

# Casey Connector

Spring 2008

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## Upcoming Events

April 28, 2008 & May 5, 2008  
*Foster Parent In-Service Training:  
Understanding Permanency*

May 22, 2008  
*Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner*

June 13, 2008  
*Family Picnic*

October 16, 2008  
*Foster Parent In-Service Training:  
Skills to Redirect Challenging  
Behaviors*



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I don't consider myself a gardener. In order to do that, I would have to like weeding more than I do. But following the destruction of a couple of old flower beds to make way for a new septic system, I must admit to feelings of both sadness and excitement. Sadness with having lost those lovely old flower beds of day lilies and wild geraniums, and excitement over the prospect of a new and "better version" of a cottage garden.

A new seed catalogue arrived a few weeks ago and with hope and not a little dread, I have been picking the flowers for a new start. My aunt, the consummate flower gardener, has offered her suggestions of hollyhock, delphinium, echinacea, lavender, black-eyed susan and a climbing rose bush. Now it is just waiting for the plants to arrive and the snow to melt. I am looking forward to spring, the hope of a new start and a summer reward that remotely resembles what my aunt creates.

This sense of leaving the old and moving toward the new brings me to thinking about what changes are happening at our division. Staff have begun to work with youth to help them create their own

profiles and give them a voice in the information that will be presented to families. This information will be used in the matching process and in our child specific recruitment efforts. We already have eleven of these profiles that were used in our first ever Matching Meeting with foster parents.

We are also in the initial stages of developing a working partnership with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE). For 50 years MARE has worked to find adoptive homes for children in the Massachusetts foster care system. We have been attending MARE adoption parties and sharing our current profiles of youth in need of permanency with families planning to adopt older youth. At a recent luncheon meeting Casey staff and MARE talked about how we can deepen and extend our work in common. This is an exciting partnership that promises to help further our permanency work on behalf of children and youth.

After many weeks of planning and development, we are ready to introduce a foster parent training on permanency, aptly named *Understanding Permanency*. The first in this series of two day trainings is scheduled for April 28 and May 8, 2008. The second is scheduled for May 20 and May 27, 2008. All foster parents will be expected to attend. This forum will be an opportunity to discuss why the focus of Casey Family Services and child welfare nationally has moved to establishing permanent family connections for children and youth in foster care; how our

permanency focus impacts and expands the role of foster parents and how permanency redefines social work practice within the division. This will be an extremely important opportunity for dialogue and discussion.

Work on the building for the new Family Resource Center goes forward. I understand the steel studs for the walls of offices on the second floor are up and the interior space is taking shape. So too is the contract we are developing with the Department of Social Service to provide a comprehensive range of services to support families in the Acre Neighborhood of Lowell and connect them to key community resources. The building should be ready in June and the contract will be submitted in March.

A spring retreat recently took place for staff in the Foster Care and Collaborative Permanency Planning Services Programs. It brought staff together to sort out the challenges of our permanency work, clarify staff roles and responsibilities and focus our efforts and resources toward reaching our division goals.

This missive does not do justice to the challenging, exciting and exacting work before the division at this time. We have a rich and complex garden filled with youth who need to be rooted deeply in the rich nurturing soil of a family; programs that need to be developed and nurtured in order to grow together in new ways, and future relationships that need to be established so that we can bloom.

*Ann Carroll*

## Looking to the Future: New Partners New Practice



### Casey Partners with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange

by Susan Rooney  
Team Leader  
Collaborative Permanency Planning Program

On Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup> the Lowell Division of Casey Family Services participated in a Multicultural Adoption Party in Boston, MA. Sponsored by the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), the party brought together social workers, foster children awaiting adoption and prospective adoptive families for an afternoon of fun, learning and networking. This annual event took place at the Boys and Girls Club in Dorchester, MA where a gymnasium, arts and crafts activities and a pizza lunch were available for children of all ages to enjoy. Twenty-four foster children in need of permanent families attended, along with over 60 families interested in adopting older children.

According to MARE, adoption parties are the single most successful way of finding permanent families for waiting children. Every year five or six parties are held across the state. Some are designed specifically for older children and teenagers and some for children of color. Many children and teens are accompanied by their foster parents, the people who know them best and can help them to feel comfortable. They are also able to talk with prospective adoptive parents about their experiences living with the youth. Approximately 35 children find their permanent families through adoption parties each year.

As we continue our efforts to help youth in foster care achieve permanent family membership, we look forward to expanding our collaboration with MARE and other agencies providing adoption services.

