



THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

*Winter/Spring 2007 Volume Eight Issue One*

## *Growing a National Movement: Families for Youth in Foster Care*

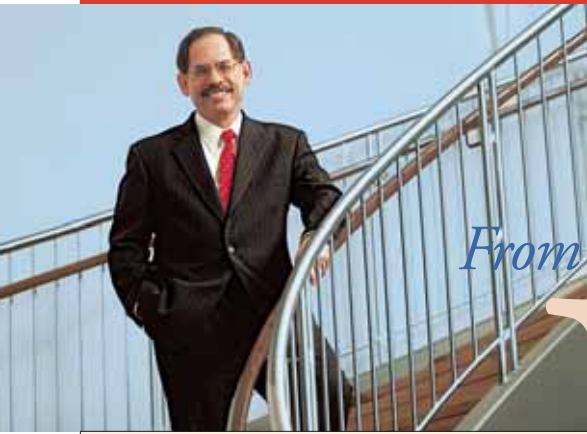
*National Convening on Youth  
Permanence Advancing Families  
for Life*

*Youth Sharing Their Own  
Perspectives on Permanence*

*States Exploring Subsidized  
Guardianship Initiatives*

*Child Welfare Pioneer Retiring  
after 30 Years in the Field*





## *From the Executive Director's Desk*

*I am pleased that we are able to dedicate this issue of Voice to the exciting momentum sparked by the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington, D.C., a four-day gathering of child welfare leaders and national advocates focusing on the issue of how to support older children and youth in foster care in finding families. Throughout the plenary, learning sessions, and courageous conversations that filled the four days of the conference, it was clear that a new way of thinking has begun to take root.*

*As a result, there is a promise for brighter futures for foster children and youth. We continue to hear of new actions taken by state professionals to move this important work forward. The excitement and energy generated at the Convening has been infectious; the experiences shared, poignant, and memorable.*

*In one of the most important sessions, a panel of young people spoke of their own journeys toward finding forever families, a state of being that they were quick to remind us is all about having families – families for life (see page 8). Twenty-two-year-old Nadege lovingly described the relationship she has forged with her former foster mother, who has since become her adoptive mom. Yet, at the same time, 24-year-old Dan, who was adopted at the age of 14, reminded us that the journey is not always an easy one, as he reflected on the challenges he and his adoptive mom have had in building their relationship. And Johnny Madrid's story, shared through a video, described the hole in his heart only a family could fill.*

*From these stories and those of countless others, we learned that no one outgrows the need to be truly connected to a family. As we shift the focus of our work to fully supporting the spectrum of possible permanency outcomes – from family preservation and reunification to adoption and legal guardianship – we are continually reminded by our youth in care, by those transitioning out of care, and by the families that love them, that this work is critical.*

*Assuring that every child, and especially every youth, has a family he or she can turn to in good times and bad, should become a national rallying cry. Families for children and youth in foster care is possible, it is powerful, and it must be a priority. It is what we know our own children need and deserve; our foster children should have no less.*

Raymond L. Torres

Raymond L. Torres, director ejecutivo de Casey Family Services. Situadas a su izquierda se encuentra Kristina Poly de Casey Family Services, y a su derecha, Louise Leary, co-presidente de la Junta de Consejeros de Casey Family Services.



## *Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo*

*Me complace en dedicar este número de La Voz al ímpetu emocionante impulsado por la Convocatoria Nacional sobre la Permanencia Juvenil 2006 en Washington, D.C. En esta reunión los líderes y abogados nacionales en el campo de bienestar del niño se enfocaron en el apoyo a jóvenes en cuidado de crianza en su búsqueda para los lazos familiares permanentes. En los coloquios plenarios, las sesiones de aprendizaje y los intercambios valientes durante los cuatro días de la conferencia, quedó claro que un nuevo modo de pensar comenzó a echar raíces.*

*Como consecuencia, hay promesa de un futuro esperanzadora para los niños y jóvenes en cuidado de crianza. Seguimos escuchando iniciativas nuevas tomadas por asociaciones estatales para que esta tarea de tanta magnitud se ponga en marcha. El entusiasmo y la energía generadas por la Convocatoria han resultado contagiosas, y la experiencia compartida conmovedora, y memorable.*

*En una de las sesiones más importantes, un panel de jóvenes habló de sus caminos hacia la permanencia, y nos hicieron recordar que este quiere decir que tenga familia – una familia de por vida. (vea p. 8). La joven Nadege de 22 años, describió con cariño la relación forjada con su madre de crianza que ahora es su mamá adoptiva. Al mismo tiempo, Dan de 24 años, quien fue adoptado a los 14 años, nos hicieron recordar que el camino no es siempre fácil, mientras reflexionó sobre los desafíos que enfrentaron tanto a él como a su madre adoptiva. Y el relato de Johnny Madrid, por medio de un video, compartió el vacío en un corazón donde no hay familia.*

*Por medio de todas estas historias, aprendemos que nadie crece más allá de la necesidad de lazos familiares perdurables. Mientras que cambiamos el enfoque de nuestros esfuerzos hacia el apoyo sustancial a toda la gama de posibilidades para la permanencia – desde la preservación y reunificación familiar a la adopción y la tutela legal – nos hacen recordar tanto los jóvenes en cuidado de crianza y los que van saliendo como las familias que los aman, que esta tarea es sumamente crítica.*

*Debe llegar a ser una llamada clarín que cada joven tenga una familia con la cual él o ella puede contar contra viento y marea. La permanencia es una posibilidad, es poderosa y tiene que ser una prioridad. Es la que nuestros propios hijos e hijas necesitan y merecen, y los jóvenes en cuidado de crianza la merecen también.*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raymond L. Torres".

Raymond L. Torres

# PERMANENCE PICKING UP STEAM, NATIONAL LEADERS SUPPORT “FAMILIES FOR LIFE”



*“Before, we used to talk about change. Now we’re doing it.”* – Mary Gambon, Massachusetts Department of Social Services

Six months after the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence gathered 400 participants from 41 states and the District of Columbia, more than half of the states represented report progress in advancing a paradigm that promises to transform child welfare. From Boston to Honolulu, the call to put lifelong family relationships back into the lives of foster children and youth is gaining momentum.

The Convening, “Families for Life: Addressing the Needs of Older Children and Youth in Foster Care,” assembled child welfare leaders, attorneys, judges, policymakers, researchers, journalists, along with parents, and youth, and succeeded in galvanizing participants around the proposition that permanence – achieving lifelong families for every child and youth in foster care – is possible and powerful, and must become a national priority. The heartfelt and often heart-wrenching personal testimonies of young people and parents added power and urgency to the research, policy, and practice discussions that filled four days and engaged legislators and policymakers from all levels of government. The Convening was sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation

and its direct service agency, Casey Family Services. Co-sponsors were Casey Family Programs, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Hite Foundation, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and the Stuart Foundation. In addition, more than 40 national organizations signed on as supporters.

In his opening remarks, Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director, said: “We have to teach more fully one fundamental proposition. While we can make a child’s life less dangerous by taking him out of harm’s way, we cannot make a child whole without putting him in a caring permanent family.”

Among the major themes to emerge from the candid discussions was the need to:

- learn from the insights of foster youth themselves;
- debunk myths that obstruct moving youth into permanence;
- integrate services, including lifeskills training with permanency work and post-permanency services and supports;
- engage youth and families in planning and decision making;
- collaborate across systems; and
- engage the media in building public will for permanence.

According to Sarah Greenblatt, Convening coordinator and director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice: “The Convening’s plenary panels, learning sessions, and courageous conversations were designed to provide participants with opportunities to explore the organizational structures and processes, policies, practices, and systems collaboration strategies that are needed to improve permanency outcomes for older children and youth in foster care.” She added that the results “deepened the understanding of the essentials needed to achieve and sustain permanence.” Those essentials include:

- leadership to sustain momentum,
- data to make the case for change
- funding to achieve and sustain permanence for youth, and
- organizational structures and processes to support permanence for older children and youth.

Sharing beginning work, promising practices, and emerging policy issues allowed for spirited discussion and a sense of hope that reform is happening. By the end, there was broad understanding that the need to act together and quickly is urgent.

“We know how to do better,” said Annie E. Casey Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson. “There are increasing numbers of

*Today’s children and youth in foster care could become tomorrow’s lost generation, based on a snapshot of the system from September 2005 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System data. For example:*

- Half – 247,645 – were age 11 and older.
- One-fifth were not living with families.
- Over one-half (53 percent) were from minority backgrounds (African American, 32 percent; Hispanic, 18 percent; Native American, 2 percent; or Asian, 1 percent).
- “Long-term foster care” and “emancipation” continued to be the goals for 69,566 children and youth (37,628 and 31,938, respectively) – despite the intent of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to eliminate them as permanency options.
- Consequently, 28,852 adolescents left foster care to be on their own with no meaningful connection to a family member or caring adult – 24,407 left to “emancipation” and 4,445 were considered “runaways.”



Participants in the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington, D.C., from left: The Children's Defense Fund's MaryLee Allen and other panelists at the public policy briefing;



Congressman Danny K. Davis (D-IL); Harry Spence, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services; and Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice.



states prepared to do better by their foster care population.” Casey facilitates some of these efforts around the country through the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, the Family to Family initiative, and the Casey Strategic Consulting Group, he noted, adding that permanence will be the focus of the Foundation’s 2007 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

“Despite what’s been learned, what’s been demonstrated, and the progress that’s been made, the performance of our child welfare systems as a whole remains unacceptable,” Nelson continued. “Too many kids still come into care. Too many stay too long. Too many kids drift from placement to placement. Too many remain in group care. Too many kids experience racially correlated impacts, and ... far too many children still exit the child welfare system without the skills, networks, and the lifelong permanent families that are absolutely essential to their safety, well-being, and success as adults.”

