

# CONNECTS

CASEY

SUMMER 2006  
A REPORT FROM THE  
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: *KIDS COUNT Data Book* Urges Support for Family-Based Child Care; Casey Family Services Marks 30 Years of Helping Children and Families; Event to Focus on Permanent Family Connections; Former Foster Youth Shares Story; Resource Corner; INSITES

## *KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK URGES SUPPORT FOR FAMILY-BASED CHILD CARE*

All young children need safe, healthy, and stimulating environments to thrive and develop the skills they need to succeed in school and life. For low-income kids in particular, getting the right start can make a big difference in boosting school readiness and closing the achievement gap between poorer and richer children. While the majority of children under five spend significant periods of time in child care settings outside the home, low-income parents often rely heavily on relatives, friends, neighbors, and other home-based providers to care for their children while they work.

As it does every year, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 17th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* examines national and state statistical trends in child well-being and includes an essay highlighting a key area of concern for the Foundation. This year's report, released June 27, explores how to strengthen family, friend, and neighbor care to help ensure bright futures for some 6.5 million kids under age 6 who are served by this form of child care. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Janice Tanita reads with granddaughter Cassidy Yamauchi during a get-together with their Play and Learn Group in Kehana, Hawaii, which offers parents, grandparents, and other home-based child care providers school readiness ideas.



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*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.*

## KIDS COUNT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The report defines family, friend, and neighbor care as regulated or unregulated care provided in a home- or family-based setting outside of a child's home, but it acknowledges that definitions of this kind of care vary.

While recognizing the important contribution of high-quality child care centers to improved results for disadvantaged children, the essay argues that many families choose home-based care for practical as well as personal reasons. Given the many families—particularly low-income families—who use this form of care, the essay states, more resources and support are needed to ensure that these settings give kids the best foundation for success.

“Early childhood research tells us that when the youngest children have opportunities to develop language and reading skills, we see better academic achievements that can provide important social benefits for children at risk of poor outcomes,” says Ruth Mayden, director of Casey’s program for young children. “Family, friend, and neighbor care providers make major contributions to young children’s healthy development and support the needs of parents, yet they are often undervalued and undersupported.”

Many parents choose home-based care because it may be more affordable, convenient, and flexible for parents working non-standard hours, or because the provider shares their culture and values. Yet these providers often lack the resources and formal training of center-based providers and have few opportunities for interaction or educational and professional opportunities that could benefit the children they serve.

“We know that many low-income workers have multiple jobs and have non-traditional work hours, such as nights and weekends, when center-based care is least available,” says Anne Roberts, executive director of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy. “These families rely on a patchwork of friends and neighbors to provide child care. We need to make sure these care providers

have access to the same good quality resources that their center-based counterparts do.”

The Casey Foundation has called for a range of steps to advance the quality of family, friend, and neighbor care and highlights programs around the country that provide home-based caregivers with good information and support.

Examples include providing guidance and educational materials through home visiting programs; creating child care “hubs” linked to child care centers or other institutions where providers can interact with other child development professionals; connecting providers to museums, libraries, and other community resources; and helping home-based providers form networks and share ideas.

Recommendations to strengthen family, friend, and neighbor care include:

- Supporting better data, research, and evaluation on home-based settings;
- Promoting stronger links between effective, high-quality child care centers and family, friend, and neighbor care providers in their communities;
- Providing technical assistance to help family, friend, and neighbor care providers adopt the most promising practices;
- Strengthening efforts to help parents make the best child care choices;
- Urging states to encourage quality improvements in subsidized family-based care; and
- Making early care and development a higher policy and funding priority at both the state and federal levels.

Top left, Chamroeun Khat, who cares for children in her Massachusetts home, belongs to a network of family-based providers.

Top right, Susan Mullen, a family-based provider, shown with her daughter, receives training and support from Family Child Care Satellites of Greater Rochester (New York).

Bottom, Iowa child care provider Kathleen Brown is part of a grassroots group of family, friend, and neighbor care providers.



“In schools around the country, too many of our poorest and most vulnerable children arrive without the developmental skills and competencies that all kids need to learn and succeed,” says Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson. “Strengthening the quality of family, friend, and neighbor care, particularly in America’s low-income communities, is a significant opportunity to improve school readiness for the millions of kids who need it most.”

