

Operational Plan

2007-2010

Casey Family Services



**CASEY
FAMILY
SERVICES**

THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



A Commitment to Families for Life

As the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services is committed to one paramount purpose: to secure improved futures for society's most vulnerable children and their families.

Casey Family Services was founded to provide effective, quality foster care for children. Over the course of more than 30 years of operation, we have evolved our practice in response to the needs of vulnerable families and children. Through research and direct experience, we have come to recognize that simply providing quality placement services for the children in our care is not enough. Although we have an unwavering commitment to positive outcomes for the hundreds of foster and adoptive children we serve each year, we also have a commitment to promote positive outcomes for the thousands of children that we cannot serve directly in New England and throughout the country.

In our early years, we established a track record of providing high-quality, long-term foster care based on the commitment to secure and preserve the right and opportunity for every child to grow up in a safe, stable, and loving family. Then we affirmed the need to document what we do and show that it makes a difference in outcomes for children. We also began to provide a continuum of services to strengthen families and eliminate the need for foster care placements, when possible. These services have grown to include family preservation and reunification services, family advocacy and support, permanency planning services, adoption, and post-adoption services.

IN 2001, AFRICAN-AMERICAN, LATINO/HISPANIC, AND NATIVE/INDIGENOUS-AMERICAN CHILDREN MADE UP 63 PERCENT OF ALL THOSE IN FOSTER CARE, ALTHOUGH, IN CONTRAST, THEY REPRESENTED JUST OVER 30 PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN THE OVERALL POPULATION.

A Commitment to Families for Life (cont'd)

Additionally, using the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections framework for neighborhood transformation, we began to focus on the fact that children and families live in communities, and healthy communities produce healthier children and families. We have developed family resource centers in several divisions as a strategic approach to strengthening families and communities. Through these centers, we have extended our work into low-income communities, forming partnerships with local residents to plan the services offered. We also have extended our partnerships with community-based and state agencies that have the power and reach to help build strong communities.

As our knowledge and experience have grown, we have made a substantial commitment to offering collaborative technical assistance services and have increased dramatically our focus on influencing policy.

In recent years, Casey Family Services has infused its commitment to achieving a family for life for every child in its care into every aspect of its work: direct practice, research, technical assistance, policy, and communications. This focus on family permanence builds on a strong track record of achieving reunification and adoption and providing post-adoption services and supports. In our foster care services, we have recruited, trained, and supported foster families able to provide stable, loving homes for children. Many of these parents have adopted the children in their care. We also have developed a range of services and supports for older youth in foster care to help them transition into families and into successful adulthood. Through policy and systems advocacy, we have worked to ensure that other young people leaving foster care find the supports they need. To evolve and strengthen our commitment to family permanence, we have formulated a three-year Operational Plan to guide our work from 2007 to 2010.





Our Vision

Casey Family Services believes that every child deserves to grow up in a loving family—one that provides safety and security and prepares a child to succeed as an adult—and that every child and youth served by the child welfare system or at risk of system involvement will have a safe and stable family for life.

Our Mission

The Casey Family Services mission is to improve the lives of at-risk children and strengthen families and communities by providing high-quality, cost-effective services that advance both positive child welfare practice and sound public policy.

Through this mission, the agency works to ensure that the most vulnerable children in our society have an enduring family relationship that provides for their well-being and offers the support and guidance children need to become successful and emotionally healthy adults. In order to accomplish this goal, we provide high-quality direct services to disadvantaged children and families in New England and Baltimore, Maryland, and offer technical assistance and policy advocacy designed to build the capacity of the child welfare system to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families.



The Issue: Children Without Families

Each year as many as 25,000 foster youth “age out” of the system, usually at age 18, alone and adrift.¹

Many children in the United States grow up in stable, nurturing families, but not all. Many of the half-million children in foster care too often do not benefit from a loving family.

