



# Voice

*Spring 2005 Volume Six Issue Two*

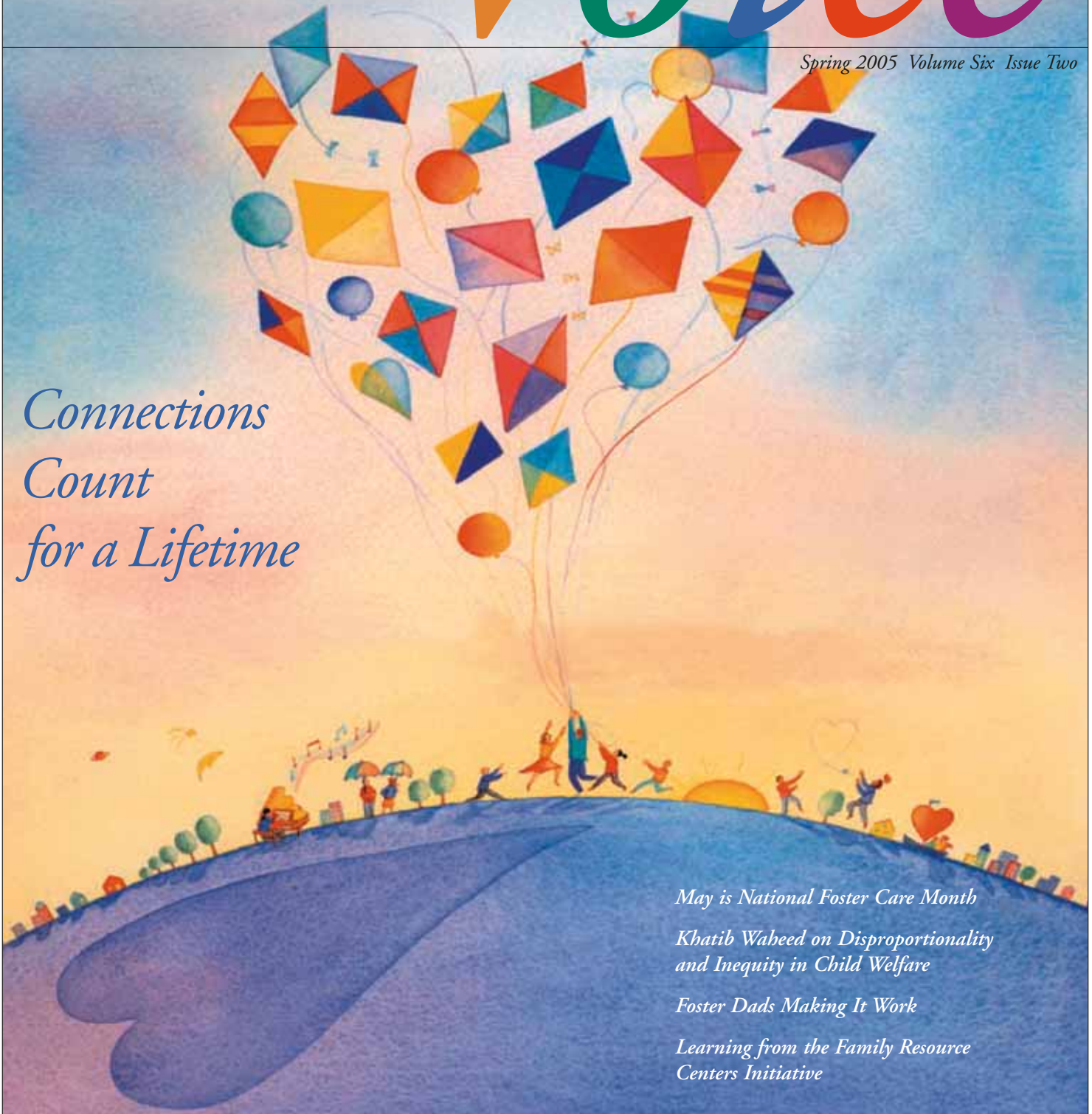
*Connections  
Count  
for a Lifetime*

*May is National Foster Care Month*

*Khatib Waheed on Disproportionality  
and Inequity in Child Welfare*

*Foster Dads Making It Work*

*Learning from the Family Resource  
Centers Initiative*





## *From the Executive Director's Desk*

*Each year, spring is a time to celebrate new beginnings.*

*In April, we returned to Boston for the eighth Casey Family Services Foster Parent Conference. A hallmark event for us, the 2005 conference—“Children, Families, Communities: Connections Count for a Lifetime”—brought together more than 500 Casey foster and adoptive parents, alumni, leading experts in the field, special guests and friends at the Marriott Copley Place for two days of sharing ideas and experiences and renewing friendships.*

*For me, and I think for all present, a special highlight of the conference came with the presentation of awards to more than 100 foster parents who have been with Casey Family Services for periods ranging from five to 20-plus years. The true value of their commitment is difficult to capture in words. You only have to look into the faces of the hundreds of children whose lives are better today because of these parents to see a true testimony to their contributions.*

*In May, as we join the nation in observing National Foster Care Month, it is important to recognize the long-lasting and profound difference that foster parents, adoptive parents and committed caring adults have made in the lives of vulnerable children. We join our colleagues and friends in sounding a call far and wide for citizens everywhere to step forward and be part of what is fast becoming a nationwide movement to better the outcomes of our most at-risk children. We know from the data collected and the real-life experiences of countless young men and women who have spent a significant part of their childhoods in care that every child needs a caring, committed family, not just for a period of time in his or her life, but for a lifetime.*

*What better time than now to celebrate and support these families who have helped to change the course of a lifetime for countless children and to encourage others to join in these important efforts in whatever way they can.*

Raymond L. Torres

*El Director Ejecutivo, Raymond L. Torres en la Conferencia de 2005 de Padres de Crianza y Adoptivos.*

## *Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo*

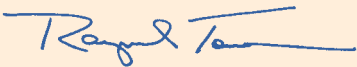
*Cada año, la primavera es una ocasión para celebrar los nuevos comienzos.*

*En abril, volvimos a Boston para celebrar la octava Conferencia de Padres de Crianza y Adoptivos de Casey Family Services. La conferencia de 2005 “Niños, Familias y Comunidades: Las relaciones cuentan para toda la vida”, un acontecimiento de gran distinción para nosotros, reunió a más de 500 padres de Crianza de Casey, ex alumnos, grandes expertos en el campo, invitados especiales y amigos en el Marriott Copley Place durante dos días en los que se compartieron ideas y experiencias, y también se volvieron a renovar amistades.*

*Para mí y para todos los presentes, una parte indiscutiblemente importante de la conferencia fue la presentación de los premios a más de 100 padres de crianza que han colaborado con los Casey Family Services durante períodos que variaron entre cinco y más de veinte años. Es difícil expresar en palabras el verdadero valor de su compromiso. Para ver un testimonio real de sus aportes, sólo hay que mirar a los ojos de cientos de niños cuyas vidas hoy son mejores gracias a estos padres.*

*En mayo, cuando toda la nación coincide en el Mes Nacional de Hogares de Crianza, es más importante que nunca reconocer los beneficios duraderos y profundos del trabajo que los padres de crianza han realizado para mejorar las vidas de niños vulnerables. Hoy, nos unimos a nuestros colegas y amigos en un llamado a todos los ciudadanos a lo largo y ancho del país para que sean parte de lo que rápidamente se está convirtiendo en un movimiento nacional para mejorar el futuro de nuestros niños en situaciones de riesgo. Sabemos a través de los datos recabados y la experiencia de la vida real de innumerables jóvenes que han pasado parte de su vida bajo cuidado sustituto, que todos los niños necesitan una familia que se comprometa y este atenta no sólo por tiempo corto y temporario, sino para toda la vida.*

*Qué mejor que ahora para celebrar y apoyar a estas familias que han ayudado a cambiar el curso de las vidas de una gran cantidad de niños y también para pedirles a otros a que se unan a estos importantes esfuerzos como mejor puedan.*



Raymond L. Torres



# SCENES FROM THE 2005 FOSTER PARENT CONFERENCE



*Above: Geoffrey Canada, founder and president/CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone, inspires foster parents to stand up for children in their own communities.*

More than 500 foster parents, youth, experts, guests and staff attended Casey Family Services' 2005 Foster Parent Conference: "Children, Families, Communities: Connections Count for a Lifetime." Held April 2 and 3, the event featured Geoffrey Canada, founder and president/CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone; Bob Danzig, motivational speaker, foster care alumnus and former head of the Hearst Newspaper Group; and actress Victoria Rowell, Casey Family Services' national spokesperson.

The conference was an opportunity to honor more than 100 foster parents for service milestones with Casey Family Services, recognizing those who have reached five, 10, 15 and 20 years of commitment. A full program of workshops and entertainment rounded out the event, held at Boston's Marriott Copley Place.

*Above: Participants in the "Performing Arts and Social Skills" conference workshop enjoy a drumming exercise. From left: Clifton Below, foster parent;*

*Cindy Obika, foster parent; and Shameika Moncrief, Bridgeport Division resource coordinator.*

*Below: Actress and Casey national spokesperson Victoria Rowell serves as Mistress of Ceremonies during the conference's awards gala.*



Geoffrey Canada recited his inspiring poem, "Take a Stand," while addressing foster parents at Casey's 2005 conference. The following is an excerpt from his creative work.

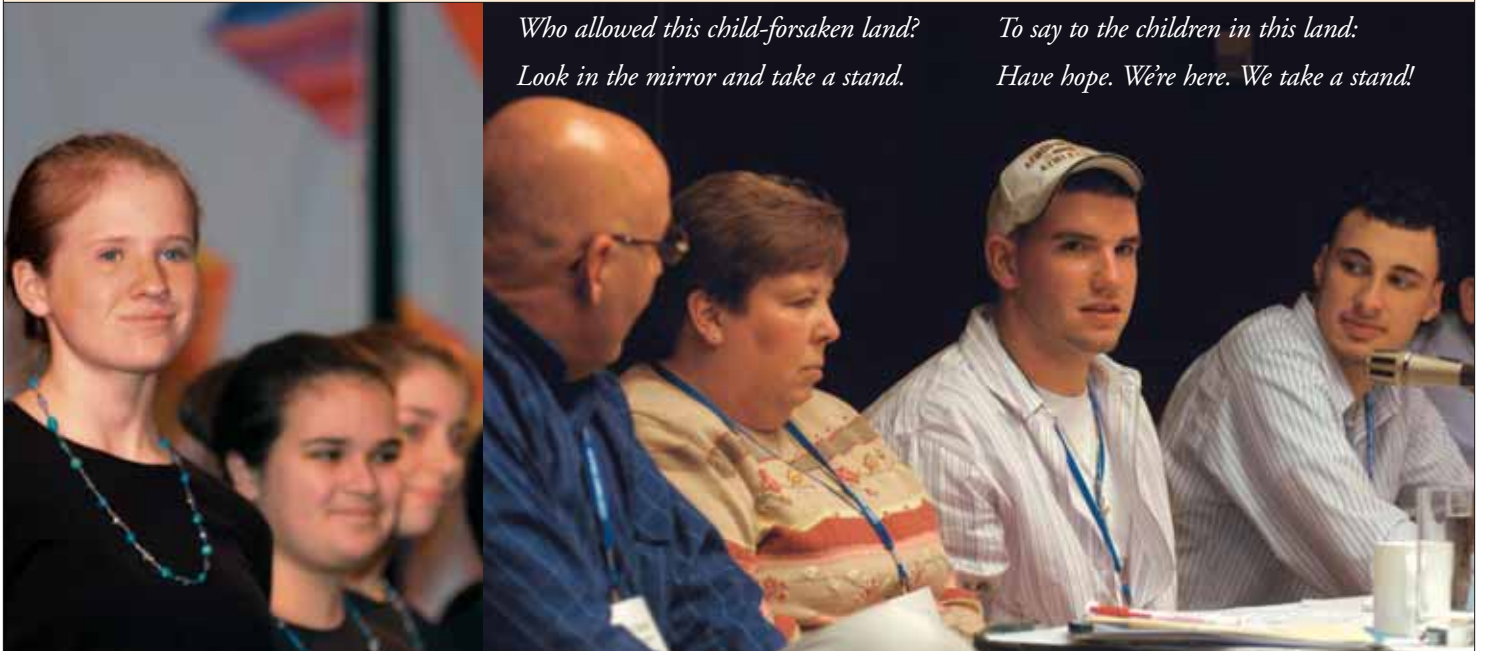
### Take a Stand

And Charlie's deepest, secret wishes,  
Is someone to smother him with kisses  
And squeeze and hug him tight, so tight,  
While he pretends to put up a fight.  
Or at least someone to be at home,  
Who misses him, he's so alone.

And tonight, some child will go to bed,  
No food, no place to lay their head.  
No hand to hold, no lap to sit,  
To give slobbery kisses, from slobbery lips.  
So you and I we must succeed  
In this crusade, this holy deed,

Who allowed this child-forsaken land?  
Look in the mirror and take a stand.

To say to the children in this land:  
Have hope. We're here. We take a stand!



Left: Foster parents take part in country line dancing lessons, one of the conference's entertainment offerings.

Above, left: Youth from Boston City Singers open the 2005 conference with song.

Above, right: A panel of foster care alumni and foster parents share their experiences about transitioning out of the system.



