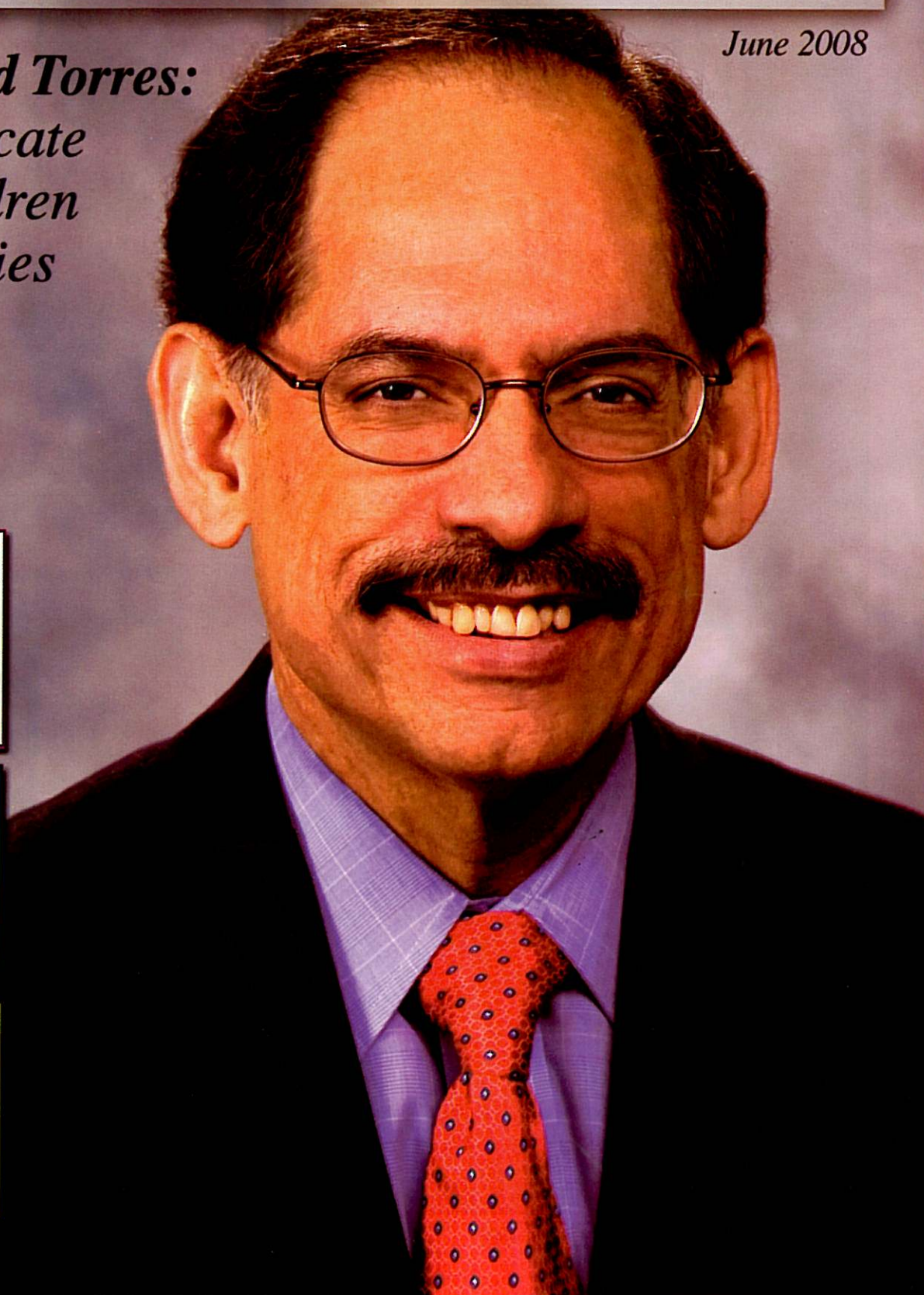


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*Raymond Torres:
An Advocate
for Children
& Families*



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Raymond Torres: Advocating for Families in Need

by Joe Zibell

Located at the corner of Church and Chapel, the building that is home to Casey Family Services serves as an appropriate metaphor to that agency's relationship with the city.

