

A publication sharing ideas and insights



THE DIRECT SERVICE ARM OF THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING
30 YEARS
of building lifelong family connections.

Voice

Winter 2006 Volume Seven Issue One



*Engaging Communities
in the Lives of
Children and Families*

*Women Showing Increased Interest in
Adopting Waiting Children*

*National CASA's Michael Piraino on
Protecting Children*

*Family Economic Success in Rhode Island
Supporting Vulnerable Communities*

Mentoring on the Rise for Foster Parents



From the Executive Director's Desk

The year 2006 marks an important milestone for Casey Family Services. Thirty years ago, Jim Casey established this agency as the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. He did so out of a deep concern for the stability and well-being of children in out-of-home care. In the following decades, we have evolved significantly, steadily adding services to address a spectrum of ways that children achieve the lifelong family relationships necessary to develop fully into healthy, self-reliant adults. The stability that Casey foster children and young adults have attained through Casey Family Services has had long-lasting impact on their lives, whether they have returned to their birth families, remained close to their foster parents, been adopted, or become permanently connected to a legal guardian.

Over time, we have been able to demonstrate the value of a comprehensive, inclusive team approach that gives children and youth, birth families, social workers, and other professionals equal standing as members of a treatment or permanency team. The criticality of hearing the voices of our children and youth cannot be overstated.

In a stunning example of the power of the youth perspective, a group of Casey young men and women from Connecticut recently met with state legislative representatives and child welfare leaders to present recommendations for addressing their concerns about the foster care system. Although each of them spoke from his or her unique perspective, a common thread ran throughout their discussion: their need and right to stay in touch with birth families, especially brothers and sisters also in care. So compelling were their words that Department of Children and Families Commissioner Darlene Dunbar agreed to meet personally with the youth advocates. At that meeting, she announced that the department would institute substantive changes in policy regarding siblings, based on the Casey youths' recommendations (see article on page three).

I am proud of our young people. They have learned to exercise their right to advocate for themselves, and their courage in speaking up now promises to improve the lives of many other foster children and youth whom they may never meet.

Raymond L. Torres

Front cover: Victoria Rowell, award-winning actress and Casey Family Services' national spokesperson, leads the 2005 National Adoption Day kick-off in New York City. The young boy was adopted in a ceremony that morning in Kings County Court.

Verónica Douglas, directora de Proyectos Especiales en el Canal 8 en Connecticut, con Raymond L. Torres, director ejecutivo de Casey Family Services, en la Conferencia Que Oigan Estas Voces (Hear These Voices) para familias afectadas por VIH/SIDA.

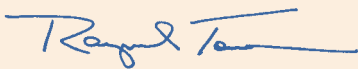
Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo

El año 2006 se marcó un hito importante en la trayectoria de Casey Family Services. Hace treinta años, Jim Casey estableció esta agencia. Lo hizo como manifestación de su interés profundo por el bienestar y estabilidad de los niños y niñas en cuidado de crianza. Durante las décadas siguientes, hemos ido desarrollando, continuamente agregando más servicios dirigidos a apoyar a que estos niños y niñas logren llegar a ser adultos sanos e independientes por medio de relaciones familiares permanentes. La estabilidad alcanzada por estos jóvenes ha sido impactante, ya que o regresaron a sus familias biológicos, quedaron con sus familias de crianza, o fueron adoptados.

En el transcurso de los años, hemos podido demostrar el valor de un enfoque amplio e inclusivo que sirve para que los jóvenes, las familias biológicas, los/as trabajadores sociales y otros ayudantes puedan participar igualmente como miembros del equipo de tratamiento o de permanencia. No se puede sobreestimar la importancia de escuchar a las voces de los jóvenes.

En un evento impresionante que demuestra el poder de la perspectiva de los/las jóvenes de Casey, un grupo de ellos se juntó con legisladores y líderes en campo del bienestar del niño/a. El grupo presentó sus recomendaciones para el mejoramiento del sistema de cuidado de crianza. Aunque cada joven tuviera su propio punto de vista, el tema sobresaliente, el hilo común, fue la importancia de mantener relaciones con sus familias biológicas, especialmente con sus hermanas y hermanos en cuidado de crianza. Se quedó tan impresionada Darlene Dunbar, la Comisionada del Departamento de Niños y Familias del estado de Connecticut, que acordó reunirse personalmente con estos jóvenes. En esta reunión, ella declaró que su Departamento iniciará cambios reales en cuanto a las políticas tocando a las relaciones de hermandad, basados en las recomendaciones de los jóvenes.

Estoy orgulloso de nuestros jóvenes. Ellos ya saben y pueden representarte por si mismos. El valor de comunicar sus perspectivas e opiniones promueve el mejoramiento de vida de otros niños y niñas en cuidado de crianza.



Raymond L. Torres

Primera plana: Victoria Rowell, actriz premiada y portavoz nacional de Casey Family Services, asiste al evento inicial del Día Nacional de la Adopción en la ciudad de Nueva York. El joven fue adoptado en una ceremonia en la Corte de Kings County durante la misma mañana.

NEW HAMPSHIRE MENTOR PROGRAM HELPS FOSTER PARENTS

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND

For new foster parents welcoming a child into their family for the first time, having an experienced foster parent to turn to for advice, sympathy, or just friendship makes the adjustment much smoother. In New Hampshire, Casey's mentor program nurtures and facilitates this important, supportive relationship.

"I think it's essential," says foster mother Gerri Firth. "Everybody needs guidance. The first child, especially, can be overwhelming." Firth's mentor, Gail Newton, agrees: "Years ago when I started, I would have liked to have had a mentor."

Mentors listen and encourage, offer feedback, and provide a role model. Firth says: "I may have situations or challenges I need help with, and I'll talk with my mentor. She'll say, 'This is what I did.' Then I don't feel all alone."

Mentors also benefit from the opportunity to help others. "I find that while I'm supporting them as parents, they're also supporting my own work with children," says Newton. "It made me see myself differently as a foster parent. And it's given me more confidence."

Foster care experts throughout the country are promoting mentor programs for foster parents, according to Gretchen Test, a program associate for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Family to Family*—a child welfare reform initiative of the Foundation that is operating across the country—encourages many types of peer-focused supports. Foster parents are lending their experience, compassion, and support in almost all of the *Family to Family* sites.

"Case workers and agency staff are unable to offer the same type of support as someone who has fostered: experiencing the late night crisis, working with birth families, and dealing with the paperwork," Test says. "That type of support is invaluable because being a good foster parent isn't something you learn from reading a book—it comes from doing, and other foster parents understand that."

Developing the New Hampshire Program

"Peer-to-peer mentoring between foster parents was happening naturally, but it's of such value we felt the need to formalize the process," says Beth-Anne Bryar, a resource coordinator in Casey's New Hampshire Division. By providing an additional level of support, the New Hampshire mentor program helps to keep foster families together.

"Ultimately, our goal is to have a mentor for every newly licensed foster parent who has a child joining the family for the first time," says Meme Wheeler, a team leader in New Hampshire. "Children in care can display challenging behavior, and we want all of our parents to have the kind of compassion, understanding, and support they can get only from a community of parents with similar experiences."

Under the Casey program model, the mentors are experienced foster parents who volunteer and are trained to help new parents as they join the organization. The mentors and protégés set up their own contact system, mostly over the phone, and sort out what is helpful to both parties.

According to Daryl Daugs, director of Families for Kids in Washington state, first-year parents have the highest attrition rates among all foster parents. Families for Kids, a

program of Lutheran Community Services Northwest, has developed several mentoring initiatives, one similar to New Hampshire's effort. "It's as simple as foster parents supporting foster parents. By connecting experienced parents with new families, we have improved our retention rates."

The agency's success is being felt beyond the first year. Families for Kids, now facilitating mentoring programs throughout the state, has found that its peer support programs have reduced, for the first time in five years, the number of foster families leaving the system, Daugs says.

The Impact in New Hampshire and Beyond

For Bryar, the real success of mentoring programs is more stable placements for children who have experienced crisis in their lives. "By strengthening the community of foster parents and their connections to each other, parents offer better care, and our kids are able to heal in supportive and supported families," she says.

Casey foster parents are not alone in their marked interest in mentoring, according to Daugs. "Foster parents have been helping each other informally for as long as there have been foster parents," he says.

"However, nationally, the call for peer-led supports, like mentoring, has been growing in the past six to eight years. Agencies are responding to that and are facilitating new ways of connecting parents to each other."

As for Casey's Newton and Firth, both of their families are doing well. Newton now is mentoring another family, and Firth is ready to share her own experiences and success. Her new role, however, won't end her connection to Newton: "I'll still want my mentor to be there for me, always."

YOUTH VOICES FOR CHANGE



In Connecticut, Casey Family Services tapped into its youth groups to help determine its policy goals. The youths also met with legislators and state administrators at the State Capitol.

(Above, left to right): Darlene Dunbar, commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families, and Legislative Program Manager Debra Korta listen to youth share their experiences of living in foster care.



Nationally, policymakers increasingly are turning to current and former youth in state care as a potential resource in reversing the dismal outcomes experienced by many of the more than 20,000 young people who annually “age out” of foster care. With the system inadequately preparing youths for adulthood, administrators are looking inward for potential solutions. The voices of the youths themselves are changing the perception of foster care and, more important, are helping to improve the foster care system.