The Convening’s peer-led learning sessions and courageous conversations addressed the importance of raising awareness about teenagers’ need for permanence and promoted interdisciplinary strategies to increase permanency options for youth. In addition, the Convening offered state participants an opportunity to plan and discuss their own efforts to address youth permanence. Delegates tackled practice issues, including child welfare financing, encouraging others to look at leveraging state funding available through existing federal funding streams; and family involvement, emphasizing the importance of helping child welfare staff improve their capacity to reach out to families, especially families of color, who are disproportionately represented in child welfare.

Some states shared their work in the use of family team meetings and “cultural consultants” to look at a range of permanency options for children and youth in foster care. Participants also explored ways to provide flexible resources that could be used in helping to maintain primary family relationships and to build support for relative care.

In recognition of the need for improved research and data, more than 35 leading researchers from across the country explored permanency implications for the field at a Convening Research Roundtable.

At the end of the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence, participants engaged in an electronic polling process to identify key lessons learned and to confirm their commitment to moving the youth permanence agenda forward within their organi-

zations and states. They overwhelmingly agreed that family permanence for older children and youth in foster care is possible, can be a transformative experience, and must be the focus of policy and practice at state and federal levels.

“The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence was an exciting vehicle for change, and for demonstrating how we can move this work forward,” Greenblatt observed.

The next invitation-only Convening, again sponsored by the Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, is slated for April 30 to May 3, 2008, in Washington, D.C.

To learn more about the past Convening, workshop sessions, presenters, and resources, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services presented its Distinguished Service Award to the Stuart Foundation for its early work supporting the National Convening on Youth Permanence. Present during the awards presentation, from left: Pat Reynolds-Harris, director of the California Permanency for Youth Project; Douglas W. Nelson, president, the Annie E. Casey Foundation; Bill Bettencourt, site leader, Family to Family California; Teri Kook, senior program officer, the Stuart Foundation; and Raymond L. Torres, executive director, Casey Family Services.



# MEDIA MEETS CRITICISMS HEAD ON PANEL ADVISES NEW APPROACHES



*Why does the press insist on reporting only the negative stories?*

*How can we get coverage for the good things our programs are doing?*

*How can we get reporters to understand permanence and write about it?*

These and other questions, often charged with emotion and frustration, were aimed at a panel of leading national journalists assembled for a plenary offered at the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence.



*From left: Nell Bernstein, author and journalist, and Nora McCarthy, editor of Rise magazine, describe the elements of a meaningful story during the Convening's media panel.*

With candor and gentle counsel, media experts Nell Bernstein, Kathy Bonk, Steven Holmes, Rachel Jones, Nora McCarthy, and Judy Woodruff spoke about their own experiences in reporting on issues related to child welfare, and engaged the audience in a spirited discussion about how to improve coverage of issues related to family permanence.

Dana Vickers Shelley, director of strategic communications for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, told the audience that the panel was assembled to help explain how media professionals work and how choices between hard news and issue-oriented coverage are made. "It is essential for us to understand how to approach journalists and work with them effectively," she said.

Judy Woodruff, senior correspondent for the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, served as moderator. "I am so pleased that we are a critical part of this conference," she noted. "The media is part of every piece of American society and policymaking, and it's so important that people have the opportunity to speak up about how and why they're covered in the news."

"We're here today to talk about daily journalism," former CNN Anchor Woodruff said. She then posed a series of questions to each of the panelists:

*What is our assessment of how the news is covering American children, especially those in vulnerable situations – especially foster care?*

Rachel Jones, correspondent for National Public Radio (NPR), was the first to respond: "It is better than when I got here 12 years ago. I then found myself in a newsroom where politics, crime, and war were prime topics. The Casey Journalism Center at the University of Maryland does a lot to train journalists about the issues, but there is a lot of room to grow."

Steven Holmes, national editor for the *Washington Post*, continued: "I think coverage is divided into two areas: national coverage and local coverage. Don't throw a blanket over all of it," he cautioned.

Nora McCarthy, youth reporter and editor of *Rise*, a publication for birth parents, observed:

"The coverage feels thin, at least in New York City. At the same time, I don't see a lot of cooperation from child welfare departments or agencies working with journalists."

Freelance journalist and author Nell Bernstein offered another point of view: "There's a tendency for reporters to bring in youth as 'color' and to focus their stories more on experts. If it were up to me, I'd reverse that emphasis. I've found the most nuanced answers to questions of what permanence means come from the youth themselves."

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**"THE MEDIA IS PART OF EVERY PIECE OF AMERICAN SOCIETY AND POLICYMAKING, AND IT'S SO IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK UP ABOUT HOW AND WHY THEY'RE COVERED IN THE NEWS." – Judy Woodruff**

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Media consultant Kathy Bonk, founder of the Communications Consortium Media Center, said: "I think the coverage is fragile. Three to four years ago there were more reporters working on this beat, but because of economics and cutbacks at most papers, the number is far fewer today."

*What makes a story? Where do you look for contacts?*

*“The news media has a different mission from yours. It is to report what they think people need to know. For many of us, there is a desire to report on issues, to help people understand.” – Judy Woodruff*

“The code word at NPR is ‘tension,’” Jones replied. “For example, I got a story about welfare reform on the air because there were two opposing views. Some said it was an overwhelming success; others said it’s been smoke and mirrors.”

Bernstein reflected: “I’ve spent most of the past decade talking about and writing about kids of the incarcerated. I’m interested in what people have experienced, but more in what they feel. The policy recommendations I’ve presented [in my book] are drawn from young people’s views.”

Holmes took a different tack in his response: “I’d like to give you an example of what I don’t consider a national story at the *Washington Post*. I’ll get a communication from a child welfare agency wanting coverage of a certain program. I then get back to them and ask what are the results of the program and what similar programs exist around the country? Most often, they cannot answer, and the story they want is never written.” He added, “You’ve got to work a story into a larger context, a movement.”

#### *How do we get you to do balanced reporting?*

Holmes observed: “I have found a tendency among organizations and agencies to view the press as the enemy. If that’s all you do, then what you’ll get is an enemy.” He offered the example of imbedding reporters with troops in Iraq as a way that the Pentagon has worked to break down barriers to balanced coverage.

Jones reported that there is a trend at NPR to run “solution” stories, and encouraged participants to bring stories to her.

To that Holmes added: “Local stories are wonderful. Don’t denigrate them or the local media. The fact is most people in the country



*Broadcast journalist Judy Woodruff leads a panel discussion during the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence for more than 400 attendees.*

get their news from local news. If you’ve got a good story, go there first.”

#### *Why do you seem to love to tell stories of failure in the child welfare system and not do equal justice to the successes?*

“Journalists are trained to think you’re doing something wrong and to report it,” Jones told the audience. More positive coverage takes building a relationship with journalists who have a great interest in the issue.

Holmes commented that “most journalists go into this work to help bring about change. If you see something that’s wrong, then you have a chance to right it. Complaining about this aspect of journalism is kind of like railing against gravity,” he added.

#### *Child protective services proceedings are closed to the press in most cases. Do you agree that proceedings should be closed?*

“Confidentiality is misused too often,” Bernstein emphasized. “I can’t count the times I’ve been told that I cannot talk to a youth older than age 18, when it’s that youth’s right to decide. However, child protective services proceedings are different because the children involved most often are so young.”

In summary, Woodruff said: “The news media has a different mission from yours. It is to report what they think people need to know. For many of us, there is a desire to report on issues, to help people understand. If they know more about an organization, more about the staff and the people, reporters are more likely to report a [balanced] story.”

*The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence featured a number of plenary sessions on the issue of helping older children and youth find families for a lifetime. For more information about the Convening, please visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).*

# MAKING FAMILIES FOR LIFE FOR OLDER CHILDREN AND YOUTH POSSIBLE

*This article shares the discussion that took place during the “Effective Court and Legal Partnerships to Achieve Permanence for Older Children and Youth” plenary, held at the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence.*

Young people in foster care want what all kids want: a home for the holidays, someone to cheer their successes and someone to trust.

## *The courts*

When a child or youth is deemed at risk of neglect or abuse by state child protective services staff, it is the courts that render the ultimate decision that sends that youngster into foster care or home to birth parents. The courts – usually state probate courts, but also family courts or courts of appeal – rule in other matters affecting young persons’ lives all through their childhoods: reunification, termination of parental rights, adoption, guardianship, and emancipation, for example.

Only recently has the child welfare community begun to advocate loudly for court reform to, among other changes, ensure the full participation in court proceedings by the families and children affected by them. Although provided for by law, participation is often made difficult and sometimes impossible by inadequate legal representation and under-informed court staff.

“Youngsters do not participate in many of the legal processes even though, by law, they should,” explained Raymond L. Torres,

executive director of Casey Family Services, speaking at the Convening. “The one voice that can best tell judges about what these children want for their lives, for their future, and what family resources may be available, may not have been tapped.”

“There are few relationships more difficult to manage than the court,” said plenary leader Gary Stangler, the executive director of Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, a member of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, and a former child welfare commissioner in the State of Missouri. “Yet we all agree that cooperation with the courts and the role they play is essential in helping children.”

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**“THE ONLY WAY WE CAN MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT PERMANENCE IS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE YOUTH ARE INVOLVED. THIS IS THE KEY TO CHANGING THE SYSTEM.” – Jennifer Rodriguez**

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The Honorable William Thorne Jr. of the Utah Court of Appeals encouraged child welfare professionals to look at things in a new way. “If we look at every one of these children as part of our family, would we be satisfied? Reasonable efforts are not enough. When we take these children away from their families, we owe them, and we need to deliver.”

Judge Thorne continued: “When I began judging whether families or parents were good enough, I believed that the foster care

system protected kids; 25 years later, I’m not so sure. Getting them to age 18 is not enough. One expert told us that in two years, 60 percent of those kids would be homeless or in jail.

