

A publication sharing ideas and insights



THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF
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Voice

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Achieving and Sustaining Loving Families for Life



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From the Executive Director's Desk

At this time of year, our thoughts turn to family more than ever. We enter a season of celebrating family connections, a season that seems to officially begin with Thanksgiving followed closely by Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and the New Year.

But this is also a time when we call attention to those children who are without a family to call their own. In November alone, we observe National Adoption Month, National Adoption Day, and National Family Week.

Throughout National Adoption Month – including National Adoption Day on November 17 – Casey Family Services joined the nation in saluting parents who have adopted children from foster care. This year, following a White House celebration on November 16, more than 250 communities in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico held National Adoption Day events to commemorate nearly 3,500 adoptions.

These achievements are nothing less than wonderful. Yet at the same time, too many children, primarily older children, are left behind. They are either among the 114,000 foster children eligible for adoption but not yet chosen, or the many others considered “too old” to be put on an “adoption track.”

As the 2007 KIDS COUNT essay points out, more than 20,000 young people exit foster care at age 18, alone and disconnected, every year. Many of these youth try to reconnect with birth families, but often find the experience difficult, disappointing, or even impossible, without help. In the end too many find their way into homelessness, drug abuse, pregnancy, or crime.

In contrast, youth who leave foster care with a legal, permanent connection to a family do much better. A study by the Chapin Hall Center for Children shows that having close family ties translated into more kids not only finishing high school, but also enrolling in college; far fewer were on the streets. It's very simple; children do best when they're part of a family forever.

As we celebrate this season, let us save a place in our hearts and minds for the children who still long for a lifetime connection to a loving family. Let us renew our efforts to work toward, and advocate for, better child welfare practices and policies that will give the most vulnerable children in our nation a chance to have what every child needs: a family to love and count on – no matter what.

Raymond L. Torres



Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo

En esta época del año, nuestros pensamientos más que nunca se dirigen a la familia. Estamos entrando al periodo de de celebración de los lazos familiares, una estación que comienza con el Día de la Acción de Gracias, seguidos por Hanukkah, la Navidad, Kwanzaa y el Año Nuevo.

También es el momento cuando damos atención a todos los niños y niñas que quedan sin familia propia. Solo en el mes de noviembre, observamos el Mes Nacional de la Adopción, El Día Nacional de la Adopción, y la Semana Nacional de la Familia.

Durante el Mes Nacional de la Adopción – incluyendo el Día Nacional, el 17 de noviembre – Casey Family Services se juntó con todo el país al reconocer a los padres y madres quienes adoptaron niños y niñas de cuidado de crianza. Este año, después de una celebración en la Casa Blanca el 16 de noviembre, más que 250 comunidades en los 50 estados, el Distrito de Columbia y Puerto Rico, patrocinaron eventos para celebrar a casi 3500 adopciones.

Todos estos logros son nada menos que maravillosos. Sin embargo al mismo tiempo, demasiados niños y niñas, mayormente jóvenes más grandes, quedan atrás aislados. Ellos se encuentran entre los 114,000 hijos de crianza elegibles para la adopción pero todavía no escogidos, o los demás considerados “demasiados grandes” para ser adoptados.

Como demuestra el libro 2007 KIDS COUNT, más que 20,000 jóvenes salen de cuidado de crianza a los 18 años, solos y aislados, cada año. Muchos de ellos intentan reconectarse con sus familias biológicas, pero sin ayuda, encuentran una experiencia difícil, desanimadora, o hasta imposible. Finalmente, muchos de ellos se encuentran sin hogar, con problemas de drogas, embarazos inesperados o la delincuencia.

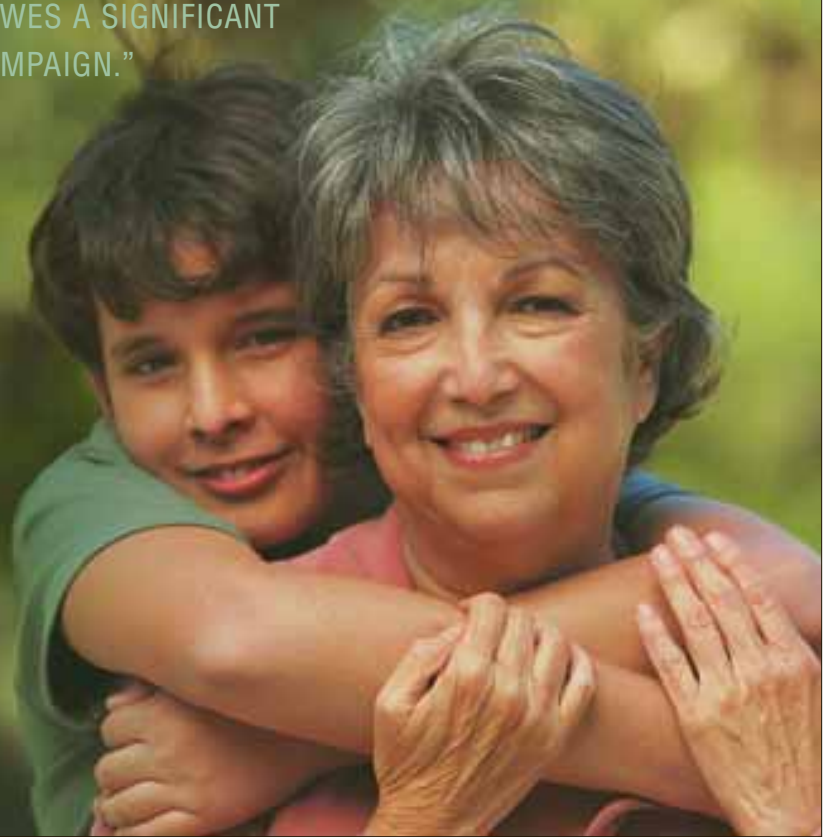
Por el otro lado, los jóvenes que salen de cuidado de crianza con lazos legales y permanentes con una familia, tienden a superarse. Una investigación hecha por Chapin Hall Institute demuestra que el hecho de tener familia se vuelve a una situación donde más jóvenes no solamente completan la secundaria, pero también se inscriben en la Universidad; muchos menos quedan desamparados en la calle. La conclusión es muy sencilla; los jóvenes salen mejor cuando se integran en una familia permanente.

Mientras participamos en las celebraciones de esta temporada, guardemos un espacio en nuestras mentes y en nuestros corazones para los jóvenes quienes anhelan de lazos perdurables con una familia cariñosa. Renovemos nuestros esfuerzos trabajando y abogando por prácticas y políticas en el campo del bienestar de la niñez, para dar a los más vulnerables una oportunidad de lograr lo que cada niño necesita: una familia con la cual puedan contar y amar para siempre.

Raymond L. Torres

“THE GROWING NATIONAL MOVEMENT TO ASSURE A ‘FAMILY FOR LIFE’ FOR EVERY CHILD IN FOSTER CARE OWES A SIGNIFICANT DEBT TO THE NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY CAMPAIGN.”

NATION CELEBRATES ADOPTIVE FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN NOVEMBER



Loving, permanent families for children – sanctioned through legal adoption – received well-deserved national acclaim this November with the celebration of National Adoption Month and National Adoption Day, on November 17. On November 16, President George W. Bush held a White House event to declare the month and note the day as one of celebration nationwide. What began as Adoption Saturday in the community of Los Angeles in 1997 continues to grow exponentially each year and now comprises 250 events across all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Rita Soronen is executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption – one of the founders and collaborative partners of the event. “I’m extremely proud that this year, the event made official the adoptions of nearly 3,500 children,” Soronen states. “We wanted to bring attention to and enhance the image of adoptions from foster care in the United States, and celebrate with these families in unique and supportive ways.”

While many celebrations were held at court-

houses, each community tailored its own event. In Phoenix, Arizona, activities included the finalization of more than 200 adoptions along with free photography sessions for families, face painting, clowns, and a visit from the Phoenix Suns. In New Orleans, the celebration was at the Louisiana Children’s Museum. Events in several cities were hosted by social service agencies.

Nationwide goals of National Adoption Day 2007 included:

- finalized adoptions from foster care in all 50 states;
- celebrations honoring all families who adopt;
- increased awareness of the 114,000 children in foster care waiting for adoption;
- encouragement for others to adopt children from foster care;
- increased collaboration among local adoption agencies, courts, and advocacy organizations; and
- increased understanding of the availability and need for post-adoption services.

While it generally is observed on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, in Columbus, Ohio – where the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is located – the celebration was slated for Wednesday, November 14, so as not to compete with the legendary Ohio State vs. University of Michigan college football game. “Our celebration was at the courthouse, where adoptions were finalized, Soronen notes. “Columbus was a pilot site seven years ago before the celebration went national. I’m very proud of that.”

In November 2000, National Adoption Day sponsors worked with law firms, state foster care agencies, child advocates, and courts to complete hundreds of foster care adoptions in nine jurisdictions nationwide. In November 2001, 17 jurisdictions participated in National Adoption Day. In 2002, 1,350 adoptions were finalized in 34 cities across the country.

In 2003, courts and community organizations in more than 120 jurisdictions coast-to-coast finalized the adoptions of 3,100 children. In 2004, courts and community organizations finalized the adoptions of

more than 3,400 children from foster care with 200 events in 37 states. In 2006, National Adoption Day reached all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, and more than 3,300 adoptions were finalized.

National Adoption Day began as Adoption Saturday by the Alliance for Children's Rights in Los Angeles and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Taking the event national attracted other partners, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation/ Casey Family Services, Children's Action Network (CAN), the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI), and the Freddie Mac Foundation.

"The growing national movement to assure a 'family for life' for every child in foster care owes a significant debt to the National Adoption Day campaign," observed Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director. "We are pleased to have been a part of its success."

Post-Adoption Services Crucial to Families Facing Challenging Dynamics

Children who are adopted from foster care often experience physical, emotional, and behavioral challenges resulting from previous abuse and neglect, as well as loss and grief. For more than 15 years, the Casey Foundation, through Casey Family Services, has been at the forefront of identifying the need for continuing services and supports among foster parents who adopt the children in their care.

In 1991, Casey instituted one of the nation's first formal post-adoption services programs to assist those families. Today, these services include comprehensive counseling, support groups, case management, and educational and advocacy services with families and individuals who have adopted children and need assistance in strengthening and preserving the family.

