected to be fully operational by the beginning of 2001.

With the close of the year 2000, we enter our 25<sup>th</sup> year of operation and open a new era of collaboration and innovation. During our first national conference in December 2000 on Post-Adoption Services—an area of work where Casey Family Services has achieved a strong track record and a position of leadership in the field—we announced our newest initiative, The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice. Through the Institute, we will respond to requests for technical assistance from agencies across the country by mobilizing teams of experts from inside and outside Casey.

Casey Family Services is building on a proud heritage. Our founder, Jim Casey, imbued our agency with a sense of courage, creativity and determination. His vision of a better world for foster children has guided us for 25 years. It will continue to light the way as we carry forward the timeless principles and values of our work

into new communities and new programs to help greater numbers of children in need. We will do so confident that Jim Casey would approve.

Raymond L. Torres  
Executive Director

Douglas W. Nelson  
Co-Chairman Board of Managers

Joseph Tranfo  
Co-Chairman Board of Managers

## **Post-Adoption Services**

There can be little doubt that the movement to place greater numbers of children languishing in foster care into adoptive homes is right in spirit and direction. But there also can be little question that adoption is a lifelong—sometimes difficult—process of adjustment, acceptance, attachment and growth.

A rising number of families engaged in this process clearly need help in coping with the inevitable issues that arise. Children who have experienced severe neglect and abuse, or who have been in foster care or in orphanages abroad for a period of their lives, carry with them emotional and psychological challenges that most parents are ill-equipped to meet on their own. Providing the right supports and services at the right times to all families in need, whatever their circumstances, is a common-sense investment in the future.

Casey Family Services, the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has learned through 25 years of service to foster families and 10 years of work with adoptive families that a stable, strong and nurturing family is the key to a child's healthy development. Supportive communities are just as critical to the social development of children who will become tomorrow's parents.

Post-Adoption Services take many forms: counseling sessions with families and children; support groups for parents and kids; workshops on adoption for parents, teachers, and mental health workers and child welfare professionals; advocacy on behalf of adoptive families; support to families in times of crisis; and collaboration with community resources. All of these fundamental activities are based on the core principles that drive our practices and reflect our beliefs about adoption and what adoptive families need in order to succeed.

We believe:

- Adoption is one way to build a family.
- Adoption is the best plan for most children who cannot be raised by their birth families.
- Adoptive families need and deserve the support of their communities in the form of acceptance, understanding and services.

The Post-Adoption Services (PAS) program grew out of the agency's experience providing assistance to foster families who adopted the children in their care. Recognizing that the emotional and psychiatric difficulties of foster children did not end when they were adopted, the agency concluded that adoptive families needed continued contact with social workers and access to services to be able to stay together. Because very few public or private agencies offered services to families after their adoptions were finalized, Casey's PAS program began offering post-adoption services in 1992 to any adoptive family in the community.

A needs assessment was conducted as a first step in designing a program model. Interviews were conducted with adoptive parent groups and professionals in the field and research studies related to needs of adoptive families were reviewed.

As a result, a program model was developed that included these core components:

- Information and referral
- Counseling
- Support groups
- Education and training
- Advocacy

The program was conceived as a center where adoptive families could come together and connect with other adoptive families and professionals. The intent of the program was to build communities of support for adoptive families among each other, within the professional fields and within their communities.

The Post-Adoption Services Program operates in six Casey Family Services divisions, including Bridgeport and Hartford, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

As with all of its child welfare activities, the ultimate goal of Casey's Post-Adoption Services Program is a safe, stable home where children can have the opportunity to grow up into healthy, productive adults who are supportive parents. Because adoption is a lifelong process that affects children and families at different stages of their development, the requests from families and the intensity of the post-adoption services provided vary. A family with a very young adopted child may seek advice on how and when to talk to the child about adoption. It may be a number of months or years before they contact the program again, when their child has a deeper understanding of adoption and may need some professional counseling to sort through emerging feelings of grief and loss around his or her birth family. At the same time, the parents might attend a support group where they meet and share parenting strategies with other adoptive parents in similar situations. And families experiencing serious difficulties--children with a diagnosed mental health need or parents having marital difficulties because of the challenges of parenting a child with special needs--may require a more intensive combination of postadoption services, including participation in family and individual counseling, advocacy services, and parent and child support groups.