Research shows very clearly that young people need family support even after they turn age 18 in order to succeed in the adult world. “Exiting the system by ‘aging out’ without a permanent family is correlated with a range of deleterious outcomes as a young adult, such as early pregnancy or parenthood, criminal involvement, homelessness, lack of employment, or dropping out of high school.”²

Although foster care originally was designed to be a temporary service for children in need of protection, that temporary status has sometimes proved illusory. In 2001, for example, 49 percent of children in foster care were 11 years of age or older, yet of those adopted from foster care, only 18 percent were 11 or older.³ This gap means that it is less likely for older youth to be adopted and many of them remain in foster care until they turn 18 years old. Research also has shown that there is a much greater likelihood of some children ending up in foster care than others, with race and family economic circumstances playing significant roles. In 2001, African-American, Latino/Hispanic, and Native/Indigenous-American children made up 63 percent of all those in foster care,⁴ although, in contrast, they represented just over 30 percent of children in the overall population. This means that some groups disproportionately bear the burden of the inadequacies of the foster care system. Finally, the child welfare system has too often made one of two choices for children in their care, offering either legal family membership or life skills training, but not both. This is despite the knowledge that children need both families to count on for a lifetime and adequate preparation to face the adult world. It has become clear that child welfare policies and practices need to change.

¹ Avery, Rosemary and Madelyn Freundlich. *Deleterious Consequences of Aging Out of Foster Care*. National Convening on Youth Permanence, Summary Report, 2003 (cyp.org).

² Ibid

³ Based on FY 2001 AFCARS estimates.

⁴ Ibid

The Solution: Families for Life

Propelled by legislation and research on best practice, child welfare professionals increasingly have come to embrace the concept of “permanence,” or “a family for life,” as the ideal outcome for each child in state care.

Casey defines permanence as having an enduring family relationship that:

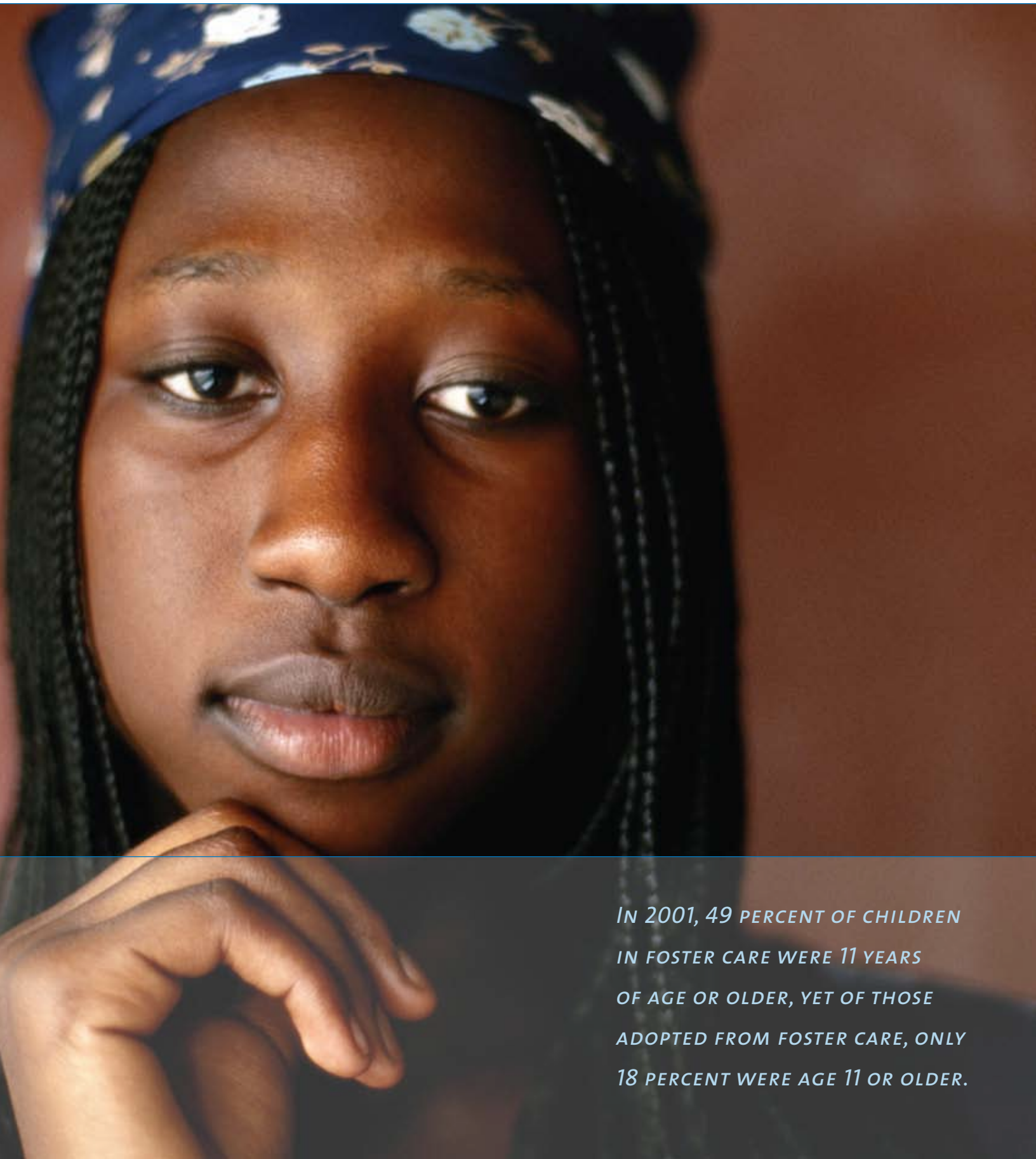
- Is safe and meant to last a lifetime
- Offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership
- Provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual well-being, and
- Assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, other significant adults, family history and traditions, language, religion, culture, and ethnic heritage