Casey Family Services went on to host the first National Post-Adoption Services Conference in Washington, D.C., in December 2000. The conference brought together more than 500 administrators, state adoption managers, practitioners, policymakers, advocates, attorneys and judges, mental health professionals, and educators from all 50 states, the District of Columbia,

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY CONTINUES TO MAKE THE DREAMS OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN COME TRUE BY WORKING WITH COURTS, JUDGES, ATTORNEYS, ADOPTION PROFESSIONALS, CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES, AND ADVOCATES TO FINALIZE ADOPTIONS AND FIND PERMANENT, CARING HOMES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.



Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. And, in 2006, Casey hosted the National Convening on Youth Permanence, drawing attention to foster youth's urgent need for enduring family relationships supported by post-permanency services.

Casey views three policy priorities as essential to successful adoptions of special needs children and youth:

1. Adoption-competent services and supports should be available to all adoptive families who need them, regardless of the circumstances of the adoption.
2. A broad network of adoption-competent services and supports should be available in communities, ranging from prevention and early intervention services to intensive in-home or residential treatment services.
3. Adoption-competent services and supports should be available as they are needed by adoptive families at various times throughout a family life cycle, when adoption-related issues surface and impact the child and family's development.

Model Post-Adoption Programs Light the Way

Two other post-adoption programs in the United States also serve as models for best practices in supporting adoptive families, according to Soronen: The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) in Maryland and Virginia; and the Kinship Center in California. Each of these organizations provides deep and multiple post-adoption programs, Soronen points out.

C.A.S.E. addresses clearly identified developmental issues and social-emotional challenges frequently shared by adoptees and their families. Post-adoption involves preventive measures to ensure the preservation of adoptive families.

The Kinship Center in California is a strength-based, family-driven, flexible program committed to permanence and adoption. Goals, developed based on family needs, are identified within regular family team meetings coordinated by a facilitator. Funds are allocated flexibly and targeted to meet the established needs of a family.

“EL CRECIMIENTO DEL MOVIMIENTO PARA ASEGURAR QUE CADA JOVEN EN CUIDADO DE CRIANZA TENGA ‘UNA FAMILIA PARA SIEMPRE’ DEBE MUCHO A LA CAMPANA DEL DÍA NACIONAL DE LA ADOPCIÓN”

DURANTE EL MES DE NOVIEMBRE, EL PAÍS RECONOCE LAS FAMILIAS QUE ADOPTAN A JOVENES EN CUIDADO DE CRIANZA



Las familias cariñosas y permanentes – por medio de adopción legal – recibieron reconocimiento bien merecido durante la celebración del Mes Nacional de la Adopción y el Día Nacional de la Adopción el 17 de noviembre. El día 16 de este mes, el presidente George W. Bush en la Casa Blanca denominó este mes y el día como ocasiones de celebración a nivel nacional. Lo que comenzó como el Sábado de la Adopción en la comunidad de Los Ángeles en el año 1997 sigue creciendo a grandes pasos y ahora abarca los 250 eventos a lo largo del país, incluyendo el Distrito de Columbia y Puerto Rico.

Rita Soronen es la directora ejecutiva de la Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption – una de las fundadoras y colaboradoras del evento. “Me quedo muy orgullosa de que este evento sirvió para finalizar la adopción de casi 3,500 niños y niñas,” dice Soronen. “Nosotros queríamos hacer realizar la imagen de la adopción de niños y niñas en cuidado de crianza y celebrar y apoyar a estas familias.”

Mientras se realizaron eventos en las cortes locales, cada comunidad dio su propia forma a la celebración. En Phoenix, Arizona, las

actividades incluyeron la finalización de más que 200 adopciones con sesiones fotográficas gratis, pintura de las caras, payasos, y una visita de los Phoenix Suns. En New Orleans, la celebración se realizó en el Louisiana Children’s Museum. En algunas ciudades, varias agencias de servicios sociales patrocinaron los eventos.

Las metas nacionales del Día de la Adopción 2007 incluyeron:

- adopciones de niños en cuidado de crianza finalizados de manera definitiva en los 50 estados;
- celebraciones reconociendo las familias adoptivas;
- una conciencia creciente de los 114,000 jóvenes en cuidado de crianza todavía esperando la adopción;
- animación para que otras personas adopten niños en cuidado de crianza;
- colaboración amplia entre agencias locales, las cortes y las organizaciones de abogacía; y
- comprensión creciente en cuanto a la disponibilidad y necesidad de servicios pos-adoptivos.

Generalmente se hace la celebración el sábado antes del Día de Acción de Gracias; sin embargo en Columbus, Ohio, donde está ubicada la Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, se citó la celebración para miércoles 14 de noviembre, para no coincidir con el partido tradicional de fútbol de Ohio State vs. University of Michigan. “Nuestra celebración tomó lugar en el palacio de justicia (courthouse) donde se concluyó en forma definitiva el proceso de adopción,” dice Soronen. “La ciudad de Columbus fue el sitio inicial antes de que la celebración se volvió nacional. Estoy muy orgullosa de ese hecho.”

En el mes de noviembre 2000, los patrocinadores del Día Nacional de Adopción colaboraron con grupos de abogados, agencias estatales de cuidado de crianza, abogados para jóvenes y las cortes para completar las formalidades de cientos de adopciones del cuidado de crianza en nueve jurisdicciones a nivel nacional. En el mes de noviembre de 2001, 17 jurisdicciones participaron en el Día Nacional de la Adopción. En 2002, finalizaron 1,350 adopciones en 34 ciudades.

En 2003, tanto las cortes como las organiza-

ciones comunitarias en más de 120 jurisdicciones finalizaron las adopciones de 3,100 niños y niñas. En 2004, las cortes y las organizaciones comunitarias en más de 120 jurisdicciones finalizaron las adopciones de más que 3,400 niños y niñas de cuidado de crianza en 200 eventos en 37 estados. En 2006, el Día Nacional de la Adopción llegó a los 50 estados, el Distrito de Columbia y Puerto Rico, y finalizaron más de 3,300 adopciones.

El Día Nacional de la Adopción se inició como el Sábado de la Adopción por La Alianza por los Derechos de Niños y Niñas (the Alliance for Children's Rights) en Los Ángeles y la Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Al llegar a nivel nacional, el evento atrajo a otros colaboradores, incluyendo la Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Children's Action Network (CAN), la Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI), y la Freddie Mac Foundation.

“El crecimiento del movimiento para asegurar que cada joven en cuidado de crianza tenga ‘una familia para siempre’ debe mucho a la campaña del Día Nacional de la Adopción,” observó Raymond L. Torres, Director Ejecutiva de Casey Family Services. “Nos complace haber colaborado en este logro exitoso.”

Servicios pos-adoptivos básicos para familias enfrentando problemas desafiantes

Los niños adoptados de cuidado de crianza experimentan desafíos físicos, emocionales y de comportamiento, resultando de abuso y negligencia previa, y también de un sentido de pérdida y tristeza. Durante más que los 15 años, la Fundación Casey, por medio de Casey Family Services, ha estado promoviendo la identificación de los servicios necesarios y el apoyo continuo para los padres y madres de crianza que adoptan a los niños en su cuidado.

En 1991, Casey instituyó uno de los primeros programas nacionales pos-adoptivos para ayudar a estas familias. Hoy día, estos servicios incluyen consejería comprensiva, grupos de apoyo, manejo de casos, y programas de educación y abogacía con familias e individuos quienes han adoptado jóvenes y que necesitan ayuda para fortalecer y conservar la familia.

Casey Family Services patrocinó la primera conferencia sobre Servicios Pos-Adoptivos en Washington, D.C. en diciembre 2000. Esta conferencia juntó más 500 administradores, practicantes, políticos, abogados y jueces, pro-

EL DÍA NACIONAL DE LA ADOPCIÓN CONTINÚA FACILITANDO LOS SUEÑOS DE MILLARES DE NIÑOS CUALES SE REALIZAN TRABAJANDO CON TRIBUNALES, JUECES, ABOGADOS, PROFESIONALES DE ADOPCIÓN, AGENCIAS DE LA PROTECCIÓN A LA INFANCIA, Y DEFENSORES PARA COMPLETAR LAS ADOPCIONES Y HALLAZGO, DE HOGARES PARA NIÑOS EN EL CUIDADO DE CRIANZA.



fesionistas de salud mental, educadores de los 50 estados, el Distrito de Columbia, Puerto Rico y las Islas Vírgenes-US. Y en 2006, Casey patrocinó la Convocatoria Nacional de la Permanencia Juvenil, llamando la atención a la necesidad de lazos permanentes familiares, apoyados por los servicios adecuados.

Casey ha dado prioridad a tres políticas básicas para la adopción exitosa de niños, niñas y jóvenes con necesidades especiales:

1. Todas las familias adoptivas deben tener disponibles los servicios y apoyos competentes, no importan las circunstancias de la adopción.
2. Debe existir en las comunidades una red amplia de servicios y apoyos adecuados, abarcando la gama de la prevención y la intervención temprana a los servicios intensivos en casa o programas residenciales de tratamiento.
3. Debe haber disponibilidad de los servicios y apoyos adecuados durante todos los ciclos de la vida familiar, especialmente en los momentos cuando surgen los problemas relacionados con la adopción que afectan a la vida y desarrollo tanto del joven como de la familia.

Los Programas Pos-Adoptivos Arrojan Luz en el Camino

Hay otros dos programas pos-adoptivos en los Estados Unidos que sirven como modelos de prácticas de apoyo para familias adoptivas, según Soronen: The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) en Maryland y Virginia; y el Kinship Center en California. Cada una de estas organizaciones ofrecen programas múltiples y amplios, dice Soronen.

C.A.S.E. se dirige a las cuestiones del desarrollo y los desafíos sociales e emocionales frecuentemente compartidas por jóvenes adoptados y sus familias. Subraya la importancia de las medidas preventivas para asegurar la preservación de las familias adoptivas.

El Kinship Center en California es un programa flexible, enfocado en la fuerza (en lugar de la debilidad) de la una familia comprometida a la adopción permanente. Las metas, al tomar en cuenta las exigencias familiares, se identifican en el transcurso de una serie de reuniones coordinadas por una facilitador. Se asignan los fondos en forma flexible para que se cumplan con las necesidades establecidas de la familia.