The *2006 KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows there were more than 13 million children living in poverty in 2004—an increase of 1 million over four years. There was also an increase in the percentage of low-birth-weight babies between 2000 and 2003 and an increase in the number of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment.

The *Data Book* also points to some good news, however: the child death rate and the teen death rate have fallen, the teen birth rate has continued to go down, and the high school dropout rate has improved. Looking across all ten indicators covered by KIDS COUNT, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Connecticut rank highest in child well-being, and New Mexico, Louisiana, and Mississippi rank lowest. For the *2006 KIDS COUNT Data Book* and related materials, visit [www.aecf.org/publications](http://www.aecf.org/publications).

Strengthening the **QUALITY** of **FAMILY**,  
**FRIEND**, and **NEIGHBOR CARE**, particularly  
in America’s low-income communities, is a  
significant opportunity to **IMPROVE** school  
**READINESS** for the millions of kids who  
need it most.



## CASEY FAMILY SERVICES CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Birthdays are significant, especially for people who work with children. Thirty years ago, Jim Casey established Casey Family Services as the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Also the founder of UPS, Jim Casey was an insightful man. But as any parent can attest, growth and change are inseparable. From its beginnings in 1976 as a relatively local provider of high-quality foster care in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Casey Family Services has grown to include an array of services in eight divisions with 15 locations operating in Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The agency's ability to promote positive change for children and families extends well beyond its direct service work in the Northeast. The agency is offering technical assistance, consultation, and training to other child welfare providers. "We now are able to share our insight and knowledge—particularly on family permanence, post-adoption services, and life skills—with our peers," notes Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice. "Jim Casey's commitment to the importance of stable families is having an impact nationally."

This anniversary is a proud moment for very practical reasons. Three decades of service and growth mean that thousands of children have been supported. Each year, hundreds more vulnerable families get help. Even more important, because Casey Family Services is committed to self-evaluation, research, innovation, and positive change, the agency has become better at what it does. "Casey has used the past 30 years to learn and evolve," says Casey Family Services Executive Director Raymond L. Torres. "We have taken what we have learned and modified our own practice, shared our findings across the Foundation about what helps children,

and developed service models that can be replicated to enrich the entire field."

For most of its first 15 years, the agency exclusively provided long-term foster care for the region's most vulnerable children. However, recognizing needs within the communities it served, the Board of Advisors for Casey Family Services committed the agency in the late 1980s to fill vital gaps in service. Casey began developing family strengthening efforts that today include family advocacy, preservation, and reunification programs, as well as six family resource centers. In 1997, Casey held a historic national conference on families affected by HIV/AIDS, tackling the issue of helping children whose parents died from the disease. Responding to the needs of children who were adopted from foster

care, Casey launched its own post-adoption services initiative in 1992, sharing its expertise in 2000 when it hosted the country's first national conference on the issue.

In recent years, Casey has placed an even greater priority on helping children develop lasting family relationships. "The goal of someone raising a child is to produce a successful adult," Torres says. "What a child needs extends well beyond a place to sleep until his or her 18th birthday. Instead, every child needs and deserves a family for life, and this—the concept of a permanent family connection—has become Casey's goal for every child in care."

*This article is adapted from the Spring 2006 issue of Voice, the magazine of Casey Family Services.*

## EVENT TO FOCUS ON PERMANENT FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Casey is hosting a convening in September to promote strategies for increasing the number of older children who leave foster care with the enduring family relationships they need to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Each year, as many as 20,000 teenagers "age out" of foster care, usually when they turn 18. Exiting the system as an older adolescent without a permanent family relationship is correlated with a range of adverse outcomes for young adults, such as early pregnancy or parenthood, criminal involvement, homelessness, joblessness, psychiatric hospitalization, inadequate education, and an inability to be self-supporting.

Helping these youth form permanent connections with family and other networks of caring adults is a key theme of Casey's work. The Foundation has been working toward the goal of permanency for foster youth not only through Casey Family Services, but also through the Family to Family initiative, which helps states and communities develop a network of neighborhood-based family foster care; the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which helps connect young adults leaving foster care to jobs, services, and caring adults; and other efforts to help reform public systems and child welfare services across the country. The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence is by invitation only and will take place September 14 and 15 in Washington, D.C., preceded by a public policy briefing September 13.