From left: Wendy Winters, Casey Family Services Board of Advisors member; Aristi Torres and Raymond L. Torres, Casey executive director.



Above: James P. Kelly, Chairman of the Annie E. Casey Foundation Board of Trustees, delivers an address of tribute and support to Casey foster parents.



Above: Motivational speaker Bob Danzig shares his message that every child deserves a champion.



Above: Award-winning vocalist Rachel Price performs a collection of memorable jazz classics for foster parents during the conference.

# MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

## CHANGE A LIFETIME

# CHANGE

This May, National Foster Care Month will be celebrated across the country with policy summits, legislative events and celebrity-filled gatherings honoring foster parents and focusing attention on the critical needs of those in foster care.

Today, there are an estimated 523,000 children and youth in the nation's foster care system, according to the National Foster Care Month Partnership. Most have been taken from their families because the birth parents are, for a variety of reasons, unable to care for their children. Foster families promote a healing process, offering stable

and secure environments until the children safely achieve permanency, by returning home or by establishing an alternative life-long relationship with their foster family, another family or caring adult.

The National Foster Care Month Partnership—a coalition of 13 public and private organizations, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs, the National Foster Care Coalition and the U.S. Children's Bureau—is supporting individual states and local communities in honoring foster parents and sharing the stories of resilient youth

in care. "This year, the partnership will expand its education campaign on the issues facing those in foster care to include how citizens can become involved in the lives of these children," says Virginia Pryor, manager of national nonprofit partnerships for Casey Family Programs, who leads the group's activities.

A newly expanded website is at the center of the partnership's efforts to advance both national awareness and grassroots participation. The site is available online at [www.fostercaremonth.org](http://www.fostercaremonth.org).

"Through the website, individuals, families and communities will not only have access to facts on foster care but also to new feature stories, alumni profiles, a mailing list to join in the efforts of the campaign and an events page highlighting activities occurring throughout the country," Pryor says.

In addition to the online presence, the partnership is building on the momentum generated by the growing recognition of National Foster Care Month with a fresh branding effort and messages. "We're very excited by the new look of the logo and our message to 'share your heart, open your home, give hope and change a lifetime,'" Pryor explains. "We hope this message will become a call to action to individuals, organizations and communities across the United States that it takes all of us to change a lifetime of a young person in care."

For the second consecutive year, communities are displaying blue ribbons to represent children in foster care. To help groups plan their events, the partnership's website offers many tools, including a media kit with tem-





*“This year, the partnership will expand its education campaign on the issues facing those in foster care*

*to include how citizens can become involved in the lives of these children.”*

plates for press releases, letters to the editor and proclamations that can be downloaded.

Events are being held in nearly every state this year, with support from the National Foster Parent Association chapters. “Once again, we’ve been asked to lead this year’s Blue Ribbon Campaign through our state associations,” says Karen Jorgenson, president of the National Foster Parent Association. “Our chapters are sending out media advisories, ordering materials and planning blue ribbon ceremonies to engage others to *change a lifetime.*”

In addition to the traditional blue ribbon ceremonies, organizations throughout the country are supporting the campaign while advancing distinct efforts to assist children in care.

In Los Angeles, for example, a city that oversees the largest foster care system in the nation, a committee has been formed to address the urgent healthcare needs of foster youth through a healthcare summit on May 24, 2005. Several of L.A.’s key healthcare and service providers, child welfare agencies and advocates have joined together to organize the first-of-its-kind healthcare summit to focus on the issues impeding access to quality and consistent healthcare.

As a child moves through Los Angeles’ child welfare system, medical records are sometimes non-existent or lost, and crucial information may not get to his or her caregivers, according to healthcare advocates. Health professionals, in turn, face tremendous challenges caring for the most vulnerable children. Co-chaired by Miriam Krinsky, executive director of the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, and Janis Spire, executive direc-



*The National Foster Care Month website, at [www.fostercaremonth.org](http://www.fostercaremonth.org), is a clearinghouse for information and ideas on how to honor foster parents throughout the country.*

tor of the Alliance for Children’s Rights, the committee behind the summit is working to develop a coordinated provider system.

“The summit will be an opportunity to review standards of care and to look at where we are now and where we want to go,” Spire says. “The focus will present practical solutions and provide resources to help solve some of the challenges. All of us are working toward the same goals, and many of us have landed on ways to short circuit the bottlenecks in the system.”

To assist in their work, the Children’s Action Network has been given a grant by the California Endowment to develop an Internet-based medical passport system for foster youth that will keep track of medical records of foster youth who move to new homes or transition out of the foster care system.

Also on the West Coast, Casey Family Services’ national spokesperson Victoria Rowell, an actress and alumna of Maine’s foster care system, will help focus attention

on the needs of foster children through appearances at special events and media interviews. On May 14, 2005, she will gather her friends in the entertainment business at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles to raise scholarship funds.

In addition, Rowell will help launch the National Foster Care Month Partnership’s new workplace initiative, which is designed to promote internships, mentors and job programs for youth transitioning out of the foster care system nationwide. Since 2000, Rowell has found jobs for former foster youth at CBS Television and Viacom in Los Angeles. Other spokespeople for the workplace initiative include Tony Shellman, founder of the Enyce Clothing Company; Bob Danzig, former CEO of The Hearst Newspaper Group; and R&B music producer Kashif, all of whom spent time in the foster care system.

“At Casey, the appreciation and commitment we feel for our foster parents and children are evident year round,” says Raymond L. Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services. “National Foster Care Month, however, offers a unique opportunity to partner with others to draw national attention to the achievements of foster children due to the caring guidance of foster families. All children deserve and benefit from the love of a family, and National Foster Care Month is an important time for individuals, organizations and communities to both recognize and support those who work to improve the quality of life for the nation’s most vulnerable children. We intend to keep the spirit of this campaign strong throughout the year in order to develop and deepen partnerships with all sectors of society.”

# Foster Dads Making It Work



Fathers are active members of many of the more than 170,000 foster families in America, according to the Child Welfare League of America. The role fathers play is a critical one. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, children without responsible fathers face much greater risk of poverty, poor school performance, criminal activity and substance abuse.

Casey Family Services reaches out to foster fathers with everything from facilitating support groups to scheduling meetings in which both parents can attend. “We promote joint problem solving when we have couples because they can back each other up. Usually, there are some things that are really going to aggravate one parent, and that’s when the other parent needs to take over,” says Bert Meek, team leader at Casey Family Services’ Maine Division, who has run a foster father support group for more than four years. “It gives so much richness

to the family, and that’s better for everyone – parents and kids.”

Steve Klein and his wife Daphne have worked together during the nearly 20 years they have fostered three children. They are very aware of the important role of foster fathers. “In almost every case, I actually bring to the children the role of father that’s been missing from their lives,” says Steve Klein, from Casey’s Vermont Division. “So often our kids have not had any previous fathering or it’s been fathering at its worst.”

Meek agrees. “Most of our kids have been abused or neglected,” he says. “Foster fathers provide a crucial corrective example of the use of power that kids can juxtapose with their previous experiences. Foster fathers can show kids that ‘just because I am bigger than you, I won’t abuse my advantage. I can control my anger. I can love you without sexually abusing you.’ ”

Dan and Cheryl Roy, of New Hampshire, decided to foster a high school-age girl when their two biological sons were 17 and 21 because they both had enjoyed working with teenagers. “Cassie is everything I could ever wish for in a foster daughter,” says Dan. “In the last six months, we’ve really developed a relationship. She looks to me as a role model and for advice on certain things. She also counts on me for certain activities that we both enjoy, like soccer and softball.

“I think a foster dad adds another dimension to what’s available to a foster child,” says Dan Roy. “It’s an opportunity for kids to experience all types of things before they go out in the world.” The Roys actively have worked to maintain a relationship with Cassie’s birth family. They have twice-monthly visits with her mother and occasional visits with her father. “We have been keeping the lines of communication open with him so he knows what Cassie is doing and that she’s all right,” he says.

## NATIONAL FATHERHOOD ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

**The Fatherhood Project**  
Family and Work Institute  
330 7th Ave., 14th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212.465.2044  
[www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)

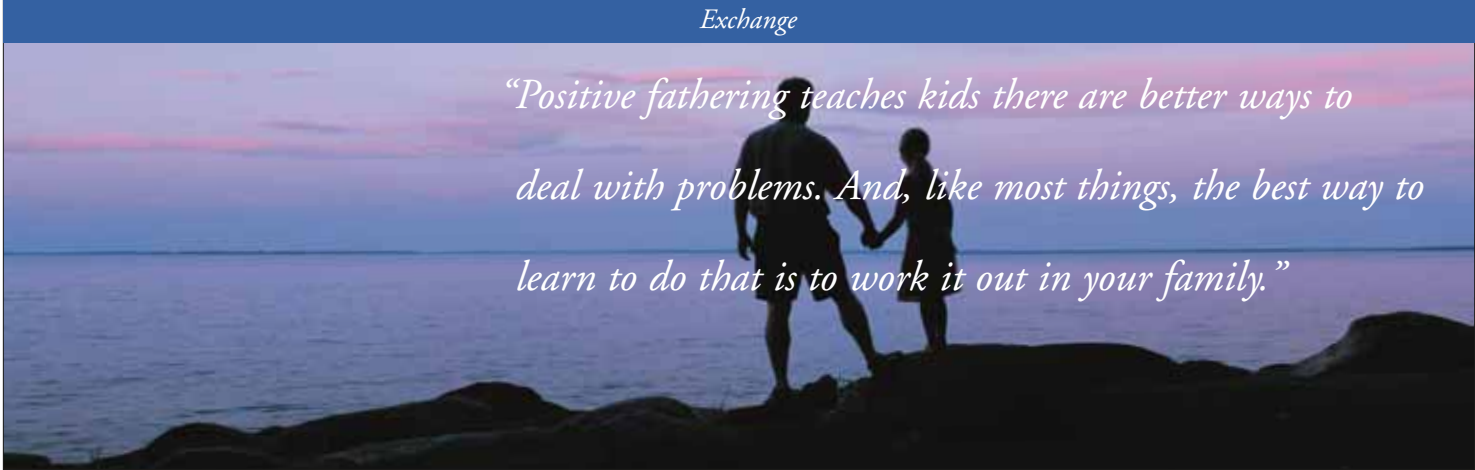
**National Center for Fathering**  
10200 W. 75th St., Suite 267  
Shawnee Mission, KS 66204  
913.384.4661  
[www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com)

**National Center on Fathers and Families**  
Graduate School of Education  
University of Pennsylvania  
3700 Walnut St., Box 58  
Philadelphia, PA 19101  
215.573.5500

**National Fatherhood Initiative**  
101 Lake Forest Blvd., Suite 360  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
301.948.0599  
[www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)

**National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute**  
5252 E. Beverly Blvd.  
East Los Angeles, CA 90022  
323.728.7770  
[www.latinofatherhood.org](http://www.latinofatherhood.org)





*“Positive fathering teaches kids there are better ways to deal with problems. And, like most things, the best way to learn to do that is to work it out in your family.”*

Keeping siblings together is another important aspect of foster fathering. Rich Palmer’s family includes two foster brothers, Al and Jerry. “When we brought Al into our home, his brother was in a residential treatment center. We started visiting Jerry and then having him visit on weekends,” Palmer, from the Massachusetts Division, says. “We really had no intention of bringing in another child, but when Jerry was ready for foster care, we had to take him. It was the first time these two brothers had been together since Jerry was three-years old.”

Foster care does not end for these fathers when their foster children turn 18 or graduate from high school. “We’re still in touch with our foster daughter who left 17 years ago,” says Steve Klein. “Although our foster son is 23 and is in his last year of college, we are still very involved in his life.” Palmer agrees: “The rewards are definitely there over the long term. You can see the outcome of all your efforts. Al is now in his

second year of college and is doing very well. His brother Jerry is making progress. The kids really appreciate it, especially as they get older.”

Support groups help to promote good parenting. “We start our groups by talking about different kinds of fathers: stepfathers, adoptive fathers, biological fathers, foster fathers,” says Meek. “That makes the point that we’re not just interested in you as a foster father of a Casey kid, but we are interested in you as a father and as a man.” Casey’s Bridgeport Division has ongoing support for foster fathers, as well as the Maine Division.

But being a foster parent is something special. “We treat our foster kids the same way as our biological kids,” says Palmer, “but you have to deal with them in a different way. Foster parenting is definitely different. I didn’t think it would be, but it is. It’s not just black and white with foster care. There’s

a lot of gray and you have to negotiate and pick your battles.” The fathers in the Maine support group have had the same experience. “For many of our kids, when something goes wrong, there are only two responses: get hostile or leave,” says Meek. “Positive fathering teaches kids there are better ways to deal with problems. And, like most things, the best way to learn to do that is to work it out in your family.”

All of the fathers agree that the deep satisfaction of extending their family has been the greatest reward. “These are our children,” says Klein. Dan Roy agrees: “Personally, just watching Cassie grow and continue to be happy is my greatest satisfaction.”

Palmer especially treasures a family portrait that their seven children – four biological and three foster – surprised him and Jill with this past Christmas. “All the kids got together and did this for us. That was so great because we’re all a family.”

## CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

*The Maine Division’s Foster Father Support Group established these principles for its participants:*

- Be gentle with yourself. No one is a perfect parent. Admit to your mistakes, learn from them and move on.
- Change how you relate to others. Ultimately, you cannot change anyone else.
- Give yourself some solitude daily to restore and regroup.
- Develop a support system for yourself. A foster father sometimes can feel the pain of his children, who might have had some traumatic experiences. Keep your supports in place and use them regularly. No one should parent alone.
- Be mindful of how effective your network of supports is to you. Make sure you feel uplifted and energized. If you discover that you leave your network feeling angry and resentful, look for a new type of support.
- Nurture your relationship with your partner. It is hoped that he or she will be with you long after the children have left home.
- Don’t neglect the other aspects of your life. With all the demands of parenting and working, there doesn’t seem to be enough time. Try to laugh and play a lot. Honor your spiritual self.

# Girls Just Want to Have Friends

As she prepared for the first session of a young women's group at Casey Family Services' Rhode Island Division, social worker Ileana Valentin-Lopez had no idea what to expect. The group was not part of the official services offered by the organization. "I had a number of teenage girls in my foster care caseload," she explains. "I saw some common themes in their lives and thought it might be good for the girls to get together and share their experiences."

The results were not only positive, they were transforming. After just two eight-week sessions, with six to 10 young women between ages 15 and 19, Valentin-Lopez reports that "every one of the girls improved academically, and all will graduate from high school." In fact, one teen even moved out of special education into mainstream classes. Another has been accepted to the University of Rhode Island and currently is in El Salvador on a project with Habitat for Humanity. But these feats didn't surprise Valentin-Lopez. "When kids get the [emotional] support they need, they can excel in other areas," she says.

That support was provided readily by Casey staff in an environment where the girls learned to feel safe. Like many youth in care, according to Tracie Jones, the division's resource coordinator and group co-facilitator, these teens had experienced loss, separation and troubled relationships and found it difficult to develop peer networks. As the group evolved, the girls were able to create their own sense of community. But their bonding was not instantaneous.



*Above: Yanelie hangs out with a "friend" before attending the girl's group. Below: Jaree welcomes new girls to the Providence group.*

"These young women were from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, and, in the beginning, they eyed each other warily," says Jones. Describing the dynamics at the first meeting, she says, "You go with what you know—so like girls sat with like girls." Some of the girls had never had friends outside of their own ethnic background, but this group changed those dynamics. Valentin-Lopez and Jones asked the teens to agree on appropriate procedures and basic rules that reinforced respect for all viewpoints during the weekly sessions. The girls also decided on the direction the group should take and identified their own discussion topics.

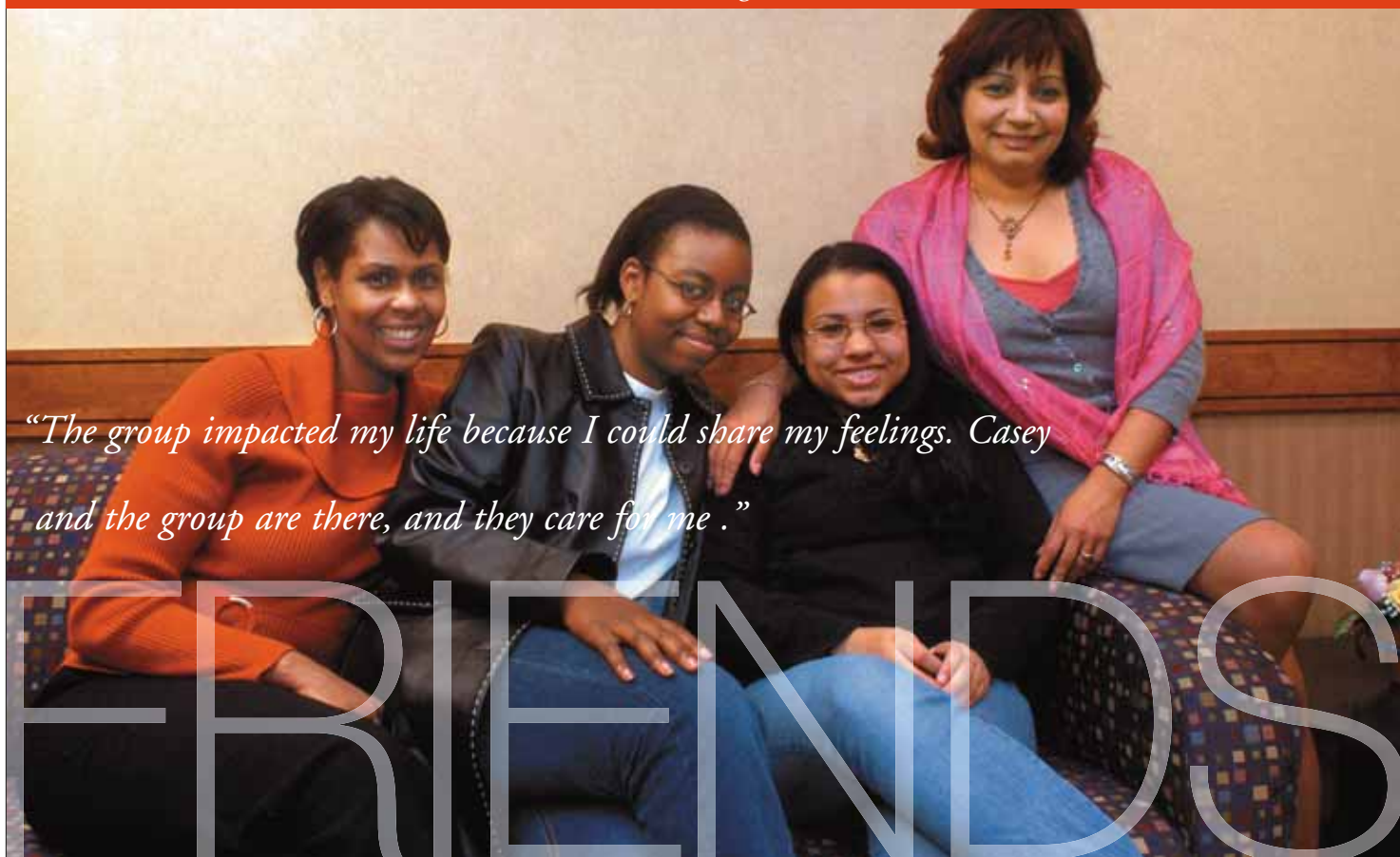
"Once they began sharing their views on topics important to them, they realized they had feelings and experiences in common," says Valentin-Lopez. More important, they learned that by sharing these through their individual cultural lenses, group members grew to understand each other in a very

personal way. Valentin-Lopez describes a discussion on grooming: "They talked about hair care and the subtle statements made by the media and others about what constitutes 'good' hair and 'bad' hair." This exchange sensitized the girls about the ways in which prejudices can be reinforced in our culture. In the end, they had reached a new mutual understanding and were able to recognize "how beautiful each of them was in her own way," according to Valentin-Lopez.

Jaree, a high school sophomore who wants to attend college and become a physician, speaks openly about how the group changed her. "I thought some of the girls were stuck up and had an attitude problem," she says. "But the group helped me learn not to judge a book by its cover. We didn't know each other [in the beginning]. We asked each other questions ... and when you find out that you're like someone else, you talk on the phone and get closer ... and now, we're like family."

Another group member, Yanelie, agrees. "We kept on talking and getting to know





*“The group impacted my life because I could share my feelings. Casey and the group are there, and they care for me .”*

# FRIENDS

each other, and relationships just got better.”

Discussion sessions covered serious topics such as HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, and peer pressure as well as lighter subjects like job readiness, etiquette, personal care, music and the arts. But the exchanges involved more than merely talking among themselves. The Casey co-leaders invited professional guests and encouraged community involvement. For example, instead of just talking about teen pregnancy, the group invited a teen mother and father with their baby to talk about the realities of becoming parents at such a young age. “The girls were able to see for themselves the consequences of getting pregnant and becoming parents,” says Valentin-Lopez. “This was an important reality check.”

Casey staff prepared a three-course dinner at the division for a session on table etiquette. The girls learned to set a formal table, arranged flowers for a centerpiece and, with some guidance, practiced appropriate table manners as they enjoyed the

*From left: Tracie Jones, Jaree, Yanelie and Ileana Valentin-Lopez come together for friendship and support.*

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## ONCE THEY BEGAN SHARING THEIR VIEWS ON TOPICS IMPORTANT TO THEM, THEY REALIZED THEY HAD FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES IN COMMON.

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dinner. Another session took the group to a beauty salon where the girls learned from a licensed cosmetologist about skin care, how to select and apply make-up, and general tips on personal grooming. “Everything was discussed through a cultural lens,” says Valentin-Lopez. “The girls became open about their own preferences and to honor each other for their choices.”

To learn more about HIV/AIDS, two girls were asked to research the topic and prepare a presentation for the group. “They really took charge,” says a proud Valentin-Lopez.

Exchanges about sexual conduct, dating and other issues relevant to their lives helped to reinforce a feeling of trust among the girls and a sense that they were not alone. Jaree agrees: “Girls like to learn about boys. We shared experiences about guys we dated. We learned about diseases and teen pregnancy.”

Yanelie had a similar reaction: “The group helped me learn a lot. People had told me [about some things] but didn’t give me the right information. HIV, socializing, self-esteem, manners – that helped me a lot.”

The 16 weeks came to an end, but the relationships continue. “The girls come back for their hugs,” says Valentin-Lopez, as she puts her arm around Yanelie. A grinning Jaree looks on and then, thoughtfully, offers, “I want the group to start up again. Some of us don’t have a lot of friends or much to do. The group impacted my life because I could share my feelings. Casey and the group are there, and they care for me.”



# VICTORIA ROWELL OFFERS SAGE ADVICE FOR RESILIENT GIRLS

*As 2005 Outstanding Actress in a Daytime Drama, NAACP Image Award Winner Victoria Rowell inspires young girls to reach for their dreams.*



*Famed actress Lana Turner returns to Hollywood High School in its golden age in 1938. Today the school is in a fragile Los Angeles community.*

*by James Peter Rubin*

Victoria Rowell is well-known to television fans. The long-time cast member on the soap opera “The Young and the Restless” is an Emmy Award-nominated actress, but she found a tough audience at Hollywood High School when she strode into its classroom last February.

It was the regular Thursday morning meeting of Young Women from Adversity to Resiliency (YWAR). The special Los Angeles program was established two years ago in city high schools to help troubled teen girls who face issues such as pregnancy, domestic violence and poverty.

Rowell won them over by finding common ground. She discussed her own upbringing in foster homes. She offered practical

advice: *Don't succumb to peer pressure. Don't allow a few wrong turns to derail your goals. Be independent. Save money. Think about the future.* Rowell asked the girls questions about their lives and challenged their assumptions about what was possible for women growing up in difficult circumstances. And, yes, she talked about show business for the girls thinking of acting.

“It was like she was any other girl,” says Yadira Alvarado, a 19-year-old senior. “I felt like here was someone who really understood us.”

Rowell's visit to Hollywood High School was her third at Los Angeles schools for YWAR. By the time of YWAR's graduation ceremony later this spring, she'll have averaged about one appearance per month. She's also committed to serve as the graduation keynote speaker for the second consecutive year. “I want these girls to know they're not alone,” says Rowell. “I want them to know there are people who share what they're going through.”

Rowell's work with YWAR in her hometown – she lives a few miles from Hollywood High – dovetails with her long-standing commitment to help girls and teens in foster care. In 1990, she founded the Rowell Foster Children Foundation's Positive Plan. The nonprofit organization connects foster children to music and arts programs. With funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, it has allocated thousands of dollars in scholarship money while raising awareness about foster care. Frequently called upon as an expert speaker, she's also the national spokesperson for Casey Family Services. “I've had a purpose in my life to ensure that my experience as a foster child wasn't in vain,” says Rowell.

While only a few YWAR teens are in foster care, Rowell saw an opportunity to help a broader range of students. YWAR's creation in 2003 followed a spike in the number of teenage girls who were in trouble with the law. Many of these girls came from difficult backgrounds. They lacked role models or support. Ungrounded, they stopped attending school and veered toward the wrong crowd. Some of them had gang affiliations.

