

*Inside This Issue...*

- 1 A Message from the Director: Looking Back - Planning Forward
- 2 Division News:
  - Collaborative Permanency Planning Services
  - Earned Income Tax Credit Program
- 3 Foster Parent Ambassador Joins Recruitment Effort
  - Appointment of Casey Family Services Staff to Lowell Housing Board
  - Training and Events
  - Kudos to Christian
- 4 Program News:
  - Promoting Life Skills
- 5 New Interns
  - Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner
- 6 YAC Kids Organize Food Pantry Drive
  - Making a Difference in the Community
- 7 YAC Member Honored by CWLA
- 8 Sharing Information:
  - Casey Family Services Provides Testimony at Massachusetts General Court
  - Youth Shares College Application Experience
- 9 New Staff
- 10 Sharing Information

## Looking Back - Planning Forward

Spring 2007



The New Year appropriately brings reflection on the year past and the future that lies ahead. We will look back on 2006 as a year that set the stage for much of what will be happening in the coming years.

As I began to write this piece, I recognized the likelihood that each person working in the division would have a perspective on what was important this past year. Given that, I sought out a “random” sample of staff and asked them their thoughts. First mention was given to the incredible work of this division’s foster parents and their extraordinary dedication, compassion and skill. Their contributions were cited as the most important aspect of our work with Casey youth in care.

Several of the respondents spoke of the importance of our focus on youth permanency and the goal that each youth in care finds a durable set of life long family relationships. Permanency is arguably the most significant shift in program focus in the history of the division and integrating this new work into Intensive Foster Care presented us with a fair amount of challenges. Meeting those challenges and moving forward has been an important achievement for this division in 2006

Some mentioned our work with Walker School and DSS; work that resulted in a critically ill youth getting a much needed heart transplant and finding a road to recovery, both physically and emotionally.

Also recognized was the importance of the various groups being offered by staff in both the Foster Care and Family Resource Programs. They include the Life Skills Group, the Youth Advisory Committee, the Family Resource Program’s Adult Support Groups and the Parent Advisory Committee. All of these groups offer support, information, opportunities to share experiences, ease negative peer pressures and raise awareness and hope through education. The Driver’s Education Program continues to grow and help primarily Spanish speaking women get a driver’s license.

The Earned Income Tax Credit free tax preparation sites saved low income working families in Lowell over \$80,000 in tax preparation fees.

Some suggested that finding new space for the Family Resource Program was important and exciting.

Our new contracts with the Commonwealth for Intensive Foster Care and the creation of the Collaborative Permanency Planning Service were important developments this past year.

Finally, mention was given to our diversity work which included a training on classicism and pot luck lunches which reflected the various cultures of our community. All enriched our understanding and connection with each other.

In the coming year, there is much to be excited about. Addressing the permanency needs of youth in care will continue to be a large focus of our efforts as we deepen and expand our work in this area. I am excited to announce the hiring of Susan Rooney as our new team leader for the Collaborative Permanency Planning Service, and the future hiring of three additional social workers to staff this program. I refer the reader to other sections of this newsletter for more on Susan and the Collaborative Permanency Planning Service. The work of the Intensive Foster Care Program and Collaborative Permanency planning will be increasingly integrated over the course of 2007.

We expect that the Family Resource Program will move into a new space in 2007; space that will allow for more comfortable working conditions for staff, as well as the opportunity to expand our services deeper into Lowell’s Acre Neighborhood. We are currently working with other community partners to develop a Matched Savings Account Program to help low income working families in greater Lowell save for important assets like education, home ownership and small business startup. The Family Resource Program will also be developing a contract proposal to provide purchased services to Lowell families who are involved with the Department of Social Services.

Finally, I want to thank this division’s entire staff for their hard work, high level of skill, creativity and commitment.

## Massachusetts Division Begins Collaborative Permanency Planning Services



by Francyne Fuller  
Resource Coordinator

It is well documented that young people who leave the child welfare system at the age of 18 without permanent family relationships or adequate preparation for adulthood are at a significantly higher risk for negative outcomes including school drop out, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration and premature parenthood.

Helping youth achieve permanence is not the same as having a permanent

plan, a permanency planning process, a permanency goal or a permanent place. It means working with youth and other important adults in their life until he or she becomes a permanent member of a family, either through reunification with a birth family, adoption, legal guardianship or other customized family outcomes. With our move to greater permanency Casey Family Services has furthered its commitment to work toward ensuring that children and youth in foster care establish permanent family relationships before they transition to adulthood.