This certainly is the case in Connecticut, where Casey Family Services tapped into its youth groups to determine the agency’s 2005 policy priorities. Facilitated by the Casey Connecticut Policy and Advocacy Strategy Group, several focus groups composed of youth currently in care, as well as alumni, were posed questions, including: “If you were talking with your state legislator, the child welfare commissioner, or the governor, what would you say to him or her about your experience in the system?” “What was helpful?” “What was missing?” “What changes would you recommend?”

After honing the focus groups’ input, the issue of family connections, particularly sibling relationships, surfaced as a critical priority. “It was not surprising that the primary issue named by our youth from Casey’s Bridgeport and Hartford divisions was the need to remain connected to their families – especially their brothers and sisters,” says Sania Metzger, Esq., director of policy at Casey Family Services. “The federal Child and Family Service Reviews found that while Connecticut does a satisfactory job of facilitating visits between birth parents and their children in foster care, the state was cited as needing to improve how it facilitates visits between siblings in care.”

The voices of the children and youth themselves are changing the face of foster care and, more important, are helping to improve the foster care system.

Moved by the sincerity and commitment of the youths who participated in the focus groups, Casey's policy group felt that it would be an educational and beneficial process to help connect these youths directly with policymakers. Staff devoted several months to preparing 20 youths to meet with legislators and child welfare leaders at the State Capitol.

For the youths, sharing their story in a healthy way was an empowering experience. Reactions from legislators and administra-

a result of the youths' efforts, the DCF recently earmarked \$200,000 to facilitate and strengthen sibling visits and interaction. For the youths, it was a powerful validation that what they had to say mattered.

The issue of sibling relationships is a common theme for youths in foster care and is becoming a motivation for youth engagement across the country. For example, in Maine, the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT), which is facilitated by the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public

Services. "Maine's Office of Child and Family Services previously had no policy guiding sibling relationships for caseworkers," Burns says. "They turned to our young people for help in developing a policy statement, and it went through the policymaking process largely remaining intact; in fact, it might have been stronger by the end."

Recognizing the learning opportunities for both systems and the youths themselves, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative launched a pilot program in 2003 with the Michigan Department of Human Services to evaluate how public will and policy can be influenced by the voices of youth in care. At the heart of its work, the Wolverine State created 13 county-wide youth advisory boards composed of current and former foster youth. Representatives from each of the youth boards also sit on a youth policy board that was created by Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Human Services director. As a result, the group has developed 15 statements that outline and discuss the concerns of youth in care.

These efforts and many others are testament to the growing realization that kids in care are effective change agents.

Even more significant is the change these youths experience within themselves. "It's so important for youth in care to be directly involved," YLAT's Burns says. "There is a validation that comes from having people understand you and believe that what you say has merit. Also, for everyone, when you do something meaningful that helps people, you have the sense that you have something to offer in this world. Knowing that you can try new things and succeed brings confidence to kids."



Former and current foster youths are joined by Casey Family Services Executive Director Raymond L. Torres (center) during Youth Advocacy Day.

tors were overwhelmingly positive, with several lawmakers promising to put the youths' concerns "front and center" in the next legislative session. More important, several legislators expressed gratitude for the knowledge they had gained, admitting they "had no idea" about the extent to which siblings lost touch with each other in the system.

A follow-up meeting with Darlene Dunbar, commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), brought welcome news to the youth and policy groups. Dunbar revealed that, as

Service, repeatedly has ranked sibling relationships as one of its policy priorities.

"Each year, we do a leadership summit with our young people," says Penthea Burns, who coordinates YLAT and its activities to empower and connect children in care. "Brothers and sisters are always at the top. Young people talk sincerely about the degree of loss in their lives when they are separated from siblings who know about their experiences within the birth family."

YLAT, an extension of a statewide life-skills effort, works to promote and advance state policies that enrich the lives of children in care. In the case of sibling relationships, the youths have been a resource for state offi-

INTEREST IN ADOPTION BY WOMEN SHOWING MARKED INCREASE



In a promising trend, interest in adoption among women rose 38 percent in the United States, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute. In research commissioned by the National Adoption Day Coalition, the Urban Institute studied the most recent results of the federal government's National Survey of Family Growth, which showed that more women are considering adoption as a way of growing their families. The report and its findings helped kick off National Adoption Day on November 19, 2005, in New York City. Casey Family Services is a founding member of the adoption coalition.

In 2002, 18 million women – ages 18 to 44 – reported an interest in adoption (up from 13 million in 1995). Of those, approximately 760,000 reported that they currently were seeking to adopt – up from approximately 500,000 women in 1995. Data also revealed an interest in adopting minority, special needs, and older children. Ninety-seven percent of the women surveyed said they would be willing to adopt a minority child, while nearly a third (31 percent) said they would be willing to adopt an older child. Ninety percent of women currently seeking to adopt said they would be willing to adopt a child with a mild disability.

While interest is on the rise, the portion of women interested in adoption who actually took steps to adopt declined. Approximately 10 percent (1.9 million) of interested women took steps to adopt – down from 16 percent (2.1 million) in 1995.

“The rise in interest in adoption is wonderful news for the children currently available for adoption in our foster care system,” says

Raymond L. Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services. “Now we must work to ensure that the adoption process is accessible and easy to navigate so that we can connect these women and their families to waiting children and offer post-adoption services as well.”

Adoption plays an ever-increasing role in the nation's child welfare system, providing youth in foster care a lifelong and legal connection to a loving and caring family. This allows them to leave the system in a supported and healthy way.

THE RISE IN INTEREST IN ADOPTION IS WONDERFUL NEWS FOR THE CHILDREN CURRENTLY AVAILABLE FOR ADOPTION IN OUR FOSTER CARE SYSTEM.

Growing interest in adoption may be a reflection of the concerted efforts made by the federal government and individual states to raise awareness of those children in foster care in need of permanent connections to caring and stable families.

In addition to adoption, there are several options for children in foster care to develop lasting and significant relationships with families, including reunification with the birth family, a lifelong connection to a foster family, guardianship, and kinship care, Torres points out.

While the Urban Institute study kicked off 2005's National Adoption Day activities,

judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare agencies, and advocates in 45 states and the District of Columbia helped to finalize the adoptions of more than 3,300 children from foster care on November 19. During the celebration, 227 events were held throughout the country to either finalize adoptions or to honor families who had adopted.

According to the National Adoption Day Coalition, there are approximately 523,000 children in foster care in the United States, and 119,000 of them are available for adoption. Since 1987, the number of children in foster care has nearly doubled, and the average time a child languishes in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years. Each year, more than 20,000 children in foster care will “age out” of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family.

In an effort to promote adoption and the full array of permanency options for children in foster care, National Adoption Day sponsors already are looking to the 2006 observance, hoping to build on the momentum of this grass roots celebration and connect more children with adoptive families.

National Adoption Day events are sponsored by a six-year-old coalition dedicated to improving the lives of children, including the Alliance for Children's Rights, Casey Family Services, Children's Action Network, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Freddie Mac Foundation, and Target Corporation.

To access the full report, please visit the National Adoption Day website (www.nationaladoptionday.org) or the Urban Institute website (www.urban.org).



MICHAEL PIRAINO, CEO, NATIONAL CASA

Close-up

Michael Piraino has served as chief executive officer of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association since 1994, overseeing projects such as a nationwide grants program that provides millions of dollars in funding for volunteer advocacy programs, a new 40-hour comprehensive volunteer training curriculum, a national quality assurance program, a major multi-site evaluation project, and national public relations efforts. The mission of National CASA, together with its state and local members, is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes. Piraino has law degrees from Cornell and Oxford universities. While practicing law, he represented children as a Guardian ad Litem and served as a consultant to international social services and child advocacy organizations in Europe and Southeast Asia. Piraino also has worked as a juvenile probation officer and was an associate research scientist for the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University.

VOICE: *As we go to press, the outlook for vulnerable children and families following the passage of the budget in Congress is bleak. What are your thoughts and predictions about the plight of child welfare as a result?*

PIRAINO: I'm very concerned, and I do think that some of the consequences will be hidden for some time. We really have to be worried about whether or not there is a trend toward capping funds that deliver services and supports to children and families. Kids today have more needs now, not less. We are underfunding some of those needs. For example, there is a methamphetamine epidemic in this country today. We know there are some adolescents for whom there are no treatment services at all. We cannot do the job of protecting children on the cheap. Yet financial decisions are set up as short-term decisions, and this precludes

long-term thinking. Short-term thinking shortchanges prevention, whether it's primary or not.

VOICE: *What are your views regarding the need for funding the "front end" of services to keep as many children as possible safely with their birth families or kin?*

PIRAINO: We put an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. If we hear, for example, that in some jurisdictions the child protection agencies have not done a thorough job of exploring the father's side of the family for potential kinship placements, we encourage the advocate to be alert to that issue, identify it, and raise it early enough so it doesn't prevent a timely permanency placement. Every volunteer recognizes permanency as crucial. But there is another side of the discussion as far as volunteers are concerned. Because they put the child's best interest first, they may feel conflicted at times. For example, in cases, where methamphetamine plays a part, we hear volunteers feeling apprehensive about the length of time it will take for parents to deal with such a serious addiction versus the drive for permanency for the child. CASA volunteers do not want the child to be returned too soon.

VOICE: *What are your specific legislative goals for CASA in 2006?*

PIRAINO: We will be setting specific 2006 legislative goals in April. In the meantime, I am sure that our request for background checks to be included in the CASA reauthorization language will be one of our goals, as it was in 2005. We also have been particularly concerned about the reauthorization cap and enthusiastic about a provision for training lawyers who do this work. In general, we have been supportive of the Pew Commission recommendations related to children, and we want to see more educational advocacy work done. We also see the need for improvements in interstate compacts. And we believe that subsidized guardianship is a tremendously valuable tool for kids and a way toward an appropriate placement that is far less destructive than placement with a stranger.