The Adoption Process for Gay and Lesbian Parents: Progress, Hurdles, and Help

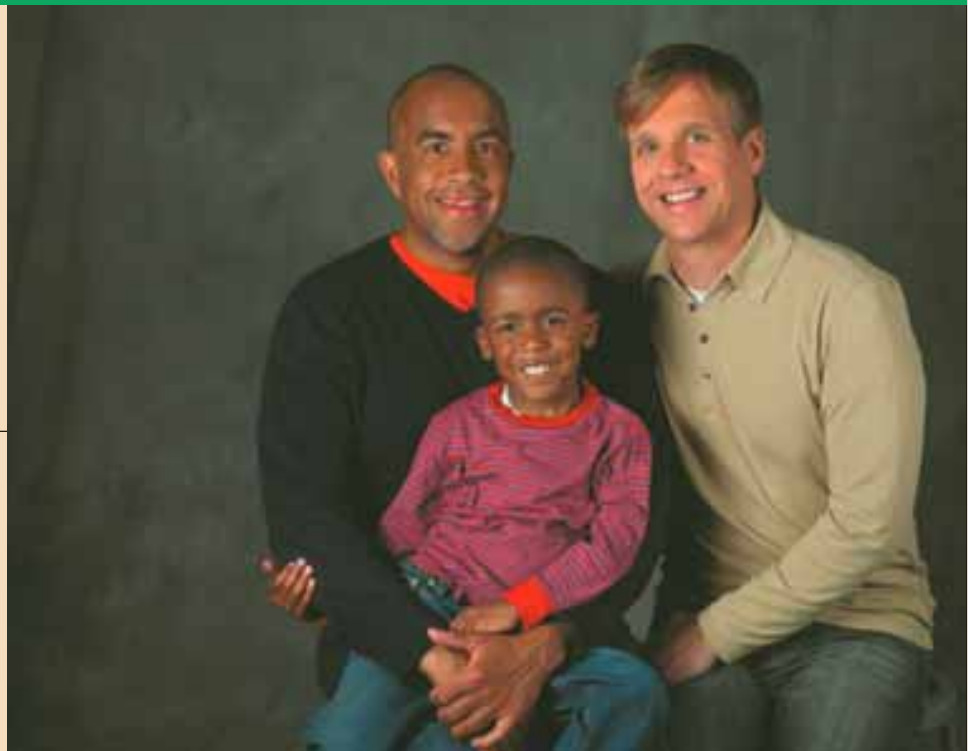
Not long ago, most people assumed the typical family was a husband, a wife, and a bunch of kids who were “chips off the old block.” But typical isn’t typical anymore. A growing number of gay men and lesbians become parents through adoption. They’re creating thousands of vibrant, loving, often multi-cultural families – and the first permanent homes for their children.

In fact, approximately 65,500 adopted children are being raised by lesbian or gay parents today, accounting for more than four percent of all adopted children in the United States, according to research conducted by the Urban Institute and the Williams Institute of the UCLA School of Law.

According to a study conducted by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 60 percent of adoption agencies nationwide accept applications from homosexuals, and about two out of five agencies in the country have placed children with adoptive parents whom they know to be gay or lesbian.

The trend is being fueled by compelling empirical and clinical evidence that same-sex parents are equivalent to heterosexual parents in their ability to care for children and provide loving homes.

According to a report in the July 2006 issue of *Pediatrics*, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, “More than 25 years of research have documented that there is no relationship between parents’ sexual orientation and any measure of a child’s emotional, psychosocial, and behavioral adjustment. These data have demonstrated no risk to



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children as a result of growing up in a family with one or more gay parents. Conscientious and nurturing adults, whether they are men or women, heterosexual or homosexual, can be excellent parents.”

Significant Legal Challenges

Nevertheless, nearly all prospective gay and lesbian parents still face enormous hurdles in a society that continues to foster discriminatory social mores, policies, and laws.

Legislators in many states continue to propose laws that would limit the ability of gay men and lesbians to adopt or serve as foster parents. Three states currently restrict gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals or couples from adopting at all. Several states also have, or are considering, policies that would restrict gay, lesbian, and bisexual people from fostering.

Miranda and Sally (not their real names), a couple who adopted in Arizona before moving to Vermont, had to work especially hard to bring together their family. The reason: Some jurisdictions will only permit adoption by married couples or single individuals, but not gay or lesbian couples. So, Miranda adopted one set of siblings in 2003, and Sally adopted two other sets of siblings in 2005.

“We were fortunate to connect with a lawyer who had lots of experience in getting us through the system,” says Miranda. “Ultimately, for us, it depended on a single judge for final approval. Even though the law won’t let non-married couples adopt jointly, the judge acknowledged publicly that we were one family. Our kids heard it, and our friends and family heard it. It was very important for all of us to be officially recognized as a family.”

This desire for legal recognition is why advocacy groups are working to get second-parent adoption laws into effect wherever the law is ambiguous or where only single gay men or lesbians are allowed to become adoptive parents.

“CONSCIENTIOUS AND NURTURING ADULTS, WHETHER THEY ARE MEN OR WOMEN, HETEROSEXUAL OR HOMOSEXUAL, CAN BE EXCELLENT PARENTS.”



Fighting Cultural Discrimination

In addition to the legal challenges, same-sex couples believe that many adoption agencies do not welcome them as adoptive parents, or fear they will be treated as second-class applicants during the process.

Dennis and Tom Patrick, the adoptive parents of four children, initially went through 12 hours of training before the director of a religious-affiliated agency told them they could not continue because their relationship violated church doctrine.

“We were hurt, disappointed, and embarrassed,” says Dennis, a professor of communication and theater arts at Eastern Michigan University. “We knew there was a huge need for adoptive parents but they still didn’t want us, even though it was clear that we were solid candidates.”



Undaunted, the Patricks pursued their goal and found an agency that welcomed same-sex couples. And now, after being foster parents for 16 children over the years, their family includes four adopted boys ranging in age from 6 to 11.

“Where the laws are positive or neutral with regard to adoption by lesbian and gay people, child welfare professionals, adoption agencies, and local judges have the obligation to treat gay and lesbian people the same as everyone else, based on their ability to be good parents and their ability to meet the needs of a particular child,” says Ellen Kahn, family project director at the Human Rights Campaign, a leading gay and lesbian advocacy organization.

To help smooth out the process, the Human Rights Campaign just published a new comprehensive guide called “Promising Practices in Adoption and Foster Care,” which is designed to give agencies the tools and resources necessary to achieve cultural competency in working with non-traditional families.

Personal Challenges/Opportunities

Of course, there are many more challenges for adoptive families that go well beyond legal and procedural hurdles. Adoptive parents must deal with children who have been emotionally scarred by years of neglect, teachers and school systems that are unaccustomed to non-traditional families, anti-gay and lesbian feelings in the families of origin, and biases in the communities.

“Whether the biases are subtle or not, we’re being challenged all the time, and we have to convince people on a daily basis that we’re a valid family,” says Dennis. “Being gay, we’re also always in the process of ‘coming out,’

because many people maintain a kind of default assumption that you’re heterosexual when you’re out with your children or at school meetings. It’s important for your kids to see that you’re not hiding.”

In addition to attitudes about same-sex parents, gay- and lesbian-led families who adopt children of other races, have additional challenges to overcome within the family and in the community. “It took a little while for all the siblings to accept each other as brothers,” says Miranda, whose family consists of African-American and Latino boys. “We were lucky because we found acceptance as a family in Vermont, but in a predominantly white community we still have to work hard to find cultural connections for our kids.

To help with all these challenges, Casey Family Services’ Vermont Division, in collaboration with the Vermont Adoption Consortium, organized a support group (GLAFF) in 2005 in Winooski for gay and lesbian foster and adoptive families. GLAFF is supported by AdoptUsKids and the Samara Foundation of Vermont.

As many as 15 to 20 families attend the monthly meetings and social events. “Children and parents can let down their guard and connect with people who share similar life experiences,” says Michael Joyce, the Casey social worker who oversees the group. “And, maybe most important, they have fun.”

GAO STUDY CONFIRMS AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN OVERREPRESENTED IN FOSTER CARE

African-American children are significantly more likely to be represented in foster care than white children, according to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other research. In fact, African-American children, who made up less than 15 percent of the overall child population in the 2000 U.S. Census, represented 27 percent of the children who entered foster care in 2004 and 34 percent of the children remaining in foster care at the end of that year.

According to a recently released study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), this disproportionality occurs despite there being no significant difference in the overall incidents of child abuse and neglect between African Americans and Caucasians – even after adjusting for income differences.

During its investigation, the GAO also found that African-American children received unequal treatment from services provided by child welfare agencies; they are moved to different foster homes more frequently; they are less likely to be reunited with their own families, and they have less of a chance of finding an alternative or adoptive family willing to make a lifelong permanent commitment.

The GAO, which is the investigative arm of Congress, was asked to analyze the major factors influencing this phenomenon, the impact of federal policies, as well as the extent that states and localities have implemented promising strategies.

Why such overrepresentation?

Not surprisingly, the study found that a higher rate of poverty is among several factors contributing to the higher rates of African-American children in foster care.

Families living in poverty have greater difficulty accessing housing, as well as mental-health and other services needed to keep families stable and children safely at home. Bias or cultural misunderstandings and distrust between child welfare decision makers and the families they serve also may hasten children's removal from their homes into foster care.

In addition, African-American children stay in foster care longer because of difficulties in recruiting adoptive parents and a greater reliance on relatives to provide informal foster care. Relatives may be unwilling to terminate the parental rights of the child's parent – as required in adoption – or may be financially unable to care for the child without supports.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE STUDY FOUND THAT A HIGHER RATE OF POVERTY IS AMONG SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE HIGHER RATES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

Most states surveyed reported using various strategies to address these issues. These strategies included involving families in decisions, building community supports, and broadening the search for relatives to care for children. While HHS provides information and technical assistance, states reported having limited capacity to analyze data and formulate strategies.

States also reported that federal funding for family support services was helpful in keeping African-American children safely at home and that federal subsidies for adoptive parents helped move children out of foster care. But they also expressed concerns about the inability to use federal child welfare funds to provide subsidies to legal guardians. As an alternative to adoption, subsidized guardianship is considered particularly promising for helping African-American children exit from foster care.

Because of these findings, the GAO report says Congress should consider amending current law to allow subsidies for legal guardianships. The GAO also recommended amending child welfare financing; improving technical assistance and accountability; expanding community supports and services; and increasing cultural competencies of child welfare leaders and staff.

Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity Endorses Federal Call for Reform

Citing the need for all children to grow up in safe and caring families with equal access to opportunity, the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare has called the recent GAO report a “clarion call to action” for everyone who cares about the nation's children and families.

Since 2005, the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare has worked to develop and implement a national, multi-year campaign to combat the overrepresentation of children of certain racial or ethnic communities in the child welfare system. The Alliance includes the four Casey foundations – the Annie E. Casey Foundation, including its direct service agency Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs, the

“SUSTAINED ACTION MUST BE TAKEN TO TACKLE THIS URGENT AND IMMEDIATE NEED FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE.”



Marguerite Casey Foundation, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative – as well as the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), and parents and alumni of foster care.

“As its first advocacy effort, the Alliance held a Congressional briefing in 2004 to define the issue of disproportionality in child welfare, to examine the impact of structural racism on child welfare treatment, services, and outcomes, and to promote its theory of change,” says Sania Metzger, J.D., director of policy for Casey Family Services and a member of the Alliance’s Steering Committee. “Subsequent to that briefing, Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY) requested that the Congressional Research Office issue a report on the overrepresentation of African-American children in foster care, followed by his request of the GAO to conduct its historic audit,” she explains.

“The basic human right to a permanent family connection that can be counted on for life must be recognized and upheld for all children and families, including those who interact with the child welfare system,” says Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Alliance has proposed several solutions to address these and other priority areas:

- **Improve Child Welfare Financing to Promote Permanence** – The Alliance agrees that federal law should be amended to support family preservation and prevention efforts that keep children from entering into care and help increase safe reunification, guardianship care, kinship care, and post-permanency efforts. Congress should also increase flexibility under Title IV-E and provide incentives for services for vulnerable families.

- **Implement Strength-Based Decision – Making Approaches in All Systems That Serve Children and Families** – Federal resources should provide supports and incentives to states for implementing proven practices such as team decision making, family group conferencing, and cultural education and training.

“THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHT TO A PERMANENT FAMILY CONNECTION THAT CAN BE COUNTED ON FOR LIFE MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND UPHELD FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, INCLUDING THOSE WHO INTERACT WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.”

- **Increase Involvement of Families in the Development and Implementation of Child Welfare Policies and Practices** – Policies and resources should ensure more active participation of youth, birth parents, and families in the decisions that shape their lives and the quality of life of their communities.

- **Enhance the Capacity of the Federally Funded Data Collection and Reporting System** – It is essential to identify racial and ethnic disparities in the experiences of families and children served by the child welfare system. HHS should adapt the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) to track outcomes over a longer period of time for

children of all races, report well-being, and compare outcomes by race at each of the key decision points.

- **Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Assessing State Child Welfare Systems** – The federal assessment of state performance – the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process – should determine the extent to which racial disparities and inequities continue to persist.

- **Expand Cultural Competence Training to Adequately Address Disproportionality and Disparate Outcomes** – All child welfare and child protective services staff and family/ juvenile court personnel should be required to receive training to become better prepared to work with culturally and racially diverse populations.

- **Provide Family-Strengthening and Prevention Services** – By investing public resources into initiatives that support parents and strengthen families – such as child care services, financial literacy counseling, mental health diagnosis and treatment, and substance abuse treatment – child welfare systems can avoid placing more African-American children in the system unnecessarily, and provide critical support for their families.

The Alliance believes that state and county systems must be the agents of change in their communities by working to address disproportionate and disparate outcomes and providing equitable services and care for all children and families.

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH IN THE GULF WAR



Editor's Note: This article is the first in a series exploring youth from foster care and their military experiences. To contribute to future pieces, email us at voice@caseyfamilyservices.org.

The war in Iraq and Afghanistan has been hard fought by thousands of American men and women, many of whom are graduates of foster care. For some of them, the military has provided a structure, sense of self, and purpose previously lacking in their lives. For others, the benefits have exacted a heavy toll. The military always has been a draw for young people exiting foster care. Just how many former foster youth are fighting overseas is not known; the Department of Defense does not track this information.

“The experience of every member of the military – and every foster child – is obviously different,” said Casey Family Services Executive Director Raymond L. Torres. “But we want to know how the military works as an option for foster youth. Is there more we can do to prepare foster children for military service, if that’s an option they want to pursue? Should we be doing more to ensure that military service is not perceived as the only option for young men and women leaving foster care? Do former foster youth have particular needs when they are in military service? What can we do to make the transition home easier?”

Meet Some Heroes

Voice recently learned about seven young men from across the United States who have served their country. They are Javier Paredes of San Antonio, Texas; Steven Smith of Brookfield, New York;

Raymond Hennagir of Deptford, New Jersey; Walter Freeman of Lancaster, California; Tung Nguyen of Alameda, California; Jamie Wilson of Temple, Texas; and Jason Lantieri of Killingworth, Connecticut.

They all have fought in Iraq.

Army Corporal Javier Paredes was only age 24 when he was killed by a rocket-propelled grenade in Baghdad. “When he found his way into the Army and became a medic, he found something that really fit,” said Gary Priour, executive director of the Hill County Youth Ranch, where Paredes lived during high school. “He gave his all to everything and became something in spite of his beginning ... He had so little in life but he made the best of it,” Priour told the *San Antonio Express-News*. Paredes and his four brothers were abused and neglected, and spent their childhood in Texas foster homes, most of the time separated from each other.

THE MILITARY ALWAYS HAS BEEN A DRAW FOR YOUNG PEOPLE EXITING FOSTER CARE.

Steven Smith, age 20, lost both his legs in a roadside attack on his first day of serving in Iraq. He recently returned to his foster parents’ home for a reception that veterans and friends had organized for him. “It feels great to be back,” he told the *Syracuse Post-Standard*. When he completes physical therapy and becomes more accustomed to his two prosthetic legs, Smith hopes to work with horses, something he did for his foster parents growing up. “Horses are relatively easy to take care of,” he said. “It’s something I’ve always loved.”

Army Staff Sergeant Jamie Wilson had been in the Army for 16 years when he was shot on guard duty in Fallujah. Wilson, who had been in foster care since he was 10 years of age, was determined to join the Army as soon as possible. He went to the local courthouse and got a judge to sign the consent form to join at age 17. “Everyone else there that day was in trouble [with the law],” his wife Christine told the *Washington Post*, “but he just wanted to join the Army.” Wilson remembered that before he left last fall, her husband said it was his “responsibility to protect his troops and make sure they made it home to their families.”

Marine Corporal Raymond Hennagir, age 21, was injured in Iraq during his second tour. He lost both legs and four fingers when he stepped on an improvised explosive device that required 16 operations, three skin grafts and an excruciating recovery. Hennagir had wanted to join the Marines since he was a child. “I wanted to prove to myself that I’m better than my father.” Hennagir entered state custody when he was 5 years old. He remained in foster care for four years until his aunt, Donna English, and her husband Jim, were able to adopt him. A week after he graduated from high school he joined the Marines. “It changed his whole demeanor. He was no longer the insecure kid,” Jim English told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Now Hennagir is getting used to his prosthetic legs and fingers, planning his wedding, and determining what kind of work he can do. “I want him to have to get a job and take care of himself,” said English.



“HE COULD HAVE BEEN ON THE STREETS JUST WASTING HIS LIFE. HE CAME FROM AN EXTREMELY BROKEN PLACE AND BECAME SOMEBODY.”



Considering the Military

Military service can be an appealing option for foster youth for many reasons – education, a sense of belonging, or structure.

When Barbara Ford’s son – whom she adopted when he was age 6 – expressed interest in joining the military, she encouraged him to talk to recruiters from all the branches. “We sought them out, because he enlisted the summer before his senior year. I think the branch he went into was partially determined by the recruiter. He appealed to my son more.”

Lana Freeman, who has fostered many children, had a similar experience with her adopted daughter. “There were several recruiters who came to her high school. We encouraged her to look at every avenue and not just jump at the first thing. She built a rapport with the Navy recruiter and was in a pre-entry program before she graduated. This was good because it gave her responsibility, and built her self-esteem and relationships.”

Freeman thinks the recruiters have to be very sensitive to the experiences that these young people have had, and their impact on a youth’s decision. “These kids are so impressionable and vulnerable,” she said. “My daughter was not in a good state of mind in her last two years of high school.”

Neither family was surprised about their children’s decision to join the armed services. “He had talked a long time about wanting to serve,” said Ford. “There was no push, but we certainly supported him. We are an incredibly patriotic family, and we feel very strongly about our country, and we felt

Army Sergeant Tung Nguyen, age 38, had an exceptional career for 20 years when he was killed in Baghdad. At age 11, he was one of the “boat people” who fled Vietnam for a refugee camp in another country. He came to the United States when he was 12 and lived with his foster parents, Jim and Karen Cracraft, and joined the Army as soon as he graduated from high school. “I was so afraid for him,” his birth mother, Duc Phan, told the *Los Angeles Times*, “but he loved the military.” Nguyen had a very successful military career: He was a Special Forces soldier; he taught at the Army’s Special Warfare Center and School; and he received many medals. He also sponsored his parents’ immigration to the United States so they could attend his wedding in 1997. “He lived a very fulfilling life and he died doing what he loved,” said Phan.

Army Specialist Walter Freeman, 20 years old, was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq. He lived with his foster mother, Gloria

Ricketts, from the age of 8. He joined the Army right after graduating from high school in 2004. “He could have been on the streets, just wasting his life,” his foster sister Donna Brown told the *Los Angeles Times*. “He came from an extremely broken place and became somebody.”

In October, Army Sergeant Jason Lantieri, age 25, died after a trucking accident south of Baghdad. According to an October 19 article in the *Hartford Courant*, “Jason was 11 years old when the state took custody of him from his mother.” He found the Miller family of Killingworth, Connecticut, when the state placed him there, and remained close to them throughout his young life. The Millers would have adopted “Jay,” they said, “but his mother was still alive.”

“EACH OF MY TEENS HAD ISSUES OF FEAR AND REJECTION. THE MILITARY ALLOWS THEM TO BE IN AN ADULT SITUATION RIGHT AWAY. IT GIVES SOME A WAY TO GO TO COLLEGE; SOME WANT TO GET AWAY FROM FOSTER CARE.”



strongly about his service.” Freeman agreed that “patriotism plays a big role.”

Ford spoke for many parents when she said: “I hated to sign the paper, but at the same time I wanted to support him. It was his first adult decision.”