We believe permanence can be achieved in a number of ways:

- Family preservation
- Reunification with the family of origin
- Guardianship or kinship care
- Adoption by relatives or nonrelatives
- Another planned permanent living arrangement that should be a secure, committed, and lasting relationship

The following principles are essential to our permanency work:

- Embrace sound definitions of permanence and preparation for adulthood and a comprehensive approach to integrated outcomes
- Blend youth-related policies and practices in developing customized permanency and preparation for adulthood outcomes
- Be youth-centered, family-focused, and collaborative in customized planning and decision making
- Ensure comprehensive, continuous, customized, and collaborative services for youth and families
- Promote a vision of shared responsibility for change



*IN 2001, 49 PERCENT OF CHILDREN
IN FOSTER CARE WERE 11 YEARS
OF AGE OR OLDER, YET OF THOSE
ADOPTED FROM FOSTER CARE, ONLY
18 PERCENT WERE AGE 11 OR OLDER.*



Operational Imperatives

A Focus on Vulnerable Children and Families

We will continue to focus on the most vulnerable children and families and their communities. By focusing on this population, we can make the greatest contribution within the spectrum of child welfare services. This will include children in low-income families, children in foster care with significant mental health needs, children exiting residential care, and older children who often have been the least well served by the child welfare system.

Permanency Services Continuum

We are committed to linking families to a continuum of permanency-related services to ensure that each child and family receives comprehensive, continuous, customized, and collaborative services and supports. We are committed to using a permanency teaming process that brings together youth, family members, and other significant adults to build and support family relationships and to prepare youth for adulthood. Our work is informed by rigorous research, designed to identify and document best practices.

In the coming years, each Casey Family Services division will design its service continuum to meet the unique needs of its respective communities. Divisions will use a permanency teaming approach to building family relationships with children and youth in care, which will:

- Ensure high-quality services to achieve and sustain all permanency outcomes
- Promote family support services as an important component of the permanency continuum
- Develop a corps of talented families to serve as resources for foster children and their families
- Engage youth, their parents, and other significant adults who know and care about them in the permanency planning process
- Expand on our post-adoption services to develop post-permanency services
- Build on learnings from the 2006 University of Connecticut Reunification Study to expand reunification capacity across the agency
- Integrate life-skills development with permanency planning services
- Measure short- and long-term outcomes

Operational Imperatives (cont'd)

Evidence-Based Practice

We will continue to emphasize research, grounding our permanency practice in best practices. We are committed to conducting research on our own direct services, to respecting privacy while collecting data, and to developing new knowledge about effective permanency practices.