“If these were our children, would we be satisfied?” he asked. “If there is a single child who hasn’t gotten what they needed, can we step back and say that was reasonable? Look at it through the eyes of the child. If these are not the results we want, what are we going to do about it?”

## *What works*

As an advocate for families and children, Elizabeth Fassler, litigation supervisor of the Center for Family Representation, agreed that courts and child welfare professionals should treat every family as if it were their own family. “The best way to help kids involved in the foster care system is to strengthen and support their families,” Fassler said. To do that, she recommended permanency planning that:

- gets everyone – including lawyers – involved right from the beginning,
- includes parent advocates and social workers in each child’s team,
- makes sense for their families in their homes, and
- provides continued funding.



*Several states have already begun to implement plans to ensure that when youth leave the foster care system, they do so knowing they have a family to turn to and at least one caring adult they can rely on for a lifetime.*



*Above, from left: Elizabeth Fassler, litigation supervisor, the Center for Family Representation, Inc.; and the Honorable William Thorne, Jr., Utah Court of Appeals. Right, from left: Jennifer Rodriguez, legislation and policy coordinator, California Youth Connection; and Robert Harris, public guardian, Cook County Illinois.*

Robert Harris, public guardian at the Cook County Illinois Public Guardian's Office, agreed with Fassler's emphasis on "having all different kinds of persons to represent a child – not just a lawyer but also a social worker."

#### *Ensuring outcomes reflect policy changes*

Harris also believes that lawyers must be vigilant in assuring that laws and policies are working for children and families. "What I've learned in my 15 years is that lawyers can set the framework through lawsuits. We can force the state to provide the services to represent children and families," he said. "But you also have to be ever vigilant to make sure that those processes really bring about changes in the lives of people. Although you can be the most aggressive advocate, you've also got to pay attention to folks and work with other people."



For example, he said teens frequently talk about the lack of contact with their siblings. "It's eye opening for us," said Harris. "We have the processes set in place in terms of the lawsuit. We have the regulations in place saying that siblings should be placed together and how often they should see each other. But what we've learned is that that's not always happening."

Studies by the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois continually have shown that the longest-lasting and most meaningful relationship foster children have is with their siblings. "Courts are oriented toward parents and services, but what we're neglecting is the bond between the siblings," said Harris. "Their concept of permanence is their ability to maintain relationships with their families, especially their siblings. What we're learning is that kids are starved for those connections."

#### *Bringing children and youth to the table*

Jennifer Rodriguez, legislation and policy coordinator of California Youth Connection, believes the court system must change to facilitate the participation of foster youth in decisions about their future. "The only way the courts can effectively make decisions about permanence is to make sure that the youth are involved,"

she said. "This is the key to changing the system. This is the work that will make the ultimate difference in kids' lives."

Rodriguez, herself, experienced the frustration of not being able to effect life-altering decisions that were made for her by others during her time in foster care. "People bring up all types of systemic reasons why youth can't participate," she added. "We need to step back from the problems and ask ourselves what this work is really all about – the kids – and then make the system match that."

Rodriguez also thought that helping children in foster care learn to make good choices while they are in care is an important part of permanency work. "On our 18th birthday, we are supposed to know how to make good choices, after all the important decisions already have been made for us in foster care. Information and experiences are the critical thing to making decisions, so sheltering youth from the reality of their life is taking away the decision-making power they need to have."

*For more information about the Convening, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).*

# PERMANENCE IS MORE THAN A WORD

## "PERMANENCE" FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OLDER CHILDREN AND YOUTH



For child welfare professionals, recommitting to the concept of permanence is reshaping service delivery and offering new hope of a family for older children and youth once expected to “age out” of the foster care system. While the intent of permanence is full of promise, the word itself might alienate children already accustomed to broken promises.

“As professionals, we throw around this term ‘permanence,’ ” said Lauren Frey, project director for permanency services at Casey Family Services. “Instead of helping us find solutions, the word gets in the way. What does that term really mean for youth?”

The question was posed to a diverse panel of young people at the start of the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence. Among the youth present in Washington, D.C., there was a shared concern that “permanence” fails to explain the powerful impact of having someone make a commitment for a lifetime.

“The word is confusing,” said 26-year-old Sarah Cedano. “For me, it’s about having someone there to care. Professionals shouldn’t talk with youth using the word permanence, but, instead, talk about all of the things that go along with it. That’s what we want.”

For adolescents who live their lives in the moment, promoting the long-term benefits of lifelong connections looks beyond their more basic needs, the panelists offered.

“You want someone you can talk with,” said James Carter, a young man who had been adopted at age 5 by an aunt when his birth mother turned to drugs. “That’s how I looked at my aunt. She was there for me.”

Youth clearly want a connection that is immediate, but that also offers true emotional security, according to Daniel Knapp, a foster youth adopted at age 14. “In my teens, I had immersed myself in extracurricular activities. I had important adults in my life: my basketball coach, an English teacher, my youth pastor,” he said. “Mentors don’t do the job a parent can do. You still yearn for family and for that support.”

Adopted at age 22, Nadege Mardy Breeden, a local youth advocate in Bridgeport, Connecticut, agreed. “I had a mentor, and she was there for me. She came to my graduation. She took me shopping for my prom dress. In the end, however, she wasn’t someone I could call ‘mom.’ That’s what all kids in foster care want.”

Opportunities to find forever families are everywhere, according to the panelists, each of whom found a different path to permanence, most of them in adulthood.

“You never know who can be that person in your life willing to make that commitment,” explained 26-year-old Nancy O’Reilly from California. “I had become close with one of my social workers when I was in my teens. We reconnected, and she adopted me when I was 24. It’s never too late to be adopted.”

For Cedano, permanence came in an unlikely way. She was speaking at a conference about her experiences in foster care and connected with someone in the audience. A

relationship developed, so she relocated to North Carolina to be part of the woman’s family and was adopted at age 24.

Breeden, who was adopted at age 21, had found permanence and never even realized it. “On the day I went to college, my foster mother wrote me a 15-page letter telling me that I would be back. I always had told her that I would never come back, that I wanted to get away from the rules. But she told me that she knew I’d found my foundation with her. That day, I realized that I would come back home.”



While these experiences might be atypical, Knapp offered a reminder that with careful initial placements, many children might find permanence sooner.

“My foster mother, my adoptive mother, she is very faith based,” Knapp said. “When I see foster kids come into our home today, I see how the kids raised with different values and experiences struggle. It’s challenging. I just find that cultural issues are neglected when kids are placed, and if more attention was

*“Youth are experts on the foster care experience, not because they’ve chosen to become experts like professionals, but because they live it.*

*They have so much to teach us.”— Lauren Frey*

paid to these upfront, maybe that first foster family might be the one willing to adopt.”

However each of the panelists had found permanence in their lives, their different paths and experiences showed the complexities of permanency practice.

For example, Breeden, Cedano, and O’Reilly all found legal connections in adulthood through relationships that they cultivated themselves with adults who loved them and who understood the emotional security adoption would offer.

For the young men on the panel, Carter and Knapp, permanence has not been a panacea.

When he was age 16, Carter’s adoptive mother died, leaving him without an important figure in his life. “I saw how much my cousin mourned the death of her mom, and it made me realize that I had to reach out to my birth mom,” he said. “I just got back from serving in Iraq, and I’m so glad that she’s in my life, because it was stressful over there, and I like having someone to talk with about it.” Now in his early 20s, he says that he

birth parent die and a mother who gave me up. Today, I struggle with it.”

Knapp joins many professionals, including the Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, in calling for post-adoption supports for families, which might have helped him to deal with his own issues about abandonment and trained his mother in how to support that healing. “The adoptive work doesn’t stop at adoption,” he said.

For the professionals attending the Convening, the candid discussion offered fresh insights. “Youth are experts on the



*Participants in a youth panel share their permanency journeys. Previous page: Sarah Cedano (top), and Nadege Mardy Breeden (bottom). This page: Daniel Knapp (left), Cedano (center), and Nancy O’Reilly and James Carter (right).*

“I had always wanted to be adopted, to be rescued from foster care,” O’Reilly stated. “Having a family has made all the difference – it’s something everyone deserves. I feel like my life started the day I was adopted.”

and his mother are rebuilding their relationship slowly.

Knapp, who was featured in a *Newsweek* article on teens adopted from foster care, said he wished that the work toward emotional security had been on equal footing with the drive for legal permanence. “After the adoption, my relationship with my adoptive mom went downhill. We both had so many expectations. She had expectations of what a son would be. I brought my own expectations and insecurities about having a

foster care experience, not because they’ve chosen to become experts like professionals, but because they live it,” Frey said. “They have so much to teach us.”

*For more information about the Convening, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).*

## PERSPECTIVES ON PERMANENCE:

### FAMILY HELPS HEAL A BROKEN HEART



*Tamika is embraced by her birth mother outside the Boston-area home of the young girl's foster mother.*

Having someone to care and a place to belong can seem an impossible dream for children in foster care, especially those who have serious medical and behavioral issues. For 10-year-old Tamika\*, living in a therapeutic, residential program without a secure family connection threatened her very survival. Tamika suffered from the same congenital heart ailment that already had killed her brother and her grandmother, and was rejected repeatedly as a transplant candidate due to the high risk of infection in group home environments.

Tamika could – and no doubt would – have suffered the same fate as her brother had it not been for an extraordinary partnership between four public and private agencies.

When the Walker School in Needham, Massachusetts – where Tamika had lived for more than a year – approached Casey Family Services' Massachusetts Division for help, Tamika was facing certain death without a heart transplant. "Within a very short time, we had to find a living situation that would meet [Boston] Children's Hospital's criteria for recuperative care and safety," explains Bronson de Stadler, Casey division deputy director.