The PAS program is designed to respond to the range of issues with which adoptive families seek help, including ensuring a smooth transition from foster care to adoption for children and families; building family relationships between adopted children and adoptive parents and adopted children and birth siblings; helping adopted children and adoptive parents to cope with the feelings of grief and loss associated with being given up by birth parents or with infertility; searching for self-

identity when there may be information gaps in a child's birth history; working with transracial and transcultural adoptive families to ensure that the child's cultural identity is respected and understood; managing challenging and disruptive child behavior at home and school; and dealing with the emotional and physical trauma, like abuse and neglect, experienced by children prior to adoption.

A successful adoption—for the children and the family—requires support before, during and after the adoption process. With the increased emphasis on adopting foster children and youth, Casey Family Services has expanded our post-adoption work. Our services in this area include comprehensive assessment, counseling, support groups, referrals, training and advocacy. Together, these services help families to resolve issues before they become crises.

The University of North Carolina is in the process of completing a study of Casey Family Service Post-Adoption programs. The preliminary results of this exhaustive study of case records and interviews with parents and staff found that our Post-Adoption Services are distinguished by several key characteristics:

- Staff is very knowledgeable about the adoption process and its impact on children.
- Staff and resources are flexible enough to respond to each family's needs.
- Support groups and social events help families to "feel normal."
- Staff and services are very accessible.
- The ability to return for additional services provides a continuity that significantly increased the confidence of children and their families.

The report found that most families felt our Post-Adoption Services helped them. The greatest improvements were in child behavior, understanding the impact of adoption on the child's behavior and effective communication. This report should be completed in 2000.

Five divisions had very active post-adoption programs in 1999.

- The New Hampshire Division provided services to 71 children in 34 adoptive families, and consultation and training to 40 mental health professionals.
- The Maine Division collaborated with the Maine Department of Human Services on a statewide Post Adoption demonstration project.
- The Bridgeport Division served over 600 children, families and professionals through groups, summer programs, a "buddy system" and training for parents, professionals and the adoption community.
- The Hartford Division worked with a statewide coalition to develop two key adoption laws and presented workshops on post-adoption services at state, regional and national conferences.

## **Sharing What We Have Learned**

### **Treatment and Long-Term Foster Care**

Treatment foster care meets the special challenges of children who come from an institutional setting or are likely to be placed in one. Typically, these troubled children have faced abuse, neglect and violence. We work to create a supportive family environment in which their needs can be met with the help of our staff and other professionals.

Long-term foster care is a related program of professionally planned services for children who, for a variety of reasons, cannot live with their birth parents or extended families of origin and who currently are not ready for adoption. Casey Family Services recruits committed, talented foster parents and supports them with training and a range of ongoing services that help create a stable family experience. To the fullest extent possible, the program encourages and assists each child in maintaining a connection with his or her birth family. Casey Family Services also provides counseling and support to children making the transition from foster homes to their birth homes, adoptive homes or into independent living.

The agency projects serving children in Long-Term Foster Care are as follows:

- The Hartford and New Hampshire Divisions have launched a pilot program, Levels of Care, that is a more flexible model of care.
- The Massachusetts Division serves more than 40 children in foster homes, offering a foster parent support group and family activities. A new therapeutic art group for adolescents and Youth Advisory Council has deepened services to older children.
- The New Hampshire Division provides services to 74 children.
- The Maine Division helped 75 children in treatment care and long-term foster care.
- The Bridgeport Division serves 100 children in treatment and long-term foster care; 74 of these families participated in the Diagnostic program, an important assessment tool developed by the division.

### **Transition to Adulthood**

Each year, more than 20,000 children “age out” of the foster care system. At age 18, or when they graduate from high school, many foster children are required to leave the system and face the abrupt end of their federal and state funding. Not surprisingly, these young adults are particularly vulnerable to drugs, crime and early pregnancy.

Casey Family Services helps foster youth prepare for the transition and make plans for their future. Equally important, we continue to help these young people after the transition. Our transition services include everything from housing assistance to counseling.

For example, Casey Family Services and the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors convened “The Road to Independence” conference in December 1999. More than 85 people from six states shared their experiences and ideas about helping youth make the transition from foster care to independent living. The conference included the release of two important documents: *A Framework for Independent Living Programs and Services* and *The Casey Family Service Foster Care Alumni Study*.

The New Hampshire Division collaborated with Lutheran Family Services to expand an independent living group and established an Independent Living Steering Committee.

