

CASEY FAMILY SERVICES

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Casey Connector



Spring 2006

Casey Family Services Co-Sponsors Aging Out Youth Conference

by Francyne Fuller

Each year as many as 25,000 young people age out of the foster care system without a permanent family relationship and/or adequate preparation for adulthood. Suddenly alone and with no one to count on these youth face serious challenges and hardships, some of which include early pregnancy or parenthood, criminal involvement, lack of employment and homelessness.

On November 29, 2005 Casey Family Services co-sponsored a day long conference on youth aging out of foster care. The conference, *Who Is Ready at 18?* was held in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services and several other private agencies and addressed the issues faced by young adults as they turn 18 and leave the state system of care.

The day began with a keynote address by Kim Stevens, the founder of Raising Children's Voices, Inc., an organization dedicated to placing youth at the helm of effective child welfare work. In her address, Stevens referenced some of the evidenced based research that is available on adolescent brain development and made suggestions as to how these findings could be used in our work with adolescent youth.

As part of this day, a panel of five



Al G., Casey Family Services youth, participated on the panel of young adults who discussed issues faced by adolescents aging out of the state system of care.

young adults spoke about their personal experiences after aging out of foster care. They touched upon issues such as homeless, unemployment and facing life on their own without significant relationships and supports. Because of a policy that exists within the Department of Social Services, these youths were able to sign themselves back into care and are currently receiving a variety of support services. Only one had a permanent family in which to live.

In the afternoon, breakout groups formed to address the issues faced by these youth. Providers from the public and private sectors of social services, as well as representatives from the law enforcement, legal, neighborhood and academic communities discussed the various ways in which they could work collaboratively to ensure that these young adults are provided with the resources and relationships necessary for them to achieve the best possible out-

comes in their journey toward safety, well being and permanency.

Follow up groups are being convened to plan strategies for furthering community involvement and sustaining the important work that was begun at this conference.



Al G. with his Casey parents, Rich and Jill Palmer, at the 2005 Casey Foster Parent Conference.

"EACH YEAR AS MANY AS 25,000 YOUNG PEOPLE AGE OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM WITHOUT A PERMANENT FAMILY RELATIONSHIP AND/OR ADEQUATE PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD."

A Message from the Director



Looking ahead, 2006 promises to be an exciting year of both evolution and creation. Our Foster Care program will continue to evolve as we make sure that every child we serve

has a family for life. Completing the integration of our youth driven, permanency planning process will continue to be the major goal of the year. As I write this, we are making great progress on this significant piece of work. Each social worker in the Foster Care Program is working on at least 2 permanency teaming processes. While this evolution is having an impact throughout the division the true impact will be measured in years to come, in the lives of children who find a family for life.

Another evolution currently underway is the development of a new contract with the state Department of Social Services for our Foster Care/Permanency Planning Program. The Department is in the process of re-procuring all contracts with service providers in a far reaching effort to create an integrated services system that promotes permanency outcomes. We are in the midst of writing our proposal at this time. Over the next few months, as the contracting and negotiations proceed, we will be in a better position to share the results with you.

The Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign continues to evolve as well. This year the City of Lowell has a tax preparation site, joining Community Teamwork and Casey Family Services in providing free tax preparation services to low income working individuals and families. The campaign was launched at a press conference held in the Mayor's reception room on January 19th. This project grows every year as we work hard with an ever increasing group of partners to extend the EITC benefit to more fami-

lies. We believe that with our partners, this will be a record year, with utilization expected to double. Next year promises to be even better with new partners already considering joining in the work.

We earnestly hope this is the year we will be able to create new office space for the Family Resource Program. Demand for services like our Homework Club grows but we are hampered by insufficient and inadequate space. We will be working together to develop purposeful and functional practices and procedures that will help us document our work in this program. We intend to continue to produce information that helps us evaluate our work and its impact. Future plans include the creation of a financial literacy program for Cambodian families, the development of a support group for young men and the negotiation of a contract with the state to provide family preservation services.