VOICE: *What are your goals for CASA in 2006 organizationally?*

PIRAINO: Our overall objective is a volunteer for every child who needs one. There are 800,000 kids out there who do. Any kids who would have been under the court's jurisdiction for abuse and neglect at any time during the year are eligible for a CASA volunteer or Guardian ad Litem. The majority are in foster care, but there are others as well.

What we have created is a plan to increase the number of volunteers by the end of 2008 by 100,000 a year. Our standards say that a volunteer can work with one or two sibling groups at a time. We know that the median cost of a volunteer to one of our programs is \$38,000 a year. Therefore, by 2008, we need an additional \$40 million in funding.

VOICE: *What are some of the innovative ways you have approached recruitment?*

PIRAINO: Our plan for recruitment is to stay focused on where we can get the biggest return on our investment. We'll look at five urban areas where the need is highest and where there is a solid program base upon which to start, and we'll link with community partners – African-American organizations in particular. For example, in the District of Columbia, we just completed a training program in the community following a very successful recruitment effort. Volunteers went door to door, talked with people, told them about the program, and encouraged them to learn more.

VOICE: *What legal services for children and youth do you see as critically lacking?*

PIRAINO: Older kids in particular are on a train that rapidly is coming to a switch that will send the train in either a positive or a negative direction. We've got to be there to help see that the train goes in the right direction. We've got to find a way to provide quality legal counsel to these kids in a way that is more than just showing up when the trial is set to begin and standing up in court – and calling that adequate representation.

KIDS TODAY HAVE MORE NEEDS, NOT LESS. WE ARE UNDERFUNDING SOME OF THOSE NEEDS. ... WE CANNOT DO THE JOB OF PROTECTING CHILDREN ON THE CHEAP.

One of the critical things kids in child welfare settings need is the earliest possible appointment of legal counsel, as well as, we would hope, a Guardian ad Litem or CASA volunteer. The earlier the appointment, the better those children will be served, the better the decision making will be, and the better the child will understand what's going on and will have a real voice in the process. We also have to look at lowering case loads and providing attorneys with better training. I recently did a telephone survey, and I found attorneys with case loads from 30 all the way up to the hundreds, even in the 700s in some places. Adults wouldn't put up with representation by some lawyer who

shows up two minutes before a hearing and says that's enough.

VOICE: *A recent study of the probate court system in Connecticut conducted by Casey Family Services noted both the need for more CASA volunteers and the need for additional training for those volunteers. What has CASA done or will it do to address these needs?*

PIRAINO: We're actively recruiting many more volunteers, as I've mentioned, and we have put into place a comprehensive training curriculum. There are some effective sections in our training curriculum that force you into circumstances that test your reactions and your ability to be objective. These include case studies with trainees talking about how they react to aspects of the selected cases. Our training process also is like applying for a job, and it serves as a screening process.

Once volunteers are accepted, they are assigned to a supervisor with whom they interact frequently. The volunteer-supervisor relationship is very close, and it plays an important part in a volunteer's success. We treat the volunteer as a professional, and we expect accountability. We give feedback and support, conduct evaluations, and let people go when necessary.

VOICE: *The majority of young people in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are African-American males. What is National CASA doing to address concerns about racial disproportionality?*



PIRAINO: We are working very hard to recruit volunteers of color. We believe that early intervention in these cases will help to keep kids of color from entering the foster care or juvenile justice systems. To date, we have had very good results among African Americans. In 2004, the number of our African-American volunteers rose by 20 percent. Today, African Americans make up between 17 percent and 18 percent of our volunteer ranks. At the same time, we need to do better in gender diversity; we have more women than men.

VOICE: *A recent survey found that CASA volunteers routinely spend less time with African-American children than they do with Caucasian children. How do you explain that?*

PIRAINO: A study that Caliber Associates conducted did show that our CASA volunteers were spending less time per case on African Americans than on others. And that didn't vary whether the volunteer was African American or not. I looked at the data and, knowing that a volunteer will go to court to represent all children in a family, asked how the finding was derived. I then found out that cases involving African-American families typically tend to have more kids in the same case (siblings) than do cases of other groups. We did the math and found that when you look at the volunteer time spent per child, it is about the same for all ethnicities.

VOICE: *You have taken part in several international discussions on foster care and adoption and have served as a consultant to social services agencies abroad. What can we learn from approaches to child welfare in other parts of the world?*

PIRAINO: While I was living in England in the 1980s, the United Kingdom was looking at American permanency ideas since the Brits were reorganizing national legislation around children and youth. It was exciting because everyone was talking about the most effective child welfare practices in

OLDER KIDS IN PARTICULAR ARE ON A TRAIN THAT RAPIDLY IS COMING TO A SWITCH THAT WILL SEND THE TRAIN IN EITHER A POSITIVE OR A NEGATIVE DIRECTION. WE'VE GOT TO BE THERE TO HELP SEE THAT THE TRAIN GOES IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

other countries and how we could put these practices to work in England. One of the things we were talking about was an added degree of flexibility in placement arrangements. I was very impressed with their drive to have a wider range of recognized permanency options, each of which would be equally supported, including subsidized guardianship, training, and ongoing support. In the United Kingdom, it is helpful that research takes place across systems; this

makes for a more unified approach. All of this would be useful here, but we are reluctant to view the U.K. system as relevant. At the same time, we should remember that the concept of family group conferencing came from New Zealand.

VOICE: *What do you see as some of the greatest challenges facing private child welfare agencies today?*

PIRAINO: It's too rare that innovative ideas can go to scale. The question is how to get the funding to change. There must be more interchanges between people in the field and funders to encourage innovators to stay the course. Another problem is that the field has lost a number of significant funders in child welfare. I also think we have to understand that outcomes and measurements may not be available for many years.

VOICE: *CASA and Casey have joined in several collaborative efforts in this country, including the upcoming National Foster Care Month partnership. What are your objectives for that partnership?*

PIRAINO: The celebration of May as National Foster Care Month is significant because we're all trying to make that experience the best it can be and the most helpful. Then we need to get kids moving toward permanent placement. We have the challenge of moving this kind of collaborative effort beyond just one month. Thus, we need to bring focus to our collaborations.

“I have learned that to be good advocates, we need to wait and listen. Every child is not the same. We must start from a position of ignorance. We must not jump to conclusions.”



For example, if we're trying to kick off a recruitment effort that is to go beyond the span of one month, we all need to ask what we can do throughout the year. We need to ask what are the key times of the year for collaboration and who are the target audiences. And we need to ensure rapid response to our audiences' interest in volunteering, mentoring, or fostering. We need systems.

VOICE: *What drew you to CASA?*

PIRAINO: I was practicing corporate law in Cleveland in the late '70s. I began to do pro bono work as a Guardian ad Litem and really liked it. I thought this might be something worth doing. My wife was a teacher in elementary education and had been involved in children's issues her entire career. I discussed my thoughts with her, and we made the decision together that I would turn my law career in the direction of child and family law.

VOICE: *What have you found most satisfying, personally and professionally, and what has been most challenging?*

PIRAINO: Personally, what this has meant to me is that every evening I come home with a story to tell that gives us all inspiration. I have learned that to be good advocates, we need to wait and listen. Every child is not the same. We must start from a position of ignorance. We must not jump to conclusions (parents do this all the time). We need to hear and learn what others are saying. I think this is so crucial for our own kids and

ONE OF THE CRITICAL THINGS KIDS IN CHILD WELFARE SETTINGS NEED IS THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE APPOINTMENT OF LEGAL COUNSEL, AS WELL AS, WE WOULD HOPE, A GUARDIAN AD LITEM OR CASA VOLUNTEER.

for the kids we work for in the system. It's been inspiring, and I think I'm a better person for having followed this course than I otherwise would have been.

When I think about the challenges, I am reminded of some beautiful words from an African immigrant. In speaking to an audience of young people, he said, "Young people are looking for adults to say to them: 'You are important. You have a future, and your future can be positive.'" Yet so much of what we're telling kids today is just the opposite: "We won't fund enough money for you. We'll call you potential criminals in

the making ..." I know those aren't the actual words we use, but it is what young people are hearing. They hear us say to them, "Our expectations for you are low ... and dismal ..." Too much of the language we use reinforces that view, and it carries over in the way they're treated.

VOICE: *What advice would you give aspiring young law students today?*

PIRAINO: I love to hear kids in law school talk about going into law with a mission that has nothing to do with corporate law and high rates of pay and that has everything to do with making the world better for people who don't have power. Some may ask about careers in this field, and I tell them that the work I do is to help those people who do not have a voice and have no access to power.



Michael Piraino, chief executive officer of National CASA, attends an event featuring the art of youth in care.



EDWARD RENNELLS, NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION DIRECTOR

As the organization's second longest-serving employee, Edward Rennells began his career at Casey Family Services as a social worker in the Hartford Division's foster care program 23 years ago. While at the division, he became the first team leader for Family Reunification Services, an important component of Casey's continuum of permanency services. Currently, he serves as division director in New Hampshire, overseeing Casey's statewide foster care and post-adoption services, in addition to spearheading a number of community-based initiatives.

