

Casey Connector

Fall 2007

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Upcoming Events

October 29, 2007
Foster Parent Training
"Activating the Best in Youth"

December 7, 2007
Holiday Party

January 9, 2008
Parent Quarterly and Youth
Advisory Meeting



18 Palmer Street
Lowell, MA 01852
www.caseyfamilyservices.org

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



The end of August signals summer vacations nearing an end, school starting up and the pace of work picking up as we head into fall. I hope you have enjoyed these precious New England summer days.

There are several things I want to share with you. Firstly, we have organized a committee that includes both foster parents and Casey staff. The purpose of this committee is to plan an upcoming Permanency Forum for foster parents. Through this forum we hope to deepen understanding for the Agency mission regarding permanency; clarify how our work is changing in terms of practice and focus and allow for an open dialoge between foster parents and administration. We look forward to having all of our foster parents participate in this important discussion. A date will be announced in the near future.

After over two years of

searching, planning and negotiating, a dream that the Family Resource Program would have a space of it's own in the Acre Neighborhood of Lowell is nearing reality. We are in the process of leasing the city's former blacksmith shop which is located at 276 Broadway Street. We hope that the building will be ready for occupancy early in 2008. Moving to this space will allow us to offer, in a broader way, the wide range of family strengthening and support services that we now offer to residents in public housing. Combined with the move will be an effort to develop a comprehensive services contract with the Department of Social Services to provide after school programming, youth development, family strengthening and family support.

Finally, Casey Family Services, along with a collaborative of local agencies including

Community Teamwork, Coalition for a Better Acre, Caleb Foundation and the Lowell Small Business Assistance Center has submitted a grant proposal to create a community wide Individual Development Account Program to help low and moderate income families develop assets that increase their financial capacity for such things as buying a home, saving for post-secondary education or starting a small business. Over the next two years we hope to enroll 50 local residents in the program as well as provide financial education to over 140 residents.

Welcome New Foster Parents

Ann Marie Curtain
Lowell, MA

Frances Darden
Dorchester, MA

Bret and Rosalie Hague
Fitchburg, MA

Tmolura and Melania Howard
Haverhill, MA

Amy Hubbard
Gloucester, MA

Marc and Patty Puglisi
Dracut, MA

Mark and Bonnie Tincknell
Westford, MA



FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

*by Sheila Fitzgerald
Team Leader
Foster Care Program*

I wanted to give parents an update on what has been happening in the Foster Care Program. We are continually receiving referrals for youth who need foster care placements and permanent homes. The ages of the youth being referred are between 7 and 16, with a mixture of males and females.

Our need to increase our number of foster parents who will partner with us as we move youth toward greater permanency continues. We will be starting a Foster Parent Pre-service Training on September 26th. Melinda will be back from maternity leave just in time to join Valerie and Mikki Shefton as co-leaders. We certainly missed her!

We have been looking at more

creative strategies to recruit foster families. Mikki Shefton, our Foster Parent Ambassador has been working dauntingly on community presentations.

Our recruitment message has been around our need for foster parents who can provide a variety of outcomes for youth. Those outcomes include helping youth transition back to their birth families; helping youth transition into families that are able to make a legal commitment to them; or helping youth plan for their future while living within the support of their Casey family. This is a tall order but we are committed to the process. As you know, our best recruiters are our foster parents.

The Foster Care staff is actively developing permanency teams for youth. Our youth tell us that the process is a positive one for them; that including

them in the decision making process gives them a powerful voice in their own destiny. Many youth in foster care have never had the chance to express what they want for their future. This process gives them that opportunity.

We will continue to ask foster parents who have gone through this process to share their experience with those who have not. We will also be looking for foster parent feedback in order to know how the teaming process is working for them. Our Research Department in New Haven will be gathering information from team participants in each division to determine how the process is working agency-wide.

We thank all of our families for their steadfast commitment to our youth and we look forward to continuing our work with you.

“THOSE OUTCOMES INCLUDE HELPING YOUTH TRANSITION BACK TO THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES; HELPING YOUTH TRANSITION INTO FAMILIES THAT ARE ABLE TO MAKE A LEGAL COMMITMENT TO THEM; OR HELPING YOUTH PLAN FOR THEIR FUTURE WHILE LIVING WITHIN THE SUPPORT OF THEIR CASEY FAMILY.”