An exciting and challenging year lies ahead.



New Staff Joins the Massachusetts Division

Marie Smith

My name is Marie Smith. I joined Casey Family Services in November as the Family Support Specialist on the Foster Care Team.

I attended Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina where I majored in Mass Communications/ Broadcast Journalism. After graduation I returned to my hometown of Boston and began work as a marketing assistant for a high technology organization in Cambridge. I was initially excited about my first venture into the field of communications, but soon learned that opportunities for face-to-face interaction with people would be minimal. I realized that I needed to have more of this to feel comfortable in my career. I left after a year.

Shortly thereafter, I was offered an opportunity to work for a specialized foster care agency. I was apprehensive about pursuing a field where I had neither an educational background or work experience, but after some thought decided to accept the position which involved working with abused and neglected children. I found the work extremely meaningful and felt an enthusiasm for learning case management skills. Much of this enthusiasm stemmed from the opportunity to provide services to the same neighborhoods in which I was raised. I took a great deal of ownership and pride in being able to make a contribution to my own community.

Five years later I was offered my current position at Casey Family Services. I saw

this as an opportunity to further develop my skills for working with children and families. I had always known of Casey's reputation for excellence in the field of child welfare and I looked forward to joining the organization. Although I have been here for just a brief period of time, I am very much aware of the commitment on the part of staff to provide the highest level of services to children and families. I am grateful to be a part of this agency.



Family Resource Program

Resource Center Families and Kids Come Together For An Evening of Fun and Games

by Delmis Sierra, age 11

Casey family game night was fun. The planning was cool because we talked about what we were going to do. We brought snacks such as chips and soda.



(left to right) Christyne DeMango, Chennara Kim, Pia Ferracin, Jessica Garue, Luis Mejias, Seyla Kim

YAC kids helped bring the games such as Candy Land, Jenga, Chinese checkers, and others. We had lots of fun. Some kids brought their family. Casey Family Center helped set up the tables and games. People sat down and played games. My favorite game was dominoes. Delmis and JR were playing with Loli and Joan. The team that won was Delmis and JR. I also played Candy Land with

Youth Advisory Council Peer Talks

by Anthony Hernandez, age 11

For December peer talks we wrote letters to Santa and we gave the kids snacks like milk and cookies. And this is a sample of my letter.

Dear Santa Clause,

What I want for Christmas? Well what I really want for Christmas is to be with all of my family. And just to have a fun time with them. And I want what any other kid wants a lot of presents and joy. I really hope my sister gets surprised when she gets to see what I got her this Christmas. And I still am wondering what everybody got me. That's what I want for Christmas Santa Clause.

P.S Merry Christmass Santa Clause

Sincerely,
Anthony Miguel Hernandez

Youth Advisory Council Holiday Caroling

by James Sarantakis, age 16

On December 19, me and my fellow YAC members planned to go Christmas caroling to get together and have a little bit of fun. We had a lot of people join

us like Helen McCreedy and Allen Casad of Casey Family Services. We also had a couple of people from around the neighborhood join us as we went around singing. A lot of people were delighted to see us singing and they thanked us for singing to them. After we finished we went back to Casey Family Services on Market St. and had drinks and cookies while we listened to Christmas music. All in all I felt this idea was a successful one. We made a lot of people happy while having fun.

Cambodian Girls Support Group

by Bossie Thang, age 11

The Cambodian Girls Support Group is a great place. I get to express my feeling and do many things. We learn manners, how to protect yourself from danger, great activities and many more. The girls that go there are Lina, Thyda, Jennifer, Linda, Sanaith, Soaran, and Bossie. Ming Vichenny is like an aunt to us all. She teaches us many things, and also we use our prior knowledge to share with the rest of the girls. I think that the Cambodian Girls Support Group is a safe place to be. Almost each month we try to get some other girls to come join us. We always welcome people. When there are more people we get more brainstorming going on. That is how I feel about the Cambodian Girls Support Group!

