

CONNECTS

CASEY

A REPORT FROM THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

WINTER 2010–2011



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Honoring Jim Casey's Legacy Through Our Core Values



The Annie E. Casey Foundation, created by UPS co-founder Jim Casey and his siblings to honor their mother, works to ensure better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Since becoming president and chief executive officer of the Foundation in April 2010, I have sought to honor the legacy of Jim Casey—who had a keen interest in improving the odds for vulnerable young people—by committing to the following core goals in all of our work: reducing poverty, increasing the odds that kids grow up with a *permanent* connection to a supportive family, and helping to improve the quality of life in the *places* children live.

- The root cause of many poor outcomes for kids and families is poverty, so we're committed to putting more families and their children on the path to economic security. This includes helping parents improve their economic circumstances and ensuring that children are prepared to succeed in school and life.
- A permanent connection to a nurturing and supportive family is critical to improving outcomes for kids. We're committed to reducing the chances of family disruption and ensuring that kids who do become a part of the child welfare system are reunified with their birth families or kin—and if that is not possible, connected to another family or adult who is willing to make that lifelong commitment.
- Families do best when they live in communities that support their ability to raise healthy and thriving kids. This means safe streets, access to economic opportunity, quality housing, and good education.

Three words have become touchstones for us in fulfilling these commitments: families, evidence, and scale. Improving the circumstances of families is vital to ensuring that their children can grow up healthy and strong. Bringing the best evidence to bear is essential to changing the trajectory for children, families, and communities. And bringing programs with proven success records to scale is critical in spreading their benefits to significant numbers of children and families.

This issue of *Casey Connects* describes initiatives that can make a significant contribution to these goals by:

- Ensuring that all children can read at grade level by the end of third grade.
- Using cutting-edge technology to put data at the fingertips of decision-makers.
- Promoting greater use of evidence-based practices.

I look forward to working with our grantees and partners on these critical issues in the months and years ahead.

Patrick T. McCarthy
President & Chief Executive Officer



CONNECTICUT CITY LAUNCHES LOCAL CAMPAIGN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

At the YWCA in New Britain, Connecticut, a city of 70,000 near Hartford, young children's play groups revolve around early literacy activities that build language skills and introduce young children to concepts of print. Parents can take English as a second language, literacy, and GED classes while their children are in care and then spend time sharing stories with their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers using brightly illustrated texts.

Such scenes have become more commonplace since the YWCA, with the help of other local organizations, opened a family literacy center and created training programs to help parents foster language and reading skills in their children.

Boosting children's literacy skills to ensure that they are reading at grade level by the end of third grade is the goal of a unique partnership in New Britain between community organizations, private foundations, the school system, and state agencies to get more children on track to achieve reading proficiency, and, ultimately, school success.

By coordinating services and supports for children from birth to age eight, the New Britain Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is looking to boost the district's third-grade reading scores, which are the lowest in the state. The local initiative, which receives Annie E. Casey Foundation support, is a first step in a larger statewide effort and reflects the goals of a multi-state campaign to ensure that more children

are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. It is also among the nation's first to rally an entire community to take action early to ensure that all children become proficient readers.

"It is a momentous occasion that an entire community would say we care so much about our kids that we will do whatever it takes to get them to this goal that we know makes such a difference," says Casey's Executive Vice President Ralph Smith. "Grade-level reading by the end of third grade is a powerful proxy for what we need to do to put all children on the path to academic success."

For many children in the New Britain public schools, the road to academic success is a bumpy ride. By the time they get to third grade, less than one-fifth meet grade-level goals on state reading tests, putting them at risk of repeating a grade, acting out, and dropping out. As in many other cities and towns across the state and the nation, economic hardship and family challenges prevent many children from reaching the developmental milestones essential to academic achievement.

Cultivating literacy skills and a love of language are key components of a collaborative effort to ensure that children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade in New Britain, Connecticut. Children at the Chamberlain Elementary School (cover and above left) and a father and daughter at the YWCA (above right) benefit from a range of literacy activities.

Even more-affluent districts are looking to improve performance by ensuring that the youngest children are on the right path. The 144,000-student Montgomery County, Maryland, school system, a high-performing district that has a few dozen high-poverty schools, was able to garner the political will and resources to boost achievement for all students. The district has identified what students need to know, beginning in preschool, to become college-ready. It revamped its curriculum and instituted assessments, starting with the youngest students, to help identify those who are struggling and provide interventions to get them on track.