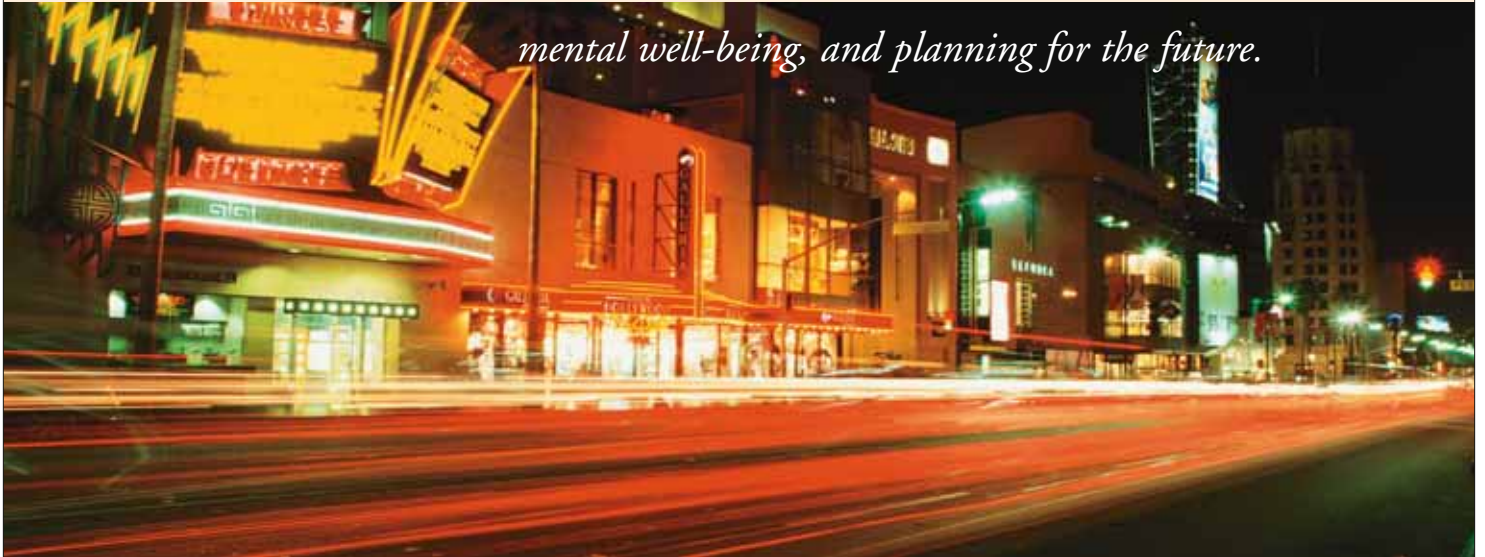
The program's centerpiece is its series of weekly meetings that typically gather about 20 girls. The discussions cover five topics: self-esteem, relationships, sexuality, physical and mental well-being, and planning for the future. The girls' lives illustrate a range of problems common to big-city teens. Frank discussion is encouraged. Students must complete the full nine-month program to receive graduation certificates, which are awarded at a spring luncheon.

YWAR's \$270,000 budget is administered by the Los Angeles City Commission on the Status of Women. The funding pays for a staff of just four people who monitor about 200 girls in nine high schools. The program started in just one school in its inaugural year. The expansion to other sites has made it important to find outside mentors to reinforce YWAR's themes of sound judgment and self-reliance.

Hollywood High was added to the list a year ago. The school has a pedigree history. Its alumni include Judy Garland, Lana Turner and Mickey Rooney. “America's most famous public school,” trumpets its website. But now, many of the surrounding neighborhoods from which it draws enrollment are struggling. Absenteeism is high. The school handed out more than 400

Today, Hollywood is home to a vibrant entertainment industry, but also to several vulnerable communities.

*The program's centerpiece is its series of weekly meetings that typically gather about 20 girls. The discussions cover five topics: self-esteem, relationships, sexuality, physical and mental well-being, and planning for the future.*



suspensions during 2003-2004 and expelled 13 students, according to one report.

Hollywood has responded by increasing services for its most at-risk students, sometimes through government partnerships. YWAR was a logical fit. It had a potentially large upside at almost no cost. "This was one more resource for our school," says Carol Berk, who was responsible for bringing YWAR to Hollywood High School.

Rowell understands hardship but also the importance of support at home. Growing up in New England in the 1960s and '70s, she developed self-confidence in part because of a strong connection to her foster mother, Agatha Armstead. At age eight, Rowell won a scholarship to the Cambridge School of Ballet. She later danced for the American Ballet Theater II Company, appeared on the cover of *Seventeen* and *Mademoiselle* magazines and was later named *Soap Opera Digest's* outstanding actress for her portrayal as Drucilla Winters in "The Young and the Restless."



*Victoria Rowell, far right, talks with students of Hollywood High.*

Rowell started with YWAR after an acquaintance asked her to speak at last year's graduation. She ran directly from a "Young and the Restless" rehearsal to deliver the speech. Touched by the event, Rowell agreed to start meeting with smaller groups of students in the fall.

Fast forward to February 2005. At her Hollywood High School meeting, Rowell sat in a circle with students and sipped juice that the school provided along with cookies. She handed out cards with her email address and encouraged students to contact

her. She purchased a full case of M&M's and Skittles from one of the girls, Alvarado, who was raising money for the high school's commencement activities.

During the meeting, Rowell advised 15-year-old sophomore Emily Acosta to get home earlier. Acosta's inability to make curfew was a source of friction with her mother. "Victoria had to be home early when she was growing up," recalls Acosta. "She had to listen to her mother. That said something to me."

Rowell asked Alvarado, who is pregnant, what she planned to do after the baby is born. Rowell encouraged the teen to hold onto her dreams and go to college. "You should never depend on someone else," Alvarado recalls her saying. "Your kids are going to think that you didn't go to school because of them."

"She was cool," says Alvarado.

*James Peter Rubin is a freelance writer in Los Angeles.*

# The Workplace Initiative: Defining a Successful Future

# Design

A youthful face in the fashion industry is creating ways to help foster youth enter the workforce.

With the launch of Mecca Clothing in 1993, Tony Shellman helped define what became known as “hip-hop” style. Three years later, he founded the Enyce Clothing Company. An immediate success, the company’s rapid growth attracted customers, as well as Liz Claiborne, Inc., which purchased the line in 2003. Clearly, Shellman excels at helping new ventures get off the ground.

Sustaining his star power in the urban clothing market is a legacy of love and encouragement from his adoptive parents. Appreciative of his own opportunities, he’s reaching out to support other youth from foster care hoping to make a splash in the workforce.

Shellman has helped to launch a new workplace initiative with the National Foster Care Month Partnership. Organizations across the country are promoting internships, mentor relationships and job programs for youth who are leaving the foster care system.

While awareness of the initiative will be highlighted during May, celebrated as National Foster Care Month, Shellman – given up at birth – sees his commitment as having a lasting impact. “This isn’t just Foster Care Month,” he says energetically. “This is foster care *life* and is about creating opportunities that will help kids long term.”



*Fashion mogul Tony Shellman, of Enyce, is a spokesperson for the National Foster Care Month Partnership’s workplace initiative.*

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**“IF MY EFFORTS HELP ONE OF THE KIDS AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE THIS YEAR, THEN I’VE DONE MY JOB.”**

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Knowing his life would be very different had he remained in care longer or gone to a different family, Shellman’s interest in foster youth is heartfelt. “I got such a good deal in life. There are so many who don’t. I realized that I could help these kids have a voice.”

Shellman hopes to educate business and creative leaders about the important contributions foster youth can make when given education, mentoring and support. He also will develop internships and opportunities for youth in the fashion industry.

“I hope to make change, not for my benefit, but for the kids,” he says. “If my efforts help one of the kids aging out of foster care this year, then I’ve done my job.”

Other foster care alumni are lending their support to the workplace initiative, including actress Victoria Rowell, star of the daytime drama, “The Young and the Restless.” “My foster parents encouraged me to follow my dream,” Rowell says. “Now I want to help foster youth have the chance to do all they can in life.”

Each year, 20,000 children leave the foster care system. Raymond L. Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services, the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and a provider of foster care services in the northeast, says, “communities must commit themselves to supporting these youngsters in accessing meaningful opportunities for work.”

For Shellman, supporting foster youth in the workplace is about more than a future paycheck. It’s about fostering greatness. “We don’t know who will be the next Einstein or Bill Gates,” he says. “He could be a foster kid today who just needs an opportunity to show how great he is.”





## KHATIB WAHEED

# Close-up

*Khatib Waheed is a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) in Washington, D.C. He joined the staff to head up the organization's new initiative to raise national awareness and concern about the overrepresentation of children of color in foster care and the inequitable treatment and outcomes that many of these children and their families experience. A leader in helping communities recognize the impact that structural racism has on children and families of color, he is working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Casey Family Services, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Marguerite Casey Foundation to address racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity in child welfare.*

**Voice:** *In plain terms, what is disproportionality?*

**WAHEED:** There are a couple ways that people are describing disproportionality. The most widely-used definition is to say that it's manifested by either an over- or under-representation of minority children in the foster care system when compared with the total numbers of these children in the population. It also refers to a situation where particular racial and ethnic groups, for example, African Americans, are represented in the system at a higher or lower rate compared with other racial and ethnic groups, such as Caucasians. I tend to think that both of these perspectives are strong and important to consider.

The issue is inequitable services provided to minority children: a disparity in treatment, experiences and services and even outcomes. It isn't just about numbers. It's about the quality of life for vulnerable children and families. Disproportionality calls our attention to larger issues associated with disparity.

**VOICE:** *So, in textbook terms, disproportionality is a mathematical formula comparing the entirety of a community with its counterpart in the child welfare system. What's the human equation?*

**WAHEED:** My interpretation of that question has to do with the individual and social costs associated with children, regardless of their color, entering the child welfare system unfairly. They often will experience multiple placements or enter adulthood without support and connections to a caring adult. One analysis done by Prevent Child Abuse America in 2001 talked about the immediate costs related to hospitalization (chronic and mental healthcare) and the long-term costs, such as special education, juvenile delinquency and loss of productivity. This analysis estimates that the nation loses roughly \$258 million a day and \$94 billion annually by inappropriately placing children in foster care.

**VOICE:** *Those numbers are staggering. What are the roots of disproportionality?*

**WAHEED:** In my mind, it is clearly not about finger pointing or blame. The root causes of disproportionality are very complex and interconnected. One way of explaining it might be to look at four signif-

icant factors that then break down into additional factors.

The first factor is external, which includes poverty and structural racism. It's not just poverty in terms of individual or family poverty, but it's poverty concentrated in racially segregated neighborhoods. What does that do in terms of limiting access to opportunity structures, such as decent housing, education and employment? Structural racism involves the policies, practices and racial stereotypes in public systems that tend to create, or even perpetuate, this disadvantage for children.

Social disorganization and safety are a second factor. By social disorganization, I'm thinking of the level of volunteerism in the community. Do the people in the community consider doing something extra to build the capacity to handle things in legal and appropriate ways? Social disorganization also speaks to the way or extent to which residents take responsibility for addressing crime and the level to which informal and formal support systems work together to meet the needs of children and families.



The third factor is internal, involving racial or cultural bias toward children of color on the part of mandated reporters and child welfare workers. There also are the challenges of retaining experienced staff and mitigating the tension of high stress, low salaries and a competitive job market in child welfare.

Last, but equally important, are those family-level factors that include inadequate parenting skills, poor conflict-management skills, drug use and other criminal enterprises.

*VOICE: How does community safety translate to the safety of a child within the home?*

*WAHEED:* In the community, an individual armed with the right filters can identify where there is cause for concern or risk about child maltreatment. For example, what should community residents do if they see school-age children unsupervised at certain hours? What is the range of possibilities explaining why children may be seen consistently at home rather than in school? The community's capacity to recognize that children are in places they should not be is important. The deeper part is that someone cares enough about the people down the street to notice, to do something about it. It doesn't mean that one's assumptions about these children are correct. It does mean that the community should have a capacity to recognize and channel its concerns appropriately.

*VOICE: If a racial group is overrepresented, such as African Americans, what are the implications for a black child in that system?*

*WAHEED:* The impact on the child's development and that family is severe. We can think about the loss of children and how it demoralizes a family; how it disrupts families and community networks; and how it reinforces existing stereotypes. For African Americans, toddlers with accidental injuries are five times more likely to be evaluated for abuse and three times more likely to be

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## THE OVERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IS NO BETTER THAN THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF CAUCASIAN CHILDREN. THEY BOTH RAISE SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS, WHERE WE PLACE OUR VALUES, AND THE ROLES BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR SYSTEMS.

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reported to child protective services. Caseworkers are more likely to substantiate allegations of neglect against African American and Latino families. The only variable that could explain the discrepancy is race.

Another example is when a newborn tests positive for prenatal cocaine exposure. An infant is 72 percent more likely to be removed from the mother if she is African American, according to a 1993 report published in the *American Journal of Public Health*. Court-appointed advocates spend less time with African American children

than with other children. The number of hours per month spent on a child are 2.67 and 4.3 respectively. These are discrepancies that clearly play out by race.

*VOICE: In that same system, what are the implications for a white child?*

*WAHEED:* Geographic isolation and poverty in rural areas contributes to an overall lack of access to needed services and disadvantages for many Caucasian children, I believe. Compounding the problem is a silence in many rural communities that leaves me to suspect that a lot of abuse and neglect go unreported. Many of these abuses go undetected until the children and youth in these rural communities either run away or end up in the juvenile justice system.

The overrepresentation of minorities is no better than the underrepresentation of Caucasian children. They both raise serious concerns about how the system works, where we place our values, and the roles between public and private sector systems.

*VOICE: Does the higher representation of minorities in the child welfare system reflect a perception that minority parents represent a greater threat for abusing or neglecting their children?*

*WAHEED:* The National Incidence Studies (NIS) is one of the few national surveys to provide an answer to that question, at least for African Americans. The surveys indicate that the highest rates of maltreatment were among families with low incomes, one parent, parents not in the labor force and large numbers of children. The assumption was, and still is, that since African Americans have higher levels of risk than Caucasians, it would be suspected that there would be

*“We hope to improve outcomes for children and families of color within targeted areas by significantly reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality by 2015. I think it is a tremendous step in the right direction.”*

higher rates of abuse and neglect, yet there was no significant evidence substantiating this in the NIS data.