### New Approach to Matching Youth and Families

by Sheila Fitzgerald  
Team Leader  
Foster Care Program

With a focus on expediting the placement process, we tried a new way of matching youth and families. In February of this year we held a Matching Meeting to which we invited Casey families who are awaiting a placement, Casey social workers and social workers from the Department of Social Services who are working with our waiting youth. Each social worker prepared a presentation that included a flyer with a photo and information about their youth. After the presentation, families spoke with the social workers about the youth that they had identified as a match for their families. The feedback that we received indicated that both families and social workers felt the meeting was a productive

and worthwhile experience. And most excitedly, it resulted in a number of potential matches which means hope to a waiting youth.

We are planning to have a second matching meeting on April 3, 2008. There is great excitement and optimism that by making families a part of this decision making process we are engaged in improved outcomes for youth.

We continue to ask for feedback from the parents and social workers so that we can make this a good experience for all involved.

We will keep you posted as to how it is working.

## FINDING MEANING IN THE FOSTER PARENT EXPERIENCE:

### A FOSTER PARENT'S STORY



*Mark and Bonnie Tincknell,  
Casey Foster Parents*

My husband Mark and I became foster parents this year with the addition of our 13 year old son James to our family. Becoming a foster parent has been life changing for me. Beyond giving me a son that I love and am immensely proud of, it gives me

new insight into what it means to be a parent, the human capacity for caring, and a chance to make a small difference in the world. In our church life we sometimes talk about “measuring the meaning of our days.” Being a foster parent gives me a daily reassurance that my days have meaning.

A transformational event for us was a Sunday several years ago when Mark, sitting alone in church while I worked in the nursery, heard a plea for a foster home for a teenage boy. While we ultimately didn't become the home for that teen, the story prompted Mark to approach me about becoming a foster parent. I immediately answered ‘yes’

and so in one hour on Sunday our lives took on a new and unexpected direction.

Looking back, I realize we had very little idea of what we were saying ‘yes’ to. Fortunately, that initial plea came from Casey Family Services, and we joined an organization that has the funding and programs to help us do our job well. Being part of Casey has made us part of a larger community. We respect the commitment and caring we see in the other foster families and feel honored to be part of this group. I look forward to visits with our social worker, Sarah Palmer, and find being part of a team effort a positive experience.

It is said that when you give you receive, and when you teach you learn. This has certainly been true of our experience as foster parents. Foster parenting is a huge commitment of our time and our emotions, but we continue to be thankful that we answered ‘yes’ to the call.

*“BEYOND GIVING ME A SON THAT I LOVE AND AM IMMENSELY PROUD OF; IT GIVES ME NEW INSIGHT INTO WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PARENT, THE HUMAN CAPACITY FOR CARING, AND A CHANCE TO MAKE A SMALL DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.”*

## 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](http://www.FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM): \$8 per class

[www.CHILDTRAUMACADEMY.org](http://www.CHILDTRAUMACADEMY.org): free classes

[www.LIFEMATERS.COM](http://www.LIFEMATERS.COM): more expensive and extensive parenting classes

[www.FOSTERCLUB.COM](http://www.FOSTERCLUB.COM): visit free on-line training

[www.FOSTERPARENTS.COM](http://www.FOSTERPARENTS.COM): \$4 to \$6 per course

[www.FOSTERPARENTTRAINING.COM](http://www.FOSTERPARENTTRAINING.COM): \$15.00 annual membership cost entitles subscriber to over 100 hours of online training.



## HELPING YOUTH ACHIEVE PERMANENCE: THE EXPANDED ROLE OF FOSTER PARENTS

by Francyne Fuller  
Resource Coordinator

Historically foster care has been a temporary intervention; a way in which children could heal from trauma. We once thought that a plan to stabilize and care for children until young adulthood was good enough. We now know that although stabilization is important, it cannot be the end. In order to grow into healthy adults, children need to feel secure and certain of permanent membership within a family.

For these reasons, achieving permanency has become the focus of our agency work and in doing so has expanded the role of our foster parents to include the following:

- o To be a member of a child's permanency planning process that will decide the best permanency plan for a child.
- o To anchor a child through the permanency planning process which may consider a number of different options for achieving permanency.
- o To help a child maintain connections or reconnect with his/her birth family.

- o To consider becoming the legal parent for a child when reunification is not possible.
- o To help a child transition to a legal permanent home when the Casey parent cannot be the permanent family.
- o To act as a life-long connection for a child who has achieved permanency.
- o To take the primary role in teaching life skills and preparing a child in their care for adulthood.

As you move forward in your expanded role, we want you to know that we have always appreciated and valued your enduring commitment and hard work. We are fully aware of the strenuous responsibilities involved in foster parenting and we remain committed to providing our families with support and guidance. Together we will work toward the goal of helping children and youth achieve the safety, well being and permanency that they deserve.