In New Britain, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading “is an important step for this city, because we all know that education is the key to a prosperous future,” Jim Horan, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Human Services, said at a news conference announcing the initiative. The association is the Casey Foundation’s Connecticut KIDS COUNT grantee. “We have a long way to go to close the reading gap and improve literacy for New Britain’s children,” Horan said.

A KIDS COUNT special report released by the Casey Foundation last May, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, says achieving reading proficiency by the end of third grade is critical because that is when the emphasis shifts “from learning to read to reading to learn.”

The report says the reading achievement gap starts early for children who may not have access to the essential conditions for learning: “good health; having the support of a strong family; feeling safe; and having positive social interaction skills, language skills, the motivation to learn, emotional and behavioral self-control, and physical skills and capacities.”

The report offers four recommendations for improving reading achievement:

- Develop a coherent system of early care and education from birth through third grade;
- Provide the tools and supports to help parents, families, and caregivers in their role as a child’s first teacher, best coach, and most concerned advocate;



The reading gap can start early for children who may not have access to the essential conditions for learning. At the YWCA of New Britain, Connecticut, children are introduced early to concepts of print.

- Ensure that all children have access to high-quality educational opportunities that raise expectations for student outcomes and close the achievement gap; and
- Develop and deploy practical and scalable solutions to the contributors to underachievement, like chronic absence from school and summer learning loss.

The principles laid out in the KIDS COUNT report have been endorsed by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a concerted effort to mobilize philanthropic leadership around moving the needle on third-grade reading over the next decade. The campaign includes nearly 60 foundations in 27 states. Casey and a small group of funders that are taking the lead are working to launch the campaign to:

- Close the gap in reading achievement that separates many low-income students from their peers;
- Raise the bar for reading proficiency so that all students are assessed by world-class standards; and
- Ensure that all children, especially those from low-income families, have an equitable opportunity to meet those high standards.



New Britain’s **campaign** is among the nation’s first to rally an entire community to take **action** early to ensure that all children become **proficient** readers.

More than two-thirds of the nation’s fourth graders and 83 percent of those considered low income could not demonstrate proficiency in reading, according to the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

In New Britain, the percentages of students in grades three through eight who meet grade-level goals on state reading, writing, and math tests are among the lowest in the state. The district’s high school graduation rate is 70 percent, compared to 92 percent statewide, and about one in four students fails to graduate within four years.

Multiple factors contribute to this crisis. Nearly 72 percent of school-age children in the district qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. Three-fourths of the students are minority, nearly 16 percent are not fluent in English, and 14 percent are identified for special education services.

“There isn’t one simple cause for the problem, or a simple solution. This is more than the schools and families can solve on their own,” says Merrill Gay, executive director of the New Britain Early Childhood Collaborative, which has launched an initiative to

increase the availability of high-quality early care and education programs and train parents to be effective advocates.

Over the next two years, the New Britain Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will design and begin to implement strategies—both inside the school system and throughout the community—to raise third-grade reading achievement.

Casey and a group of Connecticut funders, including the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund in Hamden, the Children’s Fund of Connecticut, and the State Department of Education, have pledged \$500,000 annually to the effort over the next two years. The Connecticut Center for School Change in Hartford will provide technical support to the district on early literacy development.

“We believe that the active engagement of parents, in particular those whose children will benefit the most, and the support of the whole community will bring about sustained change,” says David Nee, executive director of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. ■

DUE TASKS

WHAT YOU'RE WORKING ON »

- › Foster Family Annual Review for the Tom and Gerry
- › Home Study for the Tom and Gerry Katz Family
- › Home Study for the Tom and Gerry Katz Family
- › Foster Family Closing for the Tom and Gerry Katz Fa

RECENT ACTIVITY

ALL PRIMARY **YOURS**

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2010

Angela Supervisor reopened the Tom and Gerry Katz fa
Angela Supervisor assigned Temp User as a casework
family
Angela Supervisor assigned Temp User as a casework
Angela Supervisor assigned Temp User as a casework
Brady family
Angela Supervisor assigned Temp User as a casework



NEW CASEY WEB TOOL HAS POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM CASE MANAGEMENT

When social workers from Casey Family Services' Massachusetts Division received a referral from the State Department of Children and Families for 15-year-old Carla,* they compiled the usual data: family history, foster care placements, special needs, school performance, health, important connections, and contacts.