VOICE: *As Casey Family Services has moved to emphasize the importance of life-long family relationships, how has your division responded in New Hampshire?*

RENNELLS: We are now helping families in different ways – and working with different kids. We recently became an Independent Services Options (ISO) provider with the state, allowing us to work with children – some of them not necessarily in the foster care system – who have a variety of permanency plans. Some kids might be part of a family already, and we can do in-home work, allowing them to remain together. Being an ISO provider allows us to support more people. Casey also is offering training and expertise in assisting other providers and the state in developing a permanency model.

VOICE: *Is the state of New Hampshire embracing permanence?*

RENNELLS: In the past, the state favored the rights of birth parents, which has been a barrier to freeing children for adoption. As a result, a number of children are “aging out” of the system. The New Hampshire

Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) has been working with us on our move to greater permanence, as the agency has undertaken a permanency initiative also.

When I first came to New Hampshire, many kids stayed in foster care. As a result, we had very stable case loads. Now we have a number of kids going through adoption, and, for the first time, we're having conversations about how permanency practices impact our case loads and our referrals. I think it's a positive sign that New Hampshire is moving to support “forever families” for children.

VOICE: *Having moved from Connecticut's capital city to one of the more rural states in the nation, what do you perceive as the differences in providing services in the two diverse areas?*

RENNELLS: New Hampshire has fewer child welfare resources. There is a rural culture here where people drive half an hour to the grocery store or commute 45 minutes to work. So while there is a need for services, there isn't the concentration of people in a location. Thus, agencies are not offering services in many communities.

Over the years, Casey has made a commitment to the people of this state and, therefore, has developed three different sites – Concord, Franklin, and Littleton. To combat rural poverty, we've opened family resource centers in Franklin in partnership with local schools – a community with some of the worst child outcomes in the state.

VOICE: *Would you call the partnership with the Franklin school system a success?*

RENNELLS: Yes. It's been nothing but great.

There's been much cooperation by the school system to address the needs of our kids. From the moment we began this process, the principals and teachers were most helpful. We have filled a void in the community in that children are participating in safe activities that are supervised instead of being on their own after school.

VOICE: *What is Casey's role in the state?*

RENNELLS: We are responsible for 31 percent of all private foster families in the state, which is a significant increase from when we started a decade ago. We work closely with the state and have two contracts to support DCYF with foster family recruitment and retention. In addition to providing the state with technical assistance and support, we work directly with New Hampshire's foster parents, helping to give them a voice on a state level.

VOICE: *New Hampshire has one of the nation's highest rates of racial disproportionality within its child welfare system. What contributes to this phenomenon? What is being done to address inequities?*

RENNELLS: New Hampshire remains a state with very few racial minorities, so if a community has a 0.5 percent minority population, data will show disproportionality even with a small number of children in care. However, it's an issue that the provider community is examining. Casey Family Services and its partners recently held our third statewide diversity conference, and we had a discussion on disproportionality with Bernie Bluhm, an administrator with DCYF who is helping shape a statewide dialogue on responding to inequalities in the system.

MY LIFE. MY CHOICES.

It's my life.

When Tony Shellman took the stage at the November 2005 "It's My Life" Conference, the successful urban fashion executive offered his audience a clear challenge. "The future is in your hands," he said. "You have to make decisions. You have to make the right decisions." Shellman's instructions became the mantra for more than 600 young people attending the three-day event aimed at helping youths in foster care transition into adulthood.

"Growing up in foster care is tough, but you can get through it," Shellman said. As the co-founder of the Enyce Clothing Company and a former foster youth, Shellman shared his spirit of perseverance with a simple reminder: "It's your life."

Helping young people in foster care take control of that life for the better was the aim of the national "It's My Life" Conference, held in Baltimore, Maryland, and sponsored by Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation including Casey Family Services, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. For the past three years, the event has helped youth develop the life skills needed to succeed financially, personally, and professionally as adults. Youth in foster care and alumni from the system joined child welfare professionals from across the country to participate in "It's My Life."

For children raised in foster care, the transition to adulthood without state support can become a terrifying concept, especially for those youths without family or connection to a significant adult in their lives. An estimated 20,000 young people leave the U.S. foster care system each year without a family. Unemployment, homelessness, poverty,



substance abuse, and incarceration often can leave these youths feeling disillusioned and powerless about their circumstances or their ability to change futures, according to David Johnston, senior program associate in life skills at Casey Family Services.

"Young adults have to make decisions," said Johnston, stating the common refrain. "They need to know about the positive options available to them. They need to feel empowered about their choices, and they need to have their voices heard. That's what this conference is all about." Much of the conference's success is based on its inclusion of youth voices. Foster youths and alumni presented nearly one-third of the conference's workshops, offering an invaluable experience for presenters and participants.

A group of entrepreneurial youths from Casey Family Services' Hartford Division shared success stories about operating a small business. Guided by Casey and Street Smart Ventures, the youths have learned important vocational and interpersonal skills by managing Tempting Tasteez, an enterprise that produces fruit smoothies for sale at events throughout Connecticut. Several of

the young people who take part in the business offered tips on launching a business.

In addition to Shellman, the conference offered a full slate of speakers and presenters, many of whom have experienced the foster care system personally. For example, Tyler Bacon, age 19, a board member for the National Independent Living Association, emceed an evening reception. "I learned to turn my struggles into inspiration," he said. "I learned that my past will not dictate my future." A group of youngsters from the FosterClub All-Stars also spoke in a workshop about the need for permanent family relationships. In addition, Chicago-based Uhlich Voices performed for participants. The four-man group uses rap music therapeutically to express the artists' personal experiences while in foster care.

The conference is an extension of Casey Family Programs' It's My Life framework, a strengths-based approach to improving services for youth transitioning from foster and other substitute care. Casey Family Programs is an independent child welfare organization based in Seattle, Washington.

LAYDEN, MODEROW, AND TRANFO RECEIVE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

CASEY HONORS VALUED BOARD MEMBERS

Partnership between the nonprofit and business sectors has a proud history in the United States. And, in recent years, corporations and commercial entities as diverse as U2, American Express, and Microsoft have joined with public and private agencies to address a wide range of social issues and concerns. Behind each of these efforts often are singularly dedicated individuals.

More than 50 years ago, Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, was that engine. He created the Annie E. Casey Foundation – today the largest private philanthropy dedicated exclusively to assisting disadvantaged U.S. children, families, and communities.

Over the years, a tight-knit group of colleagues from UPS has kept Jim Casey's legacy alive, especially at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct service arm, Casey Family Services. At its final meeting of 2005, Casey's Board of Advisors paid homage to three of these champions.

In a heartfelt tribute, Donald W. Layden, Joseph R. Moderow, and Joseph C. Tranfo received the Distinguished Service Award, Casey Family Services' highest honor, in recognition of their unique and profound contributions. "We are proud to honor these fine men," said Executive Director Raymond L. Torres. "They embody the legacy of our founder as they guide our efforts to meet the changing needs of children and families. We are grateful that Don Layden and Joe Tranfo will serve on the Board as emeritus members." Moderow continues as a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees.

A highlight of the November 2005 ceremony was a tribute by David G., a former Casey youth in care. "I work with kids now.



(From left): Donald Layden, Joseph Tranfo, and Joseph Moderow were honored for their dedication to children and families.

It's hard work, but a simple 'thank you' from the kids makes all of the challenges worthwhile," he said. "I want you to know that Casey Family Services always has been there for me, and I offer each of you my thanks."

Donald Layden: Harnessing People Power

Layden started his career at UPS as a teenager and eventually paved the way for UPS to compete in the international marketplace. He came to Casey Family Services in 1978 and played a pivotal role in the agency's development as a provider of long-term foster care. "We knew that with expansion, we would have a greater opportunity to strengthen more families and have a better chance for advocacy," said Layden.

Joseph Moderow: Bridge to the Foundation

Moderow, who retired from UPS as senior vice president of legal and public affairs, general counsel, and corporate secretary in 2003, has been an active Trustee for the Annie E. Casey Foundation since 1987. He served on the Casey Family Services Board for more than a decade, retiring several

years ago. Moderow was the first to describe the special role Casey Family Services plays as the "human face of the Foundation." He saw that in order to have credibility in influencing systems and policy, Casey had to be able to show experience on the ground, bringing about change, one person at a time.

Joseph Tranfo: Guiding Growth

As a member and ultimately co-chairman of the Board of Advisors, Tranfo presided over a remarkable period of growth at Casey Family Services. "We have come a long way in budgetary terms, geographical terms, programmatic terms and staff terms."

Tranfo credits his commitment to Casey Family Services to his admiration for Jim Casey, whom he served as UPS senior vice president for public affairs until his own retirement. "Jim was a remarkable man for two reasons: first, as a businessman and, just as important, as a philanthropist," said Tranfo. "Jim was driven by the idea of helping others help themselves. He recognized that if the family is missing in a child's life, the void is enormous."

FINDING YOUR VOICE

BY
DR. GLORIA WILDER-BRATHWAITE

Photo: NASA-GSFC, data from NOAA GOES

Renowned for her work with the Washington, D.C.-based Mobile Children's Health Clinic, Dr. Gloria, as she is called by her patients, is a fierce advocate for the nation's poor, growing up in poverty herself. She travels the country as an agent of change, determined to eradicate poverty in her lifetime, and challenges all of us to address its root causes, even in this, the richest country in the world. Following are excerpts from an address delivered by Wilder-Brathwaite during Casey Family Services' Hear These Voices Conference, held October 27, 2005, for families affected by HIV/AIDS. Her speech was given with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina still in the forefront of the news.