PARENT AWARENESS: REPORTING CRITICAL INCIDENTS



As part of our professional team, foster parents are responsible for notifying the Casey social worker of critical incidents within 24 hours of occurrence.

How do I know if it is a critical incident?

A critical incident is any occurrence that represents a serious risk to the client, foster family, staff, community or agency.

What are examples of a critical incident?

Examples of critical incidents that need to be documented include but are not limited to the following:

- Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Possession of an unlawful or dangerous weapon
- Death (child or parent)
- Homicidal ideation
- Foster family that present a risk to a child in their care
- Fire setting or play
- Hospitalization
- Serious illness

- Serious injury or accident
- Illegal activity or involvement
- Any error administering prescription medication
- Pregnancy of a child in care
- Physical aggression
- Physical restraint
- Property damage over \$500.
- Runaway
- School suspension
- Self injurious behavior
- Substance abuse
- Suicidal behavior
- Transportation accident
- Victim of violence
- Violation of CFS Policy and Regulations by foster parent (s)

What if the division is closed?

If there is an emergency and you need immediate assistance call the beeper (508-426-6853) and the on call social worker will return your call immediately.

ONLINE TRAINING RESOURCES FOR FOSTER PARENTS

In an effort to accommodate the increasingly busy schedules of our families, we have identified some online resources that offer training on topics such as birth families, education, mental health and behavioral issues. If you are going to incur costs for which you will need reimbursement, please get prior approval from your social worker. For purposes of verification, it is best to obtain a certificate of course completion.

We hope that this information will make it more convenient for you to gather the required training hours.

www.FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM: \$8 per class
www.CHILDTRAUAMACADEMY.org: free classes
www.LIFEMATERS.COM: more expensive and extensive parenting classes
www.FOSTERCLUB.COM: visit free on-line training

COLLABORATIVE PERMANENCY PLANNING SERVICES PROGRAM WELCOMES NEW SOCIAL WORKER



My name is Sarah Medrano Palmer. I joined Casey Family Services in March as a social worker in the Collaborative Permanency Planning Program. I am so pleased to be a part of the Casey team and to have the

opportunity to share some of my experiences with you.

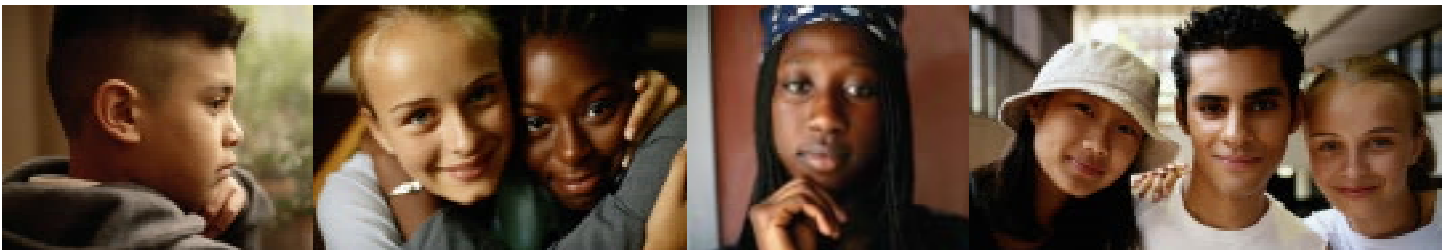
I have worked in the field of social services in several different positions and with a variety of populations for the past seven years. After completing my Bachelor's degree at the University of Vermont, I accepted my first position in the field of social services as a staff person at a homeless shelter in Santa Fe, New Mexico. While there, I worked as a case manager and shelter supervisor with a diverse population of homeless men, women and families. My time in Santa Fe was a rich learning experience

and helped me decide to pursue a degree in social work. I enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin and earned a Master's degree in Social Work with a concentration in Administration and Planning.

In 2004, I returned to New England and accepted a position as an adoption social worker at Special Adoption Family Services in Boston, MA. Special Adoption Family Services is an agency providing adoption services to youth in foster care. This position gave me my first experiences working in child welfare and taught me how crucial it is for every child to

belong to a permanent family. It was here that I developed a love for working one-on-one with children and youth to prepare them for permanent family membership.