The Maine Division’s Wilderness Work Project provided 16 youth from six divisions with an opportunity to learn valuable work-readiness and conflict-resolution skills.

## **Strengthening Families and Communities**

In addition to these core areas, Casey Family Services works with families and children to meet the particular needs of their families and communities. Some of the programs include family resource centers, family reunification, services to family affected by HIV/AIDS, Family Advocacy and Support, and "Making Connections", Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development, a national initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

### **Family Connections**

The Bridgeport Division's Family Connections programs served 25 families and 65 children affected by HIV/AIDS.

- The division sponsored a series of legislative initiatives that were instrumental in the amended "subsidized guardianship law" and sponsored the second annual family camp.
- The "Hear These Voices" conference in 1999 brought together more than 350 people to share strategies for helping children and families affected by AIDS/HIV. Casey Family Services sponsored the conference in conjunction with the AIDS Division of the Connecticut Department of Public Health, The Children's Trust Fund, the Connecticut Pediatric AIDS Foundation and Connecticut Voices for Children. At the conference, Casey Family Services released *Planning Children's Futures: Meeting the Needs of Children, Adolescents and Families Affected by HIV/AIDS*, a comprehensive review of issues, ideas and policies that grew out of the 1997 conference convened by Casey Family Services.

### **Family Reunification**

- The Hartford Division continued to work closely with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families to redesign reunification services. Staff and three birth families presented a workshop at the annual state conference of the National Association of Social Workers.
- The Maine Division worked with 78 children and 34 families on reunification.
- The Family Resource Program in Lowell, Massachusetts, served more than 100 children living in the Lowell Housing Authority North Common Village with a homework club, rap sessions, seasonal activities and parent training.
- The New Hampshire Division's outreach efforts, which encompassed both recruitment and retention of foster parents, included working with all 12 state district offices.

### **Family Preservation**

Family preservation services offer family-centered, home-based counseling and support to help struggling families remain intact, thereby preventing the need for out-of-home placements. Casey Family Services works closely with community organizations such as hospitals, schools and local service agencies that identify

families experiencing extreme pressures. Other operating costs include those associated with day care, transportation and rental assistance.

Family Preservation programs continue to develop in Rhode Island and Maine.

- The Rhode Island Division is working directly with an elementary school to serve students and their families when children are at risk of possible placement. The goal is the reduction of out-of-home placements in the child protection and/or the juvenile justice system.
- The Maine Division is working with young parents and infants identified by the Department of Human Services as being at-risk, to provide early intervention to prevent abuse and neglect.
- The Maine Division's Family Preservation program worked with 40 mothers and their infants on a collaborative initiative with the Maine Department of Human Services and area hospitals.

### **Family Resource Centers**

The Family Resource Services Program for the Lowell Housing Authority (LHA) was launched in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1998, to provide support for families and children living within two housing projects, North Common Village and the George Flanagan Development. Through a contract with the LHA, Casey Family Services is providing a growing, multi-faceted program for children and families through a family resource center, activities for children during out-of-school time and home visits, as well as family advocacy and support.

The program is expanding to two family resource centers, and will enhance its community outreach and actively assist other Casey divisions in building similar programs.

- The New Hampshire Division is preparing to open a similar family resource center to serve isolated, low-income families.
- The Vermont Division is continuing to build a wide range of services through a year-old family resource center in Chelsea.

### **Teen Parents/Young Families**

The Teen Parents/Young Families Program is located in Maryland's Historic East Baltimore neighborhood, where it is helping to develop a collaborative network of community-based services to assist adolescents and young parents. In 2001, the program will expand its outreach to the community at large, adding new programs and services and increasing its engagement in "Making Connections" work.

Current services, including family advocacy and support, crisis intervention, case management, emergency response, short-term counseling, and intensive family preservation services, are designed to help disadvantaged, single teen and other young parents cope with the myriad problems that confront them and avoid out-of-home placement for their children. New activities will include work under the Safe

and Sound initiative, the creation of a foster care program, day care for the neighborhood and increased programming for young fathers. Our intent is to conduct comprehensive community outreach services and serve a broader number of teenagers and their children who reside in the East Baltimore community. Operational costs also include those associated with transportation, childcare and tutors. Nearly 70 families participated in programs at the Baltimore Division to support young, fragile families with a variety of services.