Let's hit some nails right on the head for the sake of time. Let us acknowledge that the pre-disaster living conditions of the majority of residents of New Orleans were conditions of squalor, [and] these conditions exist

in every major city and county in the United States. We have long been aware of it, and we have failed to address its root cause: poverty.

There can be no doubt that the response in New Orleans would have been different if the faces were white instead of black, but the difference has as much to do with our class bias as with our racial bias. For decades, race has been used as a modifier to allow the elite to consistently ignore the more fundamental issue of class. We expect white people in this country to live in the middle or upper class because historically they always have. In most of our major cities, white children in poverty are an exception to the rule. That does not mean that there are not millions of white families living in or near poverty, but we do not expect that to be the norm. The history of black children and families in this country

from the time of slavery, emancipation, segregation, the civil rights movement to today is that we expect these communities ... to be struggling with chronic generational poverty. [And] our expectations guide our actions.

When America saw New Orleans drowning two days after the hurricane; when we looked at families in deplorable conditions within an athletic stadium and convention center; when we saw people breaking windows for food and breaking laws for no good reason, we saw what we expected, and our response was in kind. We blamed the victim. Instead of seeing need, many in our government saw weakness; instead of seeing pain, we saw anger; and instead of desperation, we saw lawlessness.

These images – which shocked many – left some of us who have worked in the impoverished neighborhoods of our country say-

“Our nation cannot continue to be the most powerful when its citizens are weak. The power of a nation is not measured by the strength of its leaders but by the strength of its weakest members.”

Gloria Wilder-Brathwaite



ing, “We told you so.” Poverty and hunger in the United States are not secrets, and the consequence of poverty is seen in every public program, system, and state in our nation. We all know we have millions of poor struggling in our country to survive, being paid a poverty wage (the minimum wage, which pays just enough to keep you right at the poverty level), begging for food from our pantries, and eating the scraps discarded by our wealthy industries. The medical community knows that millions die of diseases that are preventable or curable because we have not decided their lives are worth saving. The real shock of Katrina was not that Americans were reminded of the reality of America but that the rest of the world was stunned by the realization that the last remaining superpower is tattered and weeping.

We have an absolute and global responsibility to correct this problem now. Our nation cannot continue to be the most powerful when its citizens are weak. The power of a nation is not measured by the strength of its leaders but by the strength of its weakest members.

We must start telling the truth about the working poor in this country and the reality that a living wage is necessary to end the cycle of a permanent underclass. The cycle of poverty in this nation is a vicious cycle, a vortex. ... [And] most of the people trapped in the cycle of poverty never are released, and the vortex gains momentum over generations until there seems to be no way out. The power that drives the plight of the impoverished is held in four basic areas of life: education, health, housing, and food. These basic ingredients of life are

interchangeably linked in the lives of the poor and nearly poor. Prolonged instability in any of these four areas will lead to instability in all of these four areas. They are connected, and they all must be secured in order to afford our citizens the opportunity to improve the conditions of their lives.

When I was 6 years old, this country declared a war on the very thing that was hurting my family: poverty. For the first time in my life, I heard a President say publicly what my mother had said throughout my life: that poverty was wrong. Poverty and all its causes needed to be eliminated, and, for the first time, my country acknowledged that I was not to be excluded from the American dream. Well, as politics go, so went the war on poverty. It resulted in some significant legislation, but there was little change at the level of the street where I lived. However, the effect of the declaration was profound because we began to speak out ... and demand change on our own block. Even if we never directly benefited from this war, we felt justified to declare our rights as citizens, and *opportunity* became not just a word but a path to follow.

W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1903 book *Souls of Black Folk* spoke of poverty. Quoting, Du Bois wrote: “He felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors. To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance.”

Now some 100 years later, we as a people—black, white, and all the colors in between—are still feeling the weight of poverty and ignorance.

Placed on your chairs this morning is a poem by Langston Hughes: “Let America Be America Again.” I would like to share a few passages to carry us forward:

*O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.*

*I am the poor and white, fooled and pushed
apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek -
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.*

*Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today - O, Pioneers!
I am the man, who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.*

*Sure, call me an ugly name you choose -
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's
lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!*

*O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath -
America will be!*

Katrina will forever be known as the period in our history when America failed to care about America. But if we act now, it can also be known as the period when America changed.

I hope we all will pledge to end poverty in our lifetimes. Peace.

“Here Comes the Sun ...”



*Marie Telfort:
Building a New Life
in America*



Marie Telfort, an accounting assistant at Casey Family Services, shares her struggles of living under a corrupt Haitian government.

by Greg Simpson, Case Information System Administrator, Casey Family Services

“In Haiti, there is no agency such as Casey Family Services to care for kids, so children are all over the streets,” begins Marie Telfort, accounting assistant in Casey’s New Haven headquarters. “It was wonderful for me to see what Casey Family Services does for children and families here. It is an amazing place for me. I like a lot of things about Casey – the people most of all.”

Having sought refuge in the United States, Telfort describes the corruption that caused her to leave her homeland. “As a young person, I wasn’t witness to anything, but by the time I was 20, the troubles in Haiti became more apparent.”

There are three socioeconomic classes in Haiti, Telfort explains, adding that she was born into a lower-class family in a Port-au-Prince suburb, along with four brothers and two sisters. When she married, she became middle class, and by the time she and her family left the country, she had elevated to the upper strata due to her husband’s career.

Being in a position of privilege did not come without a steep price. Telfort’s husband, Chavenet, a certified public accountant by profession, became involved in uncovering corruption. As a result, the family says it became the target of persecution.

After years of harassment, Telfort decided to take her family to America. In 1998, she took a trip to see friends in Connecticut, but, at the time, she knew she never would return to Haiti. As her two children, Evengelica and Elizabeth, stayed with their maternal grandparents in Port-au-Prince and her husband was in hiding, Telfort worked to bring them to the United States. Within months, the family was reunited. “If we had stayed in Haiti, none of us would be alive now,” Telfort reflects solemnly.

Despite the distance from her homeland, she shares her culture with her children, who can understand Creole and speak some French. While the family enjoys Haitian food, her youngsters are hesitant to learn about the country’s misunderstood religion.

“Voodoo is a religion, just like Catholicism or Protestantism, though it is based on spirit,” Telfort says, admitting it is not something she practices. “My kids are afraid of voodoo. People associate it with black magic or something very negative. However, voodoo is very much a part of Haiti’s Independence Day celebration. It helped free the slaves.” Voodoo priests, finding inspiration from their oracle, launched a revolution against French colonialists in 1791, finally winning independence in 1804.

Telfort also tries to instill a sense of optimism in her children about the future, drawing on the example of her family and

friends still in Haiti. “I miss the people in there,” she says. “They have so much faith that things will improve, even when so many of them are poor and have nothing. You can look in their eyes and see that they believe in something better.”

Of course, she adds, “What I miss most is the warmth of the island sun.”

While Telfort had visited the United States many times before her immigration, she found relocating a difficult adjustment. “Everything we had was in Haiti,” she says. “We had to start over completely. We went from having a nice house to living in a friend’s house. And we had left our friends behind. It was difficult, but we had no choice.”

Despite their struggles, eight years later, it would seem that Telfort and her family are living the iconic American dream of finding opportunities through hard work. Unable to finish college in Haiti, Telfort earned her associate’s degree in America and plans to work toward a bachelor’s degree in accounting at the University of New Haven. She and her husband also had their third child last November, and they both plan to apply for U.S. citizenship.

Today, the family is appreciative. She and her husband – a former financial analyst for Save the Children, which operates programs in Haiti – volunteer to help families apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit through tax clinics sponsored by Casey’s Bridgeport Division. “It’s our way of saying thanks and sharing a piece of the sunshine that brightens our hearts.”

TRADITIONS CAN CHANGE A LIFE



by Ginny Stephan, Foster Care Alumni of America

The holidays always give us time to reflect on our memories. Often, they are positive reflections filled

with traditions held by our family and relatives, and they can make us feel special and connected. However, reviewing the past can be a painful experience for foster and adoptive youth who have survived trauma and neglect. Fortunately, foster and adoptive parents have a unique opportunity to make a difference for these youth by helping them develop healthy traditions in their own lives.

Foster and adoptive parents play an important role in forming traditions for the children in their families. Traditions give these children and youth security, identity, and stability. Misty Stenslie, Foster Care Alumni of America director, believes that rituals and traditions are claiming behaviors. “Traditions say, ‘you belong to us, and we belong to you, right here and now,’” she says.

Stenslie also says that it is important for foster and adoptive youth to claim traditions, even ones that pre-exist in a foster or adoptive family, as their own. “This sends the message to the youth that they can carry on traditions with their own family someday,” she says. “The ability to pass on what is good and right in your family is what helps youth create something wonderful in their future.”

While some children might enter a foster or adoptive family without family traditions they remember, some might come into a new home with long-held rituals they would like to keep. By embracing these family traditions, the foster/adoptive family

can smooth transitions and create a positive step in helping youth reframe their heritage. In order to help heal generational heartbreaks, foster and adoptive youth need to embrace past, existing, or new experiences to pass on to their own children in time.

Talking about the value of traditions and creating them are totally different. In order to support kids, foster and adoptive parents need solid, actionable ideas. Here are seven suggested traditions.

ALL KIDS WANT TO FEEL CONNECTED AND BELONG TO A FAMILY, AND TRADITIONS ARE A GOOD START.