My first few months at Casey Family Services have been wonderful. I am so happy to be a part of the Collaborative Permanency Planning Program and have the opportunity to work with such a skilled and experienced group of social workers and families. Many thanks to everyone at Casey Family Services for their warm welcome to the division.



PURSING PERMANENCE

by Julie Sweeney Springwater, Editor
Commonground Newspaper

On October 20, 2006 Commissioners and Directors of New England public child welfare agencies and Board Presidents of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Associations in the New England states took a symbolic step. By signing a Declaration each of them pledged their individual commitment and the commitment of their respective agencies to support and achieve permanent lifelong connections for all children and youth that they serve.

Currently approximately 28,000 children and youth are living in foster care in New England and more than 14,000 of them are between the ages of 11 and 18. These youth rely on the foster care system to provide them with a family and sense of belonging. Many of them leave these families when they are 18 with out a lifelong connection. Studies have shown that these young people are at higher risk for homelessness, incarceration, lack of education and job skills. Each of us recognizes that this is not what we want for any of our children and these are not

acceptable outcomes. We want these young people to have a connection to an adult who can provide "unconditional commitment and life long support in the form of a safe, stable and permanent relationship."

The Declaration was signed in Nashua, NH at the ninth biennial meeting of the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors and the New England Foster Care Association. Each organization will display the commitment document in their

respective states and will work together to fulfill the obligations that it references. Members of the two groups and invited guests seek effective ways to increase collaborative efforts as a means for improving the lives of children and families they serve.

"CURRENTLY APPROXIMATELY 28,000 CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE LIVING IN FOSTER CARE IN NEW ENGLAND AND MORE THAN 14,000 OF THEM ARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 11 AND 18."

PERMANENCY PACT: A TOOL TO HELP SUPPORT PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The following is excerpted from an article written by Martha Shirk entitled, "A Foster Mother Tries to Help Her Son - and Hundreds More - Find Permanence." It appeared on the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative website.

Unlike many of the 25,000 youth who "age out" of foster care each year, Seth Wendzel, 20, of Seaside, Oregon has a safety net.

Before he was discharged from foster care at age 18, Seth and his foster parents, Celeste and Jeff Bodner, entered into a "Permanency Pact" that formalized the couple's commitment to him. The pact states explicitly what the Bodners will provide for Seth, from educational assistance to spiritual support to help with money management to a home for the holidays.

Entering into the pact allayed Seth's concerns about his future. "I don't know where I would be without these guys," says Seth, a student at Oregon State University in Corvallis....

Convinced that the individualized Permanency Pact could benefit many other youth, Seth and Celeste have taken steps to help their idea spread. Since last year, Celeste has been disseminating the Permanency Pact on the web site of FosterClub, the non profit organization she founded in 1999 to link youth in foster care around the country. And early this spring, she briefed several dozen social workers at Casey Family Services on the pact's potential for helping youth in foster care think about what supports they need from adults....

Celeste and her husband always had told Seth that they regarded him as a member of their family, but Seth didn't really know what that meant. "It's always hard to know, 'How far are these people going to go for me if I need help?'" he says. "That's a question in a lot of youths' minds. This isn't a blood relationship. I didn't know how far the rubber band would stretch."



Mindful both of Seth's individual dilemma and the lack of adult support reported by many other youth who age out of care each year, Celeste began drafting the Permanency Pact. Her goal was to produce a simply written document that a responsible adult could sign to formalize his or her commitment to a youth who was about to age out of foster care.

Celeste had plenty of ideas about what kind of supports a youth might need after leaving care, but she asked Seth and another former foster son, Jake, to help develop the list. They quickly came up with some basics – a home for the holidays, an emergency place to stay, a co-signer on a loan, a place to

store stuff....

"It's important that people who enter into a Permanency Pact don't do it lightly," she says. "Both parties should discuss the tradeoffs and the expectations. I think it would be very useful to involve a facilitator. The idea is that the youth identifies the support he needs, and the adult comes in and says, 'This is what I can do.' Formalizing the Permanency Pact with Seth made me more aware of the need to not leave things open for interpretation."