Foster Care Program

Young Women's Group

by LaShanta Petruski, Student Intern
Foster Care Program

The Lowell office has begun a support group for young women. The group is an opportunity for these youth to discuss the different issues that they face as teenagers growing up in today's society.

The meetings began in November and will continue every other Tuesday until the end of March. There are currently five young women in the group; we are

always looking to have new members join us.

Some of the discussion topics have included goal planning, relationships, peer pressure, fashion and hygiene. The meetings provide an outlet for the members to express their thoughts and concerns regarding the experiences they have had in their lives and to help the others work through similar issues. The group has become a support system for everyone involved; a safe place where

they have been able to share experiences and laughter.



Project Adventure

by Sheila Fitzgerald, Team Leader
Foster Care

It was a blustery day in October when Casey youth and staff joined together for a day at Project Adventure. Although the day began as cloudy, we remained steadfast in the hope that the weather would hold out. Unfortunately it did not and as the day progressed so did the downpour. However, we did not let it dampen our fun.

The first order of business was a getting to know you/team building exercise. We were directed to stand in a circle and wait to be chosen by a leader who would then give us directions to follow. The exercise developed into quite a comedy routine as we found ourselves trying to do a number of things, all at the same time.

For the second exercise we were asked to choose a partner and without using verbal communication find out three things about them. In a charade-like fashion, we acted out our favorite mode of transportation, favorite food and our proudest moment. I chose one of our newest Casey youth, Sara S., as my part-

ner. We found that we liked many of the same things. We also found out that I'm not very good at charades. All of the youth seemed to enjoy the activity and everyone participated.



The third activity was a team building exercise where the youth and staff had to help each other through a physical challenge while also following rules. This was a major endeavor for us all, but we forged ahead and accomplished the task in record time. It was great to see how the older youth stepped up to help and

support some of the younger kids through this difficult exercise.

The final activity was called the shot-put. Everyone needed to work together as a team in order for this activity to be safe for everyone. Interested staff and youth were harnessed and placed on a ladder. Once secured, they were hoisted to the top of the wire and when ready, catapulted themselves into a swinging motion. It looked fun from where I was standing ... which was very close to the ground. All of the youth worked cooperatively to insure that every person was safe before "liftoff." Even staff member Sayida Farmer and student intern, LaShanta Petroski enjoyed swinging from the high wire.

At the end of the day each youth needed to say what they learned and what memory they would take from the day. The things that were mentioned were finding hope, developing trust in others, learning to be a better listener, improving teamwork skills and enjoying friendship, laughter and fun. All in all the day went well and everyone left enthusiastically looking forward to our next visit to Project Adventure.

New Student Interns Join Casey Family Services



Kim Karcz

My name is Kim Karcz. I am currently a student intern in the Foster Care Program and a second year MSW student at Salem State College. I will be graduating in May.

For the past five years I have been employed at a residential facility for children with emotional and behavioral problems. I have also interned at the Department of Social Services in the Domestic Violence Unit.

Since beginning my internship at Casey Family Services, I have had the pleasure of working with the experienced, compassionate, and dedicated social workers in the Foster Care Program. I have

learned a great deal from them and feel excited to be a part of their team. I look forward to the upcoming months and feel extremely grateful for this wonderful opportunity.



LaShanta Petroski

My name is LaShanta Petroski. In September I joined Casey Family Services as a student intern in the Foster Care Program. I currently attend Salem State College

as a second year MSW student with a concentration in child and family work; I will graduate this upcoming May. For the past four years I have worked at a residential treatment setting with children and youth from various backgrounds and diagnosis. While there I gained great experience.

In the course of my internship at Casey Family Services and under the guidance of a highly skilled team of social workers I have learned the important skill of case management. This knowledge has significantly improved the quality of my work as a social worker. I look forward to learning more as I continue with my placement.