1. Scrapbook: This craft project should include any past pictures, as well as pictures of a child’s first day with your family, first day of school, field trips, family outings, birthdays, holidays, other family members, proms, and, most of all, notes of encouragement from significant people in their lives.

2. Memory Box: I just made my first memory box at the age of 37. I reflected on all the items I could have put in this special place—about the size of a boot box. Children can decorate the outside with decoupage, markers, buttons, tiles, stickers, feathers, or anything that they feel represents them.

3. Stepping Stones: These do-it-yourself kits to make personalized garden stones are sold at craft stores and are easy to use, allowing children to design stepping stones to their own liking.

4. Celebration Plate: This is a tradition that I just learned about, and I plan to try it. Buy a special plate that has stars or spells “celebration” on it. At dinnertime, several times a month (depending on how many people are in your family), place the plate in front of any family member. All the other members of the family say something special about that particular person. The honored individual gets to talk about his or her day without interruptions.

5. Birthday Dinner Out: The child gets to choose his or her favorite restaurant and goes out to dinner with foster parents or the whole family. This becomes an opportunity to bond, share, and learn more about each other year after year.

6. Dated Ornaments: This holiday treat is a great tradition and memory for foster children. They can keep these ornaments in their memory box and take them along should they move.

7. Volunteerism: Making meals or preparing gifts for neighbors, family members, or friends are great ways for anyone to help others. As a family, you can volunteer at a soup kitchen or sponsor a needy child.

Savor the memories and traditions you are creating with your foster and adoptive children. All kids want to feel connected and belong to a family, and traditions are a good start.

Foster Care Alumni of America is a nonprofit organization that works to harness the knowledge and strength of the more than 12 million adults who spent time in the nation’s foster care system. To learn more, visit www.fostercarealumni.org.

POLICY CORNER

LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS OF RACIAL EQUITY



by Sania Metzger, Esq.,
Director of Policy,
Casey Family Services

Late in December 2005, as the fitful federal budget reconciliation process was nearing its end, the U.S. House of Representatives convinced the Senate to legislatively terminate an expansive interpretation of Title IV-E foster care eligibility rendered earlier by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in the *Rosales v. Thompson* case. The court's ruling had permitted a child – living with a relative to avoid parental abuse or neglect – to qualify for Title IV-E foster care maintenance payments, even if the child would not have been eligible for Title IV-E as a result of being removed from the home.

This Congressional nullification of the *Rosales* decision sent a message to many child welfare stakeholders that federal support for children living with relatives is not yet a federal priority. Guardianship placements, though recognized as a permanency placement option under the 1997 federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, are not tied to any commensurate funding authorization or appropriation.

While 2006 budget and tax deliberations were unfolding on Capitol Hill, a group of about 45 child welfare stakeholders met in early December to begin an assessment of subsidized guardianship as a public policy to reduce racial disproportionality and to promote racially equitable outcomes, treatment, and services in child welfare. Attendees at this consultative session expressed their concern about children of color who are being cared for by family



IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE KATRINA'S DEVASTATION OF THE GULF REGION, ONE WOULD HOPE THAT A FOCUS ON RACE AND ETHNIC FAIRNESS WILL BE ROUTINELY FACTORED INTO ANY POLICY DISCUSSIONS IMPACTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

resources – grandparents, relatives, “fictive kin,” godparents, tribal and clan connections – without federal support and often with inadequate state support. They expressed dismay about the lack of federal supports for relative caregivers (e.g., subsidized guardianship) and about existing racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities in child welfare. The gathering was hosted by the policy workgroup of the Casey organizations and the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Alliance for Racial Equity, the Children's Defense Fund, and Cornerstone Consulting, Inc. to assess subsidized guardianship as a policy and practice

to promote permanency and to reduce racial disparities in child welfare. Presenters and participants were guided by the following questions:

1. What has been the history of subsidized guardianship in communities of color (African American, Native American, and Latino)?
2. What is the evidence/data to suggest that subsidized guardianship programs improve racial equity in child welfare outcomes?
3. What are the potential benefits and liabilities – if any – of advocacy strategies that

Affected states will either have to use state revenues to cover the cost of providing foster care maintenance to continue the placement of children in the home of a relative or utilize a non-Title IV-E Federal funding source.



highlight the intersection of policies that support kinship care, subsidized guardianship, and racial equity in child welfare?

4. What action steps are recommended to promote policy discussion of subsidized guardianships through the lens of racial equity?
5. What are the roles of parents, youth, and other community stakeholders in advocating for permanency for youth through subsidized guardianship and for racially equitable outcomes?

Prior to the discussion, Khatib Waheed from the Center for the Study of Social Policy updated participants on the work of the Alliance for Racial Equity. The session then began with scholarly presentations by Robert Hill, Ph.D., of Westat, Inc.; Sandra Chipungu, Ph.D., of Howard University; and Carol Spigner, D.S.W., of the University of Pennsylvania. Each examined the structural racism antecedents of disproportionality and disparities in child welfare, the demographics of relative caregivers in child welfare, and the historical evolution of relative caring within African American, Native American, and Latino families and communities. The presentation of well-documented traditions and data made it clear that relative caregivers are not a new

phenomenon in communities of color but rather are an integral component of the cultural survival mechanism these communities developed in their ongoing efforts to overcome legacies of conquest, slavery, and colonization.

The morning session was followed by two outstanding panels, one focused specifically on the history, status, opportunities, and challenges of viewing advocacy for federally subsidized guardianships through a race equity lens. Mary Lee Allen of the Children's Defense Fund started the panel session off with an insightful discussion of advocacy efforts to promote support for relative caregivers. She underscored the fact that subsidizing guardianships is one of several policy strategies to ensure that more children in foster care—and children of color in particular—are able to remain connected to their family. Afternoon panelists included child welfare experts and stakeholders from the states of Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, where promising state practices are at various stages of implementation and evaluation.

A relative caregiver from the Pennsylvania team spoke movingly about the day-to-day responsibilities of serving as a guardian and the tension that arose for her in supporting the children's mother on the one hand and wanting to provide stability and permanency for the children on the other hand. This stimulated an interesting exchange between alumni, relative caregivers, parents, and other participants. Illinois' Leslie Cohen, for example, reported that her state has applied for a federal waiver extension to integrate life skills and transitional services into its ongoing effort to promote permanency for youth in care through subsidized guardianship.

The Tennessee experience also was extremely relevant to the central focus of the convening because a consent decree in that state has resulted in the establishment of a Research Taskforce on Racial Equity in Child Welfare. This group is poised to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of exciting new initiatives that support children being cared for by relatives outside of the foster care system, including the state's use of its Title IV-E waiver to subsidize guardianships and provide post-permanency supports to youth being raised by relatives.

The planners of the consultative session prioritized the inclusion of the voices of parents, grandparents, alumni, and other relative caregivers. The presence of birth families, kin, and youth helped ensure that the difficult policy and practice issues were explored.

At the conclusion of the day, participants unanimously agreed to meet again in order to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the potential of subsidized guardianship for reducing disproportionality and disparate outcomes in child welfare.

The lens of racial equity—used in the exploration of policies that will shorten the length of stay, improve stability and a sense of familial connectedness, and serve as a diversion of children from placement in foster care—will be beneficial to the child welfare system as a whole. Moreover, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the Gulf region and of New Orleans in particular, one would hope that a focus on race and ethnic fairness will be routinely factored into any policy discussions, especially those impacting vulnerable children and families.

WHAT IS ... A PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSIS?

DIALOGUE

Sharing Perspectives on Research, Practice, and Policy



by Gretta Cushing, Ph.D.,
Senior Research Associate,
Casey Family Services

When Christopher's problems in school just won't stop, you decide it is time for him to visit a mental health professional. He is diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Unsettled, you think to yourself: "He has a psychiatric disorder – that must be really bad!" What may not be apparent immediately are the benefits of a diagnostic assessment.

Benefits and Risks

A diagnostic assessment is a valuable tool in understanding and treating mental health problems. By making a diagnosis, Christopher's mental health professional can draw upon a standing body of knowledge about ADHD and ODD to choose specific medications and therapeutic interventions that have been helpful for youth who have these specific diagnoses.

Psychiatric diagnoses also alert mental health professionals to problems that are more common among children with a specific condition. Because he has been diagnosed with ADHD, Christopher is more likely than other children to have low self-esteem, academic problems, and difficulty getting along with others. If these problems are identified and addressed, Christopher's outcomes may be improved.

There is good news for his parents, too.

Christopher's challenges may not seem so mysterious when they are given a name and when parents learn that other children and parents have dealt with them before.

A diagnostic system organizes individual symptoms and names particular patterns of mental health problems, enabling mental health professionals to accumulate knowledge, develop interventions, and communicate using a shared language.

Although the intent of the diagnostic system is simply to provide a common language to classify patterns of symptoms and behaviors that people experience, negative connotations may become attached to the terms that are used. Diagnosed children and adults may be labeled or perceived differently by others as a result of stigma. A psychiatric diagnosis may even influence how those who are diagnosed see themselves. Those working with Christopher may need to address how he and others understand the diagnoses and treatment in order to ensure this risk is minimized.

Development of a Common Diagnostic System

The development of a common diagnostic system has been an enormous undertaking, spanning more than 50 years, and it continues to evolve today. Currently, mental health professionals diagnose children and adults based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders–IV–Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)* as established by the American Psychiatric Association in 2000. Improvements over time include an increased emphasis on observable behaviors and symptoms, the inclusion of standard

criteria for making diagnoses, and a greater use of empirical evidence to inform the work.