The Massachusetts Division recently embarked on a new and exciting initiative with the State to provide permanency services through our Collaborative Permanency Planning Program. These services offer an integrated approach designed to ensure that every child or youth in out of home placement achieves an enduring family relationship that provides for their safety, well being and need to become successful adults. The approach reflects a value and a practice that is driven by the belief that in order to achieve success, children and youth who are in out of home care need to leave the system in a planned manner that connects them to a lifelong family.

As we move forward with this program, we have hired a new Team Leader, Susan Rooney and look ahead to hiring two new social workers. This new initiative is a part of our overarching commitment to achieving comprehensive positive outcomes for all children and youth in foster care and builds on the philosophy that every child and youth needs and deserves a family for life.

## Earned Income Tax Credit Program

### Casey Family Services and the Lowell Community Tax Partnership Begin a Fifth Year

by Roberta Evans-Haas  
Division Administrator

The MA division of Casey Family Services, along with over forty volunteers and thirteen community partners, making up the **Lowell EITC Tax Partnership**, is offering **FREE** electronic tax preparation to taxpayers of Greater Lowell.

Last year The Lowell EITC Partnership prepared taxes for 490 taxpayers, with federal refunds totaling over \$600,000. The Earned Income Tax Credit, designed for low-income taxpayers earning less than \$38,000, returned over \$296,000 to taxpayers in 2006. In addition to the Earned Income Tax Credit,

this program benefits taxpayers by saving them a tax preparation fee, which is often in the range of \$80-\$150. One added bonus: electronic tax filing provides a quicker turnaround for taxpayers' refunds.

In 2007, the IRS is offering a long distance telephone tax refund for those persons who paid federal tax on their long distance service between February 2003 through August 2006. The standard telephone tax refund will range from \$30-\$60 depending on family size. For more information on the telephone tax refund visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)

The IRS is also offering savings opportunities with additional direct deposit options. Taxpayers have the option of

having their refund directly deposited in up to three financial accounts, such as a checking, savings and retirement account. Previously, taxpayers could have their refund electronically deposited into only one financial account. The idea behind the split refund is to give taxpayers more options to start or add to their savings accounts. As an advocate for low-income families, Casey Family Services says the split refund option is one way to help families build assets and financial security.

Casey Family Services is offering two sites this year, with varying hours of operation, opening January 30, 2007, at the Mercier Center and the Lowell Senior Center. You can learn more about EITC qualifications, what to bring with you for tax preparation and site locations by calling 800.617.1632.

## Enhancing Foster Parent Recruitment Efforts



Mikki and Frank Shefton

by Francyne Fuller  
Resource Coordinator

As a way of enhancing our Recruitment Program, the Massachusetts Division is building upon a model used by Families for Kids, an agency in Washington State that utilizes foster parents to recruit and support other foster parents.

In February of this year, we welcomed Mikki Shefton, one of our own foster

parents, into the role of Foster Parent Ambassador. As such, Mikki will be making presentations at schools, churches, libraries and other community organizations, providing first hand information on the foster parent experience and helping in our efforts to recruit additional resource families. The feedback from agencies that have utilized this model has been very positive, indicating that having an opportunity to speak to an experienced foster parent has been an impetus in the decision of prospective foster parents to move forward with the process.

Mikki and her husband Frank live in Brockton, MA and have been foster parents with Casey Family Services since May of 2002.

Please join us in welcoming Mikki to her newly expanded role

## Casey Family Services Staff Appointed to Lowell Housing Authority Board



by Francyne Fuller  
Resource Coordinator

In August of last year, the Lowell City Councilors voted to approve the nomination of Rosaline Willie-Bonglo as the first minority member of the Lowell

Housing Authority Board of Commissioners.

Rosaline is originally from Sierra Leone and has been a Lowell resident for over 13 years. She has been with the Family Resource Program of Casey Family Services for over six years. She has a son, Patrick, a U.S. Marine and a daughter, Mamei, a Umass Amherst graduate who works for the Housing Authority. Her husband is a diplomat who until

recently was working in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

While living and raising her family in the George Flanagan development Rosaline has been a positive role model and a staunch advocate for the needs of other residents. Through her work at Casey Family Services she has helped to support and aid many of the families living in housing. She brings a unique mix of qualification to her new role.

When asked if she felt pressured or uncomfortable about being the first minority nominee to the LHA Board, Rosaline answered, "Not in the least. We are all living, breathing human beings and we should learn to live with one another. If we are working on a common goal, it should be fine."