Ford’s son served in the Persian Gulf for nine months as an operations specialist. He is currently stationed on the USS John Stennis. Freeman’s daughter served in Bahrain for several months as an operations specialist. She is scheduled to go back to the Gulf but does not know when. “She’s thinking she wants it to be her career,” said Freeman. “That is the greatness of being in the military: They feel that they’re needed and their lives have a purpose.”

That sense of purpose and belonging could appeal to many foster children. “She loves

the respect and self-esteem it gives her,” said Freeman. “She had low self-esteem because she had a tough adolescence. She wants her education, but she could have gotten that in other ways. She wants to travel, too. Her biggest thing was to get away and get on her own.”

The structure that is an intrinsic part of military life can be beneficial to foster youth. “Structure tells them what to do. It gives them a plan, a way to move forward,” said Freeman. “A lot of kids are needy like that. Each of my teens had issues of fear and rejection. The military allows them to be in an adult situation right away. It gives some a way to go to college; some want to get away from foster care.”

The military can open up other career possibilities. “He went into the intelligence sector in anticipation of his desire to be a law enforcement officer,” said Ford. “He has two more years. It has served him well.”

Below: Maryland Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown served with distinction in Iraq. Back at home, he has been a leader in foster care and veterans affairs. He is shown with his son, Jonathan. Jonathan is now 7 years old and was adopted by the Brown family when he was an infant.

Just this year, Lieutenant Governor Brown announced the creation of Maryland’s third Care Management Entity, which provides wraparound community services that allow children to remain at home while receiving treatment. He also helped to establish a new scholarship program for veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq.



FOSTER CARE AND THE MILITARY

We want to learn more about the experiences of former foster children in the military. Did you or someone you know choose a career in the military?

Please tell us your story at: voice@caseyfamilyservices.org.

We would like to know:

- How and when did you decide on the military?
- Did you consider other career choices. If so, what?
- What impact did being a foster child have on your decision and experience to sign up for duty?

- What supports would have made the experience better for you?
- What issues did you face when you returned to civilian life in the United States?
- Do you have a deep family relationship that you have been able to count on?

All information will be kept confidential. Thank you for sharing your story.

GEARING UP FOR THE 2008 NATIONAL CONVENING ON YOUTH PERMANENCE

CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS SIGNS ON AS CO-SPONSOR



Casey Family Programs officially has joined the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services in co-sponsoring the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence. The invitation-only event will take place from May 1 to May 2, 2008 at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, D.C. The event will gather 500 child welfare directors, policymakers, attorneys, judges, clinicians and consumers from 50 states, tribal nations, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands for in-depth discussions on the need for lifelong family connections for youth in foster care.

“We expect the 2008 Convening to be more exciting – and more meaningful – than ever,” says Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director. “Our partnership with Casey Family Programs sends a clear message that the country’s two largest private child welfare foundations are united in their determination to make permanence for all children and youth in foster care a number one priority in every state.”

David Berns, executive vice president at Casey Family Programs, notes that, “We are excited to be a co-sponsor of this important National Convening. Our partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services in this effort leverages the collective relationships of both organizations in a powerful way. Together, in partnership with our allies, we will make great strides towards reducing the number of youth in foster care by finding ways to safely reunify children with their families or, when this is not possible, through adoptions and permanent guardianships.”

Of the 40 states represented at the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence,

NEW PERMANENCY RESOURCES:

A 19-page summary of the proceedings from the September 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence has been published and distributed to child welfare directors and colleague organizations across the nation. In addition, a summary of the Research Roundtable preceding the 2006 Convening has been published on the Casey Family

Services web site (www.caseyfamilyservices.org). The summaries include recommendations for policy, practice and research. A bi-monthly e-newsletter, *Connections Count*, (www.caseyfamilyservices.org) provides practical tips for promoting practice and systems reform around youth permanence and offers multiple resources for practitioners.

many of the state teams went home galvanized to create clear plans and action steps to fulfill the goal of permanence in their states. The 2008 Convening will share promising practices, new policy initiatives, findings from individual state convenings, and challenges that have emerged since the 2006 gathering.

“In our ongoing discussions with states around the country, we know that there have been many exciting developments in achieving youth permanence that have emerged since the last Convening,” says Sarah B. Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice at Casey Family Services. “At the Convening next May, states will have an opportunity to showcase innovative strategies they’ve used to promote greater permanence and to discuss their successes and challenges.”

Part of the efforts to expand Convening participation includes outreach to a greater number of American Indian and tribal organizations. With extensive experience in helping tribal nations to strengthen child-welfare practices and services rooted in their own cultures and values, Casey Family Programs

will be a tremendous help involving tribal nations and setting an appropriate agenda, according to Greenblatt, who is coordinating the 2008 Convening.



The co-sponsorship of the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs is indicative of ongoing collaboration between the two foundations to forward improvements in child-welfare systems and delivery. Both are partners in the National Foster Care Partnership, the National Foster Care Coalition, the Casey-Center for the Study of Social Policy Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare, and the Youth Transitions Funders Group.



JANIS SPIRE & CYNTHIA BILLEY, ESQ., THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Close-up

This year, Los Angeles celebrates the 10th anniversary of Adoption Saturday, the model of community partnership that inspired National Adoption Day. A key player in both the local and national efforts is the Alliance for Children's Rights, a Los Angeles-based child advocacy and legal-aid organization led by Executive Director Janis Spire (pictured, above right). Directing the organization's foster care adoption work and its involvement in the National Adoption Day Partnership is Cynthia Billey (pictured, above left), the Alliance's staff attorney.

Prior to joining the Alliance in 2002, Spire served as the chief operating officer of the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, an internationally known and respected children's health and advocacy organization. Previously, she worked as a leader in health care and medical practice management. Billey, who joined the Alliance in 2001, previously served as an associate and senior counsel with Konowiecki & Rank LLC, Los Angeles, where she practiced health care law. She began her legal career as an associate with a Washington, D.C., firm where she practiced government contracts and environmental law.

Casey Family Services views National Adoption Day as one of a number of its core efforts to promote family permanence for all children and youth in foster care. Casey joins with the Alliance for Children's Rights, the Children's Action Network, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Freddie Mac Foundation in leading the National Adoption Day Coalition.

VOICE: *How did the Alliance for Children's Rights become involved with National Adoption Day?*

SPIRE: National Adoption Day started in 2000, a few years after Los Angeles had experienced success with its Adoption Saturdays, which was a partnership with the courts and private law firms throughout the city to finalize foster care adoptions. It was such a success, the Alliance took the model on the road to different cities. With the support of the Freddie Mac Foundation and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, we reached nine cities in that first year. Since then, the National Adoption Day Coalition of partners has expanded to include Casey, among others, and National Adoption Day has grown to being celebrated in all 50 states and nearly 300 cities.

VOICE: *What's been the impact locally?*

SPIRE: Adoption Saturday was instrumental in helping children in Los Angeles County become part of legal and lifelong families. More important, through the volunteer work of law firms such as Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher, children receive the ongoing supports and services to which they are legally entitled. It's been 10 years and nearly 20,000 adoptions. It also has raised awareness of the importance of all dimensions of family permanence for these children and youth.

BILLEY: It's been a huge success, reducing a backlog of 10,000 adoptions at one point. In the past decade, we've created a network of hundreds of volunteer attorneys. With these attorneys, we now hold Adoption Fridays, when the court is closed to other hearings, several times a year to handle maybe 100 adoptions in an afternoon. We still use the Saturday before Thanksgiving for National Adoption Day, however, to

create a more festive experience for those adopting on that one special day.

VOICE: *Why was there an adoption backlog? Is the problem with the courts, state welfare agency, or the laws?*

BILLEY: There were big court and agency delays in the Los Angeles foster care system, the nation's largest, in the late 1990s, mostly because there were so many kids in care that it overburdened the system. The families that adopt from foster care don't have the resources to hire representation, so volunteer attorneys are essential.

VOICE: *After so many years and so many adoptions, do the individual stories and experiences of "adoption day" still inspire?*

SPIRE: You go over to the court every National Adoption Day and you get choked up about the love and sacrifices these new families are making for each other.

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A NEED FOR FAMILIES TO ADOPT AND CARE FOR CHILDREN. FINDING PARENTS FOR THESE VULNERABLE CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY OLDER YOUTH, WILL REMAIN A CHALLENGE. SOCIAL CHANGE IS A LONG ROAD.



BILLEY: The day is so meaningful for these families, who have often waited so long and who give so much to provide a loving home for these extraordinary children. There was one mother who was adopting an extremely disabled child, and she brought five bouquets of roses to the hearing to share with everyone involved with her case. She wasn't someone with a lot of money, and the flowers were expensive, but she was so grateful to everyone and really wanted to show her appreciation.

VOICE: *What does the Alliance do in moving a child toward adoption? What is the work?*

BILLEY: Once the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) completes a home study and approves an applicant for adoption, a referral is made to the Alliance. This happens in every case. One of our own attorneys or a volunteer completes a very detailed questionnaire with the family, mostly ensuring that foster children are receiving the services they need. We check to make sure medical coverage, financial assistance, special education, and referral needs are being met by the state and county. In addition, we keep the petition moving forward through the courts.

VOICE: *What do you think of National Adoption Day's dramatic growth over the past few years?*

SPIRE: No doubt, National Adoption Day has had a tremendous impact on awareness. Today, the private sector, corporations, and law firms with pro bono attorneys are more active in adoption work on all fronts.

BILLEY: I see some momentum toward positive reform as a result of the awareness raised in the jurisdictions, as well as by the National Adoption Day partners. There is more interest in adoption from foster care now, and we're countering some of the adoption myths.

THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS ARE SO EXCITED, AND THEY ARE THROWING THESE CELEBRATIONS THAT TRULY EXPRESS THE JOY THEY FEEL AS A FAMILY.

VOICE: *More locally, do you see a shift toward permanence and lifelong families in Los Angeles?*

BILLEY: Absolutely. DCFS has a designated post-adoption services unit with some very good workers. Yet it is understaffed to handle all of the referrals for help. Despite this, at the higher levels of agency management, there is more recognition that you unequivocally need to help adoptive families with services and support. Adopted families have unique needs; they require special types of treatment and interventions.

In addition, DCFS has redesigned itself to really do concurrent planning, and is doing it well. There's more reunification, for example. In addition, the agency now uses a dual-licensing process in which resource families are approved for fostering and adopting in one step. That's a positive trend.