Casey and the Walker staff launched a permanency action team. A Casey social worker and family support specialist began regular visits with Tamika and her mother. Al Casad, Casey's Massachusetts Division director; de Stadler; Richard Small, Walker School director; and staff from Walker met with representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) to develop a viable service plan to ensure that Tamika made the donor list.

Casey Team Leader Sheila Fitzgerald identified a prospective foster parent willing to take on the challenge of caring for Tamika after the transplant. Tamika would go into either the foster mother's home with 24-hour staffing or an apartment close to the Walker campus with 24-hour staff from Walker.

By the time Casey and Walker staff met with Children's Hospital, "Tamika literally had no more than days left," according to Small. But after the two contingency plans were presented, and with little time to spare, the hospital agreed to put her on the donor list.

A heart became available and Tamika underwent successful surgery on June 14 last year. She was unable to move in directly with her prospective foster mother until the home was licensed, but went instead to an apartment near the Walker School for her recovery period. Despite this placement outside her home, the prospective foster mother began visiting and connecting with Tamika during this time.

In addition, Casey and the prospective foster mother connected with Tamika's birth mother and DSS to plan visits with Tamika. Tamika's birth mother, Casey staff members, and the prospective foster mom all went through intense medical training to ensure proper infection control and diet.

The clinical team soon realized that despite her history, Tamika's birth mother had numerous strengths and wanted to reunify her family. The foster mother developed a relationship with the birth mother, and now acts as a mentor, role model, and support for more positive parenting and effective advocacy, now and in the future. "The trust that has been built among team members, including these two mothers within a culturally

competent context has been invaluable," says Valerie Brathwaite, the Casey social worker.

Tamika has made a remarkable recovery. The plan is for her to transition into her foster mother's home and eventually reunify with her mother. "Tamika's had her first home visit with her foster mother and regular visitations with her birth mother, younger brother, and sister," says de Stadler.

Both the foster and biological mothers have had dinners and visits together with and without Tamika, and continue to build their relationship. "The hope is that the foster mother and Tamika's family build a lifelong relationship," states Brathwaite.

Tamika's story is still unfolding, as collaborative team meetings – with Tamika, her birth mom, and her foster mom as equal partners – take place regularly to build trust, make decisions, and address important issues. That Tamika survived and is thriving many have described as "a miracle," a happy ending brought about by the partnership of four organizations – Casey, Walker, Children's Hospital, and DSS. They have helped Tamika not only to survive, but to grow up surrounded by a family of loving and committed adults, a family she helped to define, a family she can count on for a lifetime.

*\* Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

## PERSPECTIVES ON PERMANENCE:

### IN HER OWN WORDS: DISCOVERING FAMILY



*As part of a school assignment, Alexandra recently wrote a moving essay about her early experiences in rediscovering her family. The 16 year old from Vermont gave Voice her permission to reprint her personal story.*

“Daddy” is a word that most little girls love to say. It’s a word I haven’t used much in life. My father died when I was just over a year old. I don’t remember my daddy. I don’t remember if he had a particular scent or if I have his smile, sense of humor, or love of music. I’ve never known what we shared as father and daughter.

When my father died, in a way, so did my mom. She became careless, consumed drugs, and associated with the wrong people. I sometimes wonder what life would be like if my dad had lived. Would I be in the position I am? Would I be better or worse off? Would I still be in foster care?

I don’t know much about the early years of my life; just that my father and mom had met in Burlington, Vermont. He was older than mom. They both had children from previous marriages – mom had three and dad had four. I read that we moved a lot and that dad was pretty ill. He died shortly after my younger brother was born. Dad’s oldest child took custody of his three siblings, while mom, my younger brother, and I left Vermont for a while.

As I got older and realized that dad was with the angels, I didn’t really feel anything or care. How could I? I never knew what it was like to have a father. I knew none of his family, nothing of his past, and little about my half-brothers and sisters. This was easier

for me. I always have preferred not to know, rather than to deal with the pain of knowing that maybe my extended family had rejected me and let me fall into foster care.

However, as an adolescent, things have changed. I’ve asked the questions: “What happens after age 18?” “Where do I go for my birthday, Thanksgiving, and Christmas?” and “What do I call home?” It really worries me. I told myself that I was used to rejection, but no one wants to be lonely their whole life.

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#### ... AS AN ADOLESCENT... I’VE ASKED THE QUESTIONS: “WHAT HAPPENS AFTER AGE 18?” “WHERE DO I GO FOR... THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS?”

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My Casey Family Services social worker decided that we should start a family quest and look for my family. I responded with my typical “Hell no.” I thought that if they had wanted me, they would have tried to find me. She told me to think about it and maybe the idea was worthwhile. I did not trust her at first.

There is always that chance that I could be hurt again.

My social worker, Judi, began to unravel family members’ addresses and telephone numbers. After she contacted them, they expressed how they had been wondering where my brother and I had gone and what had happened to us. Since then, I’ve

received two pictures of my father; the first time I had ever seen him or his siblings, my aunt and uncle, Shirley and Bill. Shirley sent me a picture of herself and her daughters, and we’ve also talked on the phone. I look identical to her at 8 years old and I have the exact same smile as my dad. We all have the same straight teeth and high cheeks. It’s unreal.

For now, there are so many maybes. Maybe I can live with one of them. Maybe they will love me. Maybe I will hate them. Maybe I’m not what they expect. I feel very out of the loop on the life they’ve created for themselves, and I am not even sure I want to be a part of it, part of a family.

I basically have lived my whole life as just another name in the system, abandoned by those around me. When my mom had her last daughter, the child immediately was adopted by my aunt. When my brother and I were taken away, no one was there, not even my mom.

Today, I am very confused and very unsure of what to do. I like the idea of having all this family, but I constantly have to remind myself to explore this new life, a life with a family. My mind is open to it, and while I tell myself that I don’t have expectations, I know that I want to belong. Maybe this is the way to make it happen.

## PERSPECTIVES ON PERMANENCE:

# LOVE IS NOT WRITTEN IN A COURT ORDER

By Tracey Carter

In September I traveled with my 23-year-old son to speak at “Families for Life: Addressing the Needs of Older Children and Youth in Foster Care,” a conference convened by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services. James and I were doing a workshop about the strength of family bonds. Even though James and I were separated by my drug addiction and his adoption, our relationship is growing now.

At the conference, I explained some of the history that led to James’ placement in fos-



*Tracey Carter, of New York City, listens intently to the presentations at the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington, D.C.*

ter care. When James was born in 1983, I was 21 years old and had already one child. We lived in Queens and I worked at the grocery store owned by my children’s father. I was comfortable. I was proud when James was born. But around 1986, my life started going downhill. First I found out that my kids’ father sold drugs out of the store. Then the feds came and busted all the drug

dealers. The cops shut down the store and destroyed our house. My kids’ father ran and left us.

I didn’t know what to do. I had no income. I was pregnant with my fourth child. I was depending on public assistance. I wound up going to my sister’s in Brooklyn. She helped me out a lot, but I was stressed. Being abandoned by my kids’ father also reminded me of my parents’ deaths when I was very young, and I was depressed. That’s when I started hanging out and was introduced to what we called freebase.

I started by using drugs on the weekends. Eventually I stopped coming home. Finally my sister gave me an ultimatum: Either come home and be a mother or stay in the streets. I chose to stay out.

A couple of years later, my sister moved with my kids to Virginia Beach. She got an 800 number so I could talk to my kids anytime, but after a while I just stopped calling.

One day I got a paper from court and I gave up my rights to my children. I found out years later that my sister adopted them.

By 2004 I was drug free, raising my two youngest children with my husband, and working as a parent leader at the Child Welfare Organizing Project, an advocacy group for birth parents. I’d reconnected with my family and found out James was in the Army – in Iraq. By that time, my sister had died. James was looking to reconnect with me as well.

When he came home, I finally got a chance to talk with James. He was so young, yet he had seen a lot of things. He said he had thought about me often and had wanted to

see me again. We hugged and cried, then we laughed.

My family had only told James that I was sick. They hoped that one day I would tell James the whole truth. When I told him my story, he said he felt better hearing it from me. He asked me a lot of questions. I was straight and honest with him. I apologized for not being there for him and told him, “I can’t change the past. I’m just grateful that you still accept me.”

Love is permanent, not what is written in a court order. You can separate a mother and child but the love will still be there. I hope policymakers who heard our story will find ways to help birth parents and kids stay connected, even if there’s a long time when the parent cannot take care of her kids.

Of course, reconnecting isn’t easy. I think James has a lot more questions for me that he hasn’t asked. Some things he’s not ready to know yet, and I have to respect that.

I love James. I love who he is. He’s comical, he makes me laugh, he makes my recovery feel worthwhile. I think my presence has made it a little easier for James to do what he has to do in his own life. I think he’s a little more comfortable now. The pressure of worrying whether I’m alive or dead is off him, and he doesn’t have to wonder, “Where’s my mom?” He can always pick up the phone and call me.