For some youth, entering into a Permanency Pact actually could serve as a stepping stone to adoption, she believes. "My gut tells me that this would actually lead to more adoptions," she says. "What I've found with youth is that reading this document helps them realize why they need permanence. For youth who are saying no to adoption, we can try to get them to say yes to a Permanency Pact, keeping in mind that the end zone could still be adoption."

Seth would like judges to require that youth in foster care who aren't being reunited with their families or adopted, enter into a Permanency Pact with at least one adult, and possibly several. "It should be mandatory," he says. "I think that a lot of youth are confused about how far certain people will go for them. They think that because they have a close friendship, that person will be there for them when the time comes. But that's not always true. I think it's important to have it on paper.

I knew that the Bodners cared for me, but the Permanency Pact reinforced where they would go for me. I had a rough time my first year in college, and there were times when I worried about Celeste and Jeff giving up on me. But they didn't."

JOURNEY OF LIFE

*By Antoinette L., Age 17
Casey Youth*

Living the life, playing the game
No where to hide, no one to blame
Reach the next level, it ain't gonna stop
Try all you want, you just gonna drop
Life throws you curveballs, happens every day
Nothing you can do, nothing you can say
Conversations to arguments, next there's a fight
Next thing you know, you're hating your life
You say your life is hard, so you complain and you cry
Next thing you know, you're wishing to die
Change happens everyday; it's a big part of life
Don't let it get you down, please drop the knife
You realize you need help, so check yourself in
"Finally" you say, let the journey begin
Your life's getting better, for once you say "Wow"
Look at me then, look at me now
Your treatment is done, you're now starting over
You look to the ground and find a four-leaf clover
This is good luck, things will turn out right
This has allowed me to start a new life

FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAM: A YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER SHARES HER THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS YEAR'S TRIP TO THE SARGENT CENTER FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION



*l to r Prohoursboseba (Bossie) Thang, YAC member and
Cindy Muldonado, Lowell Housing Authority staff member*

*By Prohoursboseba Thang
Age 12
Family Resource Center*

The past adventurous days at the wonderful Sargent Center have been such an experience for us YAC members and staff advisers. Each day was no ordinary day. It filled our daily boredom with such excitement. Feeling awakened, ecstatic and frightened by each stunt, but to feel the confidence and courageousness to overcome our fears. The perseverance showed on each of the YAC members' faces and showed such an accomplishment that we felt. Far away strangers became acquaintances, and that transformed into friendship. Friends have bonded. These

different YAC members who came from different races, cultures and religions became family. Sargent Center was a big help to this success. I recommend Sargent Center to any young adolescent from YAC. Sargent Center became an important and enormous role in my life.

From the bottom of my heart, I, Prohoursboseba (Bossie) Thang would like to give special thanks to everyone who contributed in this program to better us kids and our lives. I am glad to say, I am honored to be a part of all this.

SARGENT CENTER ROCKS !
I thank you for your time.

CAMBODIAN ADULT EDUCATION WORKSHOPS: A FOCUS ON PHYSICAL, MENTAL & SPIRITUAL WELL BEING

*By Vichenny Keo-Sam
Social Worker*

The Cambodian Adult Education Workshop series is a continuation of workshops begun by Holly Redding who was an intern at Casey Family Services in 2001. She developed the Adult Education Workshops for the Family Resource Program residents. When her internship ended I took over the project. The Family Resource Program initially offered the workshops for the whole community. We had to do three language interpretations (Khmer, Spanish and English) during the meetings. Doing multiple translations was slow and difficult, and attendance

was low. Therefore, we decided to continue the workshops just for the Cambodian residents. They were the residents who showed up the most for the presentations. They were also the community that went through tremendous trauma during the Khmer Rouge regime. The topics and activities have been linked to the healing of their overwhelming loss and deep suffering from that war.

The Cambodian Adult Educational Workshop series began in 2002. It has been successful conducting the workshop for one cultural group, and only needing to do translation between English and Khmer. CFS had hired

Nancy McManus as a contactor whose role was to provide education to residents in both the North Common Village and George Flanagan housing sites regarding substance abuse. She also has been very instrumental in moving the Cambodian Adult Education workshop series forward.