Defining "Mental Disorder"

The definition of "mental disorder" used to guide decisions about which conditions to include in the *DSM-IV-TR* emphasizes individual distress and impairment in functioning. Because of this emphasis, psychiatric diagnoses usually indicate that the problems experienced go beyond typical, everyday stress. If Christopher's problems were similar to those of most other kids in frequency and severity, it is not likely that he would be diagnosed.

Although the term "mental disorder" seems to imply a difference between a psychiatric problem and a physical one, this is not necessarily the case. Just as psychological factors can influence medical illnesses, psychiatric disorders also can have physical underpinnings. For example, environmental, neurological, and psychological factors are associated with ADHD.

One Piece of the Puzzle

While psychiatric diagnoses convey meaningful information, they do not tell the whole story. An understanding of the contexts in which mental health problems developed is important, as are the strengths of the individuals, families, and communities that may be brought to bear on the challenges. Psychiatric diagnoses are an important piece – but only one piece – of the puzzle in understanding and treating mental health conditions.

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE WORKING TOGETHER:

Rhode Island's Family Economic Success Initiatives



by Carol H. Ripple, Ph.D.,
Senior Research Associate,
Casey Family Services

For more than a decade, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has been offering comprehensive resources to vulnerable neighborhoods through its Family Economic Success (FES) initiative. FES supports low-income and working families in building stronger financial futures. Through its Family Resource Centers (FRC), Casey Family Services plays an important role in the Foundation's broad strategy, developing partnerships and evaluating the needs of families within the communities it serves.

Staff members at the Casey Family Services' Family Resource Center in Providence, Rhode Island, are listening closely to the needs of the community. And what they are hearing is that financial struggles in the surrounding Washington Park neighborhood pose a serious threat to the well-being of children and families.

Rhode Island Division staff members are not alone in this observation: Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers across the United States are worried about the far-reaching effects of fiscal distress on low-income families. Although 1996 welfare

reform legislation brought with it the assumption that employment would provide a solution to poverty, research on income sufficiency demonstrates that employment does not always assure a decent standard of living (Waldron, Roberts & Reamer, 2004). According to the Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator, a single parent with two children in the Providence area needs \$42,216

**"I LEARNED HOW TO BUDGET
MY MONEY AND HAVE GOALS
FOR MY SAVINGS."**

— PARTICIPANT

in annual income today to meet the family's basic needs. This figure is more than double the 2005 federal poverty line of \$16,090 for a family of three and far exceeds the median household income of \$26,867 in Providence (2000 U.S. Census).

Poverty is arguably the most pernicious risk that imperils child and family well-being (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Rhode Island Family Resource Center Team Leader Odessie Preston is well aware of the problem: "For many years, I have seen families come into the division requesting services for a variety of issues related to family functioning. ... With few exceptions, the bottom line comes down to the family not having adequate financial resources to gain access to needed goods and services."

Compounding the difficulties of living on minimal resources, low-income families are

vulnerable to predatory lending and high interest rates on debt. Living on the fiscal edge can mean that basic fiscal practices such as budgeting, banking, and savings reflect a level of stability that is difficult to achieve. Indeed, families may not know how to go about finding the path to financial stability both in the short term (meeting expenses and avoiding debt) and in the long term (building assets). This, in turn, perpetuates the cycle: The lack of assets poses a formidable barrier to escaping poverty (Beeferman & Venner, 2001).

Casey Family Services addresses the struggles of low-income families in several ways. Free income tax preparation by trained volunteers who help families claim deductions, such as the federal Earned Income Tax Credit and child credits, has been offered by seven of Casey's eight divisions. Baltimore provides financial literacy workshops and general equivalency diploma and English as a second language classes to help individuals become more employable. The New Hampshire Division is supporting the educational needs of vulnerable youth through its FRCs. Centers for Working Families have been established in the Rhode Island and Massachusetts divisions with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family Economic Success initiative.

Staff members at the Casey Family Services' Family Resource Center in Providence, Rhode Island, are listening closely to the needs of the community. And what they are hearing is that financial struggles in the surrounding Washington Park neighborhood pose a serious threat to the well-being of children and families.

The Foundation's broad goal for FES is to increase financial literacy and promote savings by building skills and changing behaviors across three domains: *resources and connections* to meet basic family needs, emergencies, and aspirations for improving quality of life; ongoing investments in *lifelong learning*; and *asset building*, such as a home and retirement accounts (the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Individual FES programs choose specific domains as their focus.

The first Casey Family Services FES program began in Rhode Island early in 2004 with the aim of increasing effective household budgeting and promoting savings among heads of low-income households. By implementing it as a six-month demonstration program—meaning it was time-limited and evaluated—Rhode Island Division staff would apply the lessons learned to future FES program planning. The evaluation was designed to examine participant outcomes and develop recommendations for program development.

A small group of seven participants was selected from the center's family support program "whose day-to-day life [was] more predictable and settled" so that they were "less reactive" to life events than many of the families served. This was not to say that participants were at all financially well-off but more that their lives were not in perpetual crisis nor consumed by mental health issues. All, however, struggled to meet the

most basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Program activities included monthly workshops; Individual Development Accounts (IDA), in which Casey provided a matched savings of up to \$1,000; and ongoing case management. Case management was the main focus and was the most time-intensive aspect of this program, with professionals

"I LEARNED A LOT OF THINGS THAT I DIDN'T KNOW — LIKE YOU CAN GET A FREE CHECKING ACCOUNT."

— PARTICIPANT

supporting families in reaching specific goals and addressing vital issues. Staff met with each participant for one-half to two hours each week.

Outcome evaluation findings showed widespread gains among participants. They developed family budgets and learned how to monitor and manage expenditures. Changing spending behaviors was challenging. "[My kids] got mad at me [when I wouldn't give them money for Burger King]," notes one participant, and, "It was hard to stick to the budget." All but one met their goal — a notable achievement considering they had not put money aside before the program. Participants cited the program for motivating them to save and instilling the belief that they *could* save toward a goal. Reviewing their credit

reports and challenging some of the charges that they thought were in error contributed to their sense of confidence and efficacy. Participants were still saving and budgeting in follow-up interviews six months after the program, suggesting that there may be long-term benefits.

Gains among participants were encouraging, and staff members were enthusiastic about the program. However, evaluation findings reflected staff concerns about the feasibility of the program model. The intensive case management approach sometimes left staff feeling overwhelmed. Workers were committed to keeping the participants involved, sometimes providing transportation, making home visits, and arranging child care. Some very low-income families had a particularly hard time realizing meaningful fiscal gains. Some participants did not realize the full impact of the IDA match until they had received the money—after the program had ended. This was seen as a missed opportunity. The match could have worked as a potent motivator had it been disbursed while the program was still running.

When a second FES intervention was planned for the fall of 2005, the staff was ready to apply the lessons learned. This time, the aim was to engage working families who were struggling with debt by focusing on credit repair and debt management

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE WORKING TOGETHER:

RHODE ISLAND'S FAMILY ECONOMIC SUCCESS INITIATIVES



Casey Family Services' Family Resource Center in Rhode Island reaches out to families seeking to improve financial skills and build assets.

in a 12-month program. "They're never going to get ahead if they can't learn about ... credit and debt management," observes Preston. In keeping with the demonstration model, evaluation is again integral.

The program has engaged 11 families in workshops, plans for saving and spending, a one-to-one IDA match from Casey, and credit repair. Based on the lessons from the previous program, half of the match will be distributed at the program's midpoint, provided that it is applied to debt. Rather than intensive case management, this model is based on coaching and information sharing. The target population also is different. Selection criteria related to employment, agreement to engage in program activities, and fiscal status were used to recruit relatively more stable participants. All had minimum debts of \$1,000 and had to agree to contribute at least \$25 monthly to reduce debt.

According to Preston, staff members are finding that the cases are extremely complex, and "the families are mired in debt." The previous model was mostly focused on saving, which, by comparison, was a much more straightforward goal. Now, money management and credit issues sometimes mean exposing multiple sources of debt, engaging in lengthy credit repair, and working closely with the local Consumer Credit Counseling Service. Sometimes, this also requires legal advice through the center's legal clinic collaboration with Roger Williams University School of Law. In the

"A COUPLE OF WOMEN HAD NO IDEA HOW MUCH INTEREST THEY WERE PAYING ON CREDIT CARDS."

— CASEY STAFF MEMBER

case of recent immigrants, debt may be international. One couple who recently immigrated is working to clear debts accrued before coming to the United States.

"The timing couldn't be better for information and education toward developing good credit," says social worker Steve Henry. When introduced to the Consumer Credit Counseling Service, one participant comments that she "never knew there were places like this to help you figure everything out."

Although the model was designed to engage community partners to deliver services, developing collaborative partnerships can be

challenging. "A lot of our community is made up of factory workers and immigrants," Henry observes, and finding partners willing to offer bilingual services in the evenings and weekends has proved difficult.

Preston sees the potential for long-term gains in spite of the challenges: "My hope goes beyond the reduction of present debt and credit issues. I hope this is the beginning of lifelong learning regarding finances, creditworthiness, and the need to plan for major expenditures." Without programs like these dedicated to reaching families in financial distress, it seems likely that the needs simply would go unaddressed. The focus on fiscal well-being holds promise to improve the strength of families who want nothing more than to provide a safe, stable, and secure life for their children.