Individualized Services within a Community Context

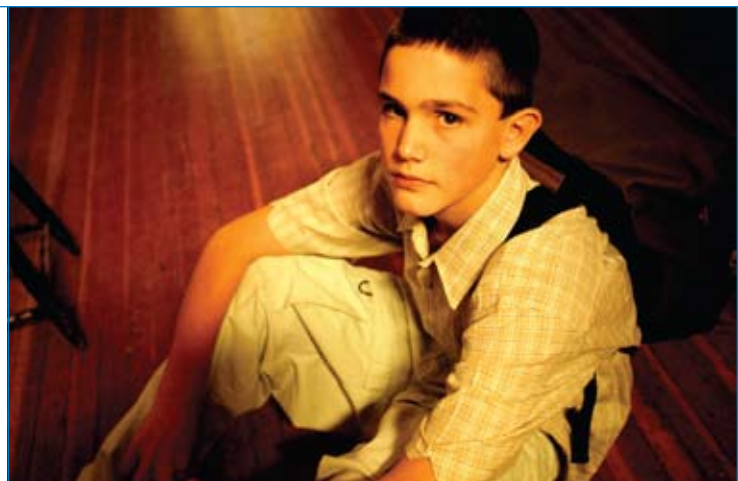
We will integrate our direct practice with our community strengthening initiatives – enhancing the community's capacity to better support and sustain vulnerable children and families.

Emphasis on Family Economic Success

As part of our community-based work, we will develop and test family economic success (FES) strategies that support both intact low-income families and families involved with the child welfare system to build assets and sustain those gains. These strategies, which complement work taking place across the Foundation, include: free tax-preparation clinics to maximize the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Center for Working Families activities, and the Rural Family Economic Success (RuFES) initiative.

Public-Private Partnerships

We will work closely with state child welfare agencies in the seven states in which we are located to ensure that our services respond to the needs of these communities and to enhance the capacity of the state agencies through training, technical assistance, and program collaboration. We will continue to develop collaborations with educational, mental health, and other community partners.



National Leadership and Collaboration

We will accelerate our commitment to learn from, and share knowledge about, best and promising permanency practices throughout the country. This will include:

- Sponsoring the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence
- Providing on-site technical assistance
- Developing materials, training curricula, and videos to enhance our training and technical assistance
- Developing and implementing public awareness and public will-building strategies that support our mission and advance our leadership in the child welfare field
- Providing leadership in national collaboratives to raise the profile of youth in foster care and galvanize support for policy and practice solutions related to permanence

Public Policy Advocacy

We will promote state and national public policies that support equitable services and greater family permanence for vulnerable children, youth, and families – advocating for:

- Using data and metrics to develop and sustain the creation of incentives for all permanency outcomes for children in foster care
- Clarifying alternative permanency options for children in foster care
- Enhancing permanence for older children in foster care
- Promoting post-permanency support to help children and youth remain with their permanent families
- Supporting the development of subsidized guardianship programs in states where they do not yet exist
- Reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in the delivery of child welfare services

Operational Imperatives (cont'd)

Strengthen Administrative Infrastructure

We will continue to integrate the work of Casey Family Services throughout the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In addition, we will strengthen our overall administrative capacity and infrastructure to support our permanency practice, research, technical assistance, public policy, and communication initiatives.

A Focus on Four Core Goals

To achieve our vision of a family for life for every child and youth, we will focus on four core goals. Established in 1998, these goals will continue to guide our family-centered permanency practice strategies we will use to achieve our vision and mission:

- I. To achieve good family and child outcomes through the delivery of high-quality, cost-effective, and family-centered services
- II. To assume a proactive role regarding family and child issues in neighborhoods and communities as part of larger state and national policy, practice, and system reform efforts
- III. To influence child welfare practice and policy directed at improving family and child well-being in collaboration with the grant-making arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation
- IV. To maintain sufficient capacity and resources to support the implementation of agency goals





Operational Goal I

To achieve good family and child outcomes through the delivery of high-quality, cost-effective, and family-centered services

This goal reflects our commitment to define, measure, and deliver quality child welfare services and to learning from that work. Building on our 2003-2006 update of the agency's Operational Plan, we continue to provide innovative community-based services and supports. Over the past two years, we have enhanced our service continuum to include a permanency teaming approach that involves youth and families in their own planning and decision making. In addition, we have strengthened our clinical oversight, research, and quality assurance initiatives to maximize accountability and learning from our experiences. Our goal for the next three years is to develop best practices in the area of permanency services. Our work will be informed by what is known about best practices in the larger field as well as the knowledge we develop as we document and evaluate our work. We will continue to evolve from an agency that provides separate services to one that offers an integrated continuum of permanency services featuring a permanency teaming approach.