*VOICE: Disproportionality has received more attention in recent years than it did in the past. Why do you think that is?*

*WAHEED:* The proportion of children of color in the child welfare system has been escalating since the end of World War II. Between 1945 and 1961, the numbers nearly doubled, from 14 percent to almost 27 percent. In the 1970s, black administrators of child welfare began raising their voices in concern about how certain practices and policies ultimately would lead to disproportionality. By the 1980s, not only did the total number of children in foster care increase, but also the number of African Americans, in particular, doubled. For many, it has been a consistent cause for concern.

I think that in the last five to seven years, there has been an increase in our comfort to talk about race and racism within institutions. Prior to that, we had to use words like culture to segue into a deeper conversation about race. In other words, our emotional quotient (EQ) is beginning to rise and catch up with our intellectual quotient about these issues.

*VOICE: You are part of a collaborative trying to achieve racial and ethnic equity for children and families. Is the group headed in the right direction to tackle this issue?*

*WAHEED:* You are referring to the Casey-CSSP Alliance on Racial Equity. I think we're definitely headed in the right direction. We've been meeting for nearly a year,

coming together initially to learn about each other's work on addressing disproportionality and disparity, and determining how we can work together to respond to these issues jointly. With the leadership within these foundations and organizations coming to the table already concerned about these issues, we were able to commit

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**I THINK WE CAN LOOK TO THE FEDERAL LEVEL TO CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS, MANDATING THAT STATES COMPILE, ANALYZE AND REPORT DISPARITY AND THEIR PROGRESS TOWARD EQUITY.**

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to the development of a business plan that would support the operation of a national campaign. We met in September 2004 to review the plan, and a compelling response from one of our key players was that the plan was both too comprehensive and yet not comprehensive enough. These words about our capacity as an alliance and the broader need for jurisdictions to address the complex needs and issues of vulnerable children and families have led us to revise the plan to identify possible opportunities for action in 2005.

*VOICE: What are the collaborative's goals?*

*WAHEED:* We hope to improve outcomes for children and families of color within targeted areas by significantly reducing racial

and ethnic disproportionality by 2015. I think it is a tremendous step in the right direction. It takes a lot for foundations and organizations even to get their arms around this issue, let alone allocate funding to address it and identify specific outcome measurements.

*VOICE: What can be done nationally?*

*WAHEED:* We can look at increasing awareness among lawmakers. I think we can look to the federal level to create accountability mechanisms, mandating that states compile, analyze and report disparity and their progress toward equity. We also should look at shifting funding and examining how it impacts practice. In my opinion, there is an imbalance between the Child Welfare Act and the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which currently places a greater emphasis on placement and adoption than on reunification and support.

*VOICE: What should we be doing on the local and grassroots level?*

*WAHEED:* There is this whole notion about public will. I think we need to develop a sharp communications message so we can mobilize our stakeholders and others. Second, we need to see that parents and youth of color are engaged in any efforts to reform child welfare and practice. In general, we need to strengthen the capacity of the child welfare workforce. We also should develop a sustained commitment to evaluate practices and policies. We can celebrate successes and eliminate or table efforts that aren't working. Data-driven decisions are important and should be made at the local level.



# “MY BACK PAGES”

## MAINE DIVISION DIRECTOR

### MARK MILLAR

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



Maine Division Director Mark Millar at Casey's new offices in Portland.

When Division Director Mark Millar sits in his attractive office overlooking Portland and the Maine seacoast, he remembers how it all began. It was May 1986, and “I spent the first six weeks on the job in a hallway with a desk and a chair in donated United Way space.”

For the first 18 months, with an administrative assistant and one social worker who handled child referrals, Millar did all the home studies and publicity for the new division. There were fewer than 30 employees for all of Casey combined. “I enjoy the role of being the historian. It is an oral history passed from person to person, and I’ve always been interested in keeping the Jim Casey legacy alive.

“The greatest challenge I faced was the rapid growth of the agency. I needed to help families and staff adjust to the change and become engaged and excited about the possibilities this growth brought to our division and the agency. Conversely, one of the greatest rewards has been ... to see Casey recognized as a quality program and a

leader that the state seeks for technical assistance in improving child welfare.”

Millar reflects, too, on what Casey has meant to his wife, Tory, and their two daughters, Marianna (16) and Heidi (20). “My family has grown up with Casey, and it has been an important part of our lives. It is fun and interesting to see our almost grown children reflect on what Casey has meant for them and how it’s had a great impact.” Millar laughs and adds, “They scare me a little bit because they both express an interest in social work. My older daughter was a job coach for foster kids last summer. Now she has more respect for me and for what I do.”

Through the years, Millar has made and sustained professional relationships. He became friends with Mike Brennan, Maine Senate majority leader and Board of Advisors co-chair. They met when the division was housed at the United Way of Greater Portland, at which Sen. Brennan was the director of community initiatives. Diane Kindler, formerly with the then Department of Human Services, now is Millar’s deputy division director. She had hired Millar for his first job as a protective services worker and was *his* supervisor. “The state made a good investment,” Millar says with a smile. “I’ve stayed in social services for 25 years.”

Millar and Team Leader Owen O’Donnell also worked together at the Department of Human Services. As human resources manager, O’Donnell helped Millar obtain educational leave for graduate school. Leaving Sweetser, another agency in Maine, to come to Casey, Millar temporarily left behind his colleague, Al Casad, until he hired him as a team leader for the Maine Division. “I’ve

always tried to hire people with the strengths and skills that I don’t have,” Millar says. “That’s how you create a quality team.” Now Casad is Casey’s Division Director in Massachusetts.

Millar admits he’s come a long way since he was a novice state protective services worker. He shares the story of going out on one of his first cases. When knocking on a family’s door, instead of saying, “I’m Mark Millar, and I’m mandated to investigate this report,” he said instead, “I’m Mark Millar, and I’ve been ordained by the state ...” His co-workers called him Father Millar for months after that.

In October 2004, Millar was honored with a National Leadership Award given by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. It’s an honor that Millar wishes to share. “How fortunate I’ve been to be able to work with bright, energetic and caring staff over the years. They’ve probably taught me more than I’ve taught them. I’d add our children and families to that. They’ve taught me more than I’ve taught them.”

Directing the largest of Casey’s divisions and approaching his 20th anniversary with the agency, Millar remembers the words of his late grandmother, also a social worker, who advised him that life goes by fast. He tries to slow things down a bit by taking hikes, watching his beloved Red Sox, spending time at his cottage on Peak’s Island and listening to Bob Dylan’s music. “As I get older, I realize my grandmother was so right about life going by fast. These 20 years sure have flown by – but I wouldn’t have missed the ride.”



Mark Millar hiking in the Swiss Alps.

## CASEY CLOSE-UP: LOOKING AT MAINE

**VOICE:** *What are the pressing concerns for children and families in your state?*

**MILLAR:** We need to ensure that all of the children who enter Maine's child welfare system have a permanent connection when they leave, whether that's through reunification, kinship care, adoption or life-long connections with a foster family. These connections are not always in place for every youth. Like many states, Maine is in a time of budget constraints, and, once again, child welfare is in jeopardy. Services to children and families are one of the first items cut because children have no voice.

**VOICE:** *What can we as practitioners do to ensure that children and families are heard?*

**MILLAR:** We need to act as child advocates and develop best practices that meet the needs of those who are vulnerable. We need to deliver quality services and demonstrate their effectiveness to the Legislature, as well as their cost-effectiveness.

**VOICE:** *What role is Casey Family Services playing in Maine?*

**MILLAR:** Our unique position as part of a foundation allows us to draw upon the lessons learned from our direct services and

to provide technical assistance to the state on how to ensure and improve services to Maine's most vulnerable families. In addition to our own direct service work, we've been able to collaborate with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in developing its School to Career program so we're bringing program innovations to Maine.

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**WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT ALL OF THE CHILDREN WHO ENTER MAINE'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM HAVE A PERMANENT CONNECTION WHEN THEY LEAVE, WHETHER THAT'S THROUGH REUNIFICATION, KINSHIP CARE OR ADOPTION.**

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**VOICE:** *You've recently expanded your capacity with a new office in Bangor.*

**MILLAR:** Personally, I've enjoyed the opportunity to open the office in Bangor, which has reminded me of my early days at Casey Family Services when we were just starting out. The site offers one program with a

small staff, and it's making an impact. The team provides post-adoption services, which we've been able to demonstrate is a cost-effective method of helping families to achieve permanency. I'm very proud of how Casey is able to apply its learning about these services locally, statewide and on a national scale.

**VOICE:** *How is the community responding to your efforts to support permanency?*

**MILLAR:** Permanency, as a concept, is still in the early stages, and we're taking a collaborative approach. In Maine, we are fortunate to have leadership at the Department of Health and Human Services that is committed to reform, which will put the state in a better place to support children in building the connections they need to live productive and happy lives.

One of the benefits of living and working in a small state, at least in terms of population, is that collaboration can really make a difference. When people work together on a common goal, they are able to get things done. We trust each other and accept accountability; there's a great commitment in trying to help children and families.

# Casey Strengthens the Foundations of Supervision



*Deputy Executive Director for Field Operations Ann Sullivan shares Casey's leadership philosophy with staff.*

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**“ONE MEASURE OF YOUR SUCCESS ... WILL BE THE DEGREE TO WHICH YOU BUILD UP OTHERS WHO WORK WITH YOU. WHILE BUILDING UP OTHERS, YOU WILL BUILD UP YOURSELF.”**

*Jim Casey, founder of United Parcel Service*

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The fundamentals of an organization's culture often are intangible, reflected in the everyday interactions between employees and those they serve, as well as the communities in which they work. At Casey Family Services, quality supervision is a fundamental, though not always visible, cultural cornerstone, enriching the foundation of its clinical practices. When the organization expanded its management structure, ensuring the strength of this aspect of “Casey culture” was a priority.

“In the past decade, Casey Family Services has grown significantly through the addition of more services and locations,” explains Ann Sullivan, Casey's deputy executive director for field operations. “In this time, a number of people have been promoted to supervisory roles, and we want to make sure that these individuals have the tools they need to succeed in their new positions.”

Jim Casey, the founder of United Parcel Service (UPS) and Casey Family Services, believed that organizations should foster the talents of their staff and promote from within their own ranks. This commitment to professional development has remained alive and well at the agency Jim Casey started. His leadership lessons served as guideposts for Casey Family Services as it looked at supporting its new supervisors. “His philosophy helps ground us in his vision of empowering staff and supporting children and families through our work,” Sullivan says.

The successful professional development of supervisors is essential to any organization. Research indicates that staff retention is

greatly impacted by an employee's positive relationship with his or her supervisor. When a staff member feels supported and connected, he or she is more willing to remain with the organization. At Casey, retention is crucial to maintaining a core element of quality in its services—continuity and stability for children and families.

Toward that end, Casey unveiled an innovative and customized training curriculum for its managers in November 2004. The hallmark of the new training is its emphasis on individualized, strengths-based and culturally-sensitive supervision throughout the organization.

“When you become a supervisor, you become part of a bigger whole,” explains Mary Anne Judge, Casey's staff development and training manager. “It's important that our managers have the larger perspective and feel supported in their work, whether clinical or administrative in nature. The new curriculum offers a way to unify our managers around a common approach to supervision.”

Casey's growth in the past 10 years impacted the traditional career progression of a supervisor. Previously, staff members have had considerable time to develop their supervisory skills before being promoted. There was an opportunity to assume a larger role in a more gradual way, for example, by supervising an intern.



*“It is important that all our managers have the larger perspective and feel supported in their work, whether clinical or administrative in nature. The new curriculum offers a way to unify our managers around a common approach to supervision.”*

# News

The call for supervisory training came from these new managers directly. “With 16 sites in eight divisions, the supervisors really spoke to wanting consistency and training in how to handle the administrative aspects of their new roles,” Sullivan says. “Because of their experiences in working with children and families, they knew how to build relationships with people, but they also wanted to know more about human resource issues.” Supervisors of administrative positions also asked for support on the same topics, as well.

Supervisors wanted guidance in adapting to their new roles. Some managers had spent years being friends and peers with other members of their team and were concerned about how that would shift with their new roles. “As an organization, we wanted them to know they were not alone in making that adjustment,” Judge says.

When the training need was identified, Casey searched for a supervisory curriculum, assuming that a pre-existing training model for managers would be available readily. After reviewing a number of national curricula, however, it became clear that nothing on the market appropriately fit Casey’s organizational structure or philosophy.

Casey already was investing resources in training all of its staff in the use of Situational Leadership, an initiative developed by Ken Blanchard & Associates. This

model helps people identify and match their leadership styles to the developmental level of those they supervise, emphasizing listening skills, building self-esteem in others and partnering for performance.

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**WE KNEW THAT WE HAD MANY TALENTED PEOPLE FROM WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION, SO BY DEVELOPING OUR OWN CURRICULUM, WE WERE ABLE TO DRAW ON THEIR COLLECTIVE WISDOM.**

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Unable to find a supervisory curriculum that met all its needs or that built sufficiently upon Situational Leadership, Casey developed its own training.

For nearly a year, 16 staff members—including team leaders, administrative coordinators, directors and staff from field operations and human resources—worked in concert to develop a curriculum that teaches the fundamentals of supervision in an interactive and useful way. “We knew that we had many talented people from within the organization, so by developing our own curriculum, we were able to draw on their collective wisdom,” Sullivan explains.

