



## EDWARD RENNELLS, NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION DIRECTOR

*As the organization's second longest-serving employee, Edward Rennells began his career at Casey Family Services as a social worker in the Hartford Division's foster care program 23 years ago. While at the division, he became the first team leader for Family Reunification Services, an important component of Casey's continuum of permanency services. Currently, he serves as division director in New Hampshire, overseeing Casey's statewide foster care and post-adoption services, in addition to spearheading a number of community-based initiatives.*

**VOICE:** *As Casey Family Services has moved to emphasize the importance of life-long family relationships, how has your division responded in New Hampshire?*

**RENNELLS:** We are now helping families in different ways – and working with different kids. We recently became an Independent Services Options (ISO) provider with the state, allowing us to work with children – some of them not necessarily in the foster care system – who have a variety of permanency plans. Some kids might be part of a family already, and we can do in-home work, allowing them to remain together. Being an ISO provider allows us to support more people. Casey also is offering training and expertise in assisting other providers and the state in developing a permanency model.

**VOICE:** *Is the state of New Hampshire embracing permanence?*

**RENNELLS:** In the past, the state favored the rights of birth parents, which has been a barrier to freeing children for adoption. As a result, a number of children are “aging out” of the system. The New Hampshire

Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) has been working with us on our move to greater permanence, as the agency has undertaken a permanency initiative also.

When I first came to New Hampshire, many kids stayed in foster care. As a result, we had very stable case loads. Now we have a number of kids going through adoption, and, for the first time, we're having conversations about how permanency practices impact our case loads and our referrals. I think it's a positive sign that New Hampshire is moving to support “forever families” for children.

**VOICE:** *Having moved from Connecticut's capital city to one of the more rural states in the nation, what do you perceive as the differences in providing services in the two diverse areas?*

**RENNELLS:** New Hampshire has fewer child welfare resources. There is a rural culture here where people drive half an hour to the grocery store or commute 45 minutes to work. So while there is a need for services, there isn't the concentration of people in a location. Thus, agencies are not offering services in many communities.

Over the years, Casey has made a commitment to the people of this state and, therefore, has developed three different sites – Concord, Franklin, and Littleton. To combat rural poverty, we've opened family resource centers in Franklin in partnership with local schools – a community with some of the worst child outcomes in the state.

**VOICE:** *Would you call the partnership with the Franklin school system a success?*

**RENNELLS:** Yes. It's been nothing but great.

There's been much cooperation by the school system to address the needs of our kids. From the moment we began this process, the principals and teachers were most helpful. We have filled a void in the community in that children are participating in safe activities that are supervised instead of being on their own after school.

**VOICE:** *What is Casey's role in the state?*

**RENNELLS:** We are responsible for 31 percent of all private foster families in the state, which is a significant increase from when we started a decade ago. We work closely with the state and have two contracts to support DCYF with foster family recruitment and retention. In addition to providing the state with technical assistance and support, we work directly with New Hampshire's foster parents, helping to give them a voice on a state level.

**VOICE:** *New Hampshire has one of the nation's highest rates of racial disproportionality within its child welfare system. What contributes to this phenomenon? What is being done to address inequities?*

**RENNELLS:** New Hampshire remains a state with very few racial minorities, so if a community has a 0.5 percent minority population, data will show disproportionality even with a small number of children in care. However, it's an issue that the provider community is examining. Casey Family Services and its partners recently held our third statewide diversity conference, and we had a discussion on disproportionality with Bernie Bluhm, an administrator with DCYF who is helping shape a statewide dialogue on responding to inequalities in the system.