Welcome to Our New Foster Parents

- Joanna Clayton
- Maria Doherty
- Lucinda Myers
- Robert & Marilyn Rebal
- Frank & Deborah Sacco
- David & Diane Souza
- Christopher & Amy Winston
- Kimberlee Worth

An Orphan No More

by Joan Ryan

Adapted from *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 25, 2004



Regina Louise Ollison with her adoptive mother, Jeannie Taylor

Regina Louise Ollison was 40 years old with a 17-year-old son of her own when she became, after a lifetime as an orphan, somebody's child. "Everybody needs a mother and it doesn't matter when you get her," she said.

In an unusual Contra Costa County court proceeding, Regina was adopted by the woman who had been denied the opportunity three decades ago. The two had fallen in love with each other when Regina Louise was a headstrong 11-year old bouncing from one foster home to another and Jeannie Kerr was a young counselor at the Contra Costa children's shelter where Regina returned after each failed placement.

Back then, the courts and the social workers refused to place black children with white parents. Both were devastated. Jeannie ended up marrying a military man, having a son and moving to the South. Regina was never adopted and left foster care at age 18. When she attended San Francisco State on scholarship, she had no name to offer when asked for an emergency contact. She had no place to go when the dorms closed for school breaks. There was not a single person in the world who claimed her as family.

"You need somebody to show up for you," Regina said, talking over quesadillas at a little Mexican place on Fourth Street in Berkeley. She sat next to Jeannie, holding tight to her adoptive mother's hand. "You need that flat mirroring from somebody who loves you unconditionally and who is so proud of you," Regina said.

Her story and her need, even at age 40, to reconnect with the long-lost woman she now calls mom reinforces the growing realization that every foster kid needs an adult who will be there well beyond childhood,

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not just because it makes sense for the adolescent, but because it makes sense for society.

The average American child lives at home, at least part of the time, until age 26. Yet the foster system tosses kids into the world alone at 18. "Older kids haven't been looked at as a group that needs a home," said Mardi Louisell, consultant for California Permanency for Youth Project. "The system is set up to consider kids over 11 not adoptable so social workers often don't go about finding an extended family that will be there for them beyond the age of 18."

According to the California Department of Social Services, about 25 percent of the kids emancipating from foster care become homeless, 30 percent end up on welfare, 33 percent land in jail, 45 percent have no jobs and 50 percent fail to finish high school. Those numbers drop when kids have adults in their lives who provide love and safe harbor.

Some visionary social workers are realizing that these adults do not have to be foster or adoptive parents. They can be anybody who has an emotional, permanent commitment to the child: a coach, a teacher, a counselor, the parent of a friend. This kind of thinking is something of a revolution in foster care.

"It's about coming at it from a relational perspective rather than a bureaucratic one," said Anthony Barrows, a former foster kid from Massachusetts who spoke at a national conference about foster care permanency last week in San Francisco. "You have to ask the kids: 'Who is important to you?' And then help facilitate that connection so it becomes something permanent in the kid's life."

On paper Regina is a foster care success story, but it didn't feel that way to her. When she left San Francisco State there was no one to advise her about getting a car loan or an apartment. There was no one to share the exciting news about opening her first hair salon or about the birth of her son or about landing a two-book contract from Warner Books to write a memoir of life in

the foster system.

She never stopped missing Jeannie Kerr, the only person who ever called her "Pumpkin" and "Sweetheart" and who told her she was smart and capable of anything. Regina spent years trying to find Jeannie through former counselors and the Internet. A letter sent to an old address came back "Addressee Unknown." Last June she gave up. "I waited for 40 years for somebody to claim me and I decided it was never going to happen," Regina said.

Soon after her first book, "Somebody's Someone," was published, Jeannie, whose last name now is Taylor, heard about it and sent an e-mail through Regina's Web site. "I am so proud of you, Sweetheart," the subject line read, Jeannie left her phone number in Alabama.