### Training and Events

#### April

Wednesday, April 4, 2007  
Wednesday, April 8, 2007  
Young Women's Group

Casey Youth Activity  
Details to follow

#### May

Wednesday, May 2, 2007  
Parent Quarterly & Youth Advisory Meeting

Thursday, May 3, 2007  
Foster Parent Training: *Parenting Angry and Oppositional Adolescents*  
Daniel B. Jacobs, Psy D.

Thursday, May 24, 2007  
Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner  
Palmer's Restaurant, Andover, MA

#### June

Friday, June 15, 2007  
Casey Family Picnic  
The Thoreau Center, Concord, MA

#### August

Wednesday, August 1, 2007  
Parent Quarterly & Youth Advisory Meeting

#### October

Thursday, October 11, 2007  
Foster Parent Training: *Psychotropic Medications for Childhood and Adolescent Disorders*  
Steve Berk, Ph.D.

#### November

Wednesday, November 7, 2007  
Parent Quarterly & Youth Advisory Meeting

#### December

Friday, December 7, 2007  
Casey Holiday Party  
Lenzi's Millhouse, Dracut, MA

### Kudos to Christian

Congratulations to Christian V. for making the school honor role. Christian is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student at the Vining Elementary School and worked very hard to achieve this accomplishment.

We are all proud of you, Christian.

## Foster Care Program

### Promoting Life Skills: Casey Youth Practice Teamwork Strategies at Project Adventure

by LaShanta Petroski-Ackley  
Social Worker, Intensive Foster Care Team



It was a beautiful sun filled day in October when several Casey youth and staff embarked on another challenge at Project Adventure. We started off by filling a toolbox with ideas that would help us to have a successful day. Some of what we came up with were trust, team work, listening, and being supportive. At that point, we were ready to begin our day. We first participated in several team building activities. They included a game of tag and a version of Double Dutch, where all members of the group had to get themselves through two sets of jump ropes without having the ropes touch each other. If someone could not do this, the whole group needed to start over. This activity opened up our lines of communication and we were able to work together to successfully complete the activity.

Next, we moved on to a low ropes challenge called The Multi-Swing. In this challenge everyone had to get from dry land to a boat docked in the middle of the "Boston Harbor," without touching the water. Once the group completed the activity we needed to get everyone back onto dry land across the harbor. This activity proved to be more challenging

than expected. Some of the members pretended to be blinded from the polluted water splashing in their eyes, while others fell into the water and needed to go back to the beginning in order to get a shot to cure them. Overall the group was able to come together, work as a team and begin to listen to each other's suggestions.

The third activity was the first high rope activity of the day. It was called the Cat Walk. The group had to put on harnesses and pick a partner. Once we had a partner each group member was asked to climb up a set of poles twenty five feet in the air. When we reached the top, we had to walk across another pole towards a partner. Once we got to the center we had to switch sides without falling off. After completing the challenge, we were gently belayed off of the pole and brought safety back to the ground. Everyone participated in the activity and supported those walking on the cat walk.

The fourth activity was the Flying Squirrel. For this challenge we needed to work together to ensure the safety of everyone. Interested staff and youth were harnessed and attached to a rope. When ready, participants told the team to start pulling the rope which allowed them to fly straight up in the air. While at the top, they were able to swing around and try to shoot a ball into a circle.

The fifth activity was called the Leap of Faith. This presented as the most challenging to all of us who chose to climb. Once again we needed to work as a team to safely and successfully complete the course. The harnessed persons climbed a pole approximately fifteen feet in the air

and balanced themselves on the top of the pole. Once they felt secure, they jumped off and tried to hit a ball five feet away.

At the end of the day each of us had to say what we had learned and what our favorite memory of the day was. We talked about the challenges that were overcome, as well as the successes of the participants. In general the team was able to use the ideas that we had placed in the toolbox and develop trust and a higher level of self confidence in our abilities to try new things. Overall everyone had a wonderful time and we look forward to next years challenges.



John Thompson,  
Social Worker, Intensive Foster Care Team

## Casey Welcomes New Interns



My name is Mary-Ellen Longworth. I have been a social work intern on the Foster Care Team at Casey Family Services since September.

I am in my second year in the Social

Work Program at Simmons College in Boston, MA and will be completing a masters degree in social work this May.

In 2004, I earned a B.A. in psychology from Saint Michael's College in Colchester, VT. Following graduation, I worked

as a preschool teacher for King Street Youth Center, a non-profit organization that provides services to underprivileged children from preschool age through their teenage years. During the same time, I worked as a counselor at ASSIST, a crisis center for adults suffering from mental illness. The combination of these two experiences led me to the decision to pursue a masters degree in Social Work.