Operational Goal I (cont'd)

Families for Life: Collaborative Permanency Planning for Children and Youth

We will maintain a commitment to high-quality services as we continue to build a seamless continuum of permanency services in the divisions over the next three years. Each division will consider the strengths and needs of its own communities in determining which services to offer and how to partner with other agencies. Using data and a permanency practice framework to guide all of our services requires that staff are trained in permanency philosophy and practice skills as well as the skills for facilitating permanency teams that build and support the family relationships children and youth need. Permanency teams will engage youth in their own planning and will include their parents, foster parents, and other significant adults who know and care about them in a shared planning and decision-making process. Agency policy, practice standards, and administrative supports must be in alignment with the permanency framework.

While the agency has committed to using a permanency framework and teaming approach for its services, there are still questions to be answered that will help to guide changes in policy and practice. The Research Department will complete an evaluation of the permanency teaming model to assist the agency in examining issues such as roles and responsibilities of staff, level of effort needed for various tasks related to achieving permanence, and factors that may influence how to determine appropriate caseload size.



Enhanced Quality Assurance, Clinical Oversight, and Training to Support Permanency Practice

Over the next three years, we will continue to enhance clinical oversight of our services. This oversight is provided by the director of clinical services, who reviews all critical incident reports and conducts on-site case consultations and administrative case reviews. We also will continue to improve a state-of-the-art, computerized critical incident reporting system that allows staff to complete incident reports in a more systematic and timely manner than the previous paper-based system allowed. This system complements our foster care Case Information System, a comprehensive database that captures case activity involving foster youth and parents. Both of these systems furnish data for the agency's results indicators. We are developing a database to capture services delivered in our family-based programs and resource centers and a comprehensive case practice standards manual consistent with our permanency practice framework.

The Training Unit will advance the development of a comprehensive, agency-wide training program for Casey staff and foster parents in the context of the evolving permanency framework. Currently, all new staff members attend a six-day orientation program, and all new supervisors participate in a five-day supervisory development program. In addition, new staff take part in an orientation to grant-making in Baltimore, ensuring familiarity with the Foundation-wide emphasis on permanence. Ongoing enrichment workshops expose staff to treatment approaches and practices that are evidenced-based and have critical acceptance in the fields of child welfare and mental health. Annual departmental workshops will continue to use Casey staff expertise to build workforce knowledge and skill. In addition, parents caring for foster children will continue to receive comprehensive preservice and ongoing inservice training.

The Training Unit also will build on curricula already developed to enhance training opportunities for staff, supervisors, and foster parents. The Training Unit will continue to work with the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice to offer training related to the permanency framework, including the facilitation of permanency planning teams and the permanency continuum series. In all its activities, the Training Unit will continue to make use of technology, namely Microsoft Live Meeting, to train on clinical topics and computer applications, and support the provision of Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) from the National Association of Social Workers.



Operational Goal II

To assume a proactive role regarding family and child issues in neighborhoods and communities as part of larger state and national policy, practice, and system reform efforts

As important as our direct service work with children and families is, we recognize that by itself, it will not produce the positive outcomes to which we are committed. Children and families live in communities, and those communities need to be healthy and supportive in order for children and families to thrive. Every aspect of our direct practice work is enhanced by the neighborhood and community work we do. Yet we know from Casey's 2006 KIDS COUNT report, that since 1990, there has been a significant increase of 5.6 million more children living in families of the working poor. In all, more than 14 million or 21 percent of all children under age 18 still live in poverty—a higher proportion than in 1975. Clearly an unacceptably large portion of America's children have become isolated in communities that are distanced from the opportunities and networks that are crucial for successful outcomes. We also know that a family's economic situation has a great deal to do with that family's ability to provide a stable, loving home for its children.