VOICE: *The Alliance is a local, grassroots organization. What has been the experience of joining with your more nationally focused partners in the National Adoption Day Coalition?*

SPIRE: It's been great for us to partner with such solid and committed organizations, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation/ Casey Family Services. We could not have imagined it better. Los Angeles is very proud of how its model is being used throughout the country.

BILLEY: I feel privileged. There is a lot of energy and passion among the national partners and event organizers all around the country. The jurisdictions are so excited by the celebrations, it's enormously satisfying. So many families and connections are being made. We have a sense that we are making progress.

VOICE: *What made 2007 stand out among other National Adoption Days?*

SPIRE: This year's national event was at the White House. And, for us, it was the 10th anniversary of our Adoption Saturday program in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, we finalized 200 adoptions in our court and recognized Judge Michael Nash, who presides over the juvenile court, for his commitment to raising awareness on this issue and his leadership in shepherding real reform of the system.

In addition, we are so pleased that actress Victoria Rowell, television personality Jo Frost, and celebrity chef Cat Cora shared the messages of National Adoption Day through media appearances.

HARTFORD DIVISION COMMEMORATES 25 YEARS OF SERVICE

Casey Family Services' Hartford Division has reached the quarter-century marker of service to children and families in Connecticut's capital city – one of the state's most vulnerable communities. Since Casey's start, it has touched the lives of thousands of Hartford's fragile children, youth, and families. Established in 1982 as a source for long-term foster care, this division has expanded to provide family reunification and post-adoption services as well. In addition, Casey educates community members on the unique needs of foster and adopted children, and supports struggling families to increase their economic stability through a range of family-based programs in the community.

Headquartered in New Haven, Casey Family Services reaches more than 4,000 vulnerable children and families through divisions in Bridgeport and Hartford, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

"Hartford is one of the oldest divisions of our agency, and it continues to be a leader in helping families grow strong and stay together," says Raymond L. Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services. He notes that Connecticut has a special place in the history of Casey Family Services and the entire Annie E. Casey Foundation. The first home of both UPS and the Foundation that UPS founder Jim Casey established in honor of his mother, the state also was the birthplace of Casey Family Services in 1976.

Marking the milestone of service in Hartford, on November 8, Glynis Cassis, LCSW, division director since 2005, gathered state officials, distinguished guests, colleague organizations, parents, youth, and alumni at the

division's offices to reflect on the challenges met and remaining to be addressed. "Our focus on building a continuum of services is built around children achieving lifelong families," Cassis explains. "We started with our long-term foster care program and added reunification in 1989 and post-adoption services in 1991."

First and Best: Child Back Safely with Family of Origin

The Hartford Division works with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), primarily in Hartford and New Britain, to provide intensive in-home reunification supports.

"We assign a team of two – a master's-level social worker and a family support worker – to work with both the child and the family," Cassis explains. "Reunification preparation takes place for two to three months before the child returns home, with an additional two to three months of aftercare once the child is back with the family. Few agencies are able to provide this level of service."

Successful reunification also depends on the collaboration of Casey and the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF). "Having providers work together with the family, addressing strengths and weaknesses, is very helpful for families," Cassis notes. In addition, Casey's reunification program provides concrete services that address issues families face around poverty, abuse, and education.

Research confirms that the combination of these efforts leads to positive outcomes for children. According to a University of Connecticut and University of Southern Maine study, children in Casey's reunification program experienced significantly less time getting to permanence and less placement

issues than a group of children receiving reunification services from another agency.

Post-Adoption Services Honor Commitment of Families

In addition to family reunification, the Hartford Division makes post-adoption services available to any adoptive family in Connecticut. Four staff members, including a team leader, are dedicated to this work, which is a key component of the agency's overall strategy for supporting permanence for youth in care.

These services are crucial in helping children achieve lifelong families, says Torres. "The majority of adoptions of children in care is done by their foster parents. The challenges – emotional and psychological – that foster children face do not end with the finalization of an adoption. Adoptive families need continued support from social workers and access to services. We need to honor the commitment they are making to children."

Cassis points out that the child welfare community's shift toward post-permanency services is a new and welcome trend. "Only in recent years has Connecticut recognized the need to support families after adoption," Cassis says. "Now we need to go further and support families no matter how they achieve permanence, whether through adoption, kinship, guardianship, or reunification."

The division currently is creating a comprehensive post-adoption resource guide that illustrates challenges and local solutions for families.

GETTING BEYOND THE SYSTEM: MAINE TEENS PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



It was 10 degrees when 13 people started snowshoeing to the cabin. “I remember thinking I was glad that we had plenty of good food,” says Shaun Taudvin, life skills specialist at Casey Family Services’ Maine Division. He and his colleagues – Bethany Jack, Sonny Prescott, and Shannon Preston – were going to spend the next three days facilitating discussions with nine teenagers about their plans for the future.

This snowy session was based on “Getting Beyond the System” (GBS), a 12-week seminar that helps teens identify goals and how to achieve them. GBS was developed by the Youth Advocacy Center (YAC), which Betsy Krebs and Paul Pitcoff started in 1992 in New York City. Having worked as lawyers in family court, Krebs and Pitcoff developed a deep belief in, and commitment to, teens in foster care. All YAC activities are based on self-advocacy through which teens take responsibility for planning their own future.

Taudvin, Jack, and Preston had attended a training session on Getting Beyond the System in 2006. They immediately became excited about the possibilities of the program but concerned about starting with the full 12-week seminar for the youths in their division.

They decided to do two things: start with a three-day session that focused on plans for the future, and incorporate outdoor activities. “Using the outdoors as a medium for learning is nothing new, but it’s something we’ve had a lot of experience with,” Taudvin says. The session had a balance of outdoor activities including snowshoeing, gathering water, and building shelter, along with a

structured discussion around self-discovery.

Everyone settled in at the cabin with the youths divided into two groups. Each group read through a set of fictional youth profiles and went through the exercise of creating a plan for the case studies. Even this initial exercise was empowering. “Reading through the examples made me realize I’m not alone and that other people had it a lot worse,” one teen explains. “If I can help them, I can certainly help myself.”

THE SESSION HAD A BALANCE OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES INCLUDING SNOWSHOEING, GATHERING WATER, AND BUILDING SHELTER, ALONG WITH A STRUCTURED DISCUSSION AROUND SELF-DISCOVERY.

GBS is based on the Socratic Method, so there was no “right” answer; each group had to defend its decisions to the other group. Because these were case studies, rather than the youths’ individual choices or stories, the issues and ideas could be thoroughly explored without people feeling embarrassed or defensive.

The case studies and the discussions opened up a world of possibilities. “I learned that there is more than one way to deal with a problem,” offers another participant. Before the session, Taudvin admits the youths’ views were more limited. “Through this process, they learned to pursue plans and goals, and to understand that nothing is absolute or final,” he says.

Another empowering process for the youth was identifying their strengths and the people in their lives who could help them reach their goals. “They could see that they don’t have to do this alone, and that they had a lot of people to help them,” says Taudvin. “This was a very powerful piece.”

At the end of the retreat, the participants each developed a career goal. The facilitators helped them identify people in the community who were involved in their particular field of interest. When they returned, the teens arranged informational interviews with these experts.

“They gain a lot of confidence to be able to talk about themselves and find the strengths in their story,” explains Taudvin. While this process reinforced some participants’ plans, others refined or altered their goals.

“We really were impressed with GBS as a tool and how it helped kids to develop critical thinking skills, which are so important,” Taudvin says. “It helps them create a plan, develop goals, and work through possibilities and not just let life happen.”

The Maine Division already is working with families to help them support the work these young people have done. “We hope the families will be able to pick up where we’ve left off so they can follow up and take the next step, like introducing the youth to people and visiting colleges,” says Taudvin. “We would also like to do the whole 12-week session because the kids responded to the methodology really well.”



BEN KERMAN, PH.D.

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION FOR CASEY FAMILY SERVICES

Dr. Ben Kerman has been conducting program evaluation and child welfare research at Casey Family Services since 1997. He is a licensed clinical psychologist and serves on the adjunct faculty of the Yale Child Study Center. As Casey research director, Kerman examines the design, implementation, and outcomes of agency services, consulting on a variety of other organization-related initiatives. He currently oversees a seven-member team in New Haven with a focus on collaboration with the practice community to refine internal services and share Casey's direct service experience-based learning with the larger child welfare community. A rugby fan and amateur musician, he resides in North Haven, Connecticut, with his wife and three children.

VOICE: *When did you join Casey?*

KERMAN: Ten years ago, I came to Casey to help evaluate foster care and family-based programs. Four years ago, I was promoted to director.

VOICE: *What were your experiences prior to joining Casey?*

KERMAN: Before I went to graduate school, I worked in a number of settings, including both in-patient hospitals and community based social services. I loved my time as an outreach worker for Catholic Charities trying to keep up with court-involved youth and families on the North Shore of Massachusetts. At the Yale Child Study Center, I completed advanced training, providing psychological assessments and therapies for children, teens and their families. Working with adolescents is a thread that runs through all of my experiences.

VOICE: *How did you move from direct service to evaluation?*

KERMAN: I was fortunate to have had two great mentors who encouraged me to apply my curiosity to graduate study. I attended the University of Rhode Island, earning my Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Even though I had a direct care focus, I committed myself to learning from each clinical experience and working to improve service delivery.

VOICE: *What draws you to performing research at Casey?*

KERMAN: This setting provides a unique opportunity to do in-depth evaluation within a service environment with a talented and innovative staff dedicated to their families and to improving practice. As part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services is fortunate that we are not dependent on grants nor do we provide services based on where the money is. This freedom allows us to be very strategic to make the best contributions we can. As a researcher, we can explore the practice and policy implications of our direct services, with the goal of maximizing the benefit to our participating families and those served throughout child welfare. To determine best practices independent from funding concerns is very valuable to developing emerging practices, such as post-permanency supports or permanency teaming. At the same time, we have to stay sharp regarding the practicalities of implementing leading-edge practices.

VOICE: *What new trends in child welfare research are you seeing?*

KERMAN: Trends to understand include not only research topics, but how researchers collect the data. Technology is becoming much more important in our work today just as more agencies take on ever increasing obligations to evaluate themselves. How can we automate data collection and ease the burdens on social workers, giving them more time to work with children and families, and offering us the quality information we need? Technology is allowing us to ask more questions and receive faster answers.