My first year placement was in the Billerica Public Schools. This gave me great exposure to how social workers function in the school setting. This year, while working at Casey Family Services, I have

learned a great deal about the Child Welfare System, especially in regards to foster care and permanency work which I have found extremely interesting and useful.

I plan to move back to Vermont following graduation and am interested in pursuing a career in either school social work or the child welfare system. The experience I have gained while interning at Casey Family Services will certainly be very helpful to me as I embark on a career in this field.



My name is Jennifer Hamilton. I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, but have spent most of my life living in Nashua, New Hampshire. I moved back to Missouri after high

school graduation and attended Southwest Baptist University. I later married my husband, Scott and together we moved to Illinois where Scott attended graduate school. While there, I worked at

a middle school as a special education teachers aid and substitute teacher.

Within the next few years, I moved back to New Hampshire with my family that now included a 16 month old child. My family grew to include two more children before I began to pursue a master's degree in social work at Boston University. I expect to graduate from that program in 2008.

Outside of my family and studies, I am very involved with my church and will be starting a project with the North

American Mission Board in the near future.

My work at Casey Family Services has been invaluable to my professional development. I have benefited greatly from the experience and support that I have received from my supervisor, Anita Marshall, and all of the Casey staff. Everyone has been kind, attentive and interested in helping me develop my case management skills. I have seen first hand the important contribution that the staff and agency make to the field of child welfare. Thank you all for being so wonderful.

## Casey Hosts Appreciation Dinner to Honor Foster Parents

Last year's Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner was held at Palmer's Restaurant in Andover. There were over 60 families and staff present to enjoy this most spirited and congenial of evenings. In addition to recognizing the hard work and dedication of all our families, we welcomed those who were new and gave special recognition to those who have been with the agency for five to fourteen years. A heartfelt farewell was said to those who were retiring.

### New

Lucinda Myers  
Bob and Marilyn Rebal (rejoined us)  
Frank and Debra Sacco  
David and Diane Souza  
Kimberlee Worth  
Christopher and Amy Winston



Rose and Muller Balan

### Five+ Years

Linda Reyes-Flores (5 years)  
Jim and Roxanna Kelley (5 years)  
Frank and Minerva Palazzo (5 years)  
Shelton and Nancy Dobson (6 years)

Joe and Sandra Fava (6 years)  
Jerry and Lidia Fortier (6 years)  
Cindy Obika (6 years)  
Marie Baldassari (8 years)  
Bob and Millie Bowes (8 years)  
Al and Blanca Cruz (8 years)  
Rich and Jill Palmer (8 years)  
Donna Webber (9 years)

### Ten+ Years

Colin and Donna Chisholm (10 years)  
Kathy Hillman (11 years)  
Scott and Jane Lindquist (11 years)  
Rosanne Dillon (11 years)  
Steve and Carol Delmonico (14 years)  
Doug and Melissa Eagles (14 years)

### Retiring

Muller and Rose Balan (11 years)  
Chris and Debra Brustas (14 years)

## Family Resource Program In the Spirit of Community

### George Flanagan Youth Advisory Committee Organizes a Food Drive

*by Rosaline Willie-Bonglo  
Parent Aide  
George Flanagan Site*

The members of the George Flanagan Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) are always looking for an opportunity to do volunteer work within their community. Being a youth leadership group, they believe it is important for them to set a good example for their peers as well as others.

During the Christmas season, they focused their energy on collecting non perishable food items to benefit the Chelmsford food pantry, a local food pantry within their community.



In order to accomplish their goal, the eight members of the group decided to set up committees to handle specific areas. Two members volunteered to create flyers that could be distributed within the development in which they live, asking for donations of food; others agreed to work with the program staff to write a cover letter to accompany the donations. It was interesting to see that members were also willing to encourage their individual families to donate food for this project.

The donation center was located at the Family Resource Center where boxes were marked for collection and in which families placed their non perishable food items. At the end, they were able to collect three large boxes of non-perishables.

The program staff drove the YAC members and the food items to Chelmsford and presented them to the manager of Market Basket, a local grocery chain, so that they could be included in the large donation food boxes set up in their store to benefit the Chelmsford food pantry.