*... MORE THAN 14 MILLION OR 21
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Operational Goal II (cont'd)

Expanding Our Work in Low-Income Communities

In 2007-2010, Casey Family Services will build on the work of the last 10 years to help strengthen fragile families in low-income communities and, whenever possible, prevent the need for foster care. We will continue to operate family resource centers in a number of our divisions to provide a wide range of services and activities designed to support families and build strong communities. We will strengthen partnerships throughout the Annie E. Casey Foundation and enhance the Making Connections framework to ensure that families in the most underserved and vulnerable communities have opportunities to earn a decent living and build economic assets; have ties with family, neighbors, kin, faith communities, and civic groups; and have reliable services that are close to home. We will expand invaluable partnerships with governmental and nonprofit agencies in these communities – partnerships that have resulted in significant benefits to these communities both in terms of services available and of the social capital development needed for a community to be able to advocate for itself and meet its own needs.



The services and activities of our family resource centers have been developed through close consultation with parents and youth in these communities who serve on the centers' advisory boards. Centers typically provide services in four areas: family and child well-being, social supports, access to social services, and family economic success. The continuation of family and child well-being and social supports will help children and families develop the skills they need to succeed in school and as parents. The social services are designed to connect children and families to community services that include translation, interpretive services, health, mental health, and advocacy. Economic self-sufficiency programs help families increase economic well-being and stability and include: financial literacy, General Educational Development (GED), English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), computer skills, and driver education. Casey divisions also will increase collaborative work with community partners through Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) campaigns in low-income communities. By receiving free tax preparation services and applying for EITC, low-income families receive significant tax refunds, enabling them to reduce debt or save for significant assets such as a home or car.

As our permanency work has shown us already, it is important to support families at every point in the permanency continuum. Our community work is one strategy we use to limit the number of children who must enter the foster care system. Our community work also serves to support families after they have adopted or reunified with a child. In the next stage of our work in low-income communities, we will connect the services of the family resource centers and the activities related to family economic success to those families who are involved in the child welfare system or at risk of system involvement. Additionally, we will continue to develop and test approaches to help poor and low-income families improve their economic futures. We currently are working with local and state teams in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont to implement short- and long-term plans to assist low-income rural families to improve their economic stability. As part of the Foundation's Center for Working Families Initiative, the Massachusetts and Rhode Island divisions are testing various prototypes that help families reduce debt, increase financial literacy, and achieve financial goals.



Operational Goal III

To influence child welfare practice and policy directed at improving family and child well-being in collaboration with the grant-making arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Through our more than 30 years of experience in helping children and families facing significant economic, social, and emotional challenges, Casey has built a knowledge base of effective child welfare policy and practice. Our commitment to the ongoing evaluation of our current services and testing new approaches to persistent problems has allowed us to add continually to this knowledge base and share what we have learned through technical assistance, conferences, publications, and policy advocacy.

Providing Technical Assistance Nationwide

In 2000, Casey Family Services launched the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice. Designed to manage and coordinate technical assistance activities aimed at improving the quality of child welfare services nationwide, the Casey Center provides assistance and guidance to public and private agencies that wish to employ successful program models established by Casey Family Services and other effective organizations in the field. A key objective is to engage our experienced practitioners as consultants to promote peer-to-peer learning opportunities related to promising practices that help at-risk children and families.

The Casey Center will continue to support systems in implementing permanency-focused policies and practices. In 2006, the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services hosted the National Convening on Youth Permanence, bringing together teams from more than 40 states. As part of its national technical assistance strategy, Casey will grow this event in the coming years with the next Convening scheduled for 2008. To track progress made in implementing permanency-related change and to share innovations across the nation, the Casey Center will connect quarterly with state leaders, many of whom have, or will, attend the Convening. It also will provide intensive technical assistance to selected sites that are committed to improving permanency outcomes. To support this work, the Center, in collaboration with the Communications Department, will produce a bimonthly newsletter on state progress, a permanency training curricula, and a white paper on integrating permanency planning and preparation for adulthood.