*Carter’s essay originally appeared in the magazine Rise. To learn more, or to order up to 50 free copies, visit [www.youthcomm.org/rise](http://www.youthcomm.org/rise).*



## JOSEPH SEMIDEI: CHILD WELFARE LEADER REFLECTS ON 30-YEAR CAREER

Close-up

*Since March 2005, Joseph Semidei has been the executive director/CEO of St. Christopher's Inc., a residential counseling and educational facility in Dobbs Ferry and Valhalla, New York. In March 2007, he officially will retire from that post. As a prominent leader in the child welfare and mental health field during the past three decades, Semidei has contributed significantly to the lives of children and families. Prior to taking the helm at St. Christopher's, he served as deputy executive director and director of policy for the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families. He co-chaired the Immigration and Child Welfare Task Force of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) for New York City, as well as ASC's Commissioner's Advisory Board.*

*In the early 1980s, Semidei was named deputy commissioner of the Division of Children and Family Services in the New York State Department of Social Services. During his tenure, he implemented the Child Welfare Reform Act and broadened the service delivery system to include community-based organizations in high-need areas. In 1999, he became the first Latino appointed to the position of associate commissioner of the U.S. Children's Bureau in the Department of Health and Human Services. Over the past several years, he also has taught as an adjunct professor in the graduate social work programs at Columbia, Fordham, and New York universities. He joined the Board of Advisors for Casey Family Services in 2006. Voice had the opportunity to speak with him recently. Following are highlights from that conversation.*

**VOICE:** *As you look back over your tenure at St. Christopher's, what would you consider the highlights?*

**SEMIDEI:** St. Christopher's was an incredible opportunity to bring all of my experience to bear on one agency in very dire straits. It was a 125-year-old institution about to close. I am most proud of how the staff pulled together. We examined our values and our identity.

St. Christopher's strength lies in offering residential services, so we moved toward educational "boutique" services (where a particular cottage will have a constellation of clients for whom staff and services are tailored to those individuals' specific needs). In the process, we changed from a behavioral model to a clinical model and

created a homelike atmosphere for those young people who were living there. These past two years have been very exciting. Now we've become pioneers in residential services. We've helped to bring kids home after they've been placed in out-of-state settings at great expense and with little opportunity to see their families.

**VOICE:** *Are there particular cases or stories that illustrate those achievements and challenges?*

**SEMIDEI:** I remember one very tough girl. She was angry about being here. Our kids are placed through the Office of Special Education, but they come to St. Christopher's on a voluntary basis with the parents making that decision. For this young lady, it took seven or eight months to get her into a neutral place, and then she began to take dance classes, to get into cheerleading and other activities. She improved her attitude, and her grades got

better. She decided she wanted to go to college. We were able to get Princeton Review folks to tutor her so her grades could improve and she could be better prepared to do well on her SATs. Now her motivation has changed to have a life very different from her parents and neighbors.

Most of these kids have the ability to do well, but they sabotage themselves. They need someone to care about them and rules to guide them. You have to persevere. We try to increase their comfort level and increase their experiences through trips to the museum and through exposure to art and music. We discover that children have an affinity for something, and we give them the tools to excel in their area of interest.

“PERMANENCE WILL TRANSFORM THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM. ... BUT WE ALSO HAVE TO BUILD A CONSTITUENCY FOR CHILD WELFARE, MOBILIZE THAT CONSTITUENCY, AND GET OUR POLICYMAKERS TO LISTEN TO WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY.”



**VOICE:** *Over your 30-year career in child welfare, what stands out for you?*

**SEMIDEI:** I'm proud of something that I developed as a signature program in Albany, New York in the 1980s. It was known as NBI – Neighborhood-Based Initiative. We discovered from data that social problems were not equally distributed throughout the state, but rather that 26 communities disproportionately contributed to the population experiencing poor outcomes. They were poor neighborhoods, and social problems were concentrated there. It's a fact that poor kids have poor outcomes. The institutions serving them are not doing a good job providing them the resources they need.

So the question became how can the state's 27 agencies and their local counterparts coordinate across systems to help these people? The 26 communities themselves created the five-year plan and then set out to convince 27 agencies, including child welfare, mental health, and education, to work with us and share priorities and funding. Those 27 state agencies not only had to accept the plan, but come to the table with resources.

We released a request for proposals with premiums given to local agencies. The plan was based on a bottom-up approach. This constituted a major shift in thinking; this was an integration of services and empowerment of people. The scope and magnitude of the state's community project had not been tried before nor has it been tried subsequently.

**VOICE:** *Permanence is now the focus of work across the Annie E. Casey Foundation, including Casey Family Services. What are your observations about the importance of permanence for children and youth in foster care?*

**SEMIDEI:** Permanence will transform the child welfare system. I think it will happen. But we also have to build a constituency for child welfare, mobilize that constituency, and get our policymakers to listen to what we have to say.

“I'M VERY PROUD OF THE COMMUNITY-BUILDING WORK THAT CASEY IS DOING. COMMUNITY BUILDING IS FAMILY BUILDING. THOSE THINGS HAVE TO GO TOGETHER.”

I also think that permanence has to be measured. We have to pay attention to connectedness, certainly adoption, but also connections that haven't been formally legalized. We want to know how connected youth and families are doing. We can see if youth and adult alumni seek help whenever they're in need. We'll need longitudinal studies to measure this.

**VOICE:** *What do you see as the principal issues, particularly as they relate to permanence, facing immigrant children who are removed from their families?*

**SEMIDEI:** The context is fear on both sides: Immigrants fear any government, based on their experiences in their home countries,

and they fear deportation. Government officials have no experience, don't know how to handle immigrants, and are not sure they should serve them.

While I was with ACS, we created a brochure on immigrants and language for staff that explained what happens in immigrant families experiencing domestic violence and juvenile justice. It talked about how youth who have been taken into foster care can get legal status, but emphasized that papers have to be filled out by a deadline. This brochure helped workers get started earlier to help kids get legal status (as allowed by Executive Order 41). We need more information like that and resources for workers who are trained to speak Spanish and other languages, including Bosnian, Somali, or Cambodian. It is difficult to achieve permanence for immigrant children because government officials do not understand or take the time to look at the extended families that all these kids have. They miss opportunities within the informal extended family.

**VOICE:** *What, in addition to permanence, do you see as the most important policy and practice issues that the child welfare system in this nation needs to grapple with in the next few years?*

**SEMIDEI:** The Adoption and Safe Families Act needs reform. The timetables are arbitrary. It allows only 15 to 24 months in many cases for birth families to be approved for reunification with their children. We know there is a very high correlation between parental drug abuse and child



*“Most of these kids have the ability to do well, but they sabotage themselves. They need someone to care about them, and rules to guide them. You have to persevere.”*



*Compassion:* An integral part of service.

*Conviction:* Look at your assumptions and values.

*Commitment:* There are no quick fixes.

*Creativity:* Kids are all unique individuals. Think outside the box.

*Courage:* To apply the first four C's: Take risks.

**VOICE:** *What are your goals in serving as a member of Casey Family Services' Board of Advisors?*

**SEMIDEI:** I want to tease out of our discussions the policy and program implications of what's happening in the Foundation's grant-making work and Casey Family Services. For example, if we say child welfare is a class issue, then nothing would help to change the outcomes for families more than jobs. I'm very proud of the community-building work that Casey is doing. Community building is family building. Those things have to go together.

**VOICE:** *What are your plans for the next phase of your career?*

**SEMIDEI:** I plan to spend my time smelling the roses and engaging in family life. I do want to continue teaching and consulting, especially in executive coaching. Mentoring has always been a very important part of my 30 years, and I hope to continue. I also plan to write a book on the 5 Cs.

foster care placements, but we also know that recovery takes time. We don't have enough help for substance abusers. We've got to pay attention to cultural differences.

We've got to shift our thinking, to look to communities and begin to think from the bottom up. I've been in the highest levels of policymaking in the states, and I can tell you that this insight has not penetrated. We have a social system that works on class differences, gender differences, and race differences. Yet, we hardly ever talk about those differences, and they are not factored into policies. The problem of child welfare that's been with us from the earliest days is that we lifted kids away from families and then

when the kids turned age 18, we sent them out alone with no real help. We haven't moved very far from that today.

**VOICE:** *Based on your experience as a practitioner, policymaker, and teacher, what changes do you think must be made in the training that social workers are receiving at schools around the nation?*

**SEMIDEI:** There is too much emphasis in schools of social work on technique. I think the field is overly specialized. We don't think across different disciplines, and we don't encourage critical thinking. Assignments are more on memorizing than on critical thinking and problem solving. Training should become more broadly focused on connecting the work to the downtrodden, on applying critical thinking, and on working in a different frame. In my own teaching I emphasize what I call the "5 Cs" that are needed to take stock of ourselves:



## GLYNIS CASSIS, HARTFORD DIVISION DIRECTOR

**W**ith her understated style and trademark warmth, Glynis Cassis assumed leadership of Casey Family Services' Hartford Division in March 2005. A former child protective worker in Massachusetts specializing in sexual assault investigations, she joined Casey in 1992 as a social worker in the agency's foster care program, eventually becoming a Team Leader. She now oversees a continuum of services for children and families in one of the nation's most vulnerable cities.

**VOICE: What brought you to Casey?**

**CASSIS:** I attended the University of Connecticut for my graduate work when Anthony Maluccio, a member of Casey's Board of Advisors, was a professor there. I had been interested in his work with foster youth and in reunification. I have the utmost respect for him. When I looked for a new job opportunity, it was Dr. Maluccio's high regard for Casey that brought me to their front door.

**VOICE: What distinguishes Casey from other providers?**

**CASSIS:** I have found there is a unique dedication to best practice, devotion to Casey's mission, and willingness to flex our resources to benefit children and families.

We are fortunate to be in the same state with the Bridgeport Division and the agency's headquarters. Casey has a strong presence in Connecticut and, together, we are able to leverage our work in different com-

munities and arenas to influence policy and create meaningful change. For example, we jointly held a Youth Advocacy Day at the state capitol to raise the voices of children throughout the state using the expertise of policy and communications staffs in New Haven to discuss sibling visitation among our youth in care. I am proud of the collective respect we have garnered throughout the state.

**VOICE: As the Casey Foundation has moved to emphasize the importance of permanent families for youth in care, how has the Hartford Division responded?**

**CASSIS:** We have always valued the importance of families for our youth; we just didn't call it "permanence." We were the first Casey division to offer family reunification services, in addition to our foster care and post-adoption services. Historically, we've had great success with our youth being adopted by their foster parents. Family always has been at the heart of our work.