**WELL DONE GUYS, KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!!**

### North Common Village Youth Advisory Committee Activities : Strengthening Peer Relationships and Making a Difference in the Community

*by Mackenzie Florez  
North Common Village YAC Member*

I have been a member of the North Common Youth Advisory Committee since October 2, 2006. Being in YAC is lots of fun. We planned a Halloween party, Thanksgiving pot luck dinner, Christmas caroling and many more fun activities. In YAC we bring happy memories to the community. All the kids

in YAC plan Peer Talks. Peer Talks are activities that depend on what holidays are coming up, like Valentine's Day, Christmas, Memorial Day and many others. Also in YAC we visit the elderly. We learn how to work with each other. Also, we learn how to create an article and write a letter. We have fieldtrips, like the Sargent Center and we go to Destination World.



*l to r Melissa McNulty, age 8, and Mackenzie Florez, age 10*

# North Common Village Youth Advisory Committee Alumnus honored by Child Welfare League of America

## Kevin Lapointe Receives National Award

by Joan Matteuzzi  
Social Worker, Family Resource Program



Kevin Lapointe, a Youth Advisory Committee alumnus, will be receiving the Child Welfare League of America's Kids to Kids National Service Award. Kevin was selected as the grand-prize winner of his age category 18-21 for this year's annual award. The award is given to youth who have made contributions to their community, especially in the form of making a difference in the lives of other youth.

In the five years since the inception of the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), Kevin has accomplished quite a bit to be so deserving of this award. Kevin was a charter member of the North Common Village YAC. Since the beginning Kevin was instrumental in helping YAC become the successful program that it is today. Kevin immediately offered his help and leadership to the staff and to the rest of the group by contributing

suggestions and putting his ideas into action.

Within the first month of YAC he suggested changing the name of our monthly psycho-educational informational workshops for youth from "Rap Session", which he felt was a negative connotation, to PEER TALKS, an acronym for "People Educating Everyone Right Teens and Little Kids Speak-Out". Some of the first PEER TALKS the youth offered to other youth in the development were: Kids Standing Up for Themselves, How to Deal With Bullies; How to Take Care of Your Teeth (in conjunction with dental hygienist students from the local community college); and writing thank you letters and drawing pictures for the fire fighters of NYC for their clean up efforts in the wake of 9/11. Kevin helped organize, market, and present each of these topics as well as others to youth in the housing community. His eagerness to help and try challenging things became apparent when he volunteered to contact the dental students to make arrangements for the presentation on dental hygiene. Within a few months, Kevin was elected to President of YAC by his peers.

Upon entering YAC, Kevin came from a single parent home and was barely attending school. Despite what was going on in his life, Kevin used the YAC as a spring board to catapult himself into many successes that he has created for himself. These successes include going back to school and graduating with high honors and gaining meaningful employment including one year as a Youth Services Coordinator at the George Flanagan housing development where he helped co-facilitate the Youth Advisory Committee at that site. When available, Kevin has helped us supervise the youth

on our annual trip to the Sargent Center for Outdoor Education, an outdoor adventure program owned and operated by Boston University. Staff and Youth Advisory Committee members have made annual trips to Sargent Center to engage in teambuilding, leadership, and self-confidence building activities. Kevin has been so supportive of the youth facing their fears as they went through the ropes courses that he has earned a lifetime of respect from them. As Dolores from the YAC said, "Kevin is like my brother, he gives me advice. I was scared of heights and he told me to face my fears, so I did. He never gave up on me."

Another accomplishment of Kevin's was to join the Army National Guard at the age of 17, while still attending high school and working. Kevin was eager to join, and with his mother's permission, was able to sign up a year early. Any time he has undergone physical activity tests he has passed them with exceptional marks, and won an award for highest physical test score. He was warned that becoming a Military Police was a difficult test to pass; nevertheless, he took it and passed with high marks. Now Kevin faces going to pre-deployment training this summer in order to be shipped to Iraq next fall, though he does so with confidence in his fellow comrades. He attributes his optimism with a bond he has within his platoon and his company as well as a belief that his fellow soldiers have his back and he has theirs. Kevin has been a part of community building and volunteering his service for many years and now he faces the ultimate in service. It is this kind of trust, dedication, honor, and respect that has made Kevin successful in all of his accomplishments. It is also why he is so deserving of this service award.

## Casey Family Services Invited to Provide Testimony at the Massachusetts General Court



Bronson de Stadler and Sania Metzger accepted invitations to provide testimony in February 2007 before the Special Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect at the Massachusetts General Court.