Operational Goal III (cont'd)

Promoting Sound Public Policy

Since 2002, the Casey Family Services policy director has provided leadership in collaboration with the grant-making arm of the Foundation in implementing a 10-point policy agenda along with indicators designed to drive the work. A major policy priority is to work with our state partners in promoting permanency options for children and youth. As an example, Casey Family Services partnered with Tufts University to examine subsidized guardianship policies in our New England states and Maryland and to share their findings and recommendations with state leaders. The Policy Department also has worked closely to raise youth voices around specific areas of interest collaboratively with several divisions and their state partners resulting in state policy and funding changes.

In the next stage of its work to promote policies that support permanence for children and youth, Casey will promote a policy agenda that will strengthen and support comprehensive practices changes on the state and federal levels. As part of this agenda, the Policy Department will promote better permanency outcomes through increased preventive services, increased supports for post-placement supports, subsidized guardianship, and adequate legal representation for children involved in child protective proceedings. Through all of its work, the Policy Department will integrate the need to eliminate racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity within child welfare.

Over the past three years, the Casey Center and the Policy Department have collaborated with the Communications Department to develop materials to guide both our local and national technical assistance and policy advocacy, grounding our work in lessons learned from research conducted on our own services while joining with our colleagues at the Foundation and other Casey organizations. We will continue to develop and refine key messages, identify target audiences, and implement a strategic communications plan aimed at building public will for improved policy and practice. This will include maintaining and sharing up-to-date information on policy and practice issues, stories that illustrate positive permanency outcomes for youth, and examples of best permanency practice. We will continue to strengthen outreach to, and collaboration with, key stakeholders, media, and others to increase influence and leverage public will-building efforts.





Operational Goal IV

To maintain sufficient capacity and resources to support the implementation of agency goals

The shift to a permanency framework affects all of our internal systems. As our direct service work evolves, there are implications for job descriptions, caseloads, and practice guidelines. As the staff requires new skills to be effective, we will provide appropriate training and coaching. The systems we have developed to collect information on our work will be revised, and the budget format will be updated to reflect the true costs of the permanency work.

Casey Family Services has increased its technological capacity and provided a wide array of supports to its departments and divisions in collecting data more easily, quickly, and accurately. To promote and support Casey Family Services' permanency practice, we have enhanced our current data systems, and we are re-examining existing resources, technology, facilities, and systems to ensure that they support the agency's permanency framework and staff needs. The use of effective technology will be critical to capturing, monitoring, and documenting our work. In addition, to prepare for emergencies or disasters, we will continue to support and enhance a strong emergency preparedness and business continuity plan to ensure the continuation of critical business functions and recovery, thus safeguarding the children and families we serve and our employees who support them.

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Families for Life

Casey believes that every child deserves to grow up in a loving family that provides safety and security and preparation for adulthood. We recognize that laws alone, including the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, cannot change reality, especially for thousands of older kids caught in a complex child welfare system with no real hope of reunification, guardianship, or adoption. Casey must help change the future for these youths.

Over the next three years, Casey Family Services will continue to provide foster care services when needed to remove a child from danger. However, the primary imperative will be to ensure that every child has a safe family connection that will last a lifetime. This means that we are examining every aspect of our work to see how it can be adapted and improved to ensure that every child with whom we work finds a family for life. To meet the needs of children and families, we will move away from providing separate programs to providing a seamless continuum that spans prevention and reunification services designed to ensure that a child can remain in his or her family of origin; and guardianship and adoption services that will ensure that a child has the family support he or she needs and deserves. We will continue to develop the permanency team approach in our work – an approach that engages youth, their parents, and other significant adults who know and care about them in the permanency planning process.

Together with our grant-making colleagues, Casey Family Services is committed to providing national leadership within the child welfare field on permanence. We recognize that to achieve our vision of a loving, safe, and secure family for every child, we must not only provide for the children with whom we work directly, but also partner with key stakeholders throughout the entire child welfare field to ensure that policies and practice result in a permanent family for every child. This will require us to work diligently to develop and document best practices. We are obligated to learn from others by closely tracking the research in the field, and to share with others what we have learned through conferences, convenings, technical assistance, legislative briefings, publications, and media outreach. Casey is committed to making permanence a more central, urgent, and prominent national priority.



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