Traditionally, our programs have worked together, but still have been separate. For example, our reunification staff has had access to the resources of our foster care team and vice versa. A family support specialist from foster care might be used to help a family in the reunification process strengthen its parenting skills, or a post-adoption worker might be called in to work with a foster family prior to an adoption. All of our services are provided within the context of family, which I think is a gift for us working at Casey.

We believe so strongly in the quality of our work that we have taken cases that don't fall clearly into one program or the other. As we

advance the permanency framework, I want to see that grow, and have my staff develop the skills to work within any of our programs, so that they come to see all of our services on the same continuum.

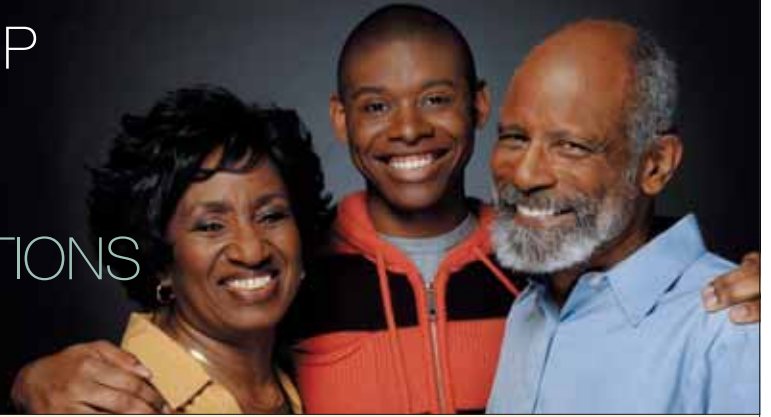
**VOICE: Whom are you serving?**

**CASSIS:** Our kids are not one demographic, but are similar by experience. What's typical is a background of trauma and loss, anger, and self-esteem issues. Our oldest youth receiving support and services is 25 years old (and a parent herself) and our youngest is just 4 years old. Thirty-five percent are Caucasian, 45 percent are African American, 12 percent are Hispanic, and eight percent are bi-racial. This reflects the child welfare population in the greater Hartford area. We recruit families from all populations to meet the needs of our youth.

**VOICE: Casey requires that all staff participate in a Diversity Training Program that promotes the organization's policies on the matter. You co-lead this training for Casey. What inspired you to take on this role?**

**CASSIS:** Many years ago, it was clear to me that we were immersed in diversity issues at Casey through our work, but that we were not addressing issues with families, or amongst the staff. We needed to increase cultural competency on all levels in order to better serve our consumers. It's been a wonderful experience that goes beyond the one-day training. I am happy to say it has become part of the fabric of Casey.

# SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR LASTING FAMILY CONNECTIONS



Of the six million children in the United States who live in households headed by grandparents and other relatives, just 30 percent have access to any federal subsidies, leaving them, unlike foster and some adoptive parents, dependent on scarce state assistance.

Subsidized guardianship became a recognized permanency option with the enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997. Subsidies have become increasingly prevalent as states seek qualified family members to provide lasting connections for kids in care. But targeted federal support is nonexistent.



*From left: Harriet Jackson Lyons, director of Raising Our Children's Children, and Carolyn Jackson, director of Grandparents on the Move, share experiences as relative caregivers.*

To help strengthen these legal family connections for vulnerable children, national child welfare experts are exploring ways to support guardians. The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services recently shed additional light on the guardianship issue by convening a symposium with

representatives of 13 states in Boston, Massachusetts. This symposium brought together the findings of a research study conducted by Tufts University graduate students and the advocacy efforts of Generations United, a national organization.

“The symposium was a working session that offered policy analysis and funding strategies to state agencies for supporting children placed with guardians as well as children in the care of relatives who are not in the child welfare system,” explained Sania Metzger, Esq., director of policy at Casey Family Services.

**“THE VAST MAJORITY OF FEDERAL DOLLARS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE ABUSED AND NEGLECTED ARE RESTRICTED TO THE COSTS OF FOSTER CARE.”**

According to symposium speaker Dr. Robert Hill, of the research firm Westat, 80 percent of children not living with their parents live “outside” the foster care system, most with relatives. While this arrangement is known as “informal” kinship care, Hill’s research indicates that these caregivers are deeply committed to providing youths with stable and nurturing environments.

As grandparent advocate Carolyn Jackson of New Haven, Connecticut, pointed out, the federal government has failed to provide the kind of robust support and funding for

guardianship that it has for foster care and adoption.

“I am the mother of six – three non-biological children whom I took in with no financial assistance,” Jackson said. “Now I am raising my 6-year-old grandchild and receive exactly \$333 per month. The amount of financial support reimbursed to foster parents per month in Connecticut is almost double. It is a frustrating process to find the help you need.” These circumstances led her to found and direct Grandparents on the Move, a support and advocacy group in New Haven.

While guardianship helps children in foster care both maintain their family connections and establish new family relationships, the federal government has yet to create incentives for such placements, putting the burden on states, according to Metzger.

### *Federal landscape*

The 2006 Deficit Reduction Act cut \$400 million from child welfare spending. Furthermore, waivers that allowed states to implement subsidized guardianship programs with their Title IV-E funds, the federally funded entitlement program that reimburses states for foster care costs, “sun-set” in early 2006. As a result, most public child welfare agencies today rely on state funding to finance subsidized guardianship programs.

As the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, a blue-ribbon review panel, stated: “The vast majority of federal dollars available for children who are abused and neglected are restricted to the costs of foster care.”



There have been numerous efforts, however, to pass federal legislation that would supplement state programs that move children from foster care. Addressing symposium participants, Rutledge Hutson, Esq., senior staff attorney at the Center for Law and Social Policy, made note of two federal bills that were introduced in 2005: the Kinship Caregiver Support Act and the Guardianship Assistance Promotion and Kinship Support Act, both of which would establish federal fiscal support for guardianship, fund kin navigator programs, require states to notify adult relatives when a child is removed from custody of the parents, and allow states to establish more lenient standards for relatives who are foster kin. Although these bills stalled in committee during the last legislative session, they present opportunities for Washington-based advocates in the current legislative session.

#### *Research as an advocacy tool*

Advocacy for subsidized guardianship policy can be strengthened with the help of research and program evaluations. A 2003 Westat research evaluation of subsidized guardianship in Illinois revealed there were fewer traumas to children, with greater stability and lower levels of child abuse, when children were placed with relative guardians rather than in foster care. The publication of these outcomes helped to bring national attention to subsidized guardianship as a viable permanency option, especially for older youth exiting foster care.

Research is an essential tool for dispelling misconceptions about subsidized guardianship. Beliefs that guardianship is less permanent than adoption or that it furthers intergenerational family dysfunction, for example, are contradicted by evaluations of

existing programs, according to the Tufts study.

#### *Subsidized guardianship in the states*

Massachusetts and Connecticut have long-standing subsidized guardianship programs, and Maine recently has established one. Currently, of the states in attendance at the symposium, New Hampshire, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia do not have subsidized guardianship programs. Rhode Island only offers subsidies on a case-by-case basis for non-kin guardians. Maryland used a federal waiver to support guardians and relative caregivers until the waiver recently expired, according to Maryland State Delegate Salima Siler Marriott.

State teams from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine formed a panel to share insights and suggestions for establishing and improving subsidized guardianship programs. They highlighted:

- A need for greater uniformity in eligibility requirements and financing regulations for subsidized guardianship and child welfare programs across the board. In Massachusetts, for example, guardianship subsidies are counted as unearned income, and may affect a family's eligibility for other programs, such as food stamps or public housing.
- The importance of court-mandated funding. In Connecticut, a consent decree process helped to ensure substantial funding for the Department of Children and Families, and created the financing for subsidized guardianship in that state.
- The strength of partnerships. Community partnerships and state agency collabora-

*Attendees at a recent symposium on subsidized guardianship in Boston, from left: Carolyn Jackson, director, Grandparents on the Move; Robert Hill, senior researcher, Westat; Rutledge Hutson, senior staff attorney, Center for Law and Social Policy; Sania Metzger, policy director, Casey Family Services; Karina Jimenez Lewis, Casey senior policy associate; Michael Brennan, cochair, Casey Family Services Board of Advisors; and Jaia Peterson Lent, public policy and outreach director, Generations United.*

tions are essential in building and maintaining strong guardianship programs.

- The need for strong and organized advocacy – among consumers and policymakers – at the local, state, and national levels.

In spite of existing state-funded programs, subsidized guardianship remains an underutilized tool, both as a permanency option and as a way to address disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system. Reasons for this may include lack of knowledge and prevailing misconceptions about subsidized guardianship, according to the Tufts research.

Massachusetts Department of Social Services Commissioner Harry Spence reminded professionals that their decisions affecting the lives of children must come from a deeply held sense of values, not just rules. “Life for humans without family is deeply destructive,” he stated.

## THEIR DAY IN COURT: IMPROVING LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS



Kim Olsen, whose three boys were removed from her home and put into foster care temporarily, had never met her attorney until the day of her custody hearing. “He just told us to sit there and be quiet, and do everything DCF [Department of Children and Families] wanted us to do,” she explained.

According to Connecticut law, children and parents are entitled to legal counsel in cases alleging abuse or neglect or whenever children are removed from their homes. But many parents, like Olsen, are unaware of their rights and have little or no contact with their attorneys before the hearing that will decide their family’s fate. “I felt like I had no voice,” Olsen added, getting nods from other parents during a recent forum at the historic state capitol.

Twenty-year-old Cameron Iacovelli echoed Olsen’s sentiments. Decisions affecting his life were made by an attorney he had not met until he turned age 18. “In order to represent you, they have to meet you and know who you are,” Iacovelli said.