What made this process different is that instead of having to sort through and complete mountains of cumbersome records to piece together the information they needed, the social workers used a new, web-based tool that put all the key data at their fingertips.

They were using Casebook, an Internet-based application that adopts some of the same social networking tools people use every day at home and at work to help child welfare professionals record, catalog, and communicate comprehensive information vital in linking foster youth to the most effective and appropriate sources of help—and even to permanent, loving families.

The philosophy behind Casebook is that these 21st century technologies have the potential to dramatically improve outcomes for vulnerable families. Says Kathleen Feely, the Casey Foundation's vice president for innovations, "We believe the advent

**Not her real name.*

of new technologies in social networking and tools for analyzing data, which have proven their value in the entertainment and consumer products industries as well as in public health and emergency response, will help resolve many of the problems and gaps in the current child welfare reporting systems."

In Carla's case, the quick access to information that Casebook provided—including histories of two of her siblings—enabled Casey social workers to work with the state to help Carla reconnect with her birth mother and siblings.

"Casebook allowed us to easily access key information on Carla's two siblings we had already worked with, to see the connections they already had and where they were, and to have all that information without starting from scratch," notes Sheila Fitzgerald, a team leader in Casey Family Services' Massachusetts Division. "Being able to build those bonds and strengthen those relationships has taken this case in a totally different direction. And Carla is very happy because she now has regular, consistent contact with her mother and sisters."

At left, a sample screen shot from Casebook (no actual names used). At right, Sheila Fitzgerald, a team leader in the Massachusetts Division of Casey Family Services, uses Casebook in her office.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's system reform work has underscored the importance of using accurate, timely, and comparable data to make sound decisions about vulnerable children and families. But unfortunately, all too often caseworkers and supervisors must make critical, life-shaping decisions based on the fragmented, inaccurate, and out-of-date information that state child welfare systems and their partner organizations report. At the same time, managers lack the ability to spot trends, deploy services, allocate funds effectively, and easily access data that would help improve performance across jurisdictions.

The information technology systems widely used across state child welfare agencies were designed to help states comply with federal fiscal and program reporting. But experts say these systems are tremendously time-consuming for workers and do not provide data or software of sufficient quality to support effective, coordinated decision-making that factors in family history and context.

Casebook uses web 2.0 technologies to solve these problems. For example, Casebook has tools that enable workers to compile a rich case history behind the scenes, helping new team members get up to speed immediately. Automatic alerts, reminders, and checkpoints keep case management on track, encouraging collective problem-solving and information-sharing. The expectation is that these improvements will free up staff to spend more time with clients.

Unlike previous systems, Casebook makes it possible to communicate and collaborate with an extended team—a hallmark of Casey's approach—including service providers, community-based organizations, and key contacts, such as teachers, counselors, nurses, and physicians.

"Another big limitation of current case management systems is that they are not family-centric, making it difficult for caseworkers to think about the family as a whole and make decisions grounded in family needs, strengths, and relationships," says Feely. "Current systems may, for example, call a caseworker's attention to an overdue administrative task, but not alert them to a possibly significant change in family circumstances."

"This lack of emphasis on the family makes it hard to paint a clear, long-term picture of family history, monitor progress toward permanence, track health and education outcomes, or understand which combinations of services and supports might work best."

Some of Casebook's key features designed to support caseworkers and improve outcomes include:

- Creating network connections to tap vital knowledge about youth, families, and their circles of support;
- Tracking the family's involvement with other agencies;
- Using visual tools such as interactive timelines to make sense of what is happening with families as it happens;
- Making case decisions more transparent and inclusive, with an emphasis on team and family involvement;
- Maintaining service plans as living documents that reflect the combined insights of everyone involved in the child's case;

Unlike existing systems, Casebook makes it possible to **communicate** and collaborate with an extended **team**—a hallmark of Casey's approach—including service providers, community-based organizations, and **key contacts**, such as teachers, counselors, nurses, and physicians.

- Telling the case story and providing a full clinical picture by blending narrative with structured case history; and
- Sharing best practice guidelines and related research to promote the most effective action steps.

