

MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

Boston Event Echoes National Blue Ribbon Campaign

The National Foster Care Month Partnership has launched a nationwide Blue Ribbon Campaign to celebrate foster families and call attention to the need for more caring adults to play a meaningful role in the lives of America's foster children. States are hosting similar events throughout the month of May, displaying blue ribbons to represent the numbers of children in foster care in each individual state or community, and echoing the campaign's slogan, "Foster Our Future."

"The blue ribbons connote 'best effort' and 'first place' – symbolic of the dedication and commitment of so many foster parents," explains Cheryl Haddad, National Foster Care Month Partnership member and president of the Foster Parent Association in Massachusetts. "The image of the ribbons tied in trees at each location or worn on lapels is also a strong visual reminder of the kids in foster care who deserve our support," says Haddad.

And the need for that support is growing. Every jurisdiction in the country has experienced a shortage of foster homes, and estimates for the number of homes needed range into the hundreds of thousands. Most agencies are perpetually recruiting new foster parents at the same time that they seek to retain the ones they have.

"The 'May is National Foster Care Month' effort provides an opportunity for people all across the nation to show their appreciation for the dedication of our foster families and workers," explains Karl Brown, project



The Blue Ribbon Campaign poster, brochure and toolkit are available online at www.fostercaremonth.org or www.nfpainc.org.

manager for the National Foster Care Month Partnership. It is also an opportunity to get more people involved, whether as foster parents, volunteers, mentors, employers or in other ways, Brown adds.

Blue Ribbon Campaign events are being held in Alabama, California, Idaho, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, Tennessee, Texas, Washington and Wyoming.

Casey Family Services' Lowell Division joins the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) and other community partners on May 5 at the Massachusetts State

House in recognition of the state's nearly 11,000 foster children. Casey's growing partnerships with child welfare organizations in the state, collaborative efforts with DSS, and the Boston location of the New England Regional Foster Parent Association made Massachusetts a strong choice as the event's host state. Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Kerry Healey, DSS Commissioner Harry Spence, state legislators, Casey Family Services Executive Director Raymond Torres, foster parents and foster youth are expected to take part in the program. "This [Blue Ribbon] event brings everyone together in a common purpose," says Torres. "Foster kids are part of our collective community, and we must each do our part to help them reach their full potential."

Every year, about 170,000 families care for over a half million children whose parents can't take care of them. These resource families and the social workers, volunteers, educators and professionals who support them take on one of the greatest challenges our society generates. "Few people know how much strong love, strenuous work and sympathetic perseverance lie at the heart of 'the system,'" says Brown. "It is hard to imagine a group of people more deserving of appreciation and recognition."

The National Foster Care Month Partnership consists of more than a dozen national child welfare organizations and government agencies.