## FORMER FOSTER YOUTH SHARES STORY ON CAPITOL HILL

*Maryellen Santiago is an intern for Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and earlier this summer interned for Rep. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.) as part of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's Congressional Foster Youth Internship Program. Currently studying for a master's degree in social work at Columbia University, Santiago prepared the following remarks for a recent congressional briefing to discuss the importance of mentors for foster youth.*

One summer afternoon, I walked hand in hand with my Dad when we passed a

I was removed from my home because my Mom's bipolar schizoaffective disorder made her unable to care for my siblings and me.

To tell you about the disruption in my family because of poverty, mental illness, and AIDS would take too much time, so I'm simply going to say that I had a really difficult childhood. I haven't had a sound-minded birth parent since age 13, but I have had many loving encounters with caring individuals. I never would have imagined that I would be here in front of you all, but I am here to tell you about the good

school guidance counselor encouraged me to apply for the Beat the Odds scholarship that Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) awarded me in 2000. I am thankful to my foster father Pedro Ortiz who took me to visit Western Connecticut State University for the first time, where I earned my undergraduate degree in social work. I am thankful to my foster mother Myrna Ortiz who—although we disagreed about the music selections—would drive me to and from school after moving to a new town during my senior year of high school, so that I could graduate with my friends. I am thank-

*Maryellen Santiago, 23, a congressional intern and former foster youth, speaks at a briefing at the U.S. Capitol on the importance of mentors for foster youth.*

ful to my former social worker Brenda Concepcion who, till this day, gives me great advice on life and relationships. I am extremely grateful to Roger Sherman from Casey Family Services who simply said, "Maryellen, you should apply to Columbia University for your graduate degree."

I would also like to thank the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute for giving me the opportunity to meet and work with such loving people. I would like to thank my new friends and family, the Alumni of 2006: Onnameaga, Abby, Andre, and all the others. Last but not least, I'd like to thank our congressmen and -women who are here today. This internship has made me realize how busy your schedules are because there are so many pressing issues that affect the entire world, and I am grateful that you took the time to be here today.

I've realized, as cliché as it may sound, that the little things in life are what matter. It is about helping each other take firm steps up the social ladder. It is about sharing our insights with one another, and helping each other find the strength within ourselves. I am here not only because of my own resiliency, but also because people have taken their time to help me along the way.



ANDRÉ CHUNG

burgundy and beige colored building with a big sign that said "Casey Family Services." I was 12 years old then, and it was the first time I ever learned about foster care. My Dad saw the building and said, "Oh, that's a place where they help kids get families." I remember thinking that it was nice, but I didn't know that walk would foreshadow my future. A little less than a year later, my whole life had changed dramatically. Not only was I adjusting to life in Connecticut as opposed to the Bronx where I grew up, but I had lost my father to AIDS within only three months of knowing that he had the disease. Within three months of being diagnosed, my father died suddenly and

things about the people who work for the child welfare system: things that my father was aware of before he passed away.

All the interns here today have had painful experiences that we will have to carry with us for the rest of our lives. We all share the commonalities of having moments where we are overburdened with the sense of confusion and the feeling that no one could ever fully understand our life experiences. Although our stories are different, we are all in it together, and we've had people along the way who helped make an impact on our lives.

I am very grateful to those who have reached out to me. I am grateful that my high



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## RESOURCE CORNER

*All publications listed below can be ordered from the Foundation's website ([www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)).*

### • GROWING UP IN NORTH AMERICA: CHILD WELL-BEING IN CANADA, THE UNITED STATES, AND MEXICO—

Published with partners from Mexico and Canada in the Children of North America Project, this report is the first to examine the state of child well-being in North America and the opportunities and challenges children face in an era of globalization. Also the first in a series of reports on North American children, it offers a demographic profile of children in the region and sets the stage for future reports on issues affecting child well-being, including health and safety, economic security, and capacity and citizenship. To learn more, visit [www.childreninnorthamerica.org](http://www.childreninnorthamerica.org).

### • BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, STEP BY STEP—

Casey's Family to Family initiative uses community partnerships—relationships between child welfare agencies and community residents and leaders to share responsibility for child safety and well-

being and helping children to develop permanent family connections—as a key tool to help reform child welfare systems and keep families connected. This guide outlines a step-by-step approach to creating community partnerships along with practical suggestions for engaging residents, identifying local leaders, and sustaining family-centered services over time.

### • BORDER KIDS COUNT: A SNAPSHOT OF CHILDREN LIVING ON MEXICO'S NORTHERN BORDER—

This report profiles the diversity and vulnerability of children and families living along the United States-Mexico border. Published by *Red por Los Derechos de la Infancia en México* (the Children's Rights Network in Mexico) and Casey's Southwest Border KIDS COUNT project, the report examines the barriers, advantages, and opportunities facing the 2 million children living in Mexico's northern states and their families. The report includes state and municipal level data.

• KIDS COUNT DATA SNAPSOTS—Published with indicators from the KIDS COUNT State-Level

Data Online System, these snapshots are the first of a series highlighting key outcomes for children and youth. *Right Start for America's Newborns* tracks state and city birth outcomes to reflect conditions surrounding a child's birth, and maternal characteristics that can have lifelong effects on a newborn's educational and social development and readiness for school. *State Differences in Rates of Overweight and Obese Youth* shows how childhood obesity, a growing concern across the country, varies across gender, race, income, and geography.

### • UNDERCOUNTED, UNDERSERVED: IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE FAMILIES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM—

While 93 percent of the children of immigrants under age 6 are U.S. citizens, they often go without services they need because of their parents' fear of immigration officials or lack of understanding of immigration policies. This report chronicles interviews, a meeting with national experts and child welfare practitioners, and an extensive literature review exploring how best to meet the needs of the growing number of immigrant and refugee children in the child welfare system.

# INSITES

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## MULTIPRONGED APPROACHES HELP FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR CAREGIVERS

Looking back, Chamroeun Khat says she couldn't have started her home-based child care business ten years ago—when she spoke little English—without help from Acre Family Day Care, a nonprofit community-based agency in Lowell, Massachusetts.

“Before, I spoke very bad English,” says Khat, a Cambodian immigrant who provides full-day care for five preschool children and after-school care for four older children in her home. “They helped me with the paperwork and training. They helped me to teach the children and do activities. They helped me learn English.”



In a small playground outside her Massachusetts house, family child care provider Chamroeun Khat, center, pushes Kai Saing, 3, on a swing while keeping an eye on the other children, from left, Erin Lee, 3, Alys Lee, 9, Holly Lee, 5, and Emma Beyer, 4.

Started in 1988, Acre serves low-income immigrant women and families in Lowell—the fourth largest city in Massachusetts—by helping women start home-based family child care businesses and by connecting families to its child care providers. Today, it oversees a network of 49 child care providers caring for 280 children—many Cambodian, Hispanic, and African immigrants.

Having this “identity with Acre” and meeting its standards, which exceed the state’s, reduces providers’ isolation and improves the quality of care, says Kathy Reticker, Acre’s executive director.

Helping providers run professional businesses also improves the care. “Part of being a good businessperson is providing a

great product,” Reticker says. “There’s a real pride in the business.”

From the start, Acre has had a small business emphasis—with child care viewed as a way to foster and encourage women’s economic independence. Helping women start small, financially successful child care businesses in their homes also contributes to the economy by helping other women who need quality care for their children while they work.

Acre offers providers low-interest small business loans, typically about \$3,000, to buy educational supplies, improve their homes, and attend child care conferences or college classes.

Acre attracts potential providers through advertisements and holds annual community-wide meetings in Spanish, English, and the Cambodian language Khmer. Interested providers take a three-hour orientation to get licensed. They attend Acre’s 77-hour family child care training, which covers topics such as how to create a safe environment and offer developmentally appropriate practices. They also spend two days in a family child care home run by a veteran provider.

Child care specialists and a social worker also make in-home visits before and after providers become part of Acre’s network. “It’s really important because they really need support,” says Bopha Tran, a former Acre provider who is now a child care specialist. “Working every day with kids, sometimes they get stuck and run out of ideas.”