The Special Committee heard testimony over a three-week period on efforts to better understand and to improve the state's child protective services system. Bronson de Stadler, deputy division director of the Massachusetts Division of Casey Family Services, highlighted some of the barriers to youth permanence, emphasized the importance of lifelong families for all youth and recognized the

leadership of Massachusetts Commissioner of the Department of Social Services Harry Spence in facilitating important system changes that have potential to improve outcomes for vulnerable, system-involved children and families.

Sania Metzger, director of policy at Casey Family Services, provided the Special Committee with information on national, state and county efforts to understand and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in their child welfare system. As examples Sania cited the legislatively-mandated work taking place in Michigan, the county-based work Casey is assisting with in North Carolina, Iowa, Washing-

ton and Minnesota, and the U.S. General Accountability Office audit on overrepresentation of African Americans in child welfare due to be completed later this year

*“Adoption and guardianship goals need to be pursued for older children (12 – 18 years of age) who will not be reunified. Identifying and working with adults with whom adolescents feel a strong relationship connection and who are able to commit to an enduring relationship is essential. Youth universally want a permanence of relationship or “relational permanence” that is best fulfilled by full family membership with legal security. The various options and possibilities for open adoption are often not explained or explored with foster families, biological family members and youth.”*

Bronson de Stadler

## One Youth's Experience Applying to College



Linda Doung

by Linda Doung  
North Common Village YAC Member  
Age 17

Applying to colleges is harder than you may think. You have to be organized and focused. You have to meet deadlines and follow up on the progress that is being made. When I began my college application process, I was not very practiced in these skills; it was all new to me.

Fortunately, I had a team of supportive people who helped me; but even with all of their guidance, there was much that I had to do on my own. I had to work with different people on different occasions. I had to reach out and ask people to write letters of recommendations; I had to be sure that my deadline information was correct; I had to ask people to edit my essays. This part took a lot of time because my essays needed to be edited many times by many different

people. I thought it would never end, but thanks to everyone who helped me it did and I was finally able to successfully complete my college applications.

My thanks to all of you who helped and supported me through this trying time. A special thank you goes to Helen McCreedy, Patty Coffey, Cynthia Ung, my Khmer language teacher for writing letters of recommendations, Robin Toof, Leonor Daley and all of the staff from the Center for Family, Work and Community. Most of all, I would like to thank Craig Thomas, the man who helped me every step of the way.

I hope that the sharing of this experience will help others who think that applying to college is easy. It requires hard work, determination and the support of others.

## Massachusetts Division Welcomes Two New Staff Members

### Collaborative Planning Services Team Leader Family Resource Administrative Assistant



My name is Susan Rooney. I joined Casey Family Services in January as the Team Leader of the Collaborative Permanency Planning Services Program. I am happy to have the opportunity to share with you some information about my experience.

My interest in child welfare began when I was a student at Bates College, where I studied psychology and sociology. After completing a Bachelor's Degree, I moved to Washington, DC and accepted

a position with House of Ruth, a community-based organization serving women and children facing homelessness and domestic violence. The following year, my career path took me to Crittenton Hastings House, a Boston agency providing health, housing, and education services to young parents and their children. Because I found this work both enjoyable and rewarding, I decided to further my education in the field. I enrolled at the University of Michigan and earned a Master's degree in Social Work with a major in Social Policy and Planning.

After receiving my degree, I returned to Boston and accepted a position as an adoption social worker at Project Impact, an agency providing adoption ser-

vices for children and adolescents in foster care. In both this role and in my later position as Director of Adoption at Special Adoption Family Services, a program of Communities For People, Inc., I gained an understanding of the child welfare system and came to see how critically important it is for children to experience the sense of belonging that comes with membership in a permanent family.

I am delighted to have joined Casey Family Services and want to extend my thanks to everyone in the Division who has made me feel so welcome. I look forward to working with the exceptionally talented team of Casey social workers whose hard work and dedication are helping youth in foster care achieve families for life.



My name is Nancy Vargas. I am currently the Administrative Assistant for the Family Resource Center. I joined Casey Family Services back in November 2006 as an independent contractor and became an employee in December.

For the past 6 years I worked as an assistant manager for a business center located in one of the largest hotels in the

city of Boston. I attended Clark University where I earned a certification in Medical Billing and Coding. Thanks to Casey family Services, I was able to complete my internship while working at the Family Resource Center.

Being part of Casey Family Services has been an opportunity for me to learn new skills and apply my past experiences. The work and supportive environment has allowed me an opportunity to grow, both personally and professionally. I thank my co-workers and the Family Resource Center families for giving me the opportunity to work with them.