In addition, while federal and state governments have invested over \$2.8 billion in the existing information systems to date, estimates suggest that Casebook could cost substantially less to build. And because it is web-based it would be easier and cheaper to maintain and update.

Rolling Out Casebook

Case Commons, a subsidiary of the Foundation created to design and build Casebook, has been piloting Casebook with Casey Family Services, its direct services agency, since spring 2010 to ensure that it fits the needs and work styles of actual practitioners. In addition to Massachusetts, Casey Family Services divisions in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont already use Casebook. When Baltimore,

Maine, and New Hampshire are on board by early 2011, the Casebook team will survey users and conduct focus groups to identify ways to improve the system.

Fitzgerald of the Massachusetts Division participated in Casebook planning meetings and was trained as one of four “power users,” meaning those who get additional training and serve as a resource in helping other staff use Casebook.

“It is much easier to figure out where you need to navigate to put in information, and it flows a lot better than the existing system,” says Fitzgerald. “I can see everything my staff is doing on a case, and if I’ve approved a document, they can see that.

“I look forward to the day when states are using it as well, so we can be on one system. That would be a beautiful thing.” ■

At left, Sheila Fitzgerald meets with a foster mother, Patricia Puglisi, and her foster daughter, Dariana De la Rosa. At right, Puglisi and De la Rosa.





CASEY WORKS TO MAKE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE THE NORM

It wasn't the first time 15-year-old Frank and his brother Joseph had gotten into a fight. But when it happened again in December 2008, Frank punched, kicked, and held his mother Nancy's head against the wall when she tried to intervene.*

Instead of being placed in a juvenile facility, all parties agreed to offer Frank a referral to a program with proven results and life-altering opportunities. He was sentenced to 18 months probation and enrolled in "Blue Sky"—a program in New York City that provides intensive therapeutic treatment for troubled juveniles and their families. Two years later, Frank still lives at home, is in school, works part-time, and no longer exhibits aggressive behavior. His mother and brother also have received treatment to address mental health and substance abuse issues.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation wants to promote greater use of "evidence-based practice"—treatment approaches such as Blue Sky's that are rigorously studied and tested to ensure proven results.

Now in its fourth year, Blue Sky has a nearly 60 percent success rate in preventing the young people it serves from being removed from their homes. Since its 2007 launch in Manhattan and the Bronx, Blue Sky has helped some 350 youths referred by New York City Family Court to safely avert

**Not her real name.*

placement in residential facilities. Blue Sky costs roughly \$17,000 per youth—including services to the entire family—which translates into about \$100,000 in annual savings for each youth kept in the community and out of incarceration. Studies also show that the therapies Blue Sky uses save money and lives by reducing recidivism, hospital stays, and suicide rates.

Despite compelling evidence that this approach works, however, many young people in similar circumstances to Frank's are placed in facilities that, in the long run, leave them no better off than when they arrived.

"Juvenile offenders are sent to institutions with the hope that removing them from their precarious situation will help, yet when the youth are released, they return to the same environment in which they first committed their crimes. Many fall prey to the same temptations, commit another crime, and remain entrenched in the juvenile justice system," notes the website of the nonprofit that pioneered Blue Sky, New York Foundling.

Sylvia Rowlands, director of the Blue Sky program in New York City, at a weekly meeting with foster parents and therapists. The Casey Foundation is promoting greater use of evidence-based approaches like the therapies used in Blue Sky, which provides intensive treatment for troubled juveniles and their families.

The evidence-based approaches used in Blue Sky, a program operated by New York Foundling, help to address issues that affect not just the young people involved but their parents, guardians, and siblings.

Scott Henggeler, principal researcher in an ongoing evaluation of Blue Sky, says evidence-based programs are used in only about 5 percent of juvenile justice cases nationally and are concentrated in a few states. Henggeler is based at the Medical University of South Carolina Family Services Research Center, in the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences.

The Casey Foundation is working to ensure that evidence-based practice (also known as EBP) is more widely used not only in juvenile justice, but throughout the entire child welfare field.

While EBP is more developed in other arenas such as children's mental health, "there is a complete void of EBP in child welfare," notes Abel Ortiz, director of the Evidence-Based Practice Group for the Casey Foundation's Center for Effective Family Services and Systems. "The goal of our work is to get the development of EBP embedded in public systems from the beginning."

