

500 Attend Foster Parent Conference

More than 500 foster parents, youth, guests, and staff attended Casey Family Services' Seventh Biennial Foster Parent Conference, "Helping Families Grow Strong Together," in Boston March 9 and 10, 2002. The event featured well-known motivational speaker Dr. Wayne Dyer, Massachusetts Attorney Gary Zerola and Matthew Faulkner, representing actress Victoria Rowell. A full program of workshops and entertainment rounded out the two-day event.

Noting Casey Family Services' 25th anniversary, Executive Director Ray Torres credited foster parents with the agency's growth. "You have helped us to learn and to measure the importance of stable, caring families in the lives of children growing up without their birth parents," he said. "And you have helped us to teach others that it is possible and important to involve birth parents in the healthy development of their children even while they are in care, and that it is critical that we continue to support foster youth as they transition out of care and into independent, productive lives."

Commenting on his personal and professional association with Casey Family Services Founder Jim Casey, Board of Managers Co-Chairman Joseph Tranfo said, "Jim had a vision to change the bleak outlook for our country's most vulnerable children, children who could no longer live with their families, children whose families could no longer care for them.

"For more than 25 years, Casey Family Services has realized that vision...and provided a broad range of services to our vulnerable children and their families," Mr. Tranfo added. "Over the years we have worked hard to live up to our obligation – to ourselves, to the children, and to Jim. We have worked hard to make sure that all of the resources, all of the efforts, are delivering results...for kids in need."

Annie E. Casey Foundation President Douglas Nelson observed that foster parents' commitment and dedication "comes at a time when your work simply could not be more important.... at a time when the world is an uncertain place for all of us, and an even more uncertain and troubling place for kids in foster care.

"We know that there are nearly 600,000 children still in care across this nation," he continued. "And we know that, regrettably, comparatively few of them will have the benefit of the safe, secure, and stable homes that you have provided through Casey Family Services. "We can point to the findings of our alumni study to underscore that safety, security, and stability make a measurable difference for foster kids," he added. "We can say, after looking carefully at how Casey kids are doing after care, that:

- more than 70 percent of Casey alumni have graduated from high school or earned a GED;
- about half have received education beyond high school; and

- nearly 70 percent are currently employed.”

The conference honored Dr. Dyer, Victoria Rowell, and Gary Zerola for their work to better the lives of children and adults, and recognized more than 50 foster parents from states throughout New England who had achieved five, 10 and 15 years of service.