The topics we have brought to the Cambodian adults have touched upon their physical, mental and spiritual well being. Before putting on each workshop Nancy and I discuss in- depth about the Western and the Cambodian ways of understanding these three aspects of one's life. We combine the two cultures and

develop the workshops using a lot of visual and hands-on experiences for them to effortlessly understand and enjoy themselves. Many of the activities have used expressive art techniques, including work with clay, beads, flowers, and collage materials. These hands-on experiences have helped participants to let their guard down, allowing them to work through fear and trauma while discovering their creativity and enjoying themselves and each other in the process.

“THEY WERE ALSO THE COMMUNITY THAT WENT THROUGH TREMENDOUS TRAUMA DURING THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME.”

SUPPORT EDUCATION CONNECTION: CAMBODIAN PARENTING SUPPORT GROUP

By Vichenny Keo-Sam
Socail Worker

The Parenting Support Group for Cambodians started more than six years ago. One resident, Mr. Brown Sarath Nou, came to me and requested a meeting with all of his peers so that they could meet and discuss parenting issues. He said, "I have many issues between my children and me. They do not respect me as a father. They do not take their education seriously at all. I am overwhelmed and very concerned. I brought them half-way around the world, hoping that they would go further than I have. They do not seem to care. I do not know what to do.

I wonder if my peers have the same issues with their children as I have." Mr. Nou went out to apartments in the development and spoke to his peers. Eight to ten people were interested in participating in the group.

The parenting group started since then. The 1st and 2nd years of the group focused on their struggles with their children's schooling. Their children did not wake up on time to go to school. The parents had to wake them up every morning. Some of their children were doing very well in grade school, but after the 1st and 2nd years in high school they had to drop out. They were also focused on the cultural differences

between how they were raised in Cambodia and how their children were being raised in the United States.

From the 3rd year to the present time the parents has been focusing on their own self care. They have realized that they have been working very hard trying to change their children. They have suffered greatly in the process. They did not get very far and the result was very sad and disappointing for them. Since then, they have been putting attention to changing themselves. For example, to not blame themselves for their children's failures and to just enjoy their children for whom they are. Also, for them to give

attention to their children who are working hard, listening to them and respecting them. In addition to parenting issues, the members have been receiving education and information from various providers in the Cambodian community. Topics presented relate to self-care and health issues that are of special concern within the Cambodian community.

After six years, the members of this group continue to attend the support group on a weekly basis, and love being together to share their life experiences as Cambodian immigrants to the United States.

Resouce Corner

BROWSE THE CASEY LIBRARY

Our library has been updated to include the following books:

- *The Mistress's Daughter*, by A.M. Homes: A true story of a young woman who was given up for adoption before she was born and what happened when, thirty years later, her birth parents came looking for her.
- *The Glass Castle, A Memoir* by Jeannette Walls: This story speaks candidly and with surprising affection about the strength of family ties, for both good and ill.
- *Parenting the Hurt Child*, by Gregory C. Keck, Ph.D. and Regina M. Kupecky, L.S.W: A book to help adoptive families heal and grow.



- *Life Givers*, by James L. Gritter: This book challenges us to treat everyone involved in the adoption process, birthparents, adoptive families, and above all, the children, with honor and respect.
- *Promise you Won't Freak Out*, by Doris A. Fuller and Natalie Fuller with Greg Fuller: A teenager tells her mother the truth about boys, booze, body piercing and other touchy topics.
- *Difficult Conversations*, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen; A helpful guide to mastering the talks we dread.





Kudos Graduates

Eighth Grade

Lena C.
 Christina C.
 Desirae F.
 Enmanuel F.
 Daisy L.
 Carlos M.
 Johanna R.
 Joe R.
 Jodeci V.
 Michael W.

High School

Christopher A.
 Miguel A.
 Erica D.
 Matt D.
 Linda D.
 Samantha E.
 Jessica V.

College
 Shaun B.

Casey Connector

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Francyne Fuller, Editor
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 parents, Casey Kids and staff to share information,
 wisdom, creativity, insights and experiences. Please
 consider enriching each issue with your contribu-
 tions.

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