VOICE: *What research topics interest you specifically?*

KERMAN: I want to better understand what factors contribute to successful outcomes for a youth, to explore experiences promoting resiliency. How does this impact family permanence and preparation for adulthood?

VOICE: *In terms of youth permanence, you're going to be making a rather large contribution to the field soon.*

KERMAN: Yes, and I'm very excited. Anthony Maluccio, a member of Casey's Board of Advisors, Madelyn Freundlich, one of our consultants, and I recently edited a collection of research on youth permanence from experts across the country. The book, which Columbia University Press will publish next year, follows the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence Research Round Table. We used this opportunity to examine what we know, and to determine what we still need to know, about finding lifelong families for kids in care.

POLICY CORNER

PROTECTING DUE PROCESS FOR BIRTH PARENTS IN TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS PROCEEDINGS



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

The case summaries in the most recent issue of the American Bar Association's *Child Law Practice* highlight divergent judicial views on the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, a decade after its enactment. The range of case decisions illustrates an alarming concern about the due process rights of low-income families in cases involving the termination of parental rights (TPR).

To avoid losing federal reimbursements, states must comply with the Adoption and Safe Families' mandate that TPR petitions are filed "when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months," unless an exception applies. Yet a decade after the Act went into effect, it appears some jurists are misinterpreting the statute in ways that have resulted in the unconstitutional termination of parental rights.

For example, in one of the 15 cases cited in the issue, the most troubling lower-case decision occurred in Idaho.¹ There, the Magistrate's decision – affirmed on appeal – held that a father's rights to parent could be terminated without the state child welfare agency meeting its burden to show by "clear and convincing evidence" that the father was unfit to parent. In other words, the ASFA statute was interpreted to mean that the child's time in foster care for "15 of the recent 22 months" automatically meant that it would be in the child's "best interest" for her father's rights to be terminated.

The state agency was not required to prove maltreatment allegations against the father.

Instead the father had to convince the court of his fitness to parent; it was *his* burden to prove that he was a fit parent. This is putting the burden of proof in the wrong place.

When the case finally reached the Idaho Supreme Court, the egregious mistake that had severed the legal bonds between father and child was reversed, and new proceedings with the correct legal standards were ordered. One has to wonder whether this was the only TPR case in which the wrong legal standard was applied by that Magistrate in that state, or even across the country.

The ABA case summaries also highlighted legal concerns regarding the sibling-relationship exception to termination; the impact of a mother's poverty on her ability to parent; the failure to provide notice of the TPR proceeding to a non-custodial father; ineffective assistance of counsel; and medical neglect as the basis for bringing a TPR among others.

Adoption is seen by most as a joyous time in the life of child or youth, a time to celebrate a mutual pledge of unconditional love between parent and child, and the adoptive parents' lifelong commitment to a child – and indeed it usually is. Federal policies including ASFA's adoption incentives urge states to place children in adoptive families.

But farther away from society's collective mind's eye, adoption also can mean an emotionally wrenching experience for the child's birthparents and other relatives, as well as for some adopted children. For the parents and the family of origin, the thought of contesting a termination of parental rights petition can at once be incomprehensible and terrifying, especially when they cannot afford to pay for an attorney. No matter the

child maltreatment allegations against the parent that may have led to the filing of the TPR, the parent – if indigent – should be entitled to a zealous defense by an attorney with specialized knowledge of child welfare laws and practice, and an interdisciplinary support staff comprised of paralegals, parent advocates and social workers to ensure that the parent contesting the TPR receives the constitutional promises of due process.

A few states however are reversing the finality of a TPR that has created more than 129,000 legal orphans.²

At the 2007 National Foster Family Treatment Association Conference, Julia Johnson, a panelist and a foster and adoptive parent from Kentucky, shared her defeats and victories as a tireless advocate for legislative reforms to make placement with a relative a priority for children in, or at risk of, foster care placements. In her conclusion, Johnson stated that she now questions whether or not the parents and family members of her adoptive children were blocked – as she had been – in their efforts to keep their family together. That is something that she thinks about a lot.

It is my hope that next year's Adoption Month celebrations in states across the nation will include in their platforms a call for adequate legal counsel for each indigent parent from the beginning of a child protective case through an appeal from a termination of parental rights order.

1 RE Doe, 2007, WL 1880602, Idaho.

2 "A State-by-State Analysis of Barriers & Promising Approaches" Jennifer Ehrle Macomber, Cynthia Andrews Scarcella, Erica H. Zielewski, and Rob Geen.

ESSAY

PERSPECTIVES

FINDING A FOREVER FAMILY
AT AGE 21



by Nadege Mardy, foster care alumna

At 11 years old, shortly after the death of my father, I emigrated from Haiti to the United States to stay with a family member. Several months later, I was introduced to the world of foster care at the age of 12.

I was placed with a Spanish-speaking family. They taught me a lot, like riding a bicycle, how to swim, and personal hygiene. Although I was comfortable in the home, the parents really wanted younger children. After a two-year stay, the foster parents decided to close their home, and I moved to another family. This meant I had to change school districts and leave most of my friends behind. It was then that I realized there were holes in the foster care system.

Before moving to my second home, I was skeptical because of what I had heard from other youths in care. The placement was supposed to be temporary; I expected to be there only for the weekend. But that weekend became four years, and four years have turned into a lifelong connection.

It took a while to build a relationship [with my foster mother]. My mom had rules and expectations: Good grades,

appropriate attire, curfews. I secretly loved the rules, but I tested her patience and her love for me all the time. After two years in her home I decided to call her “mom.” In her home I didn’t feel different. She always introduced me as her daughter – not “foster daughter.” I felt safe and loved for the first time in my life.

I’ll never forget the moment when my mom said, “You can act up as much as you want. I will still love you and I am not going anywhere.”

“ONE DAY MY MOM CALLED AND ASKED ME IF SHE COULD GIVE ME HER LAST NAME. I WAS THRILLED! NO ONE EVER LOVED ME THIS MUCH!”

The night before I went away to college, I was thinking, “This is the end.” I was 18 and “aging-out” of foster care. While I was at school my mother wrote me a letter. In the letter she described how much joy I had brought to her life. She reassured me that her house would always be a home for me. She kept her word. I came home as often as I wanted to. I called whenever I needed to talk to her. I felt normal. She was my mother and I was her daughter.

One day my mom called and asked me if she could give me her last name. I was thrilled. No one ever loved me this much. In the beginning of the adoption process people did not take us seriously, mostly because of my age. Once kids in foster care reach their teens, they are not considered adoptable. It took nearly two years to

finalize my adoption – I was 21 years old. Fortunately for me I was able to find permanence, even as an adult.

Youth in foster care come from different backgrounds and cultures; we have different goals and beliefs but one thing we all agree on is the need to be loved permanently. We want to feel a sense of belonging, to know that it’s okay to be ourselves, that we’ll make mistakes, and won’t be sent away because of them. That’s all a foster child – like any child – wants to feel.

Why does a foster child have to be “legally free” in order to start talking about permanence? Before I entered foster care, my mother’s friend wanted to take care of me. She had the space, but the Department of Children and Families told her no, because she wasn’t licensed.

Why doesn’t every state offer tuition, medical, and financial assistance for adoptive families as they do for foster families? I think there would be a much greater rate of adoption if every state provided financial and medical assistance to families after they adopt. No child should have to make a choice between medical care and college or being adopted and being part of a forever family.

Give foster kids a voice in the planning for their lives. Talk to them. Listen to them. Ask them if they want to stay in their current home permanently. Ask the youth if there is another adult they would rather live with. Ask foster parents if they are willing to adopt.

We’re not “another kind of kid.” We need what all kids need: Someone to care and a place to call home.

ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

ADOPTION AND FOSTER ALUMNI OF COLOR



by *Nathan Monell*,
Executive Director, *Foster Care Alumni of America*

“Let’s be frank,” the state advocate began. “In my state, when two children come to the attention of the foster care system with the exact same presenting circumstances, the black child is more likely to be removed from the home, and the white child is more likely to receive the supports necessary to stay in the home.” Unfortunately, her observations are all too true. White children are only half as likely to enter foster care as their African-American counterparts, even though research, most notably by Dr. Robert Hill of Westat, clearly shows that the rates of abuse and neglect are similar across the races.

I still carry the wounds of the experience. I can only imagine the anguish my father carried through life knowing that his financial means kept him from knowing his son.”

What if critical supports had been made available for this family that wanted to stay together?

Once African-American children enter foster care, they stay in the system longer than their white counterparts. (See GAO disproportionality report on page 8.) Sometimes it is a result of the personal prejudices of decision makers. Mickey recalled: “My earliest knowledge of adoption came when I attended the court hearing to terminate my parents’ parental rights. The social worker submitted a report to the judge that said I was ‘unadoptable’ and incorrigible because I

ment. All I wanted was a place where someone loved me and wanted me. I wanted to hear, ‘This is where you are going to stay.’” Now a professional working in the system, Chauncey finds the racial inequity frustrating. “Children of color come into the system too often and stay too long,” he says. “That has to change.”

Mickey added: “I believe we can do more to strengthen and empower communities, especially African-American communities and families, to care for their own children. Families of color do believe in caring for their own. They don’t always have the resources or the skills to handle some of the needs of the youth.”

For most, adoption is the only way out of the revolving door of multiple placements. As with more than 20,000 alumni each year, adoption never came for Mickey. “I aged out of the system onto the streets without any support at age 19. I cannot say if adoption would have been better for me because I spent my life in and out of the system. Being adopted would have meant my life was of value. I was never told I deserved to be loved and cared for.”

For those lucky enough to find an adoptive home, their world is forever changed. James looked back: “If I had not been adopted, I truly believe I would not be alive today.

Chauncey eventually visited his extended birth family. “Even though my brothers and I would view our adoption experience differently, my adoptive mom made sure we all attended good schools in order to prepare us for college. I am sure I am a lot better off for having been adopted, I feel very blessed.”

“WHAT WE DID KNOW WAS THAT WE WERE CONSTANTLY MOVING FROM PLACEMENT TO PLACEMENT. ALL I WANTED WAS A PLACE WHERE SOMEONE LOVED ME AND WANTED ME. I WANTED TO HEAR, ‘THIS IS WHERE YOU ARE GOING TO STAY.’ ” – CHAUNCEY

I talked with James, Chauncey, and Mickey, a few of the African-American members of Foster Care Alumni of America, about their experiences in care.