Located directly across from the Green, surrounded by the buzzing of daily commerce and the continuous movement of people, it truly is in the heart of New Haven.

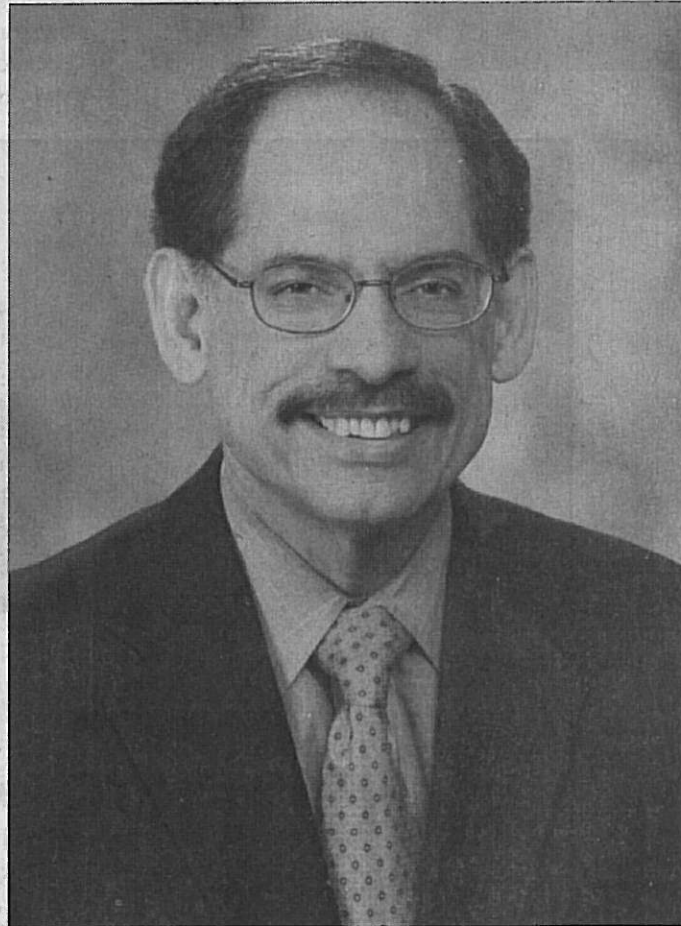
Since moving its headquarters to the Elm City in September of 2003, it has certainly been the aim of Raymond Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services, to become ingrained in the community and to make as far-reaching an impact as possible. With picturesque views outside his office window, and the rich history that echoes off the walls of the building he works in, Torres has developed a deep connection to New Haven. In looking back on the decision to move Casey Family's national headquarters here almost five years ago, it's one that couldn't have worked out better in his mind.

"In 2000, Casey Family Services began to look at different cities and locations in the region — from New Haven on south to Stamford," recalls Torres. At the time, the drive to move headquarters was part of a larger, comprehensive initiative of the agency to move all of their regional offices to central locations in order to better complement their mission of reaching at-risk children and families.

"After looking at a number of communities, and some of the pressing issues that those communities faced, I thought New Haven would be the best location for us. Strategically, it puts us

between our Hartford and Bridgeport offices; it's a nice conduit.

"Since coming here, we've been delighted by our decision. For me it's a pleasure coming to work. It's a vibrant city. There is a lot of excitement. You



Raymond Torres, executive director, Casey Family Services

have a lot of not-for-profits. There is interest, from the community at-large, in trying to do better by the families in this city.

"We came into an environment that allowed us to become part of its fabric. It allowed us to think long-term about how we can help families that are in need. Over the past five years, we have become a facilitator and a conduit for bringing together local funders."

The collaborative, known as the New Haven Funders Group or Funders

Collaborative, allows for one-on-one meetings between Casey Family and other community leaders, including The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, United Way of Greater New Haven and the Workforce Alliance to

name a few, to discuss how to enhance the quality of life in the city, specifically for those families with the greatest need.

"In designating New Haven as the headquarters for Casey Family Services, we made a commitment to come to the city and to stay in the city," says Torres. "We actually purchased this building back in 2002; our plans are to be here for the long haul."