## FOSTER PARENT IN-SERVICE TRAINING: UNDERSTANDING PERMANENCY

by Francyne Fuller  
Resource Coordinator

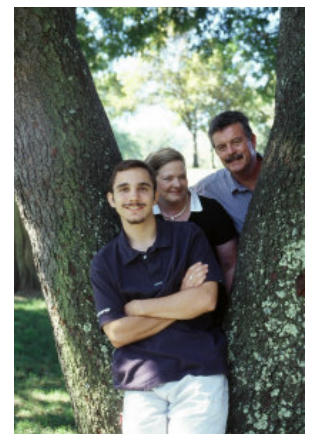
Over three years ago, Casey Family Services made a decision to move from providing long term foster care to helping youth achieve the highest level of permanency possible. This shift was propelled by legislation and research on best practice and became a national movement shared by child welfare professionals across the country as we came to embrace the concept of *permanence* or *a family for life* as the ideal outcome for children in state care.

This growing body of national evidence about what was happening to youth aging out of the foster care system became an imperative in our move toward greater permanency. The fact that many were leaving the state system without a permanent family correlated with a range of harmful outcomes; outcomes such as homelessness, unemployment, early parenthood, health problems and substance abuse. The evidence showed that in order to achieve successful adulthood, young people need the support of a family, even

after they turn age 18.

Recognizing that the agency's focus away from long term foster care and onto permanence has raised many questions for our current foster parents, we have scheduled a training that we are asking all of our families to attend. The training, *Understanding Permanency* was put together by a committee of Casey foster parents and staff. It is planned as a forum in which there can be an open exchange of information and feedback. It is just one of the many ways in

which we plan to support our families as we continue through this transition in our move to greater permanency.



## COLLABORATIVE PERMANENCY PLANNING SERVICES PROGRAM WELCOMES NEW SOCIAL WORKER



My name is MaryLuz McKenna. I joined Casey Family Services on September 17, 2007 as a social worker in the Collaborative Permanency Planning Program. I am excited to be a part of Casey Family Services and I look forward to expanding my knowledge

and experience in identifying permanent life long connections for youth.

The majority of my professional experience has been in Child Welfare. After completing my Bachelor's degree at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, I accepted a position as a bilingual special needs adoption social worker. After eight years, I took another position with Merrimack Valley Catholic Charities and then with Child & Family Services of Merrimack Valley. Both of these agencies provided adoption

services to youth in foster care. I completed my Masters degree in Social Work at Salem State College in 2007, just prior to coming to Casey Family Services.

As an adoption social worker my work focused on identifying families that could make a legal commitment to children in foster care. It was both a challenging and rewarding position. It also served to increase my awareness of just how many children were in the system and separated from their siblings. A desire to change

this became the passion behind my goal to reconnect siblings and recruit families who would adopt them together. My mind set was that every child deserves a family; a mindset that I carry with me into my work at Casey Family Services.

My first few months at Casey Family Services have been very rewarding. I am enjoying my work in the Collaborative Permanency Planning Program and I thank everyone from all the divisions for their warm welcome.

## COMING TOGETHER: PARENT QUARTERLY MEETING

*by Bronson de Stadler  
Division Deputy Director*

On January 9, 2008 we had our first Parent Quarterly meeting of 2008. It is hard to believe that another year has gone by.

For those of you who have not been able to attend, the meeting is a time for fellow parents, youth and staff to gather together. As with most every Casey event, we begin with a delicious meal that gives us all a break from evening meal preparation.

The youth and a Casey staff person meet separately and engage in activities or discussions on specific topics

of interest either identified by the youth or introduced by staff. In the past discussions have centered on the various aspects of teen life, the experience of living in foster care and the importance of developing life skills

The parent meeting has an agenda that typically starts with introductions and a special acknowledgement of new parents. We then move onto agency updates given by staff members, team leaders and the deputy director. Oftentimes information is shared on practical matters. At our last meeting we discussed tax preparation for foster parents. We strive to spend at least half

of the meeting in a round table fashion discussing the current challenges members are facing. The meetings are a place where foster parents can express themselves in a supportive environment and share their unique experience with people who understand.

From the staff's point of view, the meetings help us to better understand common concerns and facilitate discussions around issues that are relevant to our families. We welcome "constructive dissatisfaction" as a way of helping our division to continually improve upon the services and support that we provide.

All of the discussions are enriched by the wisdom, insights and experience of our families. We look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.



## FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAM

# FRIENDSHIP IS MORE THAN A WORD SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION

by Helen McCreedy  
Team Leader  
Family Resource Program

In March 2008, the North Common Village Girls Support Group celebrates its fifth year anniversary. Eight girls enrolled or re-enrolled in the group in September following a break in the summer from the previous year's group. Of these members, four have participated in the group throughout the five years!