James described the impact his removal had on his family. “I found out later in life that my birth father fought to keep me, but the state of Texas determined my medical issues far outweighed his financial ability to care for me,” he said. “It’s so hard to say whether the state made the right decision.

kept running away to be with my family in South Central Los Angeles. I remember my social worker telling me to act like I wasn’t from the ghetto, and maybe then the judge would put me on the track to be adopted.”

Children don’t know the impact that some policies or the personal prejudices of the workers in the system have in creating racial inequities. “At 5 years of age, neither my two brothers nor I knew what racism or disproportionality meant,” Chauncey said. “What we did know was that we were constantly moving from placement to place-

Foster Youth and Higher Education

View from Washington



by Robin Nixon, Executive Director, National Foster Care Coalition

I grew up believing that I was going to go to college, and that I could be whatever I wanted to be as an adult. I came from a working-class family, and neither of my parents was able to go to college. My dad went into the Navy, and my mom went to work when her dad passed away. Of 11 aunts and uncles, only one attended college; the rest went straight into full-time employment, never believing that the opportunity was there for them. In just one generation, from my parents' to mine, that expectation totally changed – almost all of us have gone to college or at least participated in some post-secondary education or training. What changed? Why was the expectation for our generation so different?

In 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society domestic agenda, the Higher Education Act was created specifically to increase opportunities for Americans from all socio-economic backgrounds to pursue post-secondary educational opportunities. The federally sponsored grants and loans created by the Act made a college education possible for millions of young men and women who might not otherwise have been able to afford it. My brother, sister and I, as well as all 20 cousins on both sides of the family, grew up believing that our future included college, and that our aspirations, whatever they might be, were achievable.

But for most of our nation's foster youth, a college education still seems to be out of

reach. While more than 10 percent of the general population achieves a degree at the baccalaureate level, less than two percent of foster youth are able to do so. Only about half of foster youth complete their high school education prior to leaving foster care, and only a quarter go on to any type of post-secondary education or training. Challenges to educational success abound in foster care. In addition to the trauma of abuse and neglect, foster youth often experience multiple moves while in care, are unable to participate in extra-curricular activities or get extra help with school work, and may experience delays in education or medical records transfers that stall enrollment or prevent appropriate class placement.

A number of efforts currently are underway to increase opportunities for school success and access to higher education for young people in foster care, and older foster youth who are adopted or achieve permanence through guardianship. Public awareness of the needs of foster youth and advocacy efforts on their behalf has never been greater.

Current efforts include:

- Proposed changes to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (part of the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act) would provide transportation and other supportive services to foster children and youth experiencing educational instability due to placement in foster care.
- The Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program (known as the Chafee ETV Program) currently provides up to \$5,000 per year to youth in care, foster care alumni, and youth adopted at age 16 or older attending post-secondary educa-

tional and vocational programs. As part of the Kinship Caregiver Support Act, young people who are in kinship care or who have permanent guardianship will be eligible for ETVs.

- Recent changes to the Higher Education Act that go into effect in July 2009, will clarify language regarding foster care status, making it easier for youth in care to fill out the federal financial aid forms and be considered independent students for financial aid determination. The changes also will enable young people who have been adopted from foster care at age 13 or older, or who achieve permanence through guardianship, to qualify for federal financial aid as independent students.

Research on youth "aging out" of foster care clearly has shown that the vast majority of these vulnerable young people aspire to a college education and to a positive future for themselves. As a society, we are all aware of the benefits of educational success and of the need to ensure that all young people are prepared to participate actively and successfully in the workforce. All of us should be aware of and support efforts to ensure that foster youth do not get left behind.

Additional Resources:

American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, National Legal Center for Foster Youth Education (<http://www.abanet.org/child/education>)

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (www.naechy.org)

National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (www.casey.org)

Resource Corner

The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence Summary and Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Research from the Research Roundtable

Casey Family Services recently released two follow-up papers to the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence. The Summary is a synthesis of the broad themes that emerged from the Convening, held September 14 and 15, 2006, in Washington, D.C. The report describes effective and promising approaches to youth permanence that were identified and the new learning that emerged as a result of the Convening's in-depth dialogues. In addition, a report from the research roundtable, *Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Research from the Research Roundtable*, offers an overview from experts around the country of how to document and understand youth permanence strategies.

To review both reports, visit www.caseyfamilyservices.org.

Fostering the Future

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care recently released *Fostering the Future* on DVD. It examines the causes and consequences of court-based delays to permanence and offers recommendations to improve the ability of courts to move children from the legal limbo of foster care to safe, permanent homes. The DVD uses firsthand accounts from children, parents, judges, administrators, and others to depict the high-stakes decisions courts make, as well as the obstacles that can prevent children from exiting foster care.



To obtain a copy of the Commission's Summary and an accompanying guide, visit www.pewfostercare.org.

Child Protection: Using Research to Improve Policy and Practice

Child Protection: Using Research to Improve Policy and Practice is the first book to report the results of the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), an ongoing long-term study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on children involved with the child welfare system. The book addresses a range of issues associated with the child protection system, including the types of problems experienced by children and families involved with the system, the range of services and interventions the system provides, and an assessment of its programs.

To order, call 800.537.5487 or visit www.brookings.edu.

"Racial Disparity in Foster Care Admission"

According to national data, roughly 37 percent of the children in foster care are African American despite the fact that African-American children make up only 15 percent of all U.S. children. This difference reflects the fact that African-American children are overrepresented in the nation's foster care system. To better understand this overrepresentation, the Chapin Hall Center for Children recently released "Racial Disparity in Foster Care Admission," a study addressing the issue of entry rate disparities at the county level. The report speaks to patterns of disparity with regard to age and place-specific risks for system entry.

To view the full report visit Chapin Hall at www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1463

Following the Tambourine Man: A Birthmother's Memoir

Ellerby M. Mason's memoir, *Following the Tambourine Man: A Birthmother's Memoir*, provides a personal commentary on the shifts in adoption culture and describes the overlooked heartbreak that many birthmothers endure. Mason follows the crooked path she took from a protected and privileged childhood and early adolescence, to her unplanned pregnancy and banishment, and to her daughter's birth and adoption. She then delves into the complex journey she embarked on over the next 35 years, haunted by her first child's memory and attempting to compensate for her loss.

To purchase this book, visit www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu.

What the Media Say

Media

Actress/Author Rowell Finds Kindred Spirit at Craftsmen's Guild

In her devotion to those in artistic pursuits, Victoria Rowell found a kindred spirit in Bill Strickland, who has spent years building up the Manchester Craftsman's Guild as a way for at-risk youth to change their lives through the arts and career training.

As an actress and national advocate for children in foster care, Victoria Rowell told Strickland that she would support him in his bid to open up another arts center for city youth in Los Angeles, still in the planning stage to open in a few years, and enlist the help of actors and advocates for foster children. She sees an especially strong demand for such a program in Los Angeles, a city she says has a high proportion of African-American children in foster care.

"I would support it wholeheartedly," Rowell, a national spokeswoman for Casey Family Services, an arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, said. "I would be able to reach into the community and make this happen."

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
September 2007



Counting What Counts

"Today, virtually no one supports the poverty threshold – currently set at \$20,444 for a family of two adults and two children – as a realistic assessment of families' genuine economic needs and circumstances. Indeed, scholar Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute has dubbed the poverty measure 'America's worst statistical indicator.' "

"Unfortunately, efforts to update the poverty measure – which began in the 1970's – have foundered repeatedly due to political discord. Proponents and critics of the current system represent genuine philosophical differences about who should be counted as poor."

Douglas W. Nelson
President
Annie E. Casey Foundation
The Washington Times

Creating a Village to Foster a Child

Treehouse is a planned intergenerational community, created in the hope that a close-knit support network can prevent children from bouncing from one foster home to another and give them tools to succeed. So far there are few such communities.

Not that Treehouse is a utopia. Early tension with the local school system has not completely dissipated. One child left because things did not work out with a foster family, and not all the older residents have assumed the grandparent role. Still, Harry Spence, who until last May was commissioner of the state's Department of Social Services, said Treehouse, which has a waiting list of 45 older adults and 15 families, is a "crucial experiment" that could also generate ideas about how to help foster children in conventional neighborhoods.

Those ideas could include Treehouse's animal therapy and gardening programs, or its methods of helping parents make decisions, said Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, a Treehouse consultant.

New York Times
August 16, 2007

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

2007: Important Dates

Voice is published quarterly by Casey Family Services, the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 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.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is 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 permanence-focused foster care, post-adoption services, family reunification, family preservation, family advocacy and support, family resource centers, assistance to young families, and nationwide 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:

Roye Anastasio-Bourke

Editor: John Hodgins

Contributing Writers: Nadege Mardy, Sania Metzger, Nathan Monell, and Robin Nixon

Design: Inergy Group

Extending the Conversation

With a vision of sharing ideas and insights, the *Voice* 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.

November

National Adoption Month

November 4

14th Annual Midwest Adoption Conference
Harper College
Palatine, IL
www.adoptivefamilies.today.org

November 8-10

2007 Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth Conference
Hyatt Regency Hotel and Riverside Convention Center
Rochester, NY
www.search-institute.org/hchy/

November 14-16

2007 Conference on Differential Response in Child Welfare
American Humane Association
Long Beach, CA
www.americanhumane.org

November 17

National Adoption Day
www.nationaladoptionday.org

December 7-9

FFCMH 19th Annual Conference
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (FFCMH)
Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill
Washington D.C.
www.ffcmh.org/conference.htm

December 10-11

ChildSafe 2007 Child Abuse Conference
ChildSafe
Norris Conference Center
San Antonio, TX
www.childsafe-sa.org/events_conference.html

December 10-12

"Shared Beliefs, Shared Values: Achieving Excellence in Adoption and Foster Care"
2007 National Foster Care and Adoption Training Conference
New Orleans Marriot
New Orleans, LA
www.cwla.org/conferences

January 28-February 1

22nd Annual San Diego International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment
Town and Country Resort and Convention Center
San Diego, CA
www.chadwickcenter.org/conference.htm

February 25-27

2008 National Children Conference
CWLA
Washington D.C.
www.cwla.org/conferences

March

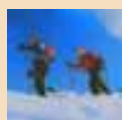
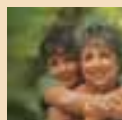
National Professional Social Work Month
www.socialworkers.org



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

Voice

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

888 799 KIDS
www.caseyfamilyservices.org