In the end, the curriculum includes a two-day program, “Foundations of Supervision,” that covers 10 modules, addressing role transition, cultural competence, human resources and performance improvement topics.

“The Foundations of Supervision is now part of a whole supervisory training program that owes a debt of conceptual gratitude to Donald Layden,” says Judge. Layden is a former vice president for human resources at UPS and an emeritus member of the Casey Family Services Board of Advisors,

Prior to starting this project, Sullivan and Judge consulted with Layden who recommended beginning with a one-day orientation for new supervisors, to be offered at the time of their promotion or hire. “How to Avoid the Top 10 Pitfalls of Supervision” ensures that new supervisors meet with early success. Since the beginning, the program now includes the one-day orientation, the two-day “Foundations of Supervision” training, Situational Leadership for managers, and instruction on creating a harassment-free workplace.

The trainings offer a mix of lecture and interaction, taking into account different learning styles. For example, during a discussion on interviewing job applicants, the group evaluates a series of resumes to determine the best candidates. The group also engaged participants in exercises that would help supervisors intervene when problematic behaviors occur.

Judge believes the curriculum covers the foundations of supervision from the philosophical to the concrete. “The individual supervisor is not alone in carrying out his or her responsibilities, but has multiple resources and supports to call upon in order to provide quality supervision,” she explains.

# TAX ASSISTANCE HELPS FAMILIES PROSPER

On a bitterly cold winter's night, Awilda hurries into the Bridgeport Division of Casey Family Services, still wearing her medical uniform. "I didn't want to miss my appointment," she explains. "At last year's clinic, I learned that I qualified for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and I wanted to make sure I received the refund again this year."

An assistant to a pediatric dentist, Awilda is a single mother of two daughters in elementary school and a 10-month-old son. She is one of hundreds of people learning to become more financially secure through the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Services' partnership with the national Volunteers in Tax Assistance (VITA) Initiative. At clinics throughout New England, Casey staff members and community volunteers are providing free tax preparation assistance and financial counseling to families in need.

*Volunteer tax preparer Pat Belanger assists a community member at the "Super Saturday" event in Lewiston, Maine.*

In 2004, the National Tax Assistance for Working Families Campaign prepared 158,410 federal income tax returns, markedly up from 96,719 in 2003. Participants claimed \$226,848,683 in federal and state refunds through more than 41 local initiatives taking part in the campaign. In total, 5,821 well-trained volunteers worked in more than 400 sites.

"The national campaign's results speak volumes for the power of grassroots organizing as an effective strategy for connecting low-income working families to tax credits and wealth-building opportunities," according to Bonnie Howard, a senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "We know that this work is making a difference for

hundreds of thousands by returning hundreds of millions of dollars back into the hands of working families."

In addition to the revenue families received, the campaign is helping the most vulnerable in the community begin to build wealth and self-sufficiency.

"We see these clinics as a first step toward financial literacy," says Lamond Daniels, community liaison at Casey Family Services' Bridgeport Division. He and Volunteer Coordinator Omayra Binion are consultants to the 11 VITA sites throughout the city. "In addition to the tax assistance, we offer credit counseling and lead workshops on long-range financial planning. We also help participants set up Individual Development Accounts, which encourage low-income families to save money with matches made on their deposits by community organizations."

*Casey Family Services Accounting Assistant Marie Telfort helps e-file Awilda's 2004 tax forms at the Bridgeport Division office as Lamond Daniels, Casey's community liaison, looks on.*



*Volunteer Coordinator Omayra Binion of the Bridgeport Division translates for sisters Consuelo and Stella at the tax clinic. A housecleaner and child care provider, Consuelo is saving money to bring her family from Colombia to the United States.*

*“The national campaign’s results speak volumes for the power of grassroots organizing as an effective strategy for connecting low-income working families to tax credits and wealth-building opportunities.”*

# VITA



*Elena Padin from U.S. Congressman Christopher Shays’ office helps Sonia, a preschool teacher, with her taxes.*

Daniels says many families aren’t aware that they may qualify to receive the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, which can help them pay off debt, continue their education or save for a major purchase, such as a house. Full- or part-time workers who earned up to \$34,458 in 2004 and have more than one child could be eligible to receive as much as \$4,300.

Awilda used her 2003 refund to pay her credit card bills and buy a car, which eliminated her long bus commute to work. She’s hoping to use this year’s credit toward a down payment on a home for her family.

Hartford, Connecticut Mayor Eddie Perez is the spokesperson for his city’s EITC campaign, a project of the Hartford Asset Building Collaborative. The campaign operates seven VITA sites and is supported by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Making Connections project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the United Way of the Capital Area.

“These free VITA sites allow tax filers to receive and keep all of their tax credit and other refunds without paying fees to tax preparers,” Perez said at a press conference to launch the campaign. “It’s your money,” he told city residents. “Claim it. Save it. Grow it.”

In Connecticut and across the nation, volunteers for the VITA sites are trained by Internal Revenue Service (IRS) staff

## WE SEE THESE CLINICS AS A FIRST STEP TOWARD FINANCIAL LITERACY. IN ADDITION TO THE TAX ASSISTANCE, WE OFFER CREDIT COUNSELING AND LEAD WORKSHOPS ON LONG-RANGE FINANCIAL PLANNING.

members, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation provides a quality assessment of the tax preparation services being offered. “We entered the new year under more federal scrutiny and with the knowledge that the measure of our effectiveness will be determined not only by the quantity of the returns we prepare but by the quality of service provided,” Howard says.

Yusef Salcedo-Ruiz is an accounting major at the University of New Haven and volunteered at the Bridgeport Division clinics most Wednesday nights throughout the tax season. “It took me a lot of years to get my

education and be in a position to help others. Many people helped me along the way so I want to give back,” she says. “I read about the tax clinics on a website listing volunteer opportunities and thought this would be a good way to use my skills.”

Bridgeport EITC volunteer Elena Padin is a staff member for U.S. Representative Christopher Shays of Connecticut. “We do so much work around IRS issues and are trying to improve the tax system,” she says. “It’s just nice to be involved directly with people and see some immediate results.”

This year, Casey Family Services also supported tax assistance programs throughout Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In Lewiston, Maine, Casey funded a “Super Saturday” tax preparation event at Andover College at which a total of 93 federal and state tax returns were e-filed for low- and moderate-income workers. Casey Family Services’ Maine Division Director Mark Millar and representatives from Community Credit Union, Key Bank, Coastal Enterprises and the Maine Center for Financial Education provided asset building information and counseling to individuals seeking positive ways to utilize their refunds and plan for the future.

“EITC campaigns have been embraced by residents, community-based organizations, local leadership, influential partners and philanthropists as a strong proponent of a family-strengthening agenda,” Howard says. “This work is making a profound difference in the lives of children, families and communities.”



## Let's Talk Entitlements for Children

# View from Washington



by Robin Nixon, Director,  
National Foster Care  
Coalition

An entitlement is a federal program, such as Social Security or unemployment, that guarantees a certain level of benefits to persons or other entities who meet the requirements set by the program.

– *Glossary of Congressional and Legislative Terms*

While the White House and Congress say that federal spending must go down, advocacy organizations are in turmoil over the number and extent of cuts to human services programs.

Our representatives in Washington, D.C. created entitlement programs because there are some issues, such as the welfare of children, which are important to us as a society, and as a nation, and we agree to pay for these programs according to human need. Yet if a program is not an entitlement, then it must fend for itself among a wide range of other discretionary programs, including the ever-increasing number of pet projects submitted by individual legislators (a.k.a. pork).

We create, through national consensus, programs that protect children, strengthen families and help to ensure that every child can grow up safely in a family. Such programs deserve our particular attention and protection. Most of us can easily relate this to our own family's financial situation. If money is tight at home, what or who becomes the priority for any expenditures? The kids. Most of us would sacrifice just about any



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**WHILE THE WHITE HOUSE AND CONGRESS SAY THAT FEDERAL SPENDING MUST GO DOWN, ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS ARE IN TURMOIL OVER THE NUMBER AND EXTENT OF CUTS TO HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS.**

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comfort or material possession to protect our children and ensure their future well-being. Behind all the legislative jargon, committee meetings, and wheeling and dealing in the halls of government, that's the reason we want laws to ensure that services for kids are prioritized and funded. And Congress knows it.

It took me about half a day of research and phone calls to find an actual definition of entitlement (thanks to Mary Lee Allen at the Children's Defense Fund). I knew there was something deeply and personally meaningful to me, as a citizen and a mom, about entitlements for children and families, but I couldn't quite wrap my mind around it in a logical way. When we advocate for programs these days, we tend to focus on the very concrete (quantitative, performance-based and researched) aspects of their worthiness. Is the program effective? Does it reach an adequate number of people to justify the dollars spent? Is the funding administered competently? How many children (youth, families ...) are being served by the program? We feel as though saying "it's the right thing to do" just doesn't carry any weight with policymakers. In the case of entitlements, however, pointing out that they exist because they are the right thing to do may be the most meaningful thing we can say.

# A-L-U-M-N-I INVOLVEMENT: PRICELESS

# PERSPECTIVES



by Ginny Stephan, Board  
Vice President, Foster Care  
Alumni of America

While I was growing up,  
my family took many trips  
to the Adirondack

Mountains in Upstate New York. One of my fondest memories is pulling over on the 87 Northway to pick wildflowers. My mother would gather up the wonderfully different and colorful wildflowers, and, when we arrived at our cabin, she would create a beautiful masterpiece for the dinner table. The beauty of that bouquet comes to mind when I think of my work today to give foster care alumni a greater voice in system reform. Very simply, it is important to mix, match and blend everyone in foster care to become an authentic and collective voice for reform.

Alumni are in the minority of advocates in the arena of child welfare and foster care reform. How does this affect the system?

There have been many attempts to change the system or make improvements in the foster care industry. Leaders in the field form focus groups of alumni and then change policies according to what they have learned and what they think would be best for the system. For example, The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care recently gathered several experts in the field of foster care. These leaders relied on focus



group feedback to understand the alumni perspective.

But what is missing in the end is the voice of alumni at leadership levels who can help point the way to reform and change. Foster care alumni know foster care perhaps better than any expert in the field. If foster care policies and practices are going to change, it will be because foster care alumni have participated in change.

There are an estimated 12 million foster family alumni across America. Many are leading productive, successful lives and have not considered (or have lost hope in) giving back to the system, perhaps because they do not have the right title, profession or degree. Many are blocked from garnering credentials because they cannot afford to further their own education.

It is time to reach out to alumni to embrace their diversity and the gifts and talents they bring to the table. We need to change the vision that the social service industry has of alumni. To help us do that, I offer this acrostic:

## *A... Adapt:*

By the time alumni are age 18, they have had to adapt to many different situations. They are incredibly versatile.

## *L... Leadership:*

A leader is a person who has commanding authority or influence in a particular field of interest. I would say this fits the potential of foster care alumni to reform the system.

## *U... Understanding:*

Alumni know the system in a deeper, more personal way.

## *M... Mercy:*

Alumni have experienced more hurt than almost anyone. They become incredible individuals because they show mercy to those who offend and hurt them continuously throughout their lives. Mercy and grace help them become happy and productive citizens in this world.

## *N... Necessary:*

It is necessary to involve alumni in every area of change to the foster care system.

## *I... Individuals:*

Many alumni are independent, educated thinkers with a variety of resources they can tap to effect change at all levels of the child welfare industry.

In the future, we need to ensure that we incorporate the "wildflowers" of the child welfare system in all discussions leading to change.

## LIFE SKILLS, LIFE SUCCESS

# LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

# PERSPECTIVES

By David Johnston, Senior Program Associate for Life Skills, Casey Family Services



A key part of the work done by youth in Casey Family Services' care—with help from workers and foster families—involves developing the basic coping skills they need to succeed as adults. One of the challenges facing their social workers has always been integrating life skills learning with overall service planning, balancing short-term needs against long-term competency-building and doing it in a way that captures and sustains youths' interests.

Staff in the organization's New Hampshire Division has developed an engaging life skills curriculum that includes a workbook and exercises that span two years. The workbook combines Casey-developed materials and activities with the TRAILS curriculum that the State of New Hampshire utilizes. At Casey, all 13- and 14-year-old foster youth are taking part in the training, and, this year, for the first time, two youth in post-adoption services have joined.

The youth meet on eight or nine school holidays over the year. The first year's sessions focus on relationships, friends, sexuality, hygiene, emotional health, exercise and nutrition, and use a variety of interactive and educational materials and exercises. The second year draws from the state's required TRAILS curriculum, which focuses on areas that include financial literacy, safety, careers, job finding, transportation and apartment hunting.

Social worker Jennifer McAllister and Family Support Specialist Patty Martin lead each session, sometimes calling upon other

staff members for assistance and sometimes drawing upon resource people in the community. Simple "pre" and "post" tests are used for each day's unit. Field trips to the library, state agencies, Job Corps offices, Planned Parenthood sites, police departments, colleges and local businesses help to enrich the experience and broaden the youths' understanding of community resources.

All materials used over the two years are kept in a three-ring binder called "The Life

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### LIFE SKILLS TRAINING NOW IS PART OF THE FOSTER PARENT PRE-SERVICE CURRICULUM, AND ALL PARENTS LEARN ABOUT THE ANSELL CASEY LIFE SKILLS ASSESSMENT.