Acre providers must complete 20 hours of continuing education training annually and attend provider meetings every other month. For Khat, this ongoing support is invaluable—and fun. In June, for example, she was among 47 Acre providers who visited an area science museum, learning about the museum’s offerings for children plus at-home educational activities. Acre is now planning another field trip—for providers and children.

“I liked all the activities,” says Khat. “I got some ideas. I can teach them things.”

## PLAY AND LEARN GROUPS PROMOTE SCHOOL READINESS

Ginger Ruiz has cared for nieces and nephews in her home for years. But when she learned about a Play and Learn Group that meets in her neighborhood, she leapt at the opportunity.

“I love it,” says Ruiz, of Kehana, Hawaii, who attends the weekly group with her 22-month-old niece Tiara and



DANA EDWARDS

sometimes her four-year-old nephew Racyn.

“The children learn how to use different things—to do painting and coloring. And they can bring stuff home for their parents to see. I’ve also learned several things that I never really knew—like about secondhand smoke. I knew it was bad but I didn’t really know how bad.”

Ruiz’s Play and Learn Group is among about 50 operating free-of-charge in churches, community groups, playgrounds, and other gathering places throughout Hawaii. Parents, grandparents, and other home-based child care providers come with their children (“keiki” in Hawaiian) for a morning of informal play activities, a brief circle time for children, and discussion time for adults.

Started in the 1980s and now regarded as an effective way to bring together neighbors and promote school readiness, Play and Learn Groups are spreading to other states.

“It’s very adaptable for different populations and cultures,” says Wayna Buch, a community program manager for Good Beginnings Alliance, which oversees early childhood efforts in Hawaii. “The groups are based upon the needs of the specific communities. It is a good way to engage people in the community.”

In Hawaii, some groups are made up primarily of native Hawaiians. Others are specifically for grandparents, incarcerated parents, or homeless families. “We look at what the children are interested in and what the [adults] want to

During a Play and Learn Group get-together in Hawaii, Ginger Ruiz plays at an outdoor activity station with her nephew Racyn, 4, whom she provides child care for in her home.



know about,” says Val Rita, a facilitator of four Play and Learn Groups on Kauai. Ruiz participates in a group of 13 adults and 17 children who meet at a low-income housing complex.

For two hours on Wednesday mornings during the school year, a meeting room is transformed into a preschool environment, with colorful posters on the wall and stations offering hands-on activities.

The goal is to empower parents and caregivers and give them a vehicle to “socialize and form networks with each other,” adds Rita. “They help each other and share information.”

Ruiz has enjoyed meeting new people who also take care of young children, including parents, grandparents, and home-based providers. “You get to talk to them about children and how they learn,” she says.

## NETWORK APPROACH EASES ISOLATION

Inside Kathleen Brown’s home in Des Moines, eight-month-old Mytrice wobbles across the carpeted living room floor. “He’s learning to walk,” explains Brown. Two-year-old Mytiara leafs through a coloring book. “She likes to color and sing,” says Brown. At the dining room table, three brothers—Tyreke, 5, Tyran, 7, and Terrance, 10—dig into heaping bowls of Apple Jacks. “They’re my nephew’s sons,” Brown says with a smile.

On this typically busy morning, Brown speaks with the calm assurance of a veteran child care provider who feels good about her work, thanks partly to her involvement with the Early Child Care Connections Network, a grassroots group of 65 family, friend, and neighbor care providers who meet monthly for support and training.

“It has been very productive and I have learned a lot,” says Brown, pointing out signs of lessons learned throughout her very child-friendly house. A communications board provides daily announcements for parents. Another sign explains the book-of-the-month Brown has chosen for the children. A daily schedule includes illustrations of activities. “They tell us pictures, for kids, are the best way to communicate,” says Brown.

Iowa family child care provider Kathleen Brown and Mytiara Caldwell, 3, play with pretend snow inside Brown’s home in Des Moines where she is a member of the area’s Early Child Care Connections Network.

The two-year-old network is an outgrowth of a broad school readiness initiative, involving parents, child care providers, and early childhood development specialists. It was launched by *Making Connections*—Des Moines, a Casey initiative that helps communities strengthen families and neighborhoods to improve the prospects for vulnerable children. The school readiness initiative also led to Action Circles—gatherings of local preschool parents and public school staff to develop school transition activities.