When Regina called and heard Jeannie's voice she couldn't speak. "Is this my baby girl?" Jeannie asked. They both cried. They reunited days later, meeting up at LaGuardia Airport during a stop on Regina's book tour. "She was so polished and refined," Jeannie recalled. "When I saw her gray hair, I flipped," Regina said.

Jeannie gave Regina a photo album filled with pictures from their time together so many years before. "It took my breath away because I had no pictures of myself as a child," Regina said.

On November 20, 2003, in the same Martinez courtroom where their adoption petition had been rejected 25 years earlier, Jeannie and Regina became mother and daughter. Mother and daughter now live a block away from each other.

"We all need to feel as though we belong," Regina said. "We all need somebody to hear us when we say, 'I'm out here by myself. I'm scared. What am I going to do?'"

Resource Articles

Family Meeting Guidelines

Redirecting Children's Behavior Workbook
Positive Parenting.com

Family Meetings can be a very successful method of enhancing family cooperation and closeness. Here are some ideas for the format of a family meeting.

- Hold the meeting once a week at a time when everyone in the family can attend. Keep this time sacred – don't keep changing it at everyone's convenience. Mark the time on a calendar and make it as important as a business meeting.
- Take the phone off the hook so there are no interruptions. This helps your children see how valuable the meetings are to you also.
- Decisions should be made by family consensus, not majority vote. If an agreement cannot be reached after a

discussion, table the decision until the next meeting.

- Elect a new leader and secretary at each meeting. The leader runs the meeting and calls on members. The leadership should rotate every meeting. Other members should be encouraged to support the leader. The secretary can take notes on what was discussed and what decisions were reached.
- Begin the meetings with compliments to each family member. Use words like, "I love you because..." or, "I'm grateful for you because..." Teach children to say thank you after they receive a compliment.
- Keep an "agenda" list on the refrigerator and discuss it at each family meeting time. As problems come up during the week, write them down to be discussed at family meetings.

- Go on to problem solving. Does anyone have a problem they would like to bring up? Teach your children that if they complain, it is helpful to think of a solution. A person who is not part of the solution is part of the problem.
- Coordinate everyone's calendar for the next week and plan some activities together as a family.
- For more productive meetings, sit at a cleared table and chairs versus the family sitting room. Don't have this meeting during a mealtime.
- Always end the meeting by allowing the leader to pick a fun way to close it. Suggestions are choosing a bedtime snack for everyone, delaying dessert until after the meeting, playing a game, etc.

Tips on Teens

Evelyn Petersen

Here some Basic Tips on Teens that have helped many a family.

1. Let teens know you are willing to just plain listen to their ideas without making judgments. Talking is a way they think things out.
2. Be accessible. Teens often blurt things out or want to talk at strange or inconvenient times. Be ready to listen anytime, anywhere.
3. Use questions sparingly. Resist the urge to know EVERYTHING your teen is thinking or planning. Show some trust; you would expect the same.
4. Try not to be defensive. When they make generalizations or critical remarks, don't take them personally. They are opportunities for discussion.

5. Give straight forward advice or feedback on important issues such as sex, drinking and drugs, but don't keep repeating it. They need to hear you and they do hear you, even if they pretend indifference.
6. Talk about yourself sometimes instead of the teen. They hate to be the only topic under discussion. Tell them about your own teen memories and mistakes.
7. Set up and use Family Meetings to full advantage. Get input from each person on rules, curfews, etc., as well as on the consequences of breaking rules. Sign agreements, try them out; modify if needed.
8. Show intimacy. Teens are still kids inside; they need the warm feelings of belonging that come from good touches and hugs.
9. Give lots of praise and positive



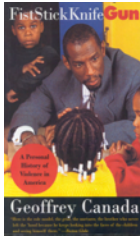
feedback. Teens need to hear the "good stuff" just like the rest of us. They need to know you love them for who they are inside, as well as what they can do.

10. Give them responsibilities with every privilege; that's real life.
11. Teach them to make decisions and make them accept the consequences of each choice they make.