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Skills Workbook" that each youth takes away from the training. The workbook starts off empty and then accumulates life skills products, including the results of the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment (required by Casey Family Services), related life skills goals, evidence of increased competency, completed exercises from the curriculum and more.

Each participating youth is eligible to receive "pay" of up to \$5.50/hour while attending the group. Actual pay is determined by each youth's behavior "so that participation feels like a real job experi-

ence," according to McAllister. Each youth completes a time sheet for every session and must notify Casey if he or she is going to be late or miss a session. Each person must make up any missed work and must dress appropriately for "the job environment." Yet it's not all work and no play; the group has fun, and "there's a lot of bonding and mutual support that takes place over the two years," she adds.

Foster parent involvement in life skills learning can be a challenge. For this two-year program, foster parents sign a contract with their foster youth, provide transportation ("often a respite day for them," according to Martin) and learn about the group's activities through regular emails from the Casey staff. Life skills training now is part of the foster parent pre-service curriculum, and all parents learn about the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment. An orientation to the TRAILS curriculum is additional training offered to parents.

The growth in skills and maturity is obvious in the youth who go through the program, and enhanced competency should begin to show up in subsequent administrations of the assessment. Many of these youth "graduate" to the division's Teen Board, and some get involved in mentoring the younger youth in the TRAILS group.

*To learn more about the workbook and curriculum being used in New Hampshire, contact David Johnston at [djohnston@caseyfamilyservices.org](mailto:djohnston@caseyfamilyservices.org).*



## POLICY CORNER

# EXPANDING PERMANENCY INCENTIVES AND SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN



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

Early in the 109th Congressional session, the Children's Defense Fund, represented by Mary Lee Allen and Barbara Condliffe, and a team from Casey Family Services convened an important policy discussion on expanding permanency incentives and post-permanency supports for children, youth and families involved with child welfare systems. The desire to host such a symposium was triggered to a large extent by the results of the completed federal Child and Family Service Reviews. These federally-mandated reviews of state child welfare practices demonstrated, among other things, that every state must improve its system's ability to secure permanence for children and youth in foster care.

In order to contribute to the systemic challenge of identifying new policy directions with potential to significantly improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care, the Casey Family Services and Children's Defense Fund hosted the two-day Permanency Symposium on January 27-28 in Washington, D.C. The 41 attendees represented an array of national, state and local child welfare perspectives, including youth and parent advocates, policy analysts, advocates, direct service providers, state and county child welfare agency administrators and students. Attendees came from as far away as California, Colorado and Tennessee and as close as Pennsylvania.

A sample of organizations represented at the symposium include the National Conference of State Legislators, the Child Welfare Organizing Project, the Hispanic National Association on Adoptable Children, The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, Children's Rights Inc., Black Administrators in Child Welfare and the National Indian Child Welfare Association.

Over the two days, symposium attendees considered a variety of policy solutions aimed at better ensuring that youth in foster care achieve permanence in a timely and appropriate way, with placements individually tailored for each child and family. The significant role that permanency incentives should play in achieving reunification and guardianship, as well as adoption, was a theme that permeated the discussions, as did the challenge of providing front-end services to prevent out-of-home placements and post-permanency services to stabilize the family unit once the child exits foster care.

The symposium's work agenda was organized around a set of five questions designed to ensure policy analysis of current federal and state policies impacting permanency and information sharing about permanency policy implementation in different jurisdictions. The questions also were intended to stimulate brainstorming about new policies and strategies to move children out of foster care and into families. As a result of the discussion, the group was able to:

1. Identify additional policy incentives to ensure that more children have permanent families through reunification, sub-

sidized guardianship, adoption or other permanent connections;

2. Assess the benefits and challenges of providing post-permanency support wherever and whenever a child exits foster care;
3. Learn from one another how practices and programs may strengthen policy directions and enhance one another's efforts; and
4. Leave with an energized, positive sense of accomplishment and potential actions for improving policy in support of permanency.

To jump-start the discussions, symposium planners developed a set of background papers responsive to each of the discussion questions. These background papers, together with a summary of the Permanency Symposium and its specific policy recommendations, soon will be available to advocates, policy analysts, policymakers and the general public.

In addition to myself and Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, who planned and facilitated the symposium, Casey's representatives in this discussion also included Joy Duva, deputy executive director for planning and policy; Jim Gannaway, Rhode Island Division director; Linda Goldenberg, Bridgeport Division director; and Wanda Mial, from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

*For more information about the Permanency Symposium or to request a copy of the symposium report, contact Sania Metzger by email at [smetzger@caseyfamilyservices.org](mailto:smetzger@caseyfamilyservices.org).*

## CASEY CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

# SUPPORTING LIFELONG FAMILY CONNECTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN TEXAS



by Sarah B. Greenblatt,  
Director, Casey Center for  
Effective Child Welfare  
Practice

From the far eastern corner of New England, a team of practitioners from Casey Family Services' Maine Division embarked on a trip to the far southwest corner of Texas to collaborate with the El Paso County Attorney's Office, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to provide an innovative interdisciplinary training that addressed the complex needs of vulnerable children and families.

The one day session, "Supporting Lifelong Family Connections for Children in Foster Care" was part of the October, 2004, Child Advocacy Recruitment Effort (CARE) Conference, featured a unique opportunity to recruit resource families and provide training for professionals and families together. More than 100 social workers, attorneys, child advocates, youth and resource families attended the professional conference held in the El Paso County Court House.

The training was planned jointly with a unique local and national team, including: Maine Reunification Services Team Leader Trisha Maling; Resource Coordinator Rana O'Connor; and social worker Kris Nason – all from Casey, in collaboration with Marilyn Munson from the El Paso County Attorney's Office; Sylvia Elixavide-Pitcher, director of the Regional Office of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services; Joey Orguna, from the National



Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; and a diverse planning team.

Maling served as moderator for the day's training, joining her colleagues O'Connor and Nason as co-trainers. Over the past year, Casey's Reunification and Foster Care programs have participated with the Maine Bureau of Children and Families in an effort to use family team meetings to engage family members in collaborative permanency planning and decision making. This statewide effort is guided by the belief that every child needs, deserves and has a right to grow up in a family. It also is predicated on the conviction that when families are involved in decision making for the children, outcomes can improve. Building on emerging lessons learned in Maine, the Casey training team facilitated opportunities for the El Paso audience to build on their own experiences with family group conferencing and to learn more about how to include birth families, youth and foster parents in the collaborative process.

El Paso County is participating in a statewide effort to plan for implementation

of an approach to family group conferencing based on the belief that when given the opportunity and guidance, parents can make sound decisions in the best interest of their children. Once implemented in El Paso County, the Family Group Conferencing program will convene families for the purpose of establishing treatment plans, resolving problems and assuring the safety of the children when reunifying families.

Since 2002, Casey Family Services has supported the El Paso CARE Coalition Planning Committee by sharing knowledge and experiences aimed at strengthening community awareness of the need for more foster and adoptive family resources for children in foster care. Each year, Casey staff have highlighted promising practices in supporting resource families, while promoting collaborative permanency planning. In addition, the Thornton family shared its stories – with Gary, his wife Trisha and their daughter Ashley describing their experiences in coming together as an adoptive family. The Thorntons, who also have adopted Ashley's brother and another sibling group of four sisters, provide a structured and nurturing family environment and value the importance of having connections with their children's birth families.

El Paso County is making a dedicated effort to change the way its juvenile court and child welfare agencies work in partnership with other community organizations to address the complex needs of vulnerable children and families. Casey Family Services staff members say it has been a privilege to be involved with this meaningful reform effort.

## THE CASEY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS INITIATIVE

# DIALOGUE

*Sharing Perspectives on Research, Practice and Policy*

by James W. Drisko, *Smith College School for Social Work*

“Family Resource Centers [FRCs] represent a commitment by Casey Family Services to provide preventive services to a wide range of families in diverse communities,” says Casey Family Services Executive Director Raymond L. Torres. “In keeping with the 1998-2003 strategic plan, the Family Resource Centers have extended our efforts to support at-risk children, their families and the neighborhoods in which they live.” In locations from Baltimore, Maryland, to Franklin, New Hampshire, Casey Family Services’ Family Resource Centers indeed have broadened the range of services to strengthen families. Begun in 1999, FRCs are directed to enhance and empower families in specific neighborhoods and to prevent the need for child welfare interventions. Building on family and community strengths, empowerment and the development of leadership skills within communities is central to FRC philosophy and goals. That emphasis remains a key part of the 2003-2006 strategic update.

“Empowerment is a core part of our purpose,” says Casey Massachusetts Division Director Alan Casad. “It takes place at the individual level, for the family as a whole and in the community.” FRC services reflect efforts at all three levels. These services seek to build individual skills and the confidence to apply them, to strengthen

families’ ability to meet their needs, and to prepare families to be active participants and leaders in their local communities.

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### EMPOWERMENT IS A CORE PART OF OUR PURPOSE. IT TAKES PLACE AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL, FOR THE FAMILY AS A WHOLE AND IN THE COMMUNITY.

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Scholars describe empowerment psychologically as “a cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, perceptions of competence, and internalization of the goals and objectives of the organization.” For individuals and families, identification of their own goals and objectives is a crucial part of empowerment as well. At the level of an organization or a community, goals and objectives also must be clear and need to be embraced by the community members who work on them. Evidence of empowerment is found in actions that work toward reaching the intended goals and objectives.

Working to strengthen families and communities requires the active participation, even the leadership, of the community in setting goals and objectives. How this process occurs is not well described in the professional literature. Indeed, most empowerment models assume individuals, organizations or communities already have clear goals, and the empowerment process is

mainly about achieving them. The reality for many disadvantaged families, however, is that they may lack defined goals and confidence in their ability to meet them. If there are any preliminary steps or competencies necessary to foster real empowerment, the literature says little about them.

To learn about several aspects of the Family Resource Centers Initiative, including empowerment and leadership development, Casey contracted with the Smith College School for Social Work to perform an implementation study. Begun in 2002, the study explored early stages of FRC development, particularly how the different FRC sites and program models actually enacted their mission of strengthening families and communities. Implementation studies examine how a program works, allowing comparison of intended plans and strategies with those actually delivered on-site. These studies focus on the processes used by programs to achieve goals, with the purpose of identifying areas of challenge and clarifying how best to address such challenges.

The Smith College Implementation Study used multiple in-depth interviews and observations over a three-year period to collect data on the Casey FRCs. Interviews with children, families, staff, administrators and community partners were used to clarify service needs and determine how these needs were met, where challenges arose and what strategies were used to address those challenges.



## THE CASEY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS INITIATIVE



Casey social worker Joan Matteuzzi with Francesca at the Family Resource Center in Lowell, Massachusetts.

“We used qualitative methods, over time, to learn from the many participants what works in the FRCs, what challenges they face and the strategies the programs used to address those challenges,” says Joyce Everett, principal investigator and a professor at the Smith College School for Social Work. Data analysis centered on identifying issues and strategies used by participants, staff, administration and partners at each site. Empowerment and leadership development were key at each FRC site.

Because each location proved to be unique, no single FRC program model was applied in all locations. For example, in Baltimore, Maryland, and Providence, Rhode Island, Casey Family Services built “free standing” sites to house the Family Resource Centers’ programs and services. In two sites in Lowell, Massachusetts, and one in Franklin,

New Hampshire, Casey partnered with local agencies, working in “host settings,” including housing developments and public schools, to deliver FRC services. A third model found in Bridgeport and Hartford, Connecticut, has Casey serving as a “catalyst” and sponsor for collaborative family support efforts of community members and agencies.

### IN SOME CASES, SUCH STEPS ARE CALLED “ENABLING” – BUILDING CAPACITIES AND CONFIDENCE NEEDED TO UNDERTAKE REAL EMPOWERMENT BASED ON AN INDIVIDUAL’S OWN INNER GOALS AND PURPOSES.

Not only are the Casey FRC program models different, each geographic location offered challenges. “Diversity by race, ethnicity, language, class, religion and time in the United States distinguishes the communities served by the Family Resource Centers,” says co-principal investigator James Drisko, also a professor at Smith College School for Social Work. “And even during our study, demographics shifted in at least one community, changing those who used the FRC’s services and adding new demands on the program.” Yet empowering complex, needy and diverse communities, often with high levels of mistrust, is vital to the Casey FRCs’ purposes.

### A MODEL OF EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

One finding of the Smith College Implementation Study was that a clear progression of participant involvement was described by program participants and staff across FRC sites. First, participants varied in their own skills and levels of confidence. Staff members described some participants who were isolated in their homes and faced so many barriers to meeting their own goals that they stopped trying. This challenge called for an outreach strategy – simply getting people to come to the FRC. Staff persistently made outreach efforts and kept people informed of activities and events at the FRCs. Even with such efforts, friends and family proved to be the best way to get people to come and try out the FRCs. “Children often used the FRCs first and gradually introduced their parents and extended families to the centers,” says Kerry Homstead, Smith College research project director.