References

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2003). *An overview of family economic success*. Baltimore, Md.: Author.
- Beeferman, L.W., & Venner, S.H. (2001). *Promising state asset development policies: Promoting economic well-being among low-income households. A resource guide for policymakers and the public*. Waltham, Mass.: Asset Development Institute, Center on Hunger and Poverty.
- Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G.J. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *Future of Children*, 7 (2), 55-71.
- Waldron, T., Roberts, B., & Reamer, A. (2004). *Working hard, falling short: America's working families and the pursuit of economic security*. Baltimore, Md.: the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Resource



Child Welfare for the 21st Century: a Handbook of Practices, Policies, and Programs

This up-to-date and comprehensive resource by leaders in child welfare reflects on the impact of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 on child welfare practice and policy. The text, edited by Gerald Mallon and Peg McCartt Hess, serves as a single-source reference for a wide array of professionals who work in child welfare, as well as policymakers. This guide is organized around ASFA's guiding principles of safety, permanency, and well-being and includes data from the first round of *Federal Child and Family Service Reviews*. Topics explored include child and adolescent well-being, child and adolescent safety, permanency for children and youth, and systemic issues in child welfare. Stephanie Gosteli, senior program associate at Casey Family Services, is a contributor to this reference book, offering an article on reunification issues.

For more information, telephone Columbia University Press at 800.944.8648 or visit www.columbia.edu/cu/cup.

Casey Connects Winter 2006

Casey Connects is a newsletter that reports on current activities of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its grantees. The winter issue focuses on the impact and influence of Casey's work to promote reforms in juvenile detention practices. The publication also highlights some of the exciting work going on in the Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative sites and in other

reform efforts. The issue also recognizes recent honors and accomplishments of staff and grantees.

To learn more or to download the PDF file, visit www.aecf.org.

Beyond the Tunnel Problem: Addressing Cross-Cutting Issues that Impact Vulnerable Youth

This series examines how the systems of public education, juvenile justice, and child welfare can work in better coordination to address the needs of youth who often are impacted by more than one system at a time. The series provides information on the scope of the "tunnel problem," which refers to the fixed path many children must travel when they enter a system. It also offers recommendations for how funders and policymakers can support better collaboration between systems and youth-serving organizations at the federal, state, and local levels. Current briefing papers produced as part of the series include "Youth and Cross-Cutting Problems" and "Redirecting Youth from the School-to-Prison Pipeline." The series is sponsored by the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG), a network of grantmakers helping vulnerable youth make a successful transition to adulthood, in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

To view the series of YTFG briefs, visit www.ytfg.org/spotlight.html.

Learning Curves: Education Advocacy for Children in Foster Care

This book, by Kathleen M. McNaught, is a culmination of an article series that appeared in the American Bar Association's *Child Law Practice* and addresses numerous topics of use to advocates for children in foster care, including: general education advocacy strategies; education rights and key federal laws; special education process; educational needs of young children; how school discipline policies impact children in foster care; and creative approaches to address education barriers for children in foster care. It includes at-a-glance practice tips, commonly used psychological tests, education advocacy resources, and excerpts from key federal laws and regulations.

To order, visit www.abanet.org.

Under the CFK Umbrella Blog

Connect for Kids (CFK) is an Internet-based organization that is giving families, service providers, and policymakers the tools and information they need to improve the lives of children, youth, and families. Recently, Executive Director Cecilia Garcia and staffer Susan Phillips launched a blog, "Under the CFK Umbrella," to engage readers in a discussion on news and events that affect children and teens.

To view the blog, visit www.connectforkids.org/blog.

What the Media Say



Above: Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director, leads the kick-off celebration of National Adoption Day in New Haven, Connecticut

Right: Actress Victoria Rowell, national spokeswoman for National Foster Care Month, and Academy Award-winner Jamie Foxx attend a recent benefit for the Entertainment Industry Foundation's National Arts and Music Education Initiative. Rowell's own philanthropy, the Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan, helps foster youth through fine arts, sports, and job opportunities. Adopted from foster care, Foxx says: "Victoria keeps me connected to foster care and adoption issues." Rowell recently was awarded her 11th NAACP Image Award.



"paycheck" at the end of every week, with points given for a variety of good behaviors. Students can bank their earnings and buy items like school supplies or go on a pizza outing with friends. This fall, Casey has also put a new focus on helping low-income parents manage their finances, hosting evening panel discussions on home-buying, debt management and even basics like how to set up a checking account.

The Concord Monitor
December 11, 2005

Savings Program Helps Foster Dreams

Anita Alston and Katrina Lawson are the first two young adults in the nation to buy homes through a new program geared toward teaching former and current foster children the financial skills most young adults rely on learning from parents, siblings, or family friends. "They make the same mistakes that all kids that age make. But when these kids make them, they have more severe consequences because there's nobody to fall back on," said Gary Stangler, executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which is working through local groups in 12 cities with about 1,000 teenagers and young adults who have been in foster care. The Annie E. Casey Foundation provides grants to local organizations that work with foster children and which are able to identify and recruit the young adults eligible to participate in their areas.

The Associated Press
December 10, 2005

Interest in Adoption Rises among Women

The Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based economic and social policy research organization, found that interest in adoption rose 38 percent between 1995 and 2002, among women ages 18-44. Of the women who took steps to adopt children, 66 percent are married, and 73 percent already have children.

USA Today
November 16, 2005

Celebration Draws Attention to Adoption

"There are more and more people learning about adopting, but only 4.2 percent of the

18 million people surveyed [by the Urban Institute] actually took steps forward in the adoption process," said Raymond L. Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services. Adoption advocates hope that the National Adoption Day celebration will inspire people to get involved, if not as an adoptive parent, then as a mentor or tutor for a child who needs support.

The New Haven Register
November 19, 2005

Students Learn the Ins and Outs of the Business World

Junior Achievement adapted its usual school-day business classes for a six-week session at Franklin Celebrates, the after-school program run by Casey Family Services in coordination with the Franklin Middle School. This pilot program, which helps students learn to make wise business decisions, isn't Casey's first venture into helping teach financial management. Since last year, every child in the program gets a

For more important dates, visit www.caseyfamilyservices.org.

2006: Important Dates

Voice is published quarterly by Casey Family Services for child welfare professionals, advocates, and the children and families they serve. The opinions expressed within this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, including Casey Family Services. Casey Family Services is the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization established in 1948 by UPS founder Jim Casey and his siblings in honor of their mother.

The Foundation is dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Started in 1976, Casey Family Services offers quality foster care, post-adoption services, family reunification, family preservation, family advocacy and support, family resource centers, assistance to young families and families affected by HIV/AIDS, and technical assistance through the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice.

The mission of Casey Family Services 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 practice and sound public policy.

Executive Director: Raymond L. Torres

Director of Communications: Lee Mullane

Public Affairs Manager/Managing Editor: Roye Anastasio-Bourke

Writer/Editor: John Hodgins

Contributing Writers: Gretta Cushing, Sania Metzger, Carol Ripple, Greg Simpson, Ginny Stephan, Gloria Wilder-Brathwaite

Design: Inergy Group

Extending the Conversation

With a vision of sharing ideas and insights, *Voice's* editorial staff welcomes feedback from its readers. Please feel free to contact us with your story ideas, requests for additional information on topics covered, and updated subscription information. The editor can be reached by sending an email to voice@caseyfamilyservices.org or calling 203.401.6940.

April

National Child Abuse Prevention Month
Prevent Child Abuse America
www.preventchildabuse.org

April

Casey Family Services Celebrates 30 Years of Service
www.caseyfamilyservices.org

April 1-4

2006 National Court Appointed Special Advocate Annual Conference
San Diego, California
www.casenet.org

April 2-5

24th Annual Protecting our Children Conference
National Indian Child Welfare Association
San Diego, California
www.nicwa.org

May

National Foster Care Month
www.fostercaremonth.org

May 1-5

36th Annual Education Conference
National Foster Parent Association
San Antonio, Texas
www.nfpainc.org

May 21-24

Prevent Child Abuse America
2006 National Conference
San Diego, California
www.preventchildabuse.org

May 31-June 2

2006 Juvenile Justice National Symposium
Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
San Francisco, California
www.cwla.org

June 27

2006 *KIDS COUNT* Data Book released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org

June 27-28

2006 Youth Conference
Casey Family Services
Storrs, Connecticut
www.caseyfamilyservices.org

June 29

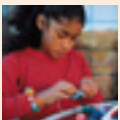
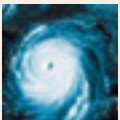
Young Fathers Conference
Casey Family Services and the Maryland Regional Practitioner Network for Fathers & Families
Baltimore, Maryland
www.caseyfamilyservices.org

September 14-15

2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence
Casey Family Services
Washington, D.C.
www.caseyfamilyservices.org

Voice

In This Issue



- i** Executive Director's Message
- 2** Exchange:
You've Got a Friend: New Hampshire Mentor Program Helps Foster Parents
Youth Voices for Change
Interest in Adoption by Women Showing Marked Increase
- 6** Close-up: Michael Piraino, CEO, National CASA
- 10** Casey Close-up: Edward Rennells, New Hampshire Division Director
- 11** News & Highlights
- 16** Perspectives:
Traditions Can Change a Life
Policy Corner: Looking through the Lens of Racial Equity
- 19** Research Dialogue:
What Is ... a Psychiatric Diagnosis?
Research and Practice Working Together:
Rhode Island's Family Economic Success Initiatives
- 23** End Notes: Resource Corner, What the Media Say, and Important Dates

127 Church Street
New Haven, CT 06510
Telephone: 203 401 6900
Fax: 203 401 6901

888 799 KIDS
www.caseyfamilyservices.org