**Family Advocacy and Support**

Family Advocacy and Support has been designed in conjunction with Vermont's Department of Social Services and provides a single point of access for families in poverty who are seeking to resolve child development and neglect issues. Based at the Waterbury office of Casey's Vermont Division, this program strives to integrate service delivery, incorporate the values and assets of the community, and maximize family strengths. This program was launched in 1996 in Waterbury, Vermont.

### **“Making Connections”**

Casey Family Services helped to develop Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development Partnerships, a national initiative sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Through “Making Connections,” Neighborhood Transformation is creating broad-based partnerships to make troubled neighborhoods places where children and families can thrive.

- The Hartford Division has begun working with community groups, neighborhood representatives and other city, corporate and educational entities to develop shared goals. With the addition of a community liaison position, the division expects to strengthen its ties to neighborhoods in key areas of need throughout the city.
- The Baltimore Division continues to work with Foundation staff to develop the program. The groundbreaking for the new division location on Caroline Street served as the platform for announcing the selection for the new Making Connections site. The division is working with the Foundation and the City to implement a new Safe and Sound program that will reach young families and children.
- The Rhode Island Division continues to build networks of support for families in South Providence. Working with Foundation staff and local leaders, the division is working to extend its family preservation program and strengthen supports for foster families in South Providence.

## **Breaking New Ground**

### **Computer Pilot Project**

An innovative pilot project to assist foster children in gaining skills and knowledge in the use of computers is well underway in Bridgeport. The project is in response to the significant challenges facing foster children preparing for independence. To compete in the job market or post-secondary school, youth increasingly need to possess working and practical knowledge of computer skills and systems. This pilot will provide a computer in each foster home, as well as training and follow-up.

To date, Casey's research department has completed a needs assessment survey. In addition, a Computer Pilot Committee made up of foster parents, Casey staff and TARC staff, has completed a draft proposal for the project, initiated a search for a project director and defined distinct project components. Components include computer accessibility and proficiency for foster families, computer accessibility and proficiency for foster children, and computer accessibility and proficiency for youth in transition.

### **Probate Court Pilot**

In June 2000, the Bridgeport Division launched the West Haven Probate Court Project. For two years, Casey is replacing the State of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families as the primary service provider on children's issues for the Probate Court of the District of West Haven. The pilot was initiated to address the long delays in getting referrals completed. "We hope to show that children and families are receiving more timely and better services," says Cynthia McCall, Deputy Director of the Bridgeport Division. "We also want to better educate the public about the needs of children and the referral process."

In just the first six months, the pilot has already had 54 referrals involving 43 families. The referrals included temporary custody, immediate temporary custody, termination of parental rights, reinstatement, co-guardianship, visitation and adoption. While a few cases were resolved in one or two months, most involved complicated family situations, including substance abuse and conflict about family issues.

"These are very fragile families. Unless there is some counseling and support, they won't be able to maintain it over the long haul," says McCall. "Providing that support is a frontend way to keep children out of the child welfare system. It's also one less move for the child within that family environment."

"We're finding that it's not simply case assessments and recommendations to the court," says McCall. "We negotiate agreements so the child doesn't get caught in the middle." Social workers Joanna Korsh and Patricia Lugo, both MSWs with experience in the legal system, have provided a great deal of support by identifying numerous social service, mental health and developmental issues for the children and families. "We feel very good about this project," says McCall. "We are making

things better for these children while collecting the data and refining the models that can help children in other courts and communities.”

The next phase will be to move into another probate court to see how this model works in a different setting. Providing technical assistance to locate local agencies that could meet needs—from financial backup to children’s social services—is another element of the project that will be refined during the pilot.

## **Children in Care**

### **1998**

- Post-Adoption Services 465
- Family Reunification Services 130
- Family Preservation 98
- Long-Term Foster Care 517
- Family Connections 63
- Family Advocacy and Support 251
- Teen Parenting Program 63

### **1997**

- Post-Adoption Services 516
- Family Reunification Services 114
- Family Preservation 77
- Long-Term Foster Care 565
- Family Connections 63
- Family Advocacy and Support 176
- Teen Parenting Program 26

**Expenditures**

Total expenditures incurred by Casey Family Services during 1998 on agency operations amounted to \$24,984,985. Funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation for operations amounted to \$22,766,291, and reimbursement received from outside sources totaled \$2,218,694.