The forum, co-sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Connecticut Voices for Children in November, brought together legal experts, legislators, state officials, judges, legal and child advocates, parents, and young people, to learn about how lawyers represent children and parents involved with protective services in other jurisdictions.

According to Raymond L. Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services, “Attorneys assigned to these cases are underpaid and overwhelmed with high caseloads. They don’t have the time or incentives necessary to become familiar with the particu-

lar needs of the child or the family when they are at their most vulnerable.”

The Hartford, Connecticut, event continued a conversation that began months earlier during a plenary at the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington, D.C., and focused on the court’s role in helping children find permanence and in protecting the rights of families during the process.

Sania Metzger, director of policy at Casey Family Services, reported that a study by Fordham University indicates that the average attorney working on child protective cases carries an average of 100 cases nationwide. Connecticut lawyers receive a per-case payment of \$500, providing little incentive for the attorney to explore in depth the complexities of family history and needs.

Yet, progress has been made. Connecticut legislative reforms in 2005 shifted the responsibility for appointing and paying child welfare attorneys from state judges to the new Commission on Child Protection, which also has established standards for attorneys representing children and parents in child protective cases. Most policymakers at the briefing, including State Senator Andrew McDonald, cochair of the judiciary committee, agreed that these reforms don’t go far enough to keep families together.

Experts like Mark Hardin, Esq., of the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and Law; Michele Cortese, Esq., the Center for Family Representation (CFR) in New York City; and Robert Harris, Esq., Office of the Public Guardian in Cook County, Illinois, promoted higher standards, more accountability, and

*Connecticut’s Kim Olsen shares her experiences with the state’s protective services system during a 2006 legal forum in Hartford.*

adequate hourly fees for attorneys; current training for attorneys on the complex and sensitive nature of child protective proceedings; and increased numbers of attorneys assigned to child custody cases.

In a CFR model program, Community Advocacy Teams (CAT) offer families the assistance of an attorney, a social worker, and a parent advocate (a parent who has had personal experience having children placed in foster care and successfully reunifying with them) as early as possible after a risk to a child is identified. If a case goes to court and children are removed, the family’s ability to reunify is improved by intensive support from CFR, which provides information to the court to help in making informed decisions. Of the 70 families whose cases CFR received after a family court case had started, children have returned home safely in more than 30 percent of the cases, often in as little as a few weeks and all within one year of CFR beginning the case.

The educational forum ended with Connecticut policymakers promising to make every effort to achieve the kind of quality legal representation that at-risk children and parents need and deserve. According to Shelley Geballe, president, Connecticut Voices for Children, follow-up events are being planned to keep the issue front and center in the Constitution State.

In addition, the event’s panel of experts agreed that the forum elevated a discussion that has the potential to help other states improve the legal services provided to children and parents.

## NEW HAVEN:

# NEW LEADERSHIP READY TO ADVANCE CASEY'S PERMANENCY PRACTICE

Familiar faces have assumed new positions at Casey Family Services just as the agency is striving to integrate youth permanency planning throughout its programs in all six New England states and in Baltimore, Maryland. Prepared to advance this internal strategy are Eliot Brenner, the organization's new deputy executive director for field operations, and Lauren Frey, the recently named project director for permanency services.

At the year's start, Brenner succeeded Ann Sullivan, the former field operations head who retired at the end of 2006. Previously the agency's clinical director, Brenner now oversees day-to-day service delivery for



*Lauren Frey, project director for permanency services; and Eliot Brenner, deputy executive director for field operations.*

Casey Family Services, including clinical practices, staff training, quality improvement, and the organization's eight divisions.

Prior to joining Casey Family Services as clinical director in 2002, Brenner served as the chief consulting psychologist for the Illinois Department of Children's Services. He earned his doctorate in psychology from Yale University in 1995, training at the Yale Child Study Center, and received his bache-

lor's from the University of Chicago.

A major thrust of his team's work in the next three to five years will be the continued implementation of a standardized permanency framework that shifts Casey's historic focus away from long-term foster care to an emphasis on a lifetime family.

"The Casey Foundation holds the fundamental belief that all kids are best raised within families," explains Frey, who originally joined the organization as a project manager for the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice in 2003. "Children have a right to a family. We have an obligation to teach them how to feel okay about being part of a family, even if they previously didn't feel safe within a family."



The agency's move toward permanence is not new, but rather an effort that began in 2005 with a vision of improved service delivery. "It's now

time to develop benchmarks that will allow us to be a model for other agencies doing permanency work," Brenner says.

Primarily, Casey Family Services views legal permanence through reunification, guardianship, and adoption as the ideal outcome for youth in care, Brenner says. In addition, the agency has established emotional security as a goal for all clients, even those who leave care without legal permanence.

Key to the agency's transition, and the focus of Frey's duties, will be assisting staff in

enhancing their permanency planning case-work skills.

"We have a talented workforce," Brenner says. Social workers in the field simply need to augment their skills to include a focus on permanence. For example, some staff might need to enhance their ability to lead a team of adults significant in a child's life to serve as a resource for identifying lifelong families."

At the Casey Center, Frey was a nationally recognized trainer on permanency practice. Prior to joining the agency, she spent nearly 10 years leading a system reform effort in Massachusetts to promote the reunification, adoption, and guardianship of older children and youth in foster care.

"Our work will look different, and our niche in providing permanency planning services will help even more children," Frey says. "We'll see more adoptions, more reunifications, and more guardianship placements, and fewer children leaving care with a goal of independent living with no family relationships."

Brenner notes that Casey has been growing its continuum of services in the past decade, all of which will complement and encourage permanence for children. As a result, the Field Operations team also will be placing a greater emphasis on data that will help "connect the dots" on how services interrelate and support each other. Through this data, Casey expects to contribute to the national dialogue on permanence. "We all have a shared vision for this work, but our experiences will test that vision in a way that will be meaningful to the field and the children we serve," Brenner notes.

## Resources to Find Families and Prepare Foster Youth for Adulthood

# View from Washington



by Robin Nixon, Executive Director, National Foster Care Coalition

I frequently am asked to comment on the quality of independent-living or transition services in the United States. Many times, service providers are looking for model programs and services, or are wondering how their state's services compare to other states. Reporters always want to know which states have the "best" services, and which states have the "worst."

My usual response, which often doesn't make anyone happy, is that great practices and programs can be found in almost every state, but that no state really has an ideal program, or one that provides a comprehensive, seamless set of services, supports, and opportunities for young people making the transition from foster care to adulthood.

Our collective efforts, as a field and as a nation, are an ever-changing work-in-progress when it comes to transition services. I am happy to report, however, that this is a work-in-progress that continues to garner a huge amount of attention – both in the field of child welfare and in communities that are genuinely concerned about the well-being and future prospects of our older youth in foster care.

This attention has resulted in the creation of numerous innovative partnerships and programs designed to enhance permanency efforts for older youth, to promote better educational outcomes, increase resources for post-secondary education, ensure safe and stable housing, extend foster care support

beyond age 18, and engage youth and foster care alumni as partners and leaders in advocacy, training, and service delivery.

Attention to this issue across the country is heard loud and clear in Washington. There are numbers of ongoing discussions in Congress and in the Department of Health and Human Services regarding strategies for improving the outcomes of young people who have left the foster care system. Efforts include bringing youth onto the federal teams conducting Child and Family Service Reviews in the states, implementation of a National Youth in Transition Database to measure state performance in implementing the Chafee Program, and new legislation to extend Title IV-E funding to age 21 nationally. It's an exciting time. Advocates, young people, service providers, and other stakeholders should be staying on top of discussions about foster youth transition at the community and state levels, as well as here in Washington. The more information we share, the more momentum we can build for positive changes.

To that end, here are links to some of the existing programs that support and prepare youth as they get on the road to adulthood.

### *Permanence for older youth*

California Permanency for Youth Project  
[www.cpyy.org](http://www.cpyy.org)

National Permanency for Youth Convening  
[http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pr\\_nc\\_covening\\_home.html](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pr_nc_covening_home.html)

Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood  
<http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org>

### *Extending foster care supports beyond age 18*

Iowa:  
<http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/whatsnew/spotlight/spotlight24.htm>

California:  
<http://www.calyouthissues.org/sites/cyclsection.php?id=6>

<http://www.calyouthissues.org/sites/cyclsection.php?id=338>

American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law  
<http://www.abanet.org/child/transitioning.pdf>

### *Youth and foster care alumni as leaders and partners*

California Youth Connection  
[www.calyouthissues.org](http://www.calyouthissues.org)

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute  
[www.ccaainstitute.org](http://www.ccaainstitute.org)

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative  
[www.jimcaseyyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org)

Foster Care Alumni of America  
[www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org)

FosterClub  
[www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com)

Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team  
<http://www.ylat.org>

*The National Foster Care Coalition is a diverse group of national organizations working in collaboration to raise public awareness, coordinate advocacy efforts, and build alliances that strengthen foster care and community supports for children, youth, and families. More information is available at [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org).*

# PERSPECTIVES

## IS IT TOO LATE FOR CONNECTIONS FOR ADULT ALUMNI?



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

*“The great French Marshall Lyautey once asked his gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow growing and would not reach maturity for 100 years. The Marshall replied, ‘In that case, there is no time to lose; plant it this afternoon.’ ”*  
– John F. Kennedy

Probably no concept is gaining more traction today on how to improve the outcomes of youth currently in foster care than that of creating permanence or lifelong families. The desire to create meaningful, enduring relationships with significant adults reflects the rich benefit of belonging.

But for the estimated 12 million adults in the United States who experienced foster care during their childhoods, creating a sense of belonging can still be a challenge. Is it too late for them?

Since August of 2006, it has been my privilege to serve as the new executive director of Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA). This national association was created by, and for, adults who are alumni of foster care and who want to connect with one another and use their combined resources to transform the system of foster care for a new generation.