#### *Enabling Steps – Preparing for Real Empowerment*

For a typical family, simply coming out to an event may not seem like a step toward empowerment – but it is when the family members don’t believe the effort will pay off but then discover that it does. The Casey FRCs attentively made sure families were “thought of” and “valued as members of their neighborhoods.” Such preliminary steps to empowerment rarely are mentioned

*Researchers examined the six phases of community engagement by Casey's Family Resource Centers, including challenges and strategies.*

## *Family Resource Centers Model*

CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS	PHASES	PROCESS AND STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community mistrust and suspicion</li> <li>Past negative service experiences</li> <li>Ongoing recruitment and outreach</li> <li>Different cultural attitudes re. services</li> <li>Resources needed:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child care</li> <li>Transportation</li> <li>Staff time</li> <li>Space</li> <li>Scheduling</li> <li>Language</li> <li>Capacity</li> </ul> </li> <li>Atmosphere not welcoming to new participants</li> <li>Episodic participation</li> <li>Maintaining momentum</li> <li>Different starting points/Developmental differences</li> <li>Activities and services based on who participants are</li> <li>New belief systems</li> <li>Clear expectations</li> <li>Gray areas regarding authority</li> <li>Staff ambivalence</li> <li>New for participants to think in terms of getting in touch with their own power</li> <li>Meaningful meetings for participants</li> <li>Resistance to empowerment</li> <li>Concept of "joining" versus "owning"</li> </ul>	<pre> graph TD     A[RECRUITMENT] --&gt; B[ENGAGEMENT]     B --&gt; C[INVOLVEMENT]     C --&gt; D[RETENTION]     D --&gt; E[PARTNERSHIP]     E --&gt; F[LEADERSHIP]             </pre>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invitations in                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Door-to-door visits</li> <li>Flyers and events</li> </ul> </li> <li>Non-clinical image</li> <li>Incentives</li> <li>Comfort and willingness to "try it out"</li> <li>"Buddy system," friend-to-friend</li> <li>One success leads to new participants</li> <li>Collaborative goals</li> <li>Participant strengths highlighted</li> <li>Useful services</li> <li>Ongoing listening, assessment of participant, and community needs and interests</li> <li>Participant involvement and connection</li> <li>Relationship required before empowerment</li> <li>Nurturing required for empowerment</li> <li>Parallel process of training staff and participants</li> <li>Supervision to support staff and process</li> <li>Sensitivity to cultural relationships with power</li> <li>Active Parent Advisory Council</li> <li>Participants as creators and users of service</li> <li>Participants as bridges from community to center</li> </ul>

*For a typical family, simply coming out to an event may not seem like a step toward empowerment—but it is, when the family members don't believe the effort will pay off, but then discover that it does.*

in the empowerment literature. In some cases, such steps are called “enabling” – building capacities and confidence needed to undertake real empowerment based on an individual’s own inner goals and purposes. Casey FRC staff saw the need for such early steps and developed strategies to build these enabling capacities.

The Family Resource Centers also had to recruit staff members who could speak the languages found in the neighborhoods. In some FRCs, where populations served included Hispanic and Cambodian families, translation from English to Spanish or Khmer took place to make sure everyone followed the discussion. Other supports, such as food and child care, proved crucial to getting people to turn out at first.

#### *Empowerment – Early Stages*

The Smith Research Team found that once people developed some initial comfort with the FRCs and began to see them as useful, empowerment strategies became more prominent. Still, early involvement proved to be episodic for many. In this phase, FRC staff recognized clients’ strengths, listened attentively and developed relationships.

This process helped participants feel that the program was a safe and useful place with the potential to help them achieve their own goals. “As involvement increased, work to retain participants by demonstrating the value of being part of the FRCs

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### **IN THIS CASE, EMPOWERMENT FOSTERED WITHIN THE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS CARRIED OVER TO DEMONSTRABLE LEADERSHIP FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD. CONSISTENT WITH THEIR PURPOSES, THE CASEY FRC STRENGTHENED BOTH FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS.**

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emerged as the key focus by program staff,” says Everett. Staff did this by tailoring programs responsively to meet participant interests. Staff also actively involved participants in making choices, a vital step in empowerment.

#### *Empowerment – Later Stages*

To facilitate partnering with participants to set goals and make decisions, formal organizational structures were developed by most FRCs. These have included adult advisory councils and separate youth advisory councils as well as skill-building activities and

consultation. At times, participants showed ambivalence about assuming leadership. Some said they found it to be a lot of work and that it felt easier just to participate. Continued staff support and encouragement from other members was the best strategy to foster empowerment and to reinforce leadership efforts and skills.

In Lowell, Massachusetts, members of the Program Advisory Council of the George Flanagan FRC used skills and confidence developed in the FRCs to run for leadership positions in the Tenant Council of their housing development. They won the election and served as leaders in the Tenant Council, a federally mandated component of local housing authorities. “In this case, empowerment fostered within the FRCs carried over to demonstrable leadership for the neighborhood. Consistent with their purposes, this Casey FRC strengthened both families and neighborhoods,” observes Drisko.

The Smith College Implementation Study has finalized reports on five Casey FRC sites as well as an overall summary of the Casey Family Resource Centers Initiative. The study also will yield “Community Profiles and Resource Guides” for the three most established FRC sites.



## Resource

## Corner

## Reviews

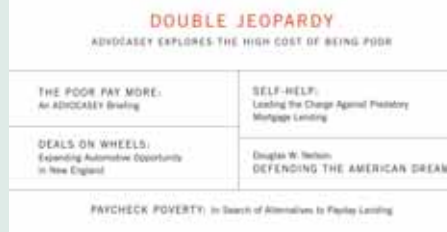
***PBS Television to Air "Aging Out"  
Documentary Nationwide***

On Thursday, May 26, 2005, PBS television stations will air "Aging Out," a film created by award-winning producers and directors Roger Weisberg and Vanessa Roth. The documentary, made with support from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, is a production of Public Policy Productions for Thirteen/WNET New York. The film follows young people as they emancipate from the nation's foster care system and discover they're on their own. The youth chronicled become parents, battle drug addiction, face homelessness and even end up in jail. Their stories force us to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the public systems that serve these youth, as well as the roles that private citizens and organizations can play. Check your local listings for broadcast time on your local PBS station.

For more information, visit [www.pppdocs.com](http://www.pppdocs.com).

***Double Jeopardy: AdvoCasey Explores the High Cost of Being Poor***

The Winter 2005 issue of AdvoCasey – the magazine of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that documents programs that work for kids and families – explores why the poor pay more and how the economically vulnerable experience a financial drain. An AdvoCasey briefing spells out the high prices low-income Americans pay for credit, home-ownership, banking, shopping and medical debts. Author Martha Shirk explores alternatives to "payday lending," the high-cost cash advances that have proliferated wildly in recent years. Another article examines programs to help low-income workers buy their own cars, and a third details one



agency's efforts to combat predatory mortgage lending. Foundation President Douglas Nelson urges new efforts to lower these excessive costs exclusively facing low-income families.

To receive a copy or view the magazine, visit [www.aecf.org/publications](http://www.aecf.org/publications).

***fyi3.com: The National Network for Foster Children and Foster Youth***

fyi3.com is a partnership web project between FosterClub.com and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. The site provides foster youth, ages 14 through 23, opportunities to become involved, informed and independent in their transitioning journey toward adulthood. This cyber-collaborative empowers young people to become: involved through message boards, contests and feedback forums; informed of their rights and responsibilities pertaining to foster care; and independent, with access to opportunities, resources and scholarships in dozens of communities.

***Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study***

During fiscal year 2003 in the United States, 800,000 children were served by foster care

services; and an estimated 523,000 children were still in care at the end of the year. Relatively few studies have examined how youth formerly in care (alumni) have fared as adults, and even fewer studies have examined what changes in foster care services could improve their lives. The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, conducted by Casey Family Programs and Harvard University, provides new information in both areas. Findings for three domains are presented: mental health, education, and employment and finances.

To receive or view a copy of the study, visit [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org).

***The City and Rural KIDS COUNT Data Book***

The Annie E. Casey Foundation recently released a report that uses 10 key measures of child well-being to track the conditions of children living in rural portions of each state, as well as 71 large cities across the country. "The City and Rural KIDS COUNT Data Book shows that child poverty is well above the national average in isolated rural communities, as well as large cities," says Dr. William O'Hare, project coordinator at the foundation. "Too many children are not getting the kinds of support they need to develop into responsible, productive adults." Based on figures from the 2000 U.S. Census, indicators used to compare the well-being of children address poverty, family structure, parental employment, housing affordability and education. A pocket guide of the report also is available.

To receive or view a copy of the report, visit [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org).

# What the Media Say

# Media

## *National Adoption Day*

“There are too few adoptive parents, especially for minorities, so many children bounce from home to home. We always have to look at what’s in the child’s best interest ... all children deserve families they can depend on.”

Raymond L. Torres  
Executive Director  
Casey Family Services  
“Hispanics Today”  
February 2005

## *Local Tax Clinics*

A new partnership between Casey Family Services’ Bridgeport Division and People’s Bank will provide low-income residents with free tax preparation assistance every Tuesday and Wednesday evenings throughout the tax season. Lamond Daniels of Casey Family Services says people who come to the tax assistance centers at Casey’s Bridgeport Division or the People’s Bank branch at North and Park Avenues will learn about a variety of additional workshops and financial services available to them at no cost. “Our hope is that many of our clients will want to learn about budgeting, homeownership, savings plans and ways to repair their credit records so they can improve their situations and meet their long-term financial goals,” Daniels says.

*The Bridgeport News*  
January 2005

## *New Offices in Vermont*

“When Casey Family Services – the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation – began to outgrow its office in



*Raymond L. Torres talks with an adoptive family while being filmed for a segment on “Hispanics Today.”*

Waterbury, staff thought long and hard about where we would make our new home. Early in the process, we were drawn to Winooski, a community that is working hard to improve the lives of its remarkably diverse population. Casey has been providing foster care, post-adoption services, family advocacy and support services to children and families throughout the state for 20 years. We couldn’t be happier with our decision to move into the heart of Winooski’s impressive redevelopment effort. It’s a privilege to support the new teen center, and we look forward to many other productive partnerships in this vibrant community.”

Nita Lescher  
Vermont Division Director  
*The Burlington Free Press*  
February 2005

## *First Jobs in Maine*

Getting that first summer job as a teenager is always a bit intimidating, but for some kids it is especially challenging.

When it comes to customer service, Kate, with her big smile and cheerful demeanor, is a natural. She started working here at the Hannaford Store in Windham last summer, one of 15 young people in a program called “First Jobs.” Its focus is to help kids in foster care climb the first rung on the job ladder. ... What First Jobs is all about is access to a good job, opening up a good door so that they have a good first opportunity for work. The program is also a plus for Hannaford in meeting its employment needs. The First Jobs program is funded by the Anne E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Services in Portland.

*WCSH Channel 6 News*  
Portland, Maine  
February 2005

# 2005: Important Dates

## May

### May 1-31

National Foster Care Month

### May 2-4

Finding Better Ways Conference  
 “Addressing the Mental Health Needs of  
 Children, Youth and Families”  
 Child Welfare League of America  
 New Orleans, Louisiana  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

### May 6

Second Annual Life Skills Conference for  
 Youth  
 “Road 2 Success”  
 Casey Family Services  
 Baltimore, Maryland  
[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)

## May

### May 9-14

Annual National Education Conference  
 National Foster Parent Association  
 Hyatt Regency Orange County  
 Garden Grove, California  
[www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)

### May 18-20

National Foster Care Conference  
 “Soar to New Heights”  
 Daniel Memorial Institute  
 Jacksonville, Florida  
[www.danielkids.org](http://www.danielkids.org)

### June 1-3

CWLA Juvenile Justice National  
 Symposium  
 “Joining Forces for Better Outcomes”  
 Child Welfare League of America  
 Miami, Florida  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

## June

### June 8-11

Conference on Family Group Decision  
 Making  
 “One Family, One Community, Many  
 Voices ... Rediscover the Village”  
 American Humane Association  
 Long Beach, California  
[www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org)

### June 20-22

CWLA Western Region Training  
 Conference  
 “Realities, Risks, Rewards: Sharing in the  
 Care of Our Children and Families”  
 Child Welfare League of America  
 Pasadena, California  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

### July 20-22

Eighth National Child Welfare Data  
 Conference  
 “Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children  
 and Families”  
 National Resource Center for Child Welfare  
 Data and Technology  
 Washington, D.C.  
[www.nrcwcdt.org](http://www.nrcwcdt.org)

## July

### July 24-27

19th Annual Conference on Treatment  
 Foster Care  
 Foster Family-Based Treatment Association  
 Atlanta, Georgia  
[www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org)



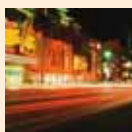
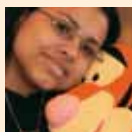


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# Voice

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*Voice* is published quarterly by Casey Family Services for child welfare professionals, advocates, and the children and families they serve. The opinions expressed within this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Casey Family Services or the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Casey Family Services is the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization established in 1948 by United Parcel Service founder Jim Casey and his siblings in honor of their mother. The Foundation is dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged

children in the United States. Started in 1976, Casey Family Services offers quality foster care, post-adoption services, family reunification, family preservation, family advocacy and support, family resource centers, assistance to young families and families affected by HIV/AIDS, and technical assistance through the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice. The mission of Casey Family Services is to improve the lives of at-risk children and strengthen families and communities by providing high-quality, cost-effective services that advance both positive practice and sound public policy.

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