I am looking forward to starting a new career path and to discovering the world of human and social services. I hope that I can one day return my gratitude and appreciation to the community and the people that have given me the opportunity to join this wonderful family. I hope the future will bring me many years at Casey Family Services and that I bring to the agency the best of me through this experience.

## Resource Articles



### Homework: Trials and Tribulations

*Susan J. Schwartz, M.A. Ed., Victoria DeLuca, Ph.D. and staff of NYU Child Study Center*

#### Why homework?

The purpose of homework is to review class material and practice skills. As children complete their assignments, they become more invested in and responsible for their learning. Homework places demands on children that help them develop mental skills. It demands that a child concentrates, follows directions, organizes materials, solves problems and works independently. Homework offers a way to show a growing sense of competence and independence. Additionally, homework helps forge a connection between school and home.

#### What do researchers tell us about homework?

Research has challenged the myth that America's students are overburdened with homework. According to recent national research, children actually do not do enough homework. The Brookings Institute has found that on average, daily time spend on homework in the U.S. increased from 16 minutes in 1981 to slightly more than 19 minutes in 1997. However, the amount of homework assigned to children aged 6-9 has increased from about 44 minutes per week to more than two hours per week. Additionally, homework for kids aged 9-11 increased from about 2 hours and 50 minutes to more than 3 1/2 hours per week. A poll conducted in 2000 by the Public Agenda Foundation showed that most parents feel homework is about right. However, as both parents and children are busier than ever, it is no surprise that some parents perceive an in-

creased homework load, in part because there are competing options for children including sports, music, part-time jobs and family responsibilities. It is sometimes difficult to imagine where time for homework will fit in.

#### Developmentally, how much homework is appropriate per grade?

The amount of homework assigned increases as children grow older. In **Grades K-1**, 10 to 20 minutes or less per day is usual. From **Grades 2-3**, 20 minutes per day plus 15 minutes of reading is expected. When children reach **Grades 4-6**, 20-to 40 minutes per day plus 30 minutes of reading is the norm. In **Grades 7-9**, homework can span as long as two hours per day. Once children reach middle school, and with each new school year, the complexity and quantity of assignments increase, along with the assumption that students ought to know how to do homework.

#### How much help with homework is appropriate?

The most useful stance a parent can take is to be somewhat, but not overly involved. The emphasis should be on helping your child, not on doing homework for them. Some useful strategies for becoming involved in your child's schoolwork include the following:

- **Communicate:** It is a good idea to get an understanding of what teachers expect of your child. Meet with teachers early in the year to set a good precedent for facilitating communication later in the semester, if need be.
- **Monitor:** Talk about the assignment so your child can figure out what needs to be done. Reviewing a completed assignment is helpful. For younger children, it is appropriate to help them with their homework and closely monitor their progress. For children age 12 and over you may want to leave it up to their discretion as to whether or not they want help. If your older child does not ask for help with homework, but you notice that he/she

is having difficulty, you will want to intervene and help your child get outside supports (i.e., extra help sessions with a teacher, after school study sessions, individualized student homework contracts or a tutor.)

- **Encourage:** Regardless of your child's age, never underestimate the importance and impact of your praise and encouragement on his/her success. Talking about an assignment and showing your interest in your child's schoolwork may also help him/her maintain motivation and interest.
- **Model Behavior:** Parents' beliefs and practices are very important influences on children's success. Show that you think homework is important by providing a consistent time and place for it. Try and help your child see homework as an opportunity, not a threat. Never use homework as a punishment and don't exempt kids from homework as a reward. Both actions imply that homework is not fun and not part of the routine and send a message that can backfire on students, teachers and parents.

#### How can I help my child be ready for homework?

By focusing on certain skill areas you can help your child complete his/her homework with less stress and frustration.

Choose a specified space and time to do homework. Remove any distractions. Help your child concentrate by turning off the television, limiting personal telephone calls and setting a good example by reading and writing yourself.

Make sure that your child has all the tools and supplies needed to complete work. It is a good idea to accompany him/her to an office supply store at the start of each semester to purchase new school supplies as necessary.

Help your child to set realistic goals regarding how long each assignment may take so that he/she knows that there will also be free time available.

## Do Violent Video Games Result in More Aggressive Teens?

by Lynn Blinn Pike, Ph.D.

Violent video games have been accused of causing more aggressive behaviors among teenage boys. This has been talked about more lately because the teen boys who were involved in the recent school shootings were also video game players. Parents often disagree about how to react when their sons play war and other aggressive video games. Some parents believe that aggressive games foster violent behavior. Some parents believe that aggressive play is natural for boys and it helps them practice dealing with issues they may face in real life. And finally, some parents believe that playing violent video games provides a boy with an outlet for intense feelings that might otherwise result in destructive acts or fights.