The child care network gradually emerged after Brown and several other home-based providers were invited to a gathering to discuss their needs. “They really are excluded from things, especially being home providers,” says Melissa Nelson, who provides support for the network. Nelson is the school readiness coordinator for the Child & Family Policy Center in Des Moines, a *Making Connections* partner. “We did not realize how much training they wanted to be able to work with their kids. That’s how the training came about.”

At network meetings, providers share a meal, discuss issues, and listen to speakers on topics including lead-poisoning prevention, creating a healthy environment for asthmatic children, and using books as a learning tool. A steering committee of providers plans the meetings and selects guest speakers.

Several providers have attended leadership training and out-of-state child care conferences, becoming mentors who offer peer support. Network leaders have met with state legislators to press for swifter reimbursement of providers from the state child care subsidy program. Many providers are participating in a “Ready to Learn” program sponsored by public television. The network is also organizing a Play and Learn Group like the one in Hawaii (see story on page 2).



“The networking is very important,” notes Brown. “As a group, we have brought to people’s attention that we are not babysitters. We are child care providers and we are getting their kids ready for school.”

“Whatever she learns, she brings back and shares with me too,” says Brown’s nephew, Terrance Bush, whose three sons are cared for by Brown. “It’s going to be better for the kids and helps the parents out too. What she’s doing is a good thing.”

## SUPPORTING PROVIDERS—AND PROVIDING VALUABLE DATA

Susan Mullen admits it was a little unnerving to have an observer visit her Rochester, New York, home and evaluate her work as a family, friend, and neighbor care provider.

“I’m not perfect but I try to be a perfectionist. So to hear somebody say ‘You can do this better’...was hard,” says Mullen, who cares for three preschoolers, including her daughter. But the guidance was constructive, she adds, and she earned praise too.

The evaluation was part of Caring for Quality, a new home visitor training program offered to 40 providers through the Family Child Care Satellites of Greater Rochester, which provides support services to 500 family child care homes serving 4,000 children in low-income neighborhoods.

For 12 months, trainer Sally Taft made biweekly visits to Mullen’s home, providing instruction and hands-on activities in areas including science and music. Before-and-after evaluations of the home visitor program provide valuable feedback for people like Mullen, plus information for Cornell University researchers studying the program’s effectiveness.

The study also may offer valuable information about what makes a quality family child care program, adds Diana Webb, coordinator of the satellite system, which is run by Rochester Childfirst Network, one of New York’s oldest child care centers. This system is a good example of a hub of support that connects home-based child care providers to resources and training and has linkages to a formal child care center. Webb and Marsha Dumka, executive director of the Rochester Childfirst Network, both participate in a local early childhood council and help raise issues of concern to family, friend, and neighbor child care providers, such as advocating for an increase in rates paid for subsidized care.

Developed during the past 25 years, the system includes three satellites located across Rochester. Offerings include

the training required to obtain and maintain a state license, plus other free classes; access to the child care food and nutrition program; educational field trips; and financial management and record-keeping assistance. “Everything we do is tailored to meet their specific needs,” says Webb.

A family support approach is key to the system’s success. Providers serve on an advisory board and “their input drives what we do,” says Webb. Staff build personal connections and supportive relationships with providers.

“We care,” says Webb. “When a provider calls with an issue, we do whatever we can to help. The goal is to give providers the tools they need to reach their highest professional potential and do quality programming.”

Mullen says she joined the satellite in northeast Rochester, which is located in a community center with a preschool, “to better myself for the kids.” The Caring for Quality program offered extra learning opportunities and peer support via monthly provider get-togethers. “She’s always been good with my kids, but there’s so much of a difference with how far she’s come and learned and how much enjoyment she takes in teaching the kids,” says Angie Cooney, whose daughter Victoria, 3, is cared for by Mullen. “As a single mom of three kids, I don’t have the time to provide Victoria with that much one-on-one attention. Yet she’s learning and I know it’s because of Susan and what she’s learned and how the program has helped her be a better day care provider.”



FOREST JACQUELIN

Sally Taft, right foreground—a child care trainer who has worked with Rochester, N.Y., provider Susan Mullen, left rear—plays “Red Light, Green Light” with children, from left, Victoria Cooney, Aviona Lantz, Angel DeJesus, and Savannah Carpenter.