Cultural Change Serves as Inspiration

Torres' interest in social work is tied to his own life experience. Born in Puerto Rico, he came to the United States at the age of 12. Having grown up in a rural part of Puerto Rico, it was a major cultural change to be transported to the urban environment of Harlem, and presented many challenges. Torres says now that this experience, which included learning a new language and being in an urban area that had significant needs, spurred him

on his career path.

"All of my work, in some way, goes back to growing up in a situation where my family, like all the families around us — we were the working poor — needed an advocate," says Torres. "Later as I got older, I learned that there was an actual profession that addressed this called social work."

Torres completed his Master's degree at Adelphi University in 1979, and began addressing communities close to home.

"I worked in some of the toughest

neighborhoods in New York City, visited families in their homes and later on was a supervisor, program director and on up the line," says Torres.

Torres' time in the City included stints in Brooklyn and the South Bronx. In the case of the latter he was involved with a child abuse and neglect prevention program, which became well known. Later, he directed programs for the largest agency dealing with domestic violence in the country, which was Victims Services Agency. Additionally, he held the post of deputy regional director for the New York State Division of Family and Children Services, covering the metropolitan New York City and Mid-Hudson regions.

After his work in New York, Torres transferred to Oklahoma, where he was the programs administrator for Child Welfare Services within the Oklahoma State Department of Human Services. In that capacity, he was responsible for the statewide administration of child welfare services, which included child protective services, preventive services, foster care and adoption. He oversaw a staff of 1,200 with a budget of \$58 million, and was in Oklahoma until making the transition to Casey Family in 1992.

Responsibility on a Large Scale

Torres has been executive director for nearly 16 years now, and he is responsible for the oversight and administration of Casey Family Services' eight divisions, located throughout New England and in Baltimore, Maryland.

In 2008 he was named vice president for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which is the 14th largest foundation in the country, and the largest foundation in the nation dedicated to disadvantaged children. Casey Family and the foundation are essentially one and the same, with the former operating as the direct service arm.

While associated with foster care primarily, Casey Family Services has steadily grown the breadth and depth of its programs over the last 25 years. Beyond foster care, the agency also offers

post-adoption, preservation and reunification services for families. In addition, Casey Family has established a number of specialized and innovative community-based programs to help strengthen families and enable parents to provide the healthy, nurturing environments their children need to grow and thrive.

One such example is the Direct Services Grant Program for New Haven, which is administered jointly with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Since 2004, Casey Family has distributed nearly \$1.5 million to New

Haven area non-profits and charitable initiatives. Regarding the next cycle of distribution slated for this spring, the agency noted, "We anticipate awarding nearly \$300,000, supporting a wide range of not-for-profit and community-serving organizations that

work directly with disadvantaged children, youth and families in New Haven, with a strong focus on efforts that support family

economic success, one of the main initiatives of the Annie E. Casey Foundation."

Considering Torres' energy and commitment to the tasks at hand, there is no shortage of ideas when it comes to bridging the resources of the community to those families and children who are most in need. Whether it's collaborating with WTNH News Channel 8 on

"Wednesday's Child," which showcases children up for adoption, working with the Shubert Theater to bring in the Big Apple Circus and make it accessible to

disadvantaged children, or assisting non-profits in effectively implementing funds, Casey Family Services has made great strides in making a major impact on New Haven in a short amount of time. It's that spirit of cooperation that Torres stresses, and hopes to grow even more over time.

"This is a relatively manageable city, in terms of its size," notes Torres. "You get

to know people quickly. There are a lot of people to meet, but you're able to establish that cooperative and beneficial relationship."

The profile of Casey Family Services and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, coupled with Torres' experience, knowledge and ability to call community leaders to action, has given him great standing in the social work field. He is recognized, and often called upon, on a national basis for his insight.

"Being in this agency now allows me a national platform. In this position, through this opportunity I have been given, I am one of the people that is primed to make a difference for children and families. Being housed here in New Haven is a great complement. We have a great relationship with the Mayor's office and Yale University just to name two entities; they understand our value to this city. They understood that from the very beginning. We love being here." ♦



As executive director, Torres is responsible for the oversight and administration of the agency's eight divisions located throughout New England and in Baltimore, Maryland. Photo, smcooper.com

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