Studying the effects of violent video games on teens is a relatively new idea that began

in 1984. Since that time, few studies have found that violent video games result in violent teens. However, parents need to pay close attention to their teens and watch for signs that video games are taking the place of other healthy activities such as sports, clubs and school-work. As with other teen activities, parents need to monitor the following: where (home or arcade), when, with whom and how long their teens play. It would be helpful for parents to actually play the more popular video games and make their own decisions about how violent the games are. This would also foster parent and teen communication.

It is not known if violent games result in violent teens or if violent teens are more interested in violent games. But it will payoff for parents to spend time getting to know this new teen activity in order to be able to make effective rules for their family and to be able to communicate more effectively about these rules with their teens.

## 4 Solid Reasons to Take a Look at Community Colleges

by Denise Witmer

*Your Guide to Parenting of Adolescents*

Community College is the answer to the question many young adults ask themselves: What do I do now? There are several reasons why a four year school is not the best alternative after high school. These reasons can range from not having the money to just not feeling like they can handle all the pressure.

So if your teen is questioning his/her future, here are four solid reasons to explore the world of community college.

### Time to Mature

The age of 18 does not magically grant the maturity level needed to handle the pressures of being away from home or achieving high goals while under stressful situations. Consider giving your young adult the ability to achieve by giving them the time to mature.

### Transferable Credits

Most universities accept many if not all of the credits from two year schools.

This will put your young adult ahead of

the game. They can finish their core requirements, i.e. English Literature, World History, at the community college and focus on their major while attending the University. This makes community colleges an alternative to just starting out at a four year school.

### Training is part of Teaching

Many community colleges have courses that you will not find at four year schools. This is because community colleges focus on real world jobs and they are a part of the community in which you live. The teachers are generally people who work in the field that they are teaching about. Many have hands on experience in their field and they impart their experiences to their students in their lessons. To top it off, the average expected lifetime earnings for a graduate with an associate's degree is more than \$1 million, about \$250,000 more than an individual with only a high school diploma. So the training that is learned in community college is very beneficial.

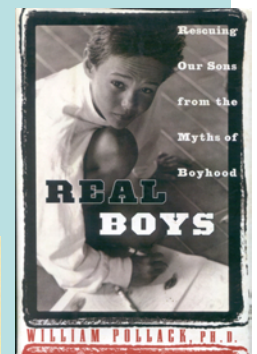
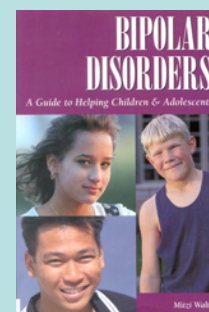
### Money

Community colleges cost less than a +4-year college. Not only will you save money on room and board, but you will save on a per credit basis. You can save up to \$100 per credit for courses that will transfer

## Please Browse the Casey Library

Our library has been updated to include the following books:

- *That's My Child; Strategies for Parents of Children with Disabilities*, by Lizanne Capper
- *The Bipolar Child: The Definitive and Reassuring Guide to Childhood's Most Misunderstood Disorder*, by Demetri Papolos, M.D. and Janice Papolos
- *Treating the Unmanageable Adolescent: A Guide to Oppositional Defiant and Conduct Disorder*, by Neil Bernstein
- *Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families With Special Needs Kids*, by Gregory C. Keck, Ph.D. and Regina M. Kuppeky, LSW
- *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood*, by William Pollack, Ph.D.
- *The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries About teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids*, by Barbara Strauch
- *The Things I Want Most: The Extraordinary Story of A Boy's Journey to a Family of His Own*, by Richard F. Minter





**The Casey Connector** is a production of  
Casey Family Services  
Massachusetts Division  
18 Palmer Street  
Lowell, MA 01852

This issue was made possible through the  
generous contributions of:  
Al Casad, Roberta Evans-Haas, LaShanta Petroski-Ackley,  
Mary-Ellen Longworth, Jennifer Hamilton, Rosaline Willie-Bonglo,  
Mackenzie Florez, Joan Matteuzzi, Linda Doung,  
Nancy Vargas, Susan Rooney

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.

Francyne Fuller  
Editor

Casey Dennis  
Graphic Design Specialist



18 Palmer Street  
Lowell, MA 01852-1818  
978 937 1877 TEL  
800 883 8836  
978 937 2262 FAX  
[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)

