

## **Child Care Program Strengthens Family Services**

When the Baltimore Division began to focus on the coinciding needs of young parents and the community several years ago, it became increasingly clear that child care had to be an important part of Casey's service structure.

The Reason: There was a lack of infant and toddler day care slots in Baltimore City. Therefore, it was a challenge to meet the needs of teen and young adult parents who were already under a great deal of stress as they attempted to complete school or make ends meet in low-income jobs. Having a consistent provider would give these parents the security of knowing that their children would be safe.

As a result, the child care concept began taking shape for the division in 2000, when Division Director Anna Williams and her staff began looking into financing options and creative approaches to help alleviate the problem. Eventually, the decision was made to begin the arduous task of establishing a Casey-supported network of licensed home care providers in the neighborhood.

By January 2002, the first licensed home care provider began to care for four young children, with Casey providing child care guidance, monitoring and supplemental income. Casey staffer Dorothy Lievers, who was instrumental in launching the program, is providing this ongoing support, as well as helping to place more children with additional home care providers.

In the meantime, the division has continued expanding its services for teen parents, pregnant teens, young adult parents and even grandparents who are struggling with their lives, finances and parental responsibilities. On the case management side, Casey social workers serve approximately 50 families, working closely with young parents who struggle with everything from health concerns and employment issues to abuse prevention and anger management.

In the Family Resource Center, moreover, which opened in March 2001, the division offers a drop-in child care service where parents from the community can leave their kids in a safe, educational and fun environment, in order to attend GED, art and other classes, parenting skills groups, health and drug education programs, and various community meetings at the center. The drop-in center will hire a full-time teacher early this year to further strengthen this vital capability, says Williams.

A special area of focus is the after-school program designed for children and youth 11-to-14 years old, which attracted 30 participants a day last year, with many more clamoring to be involved as word of its success spread. "These kids have never had a program like this where they can learn about reproductive health, life skills, and hygiene, as well as have fun, take trips and play ball," says Baltimore Team Leader Terry Baisden. "It's become very popular."

On the other side of the spectrum, the division's grandparents support group meets once a month for the parents of teen and young adult parents. "These are young grand-parents for the most part who must financially support and provide housing for their kids and grandkids," says Baisden. "The burdens of three generations can be enormous, so we provide a place where they can talk things out with their peers, try to solve problems, find resources and have a break."

In 2002, the division plans to strengthen its child development activities, encourage greater participation in existing fatherhood groups, and build parent leadership within the Family Resource Center, says Williams. The recent addition of 13 Internet-connected computers will also be a focal point of both education and recreational activities for both youth and adults, who otherwise have little or no access to these increasingly vital technologies.

"All of these programs evolve from the expressed needs of the community," Williams notes. And as the Family Resource Center evolves, monthly family support meetings, as well as volunteer marketing, outreach and program committees, will continue to provide us with the information and feedback we need to meet future needs.

"We're making so much progress thanks to a remarkable and talented staff. They offer a wide range of complimentary skills and have been willing to make a challenging transition from case management to a case management/family resource center model," Williams says