It has been an amazing experience working with these girls over these five years. Family Resource Program staff who co-facilitate the group have had the opportunity to witness these girls grow from the ages of 10 or so when they began, to their current ages of 14 to 19. They are wonderful young women who care about themselves, their families and

friends, and their community. They continue to strive for good performance in school, but now they are also identifying and working towards goals of obtaining driving permits, getting jobs, saving money for large expenses such as a car, and thinking about careers and possibly college after graduation from high school.

In a recent discussion in group each young woman spoke of specific ways she helps her family now (e.g., in buying food to help the family, buying clothes or school supplies for siblings, purchasing household necessities such as cleaning supplies as a way of helping out, taking care of younger siblings). Each also spoke of her plans to assist in the future with ideas such as helping to pay for rent, food, internet, cell phone bills, as well as being independent

and taking care of her own expenses so that she will not need to rely on her parents as much for assistance. Several had jobs this past summer and were proud of their ability to earn money, purchase things for themselves, and save for future needs.

These young women consistently engage in honest discussions about their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Topics in group have focused on relationships with family members, friends, dating, personal safety, diet and exercise, health issues, and making sound choices in all aspects of their lives. Their ability to care for themselves and others shows that they each truly have the potential to create positive futures and to enrich their communities.



*l to r, Kimsang Tom, June Taing, Delmis Sierra, Elisha Bartlett, Minnette Echevarria, Loli Sierra, Kiara Diaz, Ivette Nieves*

### Reflections

by Saodarin Ros  
Program Advisory Council  
Member

PAC is one of the groups at Casey Family Services that I attended. It helped me and my family a lot to open our minds to new and great things like how to socialize and made me not worry so much about personal things in the past. And I want to thank Joan and the staff of the Casey Family including June how much I appreciate their hard work in helping my family and many others with their problems.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY - STRENGTHING FAMILIES SITE OF THE NEW FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER



# PLANNING AHEAD GEARING UP FOR THE FUTURE WHAT DO COLLEGES WANT?



by Kathleen McCoy, Ph.D.

“What do colleges want?” is a question nervous high school seniors and their parents ask over and over – especially as the application season approaches.

Individual requirements vary with highly selective private and public universities differing quite dramatically from less demanding community colleges to four year schools struggling to fill their freshman classes.

Overall, however, the colleges that tend to be selective to varying degrees look for students who will not only

benefit from that college’s academic offerings, but who will also be a vital part of the academic community by participating fully in campus life. The selective colleges look not only for academic excellence, but also for leadership qualities, special talents and altruistic concerns.

Many students feel, and fear, that an SAT score can make or break their chances of getting into the college of choice. While SAT scores play a part in the overall evaluation process, many college admissions officials contend that these are not of primary importance

and that other factors such as high school grades, teacher recommendations, sincerity and insights shown on the application essay, commitment to and leadership in extracurricular activities actually count much more in the evaluation process than SAT scores.

However, an extremely high or an extremely low SAT score can cause admissions officials to take a special look at an application. If, for example, a student with high grades who seems otherwise qualified has SAT scores dramatically lower than the college’s average

acceptable SAT (such as a score in the 900’s or below, when the average score of applicants to that college is 1250) this may cause the SAT to be more important in the evaluation process that it would otherwise be. In the same way, if a student whose grades are in the lower range of acceptable to the college has an SAT score much higher than average for that college, this may help his cause. However, if his grades are considerably below the acceptable range for that particular college, a high SAT score may not be enough to win admission.

## TEN IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN PICKING A COLLEGE

*Your Guide to Parenting Adolescents*  
by Denise Witmer

The guidance office at your teen’s high school is there to provide students and families with guidance about a realm of things, including everything that has to do with college searching. It is, however, the responsibility of the parent and/or the student to seek help from the guidance office. Therefore, when you meet with someone from the guidance office you should be prepared with questions and record the answers so that you and your teen can develop your college search game plan.

The following are some questions to ask;

1. Who do I get in touch with in this office to get my questions answered in a timely manner?
2. What resources, books, internet, etc. are available to us through the school?
3. How do we receive testing and preparation course information from you?
4. How does my teenager know that he is taking the right courses to get into college?
5. What colleges have the students from this high school attended?
6. Is there a list of scholarships students from this school have applied for in the past? Is there a list of scholarships that other students from this high school have received in the past?
7. Do you keep a ratio of how many students from this high school make it through a four-year college with a degree, as opposed to how many started college?
8. What local scholarships should my teen apply for? When do we get started and what are the deadlines for those scholarships?
9. What local community colleges are in this area? What do they offer?
10. Are there technical schools in this area? What do they offer?



# Casey Connector



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Francyne Fuller, Editor  
Casey Dennis, Graphic Design



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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