Encouraging Evidence-Based Practice

Since the 1980s, public and private investments in research and programs aimed at preventing poor outcomes for vulnerable children have identified factors that can help protect them and make them more resilient, such as strong families and communities and support services that build on their strengths.

In addition, it's now possible to identify highly effective efforts that can cut rates of drug use, school dropout, and other adolescent risks, thanks to rigorous evaluations. But despite a legacy of poor long-term outcomes for young people placed in restrictive institutional settings and massive expenditures of taxpayer dollars, evidence-based alternatives like Blue Sky aren't widely embraced.



Casey's Evidence-Based Practice Group works with leading researchers and taps staff expertise in child welfare, system reform, health, education, mental health, youth in transition, adolescent health and development, and community building. Indicators of success the team has developed include academic achievement, emotional well-being, behavior, relationships, and physical health from birth through early adulthood.

Casey is working to develop tools to help and encourage public systems to fund their own evidence-based programs and to help replicate successful efforts. Some of the tools the Foundation's EBP group is working on include:

- Surveys to assess outcomes and risk and protective factors to help potential EBP sites determine which child-specific outcomes to prioritize and which evidence-based practices to implement;
- A financial analysis toolkit to help public systems develop a plan to sustain these practices using traditional funding sources;
- A database containing the most effective programs available; and
- A series of manuals that describes strategies for engaging communities and public systems in collaborating to implement evidence-based practices.

While these tools are still under development, the Casey team has formed partnerships to help advance evidence-based practice. For example, the team is working with Casey Family Services, the Foundation's direct services agency, to develop some of its most successful approaches into evidence-based models.

Another partnership is underway between the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative—which provides support to ease young people's transition out of foster care—and the developers of Communities That Care, an evidence-based community change initiative developed by the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington in Seattle.

How Blue Sky Works

New York Foundling, created in 1869 as a home for abandoned children, now has a diverse network of programs serving families with multiple needs. It received Casey support to develop Blue Sky, working with the developers of the three evidence-based treatments it provides. Blue Sky's services are funded with federal, state, and local prevention dollars.

Blue Sky got its start after New York Foundling began working with the Administration for Children's Services on an initiative to reduce the number of New York City youth being placed in upstate facilities operated by the State Office of Children and Family Services. The initiative, which came to be known as Blue Sky, provides a continuum of care for high-risk youth, serving some 60 families at a time for four to six months on average. It combines three treatment models: Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC).

"The notion was that the intensity of services could range from outpatient services once or twice a week to a more intensive home-based model to a short-term specialized foster care approach aimed at stabilizing serious anti-social behavior before returning the youth to the family," says Henggeler. Each treatment has advantages for specific youth and families,

who can move from one to another seamlessly depending on their needs.

One reason Blue Sky is so effective is because of what EBP researchers call "fidelity"—practicing each of the therapies according to specific guidelines—notes Sylvia Rowlands, assistant executive director of the New York Foundling and director of Blue Sky. "We follow the models with adherence. There is a lot of communication between and across the three treatment models, with everyone involved doing whatever it takes" to address any challenges the family is facing, she says.

Casey's support of Blue Sky has "had an enormous impact on the field in New York City," adds Rowlands. "In partnership with the Department of Probation, we have been able to help influence how judges make orders, how they allow clinicians to do the clinical work, and their patience in allowing these family systems to change."

Next Steps

The Casey Foundation plans to use strategic grant making to support efforts to enhance and increase the supply of EBP. Casey is also looking to provide guidance to public systems on how they can best partner with community organizations to use evidence-based practices to improve child outcomes. One example is Communities That Care, the Seattle initiative that has successfully helped community advocates raise local funding and work with public agencies to implement effective prevention programs.

"Supporting EBP is well overdue in the field—and critical in getting better outcomes for kids," says Henggeler. "Too often, people keep doing what they learned in graduate school with little regard for how it works. Casey is trying to set the stage for wider dissemination of innovative approaches that actually work." ■

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CASEY CONNECTS

Winter 2010–2011

*A newsletter published by
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Deborah L. Cohen, editor
www.aecf.org*

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Baltimore, Maryland

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.



The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in New Britain, Connecticut, aims to help boost academic performance and school graduation rates, which are among the lowest in the state. Play groups and other activities at the YWCA help build children's language skills.