Please Browse the Casey Library

Our library has been updated to include the following books. The selection, *Fist Stick Knife Gun* and *Every Child Deserves a Champion*, were written by Geoffrey Canada and Bob Danzig, respectively, both of whom spoke at the Foster Parent Conference held in April of 2005.

- *Fist Stick Knife Gun*
by *Geoffrey Canada*
- *Every Child Deserves a Champion*
by *Bob Danzig*
- *Positive Discipline For Teenagers*
by *Jane Nelsen, Ed.D. and Lynn Lott, M.A.*



- *Parenting With Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility*
by *Foster Cline, M.D. and Jim Fay*
- *Teens in Turmoil: A Path to Change for Parents, Adolescents and Their Families*
by *Carol Maxym, Ph.D. and Leslie B. York, M.A.*
- *Orphans of the Living: Stories of America's Children in Foster Care*
by *Jennifer Toth*

Reading a book on a topic that is of interest to you is a great way to fulfill foster parent training requirements.

Casey Youth Corner

Out of the Blue

*by Liliana R., Casey Youth
Age 16*

Betrayal is too big for a word
They did this out of the blue.
Now is when you just heard.
They kept it a secret which has been bad.
These people don't even know the problems we've had.
I wish you wouldn't leave me in this world full of pain.
Now tears are falling from my cheeks like puddles of rain.
We understood each other better than we thought.
We always respected each other and never fought.
Why did you have to leave so soon?
We were both born in the same month, June.
So this is the time to walk out the door; now I can't see you anymore.
October 4, 2004, we couldn't even say goodbye; so we gotta grow up with these messed up lies.

Love

*by Jacqueline C., Casey Youth
Age 14*

Someone wrote me a letter about love but I don't think they know what it means.

Love means to regard with affection. Love-desire, passion, aspiration, fantasy, those are words with the same meaning as love. For you to say that you love someone is like saying, "I'm here no matter what." When that someone left that message to sit there and walked away from me, it was like a disappearance. When I hear that someone loves me it is like passion for the future; it's like I have someone to count on for desire. Love is like fulfillment in the heart. Not even the heart, the body. Love is valid true. Love is something you can count on.

So when you say you love someone, know what it means and mean it.

Motivating Teens

www.parentingteens.com

Sometimes motivating teens can seem as difficult as urging a tortoise on to win a race against a hare. It's not impossible, but often seems highly improbable. Whether you are trying to motivate your teen to do better in school, to read more, to get some exercise, or to do something else, expect to put forth a lot of effort before your goal is met.



It seems that the most important factor in your being able to influence your teenager is the strength of your relationship with him or her. When there is a good parent/child relationship, a teen is more apt to have a healthy view of life and will be easier to motivate than others.

If a parent who has a superficial relationship with his or her teenager tries to motivate the teen toward some type of academic or life skills goal, chances are slim that the methods will be effective.

Simply lecturing a kid or telling him or her what to do, will actually undermine any effort that you have made to spur your teenager on toward loftier goals.

Another way to undermine your efforts is to condescend to your teenager. Teens need to be treated as whole people, not just as students, children or delinquents. They also need to be shown how to be successful.

If you can help your teenager to develop a positive attitude about life in general, they are more likely to develop a higher degree of motivation. Stress to them the value of their education.

You also should spend some time asking your teen questions so that you can better understand their motivation or lack thereof. Ask your son or daughter what their goals are. Ask how you can help and then make yourself available when they come to you. If you put them off time and time again, chances are that they will stop asking for help altogether.

As you set goals together, also discuss consequences for not meeting those goals. Teens need all the help that they can get. If you don't offer it to them, they will seek it out elsewhere. In order to ensure that the help they get is help that will motivate them toward higher goals, its best that you, as a parent, are the source of most of their help and encouragement.



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The newsletter provides an opportunity for foster parents,
Casey Kids and staff to share information, wisdom creativity, insights and
experiences. Please consider enriching each issue with your contributions.

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