FCAA is the only national association that seeks to create a connection, a place of belonging for all foster care alumni. Each foster care experience is unique. Care might have lasted from a single night to an entire childhood. For some, loving adoptive

parents came quickly. Others “aged out” with no supports – alone. Some reunited with families. Some are still estranged. Temporary homes ranged from kinship care to foster homes to congregate living.

No matter what the experience was for an individual, FCAA welcomes all. As alumni come together, life is better together. Alumni share a common language, the culture of foster care, which emanates from resiliency, loss, humor, self-sufficiency, and redemption. Sometimes what alumni share is heartbreaking – sometimes it refreshes and inspires.

to educate others about their foster care experience. For even the most remotely isolated alumnus, our soon-to-be-launched online virtual community will create a network where a struggling student can find an encouraging graduate, where a novice accountant can be coached by an experienced accountant, and where two moms can share parenting tips.

It is our hope that in time, each young person who “ages out” of care will receive, as part of their exit services, a one-year membership in FCAA so that they will all have this important connection. The foster care

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**“THE FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE THAT MAKES EACH ONE OF US DIFFERENT IS INDEED WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL! WE DO NOT WANT TO LOSE CONNECTION WITH A SINGLE ALUMNUS OF CARE.”**

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As members join FCAA, many contribute to our community art project, “Exploring the Culture of Foster Care,” in which members submit post cards sharing diverse experiences from life in foster care. You can visit our post card project on our website, [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org), and we invite you to make your own submissions.

Can we create personal connections now, or is it too late for alumni already out on their own? We think it is not too late. When alumni join a local chapter in their area, we believe each will find a place where they know for sure they belong, whether it’s through sharing a holiday meal together, conducting outreach projects for youth in care, or taking advantage of an opportunity

experience that makes each one of us different is indeed what makes us special! We do not want to lose connection with a single alumnus of care.

For those alumni who have already missed that opportunity, you may be the link that lets them know there is a place where they belong, where they can find one more bridge to an important personal connection. Invite them to visit our website and join today.

*For more about Foster Care Alumni of America, visit [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org)*



## Resource

## Corner

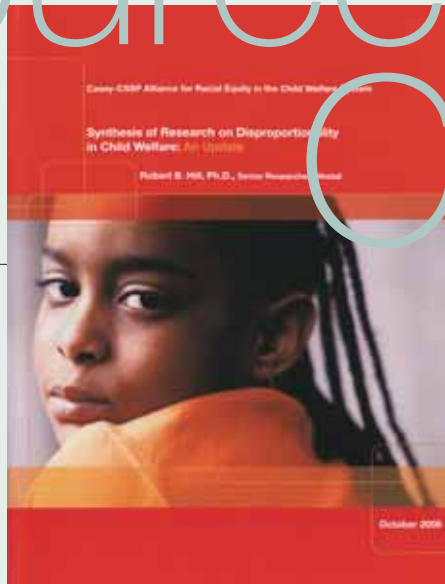
***The Pew Charitable Trusts: Time to Reform: Fix the Foster Care Lookback:***

Thousands of foster care children and the states responsible for them are losing the critical help they need from the federal government. A newly released report entitled “Time to Reform: Fix the Foster Care Lookback” kicks-off a campaign led by the Pew Charitable Trusts that highlights the urgent need for federal care financing reform, especially with regard to the eligibility provision known as “lookback.”

The lookback provision ties a child’s eligibility for foster care support to the income of the family from which he or she was removed. The report demonstrates that there is a significant downward national trend in the rate of eligibility, and experts concur that at least part of that decline is due to the lookback.

Partners on the Kids Are Waiting Campaign include Fostering Results, Generations United, National Council for Adoption, National Indian Child Welfare Association, North American Council on Adoptable Children, Public Children Services Association of Ohio, and the Center for Public Policy Institute.

*To view or download a full copy of the report, visit [www.kidsarewaiting.org](http://www.kidsarewaiting.org).*

***“Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update”***

African-American children and youth are not only over-represented in the nation’s child welfare systems, but also are subjected to poorer treatment within those systems than are their Caucasian counterparts. Despite data that show no difference in the rates of child abuse and neglect between the races, African-American families are more frequently reported for abuse and neglect of their children, and their children are more frequently removed from their homes. This study authored by Dr. Robert B. Hill for the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity is a comprehensive summary of past and recent data examining racial disproportionality and disparities in treatment and services within the child welfare system. It gives credence to concerns long voiced by child welfare professionals.

*To review the report, please visit [www.racemattersconsortium.org](http://www.racemattersconsortium.org).*

***Casey Connects: Momentum Building in the Quest for Permanent Family Connections***

The move to greater permanence for children, youth, and families is an emerging national movement to ensure that no child

grows to adulthood without a lifelong family connection. This article addresses the necessity to achieve “lifelong connections” for young people in foster care and highlights last September’s National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington D.C., hosted by the Casey Foundation. *Casey Connects* is a quarterly newsletter published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

*To review this report, please visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).*

***Chapin Hall: Entry and Exit Disparities in the Tennessee Foster Care System***

This study seeks to analyze the local variation of foster care usage to better understand disparities in the use of foster care and to highlight strategies that may bring greater equity to the delivery of child welfare services. It is based on Tennessee children first placed in foster care between 2000 and 2005 inclusive. The report also examines how entry rate disparities at the county level vary in relation to characteristics of the local population.

*To review the report please visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org).*

## What the Media Say

# Media

## The New York Times

### *N.H. Agency Gets National Adoption Award*

Casey Family Services was honored with an Adoption Excellence Award for 2006 from the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

The agency works with more than 70 foster families in the state and provides services for adoptive families. In five years, it has worked with 750 children in 450 adoptive families. The award, one of 13 given nationally in various categories, recognizes organizations that help families adopt and promote the stability of adoptions.

*The Boston Globe*  
November 2006

### *Daytime Talk Focuses on Adoption and Foster Care*

“When I emancipated at age 18 here in New York City,” Victoria Rowell said, “there were no types of stipends available, no dental care or any types of medical supports, and so a lot of our children turn to the streets, they turn to prostitution, they turn to what they must do to eat and sleep. Unfortunately, a lot of our foster children are in jail and in mental institutions where they should not be.”

“It seems as though lawmakers could have a great impact on this particular system,” offered host Joy Behar.

“Many in Congress have done tremendous work, and we have the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute and Casey Family Services ... And, we as a people can come together,” Rowell responded.

*The View* on ABC Television  
November 2006

### *Alone and Adrift*

Every year, thousands of teenagers “age out” of the foster care system and go off on their own, unprepared for independent living and without strong family support systems. Some manage to go to college, get jobs, and live full lives. Many more end up homeless or unemployed, on welfare, in jail, or in mental institutions.

State and federal policies have unintentionally perpetuated these troubling trends. ... The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has launched a national campaign to promote adoption of older foster children. Just last week, the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation gathered child welfare experts, state administrators, and service agency providers from around the country to discuss these challenges and hear from former and current foster children.

These are welcome moves. But more could be done.

*The Baltimore Sun*  
September 2006

### *Giving Troubled Families a Say in Child Welfare*

In an effort to correct dysfunctional foster care systems, a growing number of child welfare agencies around the country are reaching outside their ranks to involve troubled families and the people in their lives in wrenching decisions about where endangered children should live. Some agencies find that by enlisting help from grandparents, church members, school counselors, and sport coaches, they can reach faster, safer, and more lasting decisions that result in fewer children languishing in foster care. Under the practice, known as team decision making, a group is assembled [around a youth].

*The New York Times*  
December 2006

### *Offering Help for Former Foster Care Youths*

“We’re finally seeing a recognition by public agencies that they have a responsibility to this population beyond the age of 18,” said Gary Stangler, director of Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, an organization based in St. Louis, Missouri, that is helping to organize foster youth boards and offers matched savings accounts as well as job aid in 10 states. “In our society, most 18-year-old kids aren’t ready to be thrust into the world.”

Long in the shadows, the plight of aging-out foster youths – some 24,000 a year nationwide who fail to be adopted and usually leave court-monitored care at 18 – is gaining new attention, as youths speak out and research reveals the numbers who end up in homeless shelters, jail, and long-term poverty.

*The New York Times*  
January 2007

For additional important dates, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).

# 2007: Important Dates

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

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

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

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**Extending the Conversation**

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

## April 15-18

National American Indian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
[www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)

## April 16-21

16th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect  
Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect  
Oregon Convention Center  
Portland, Oregon  
[www.pal-tech.com/cbconference/](http://www.pal-tech.com/cbconference/)

## May 1

National Foster Care Month

## May 9-11

Pathways to Adulthood National Independent Living/Transitional Living 2007 Conference  
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development  
The Hilton Minneapolis  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
[www.nrcys.ou.edu](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu)

## May 23-27

National Foster Parent Association  
37th Annual Education Conference  
Omni Shoreham Hotel  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.nfpa-inc.org](http://www.nfpa-inc.org)

## May 30-June 1

One Child, Many Hands: A Multidisciplinary Conference on Child Welfare  
The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research  
Philadelphia, PA  
<http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/onechild/index.html>

## June 6-9

2007 Conference on Family Group Decision Making  
National Center on Family Group Decision Making  
American Humane  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org)

## June 9-12

National CASA's 30th Anniversary Conference  
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Caribe Royale  
Orlando, Florida  
[www.casenet.org/conference/index.htm](http://www.casenet.org/conference/index.htm)

## June 13-15

9th Annual International Fatherhood Conference  
National Partnership for Community Leadership  
Morehouse College  
Atlanta, Georgia  
[www.npcl.org/](http://www.npcl.org/)

## June 26

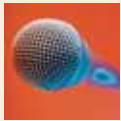
2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book release



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

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