

CONNECTS

CASEY

WINTER 2001
A REPORT FROM THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: Conference Focuses on Adoptive Families; 2001 FAMILIES COUNT Honorees; A Note of Recognition; New Casey Fellows; Resource Corner; INSITES

CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON HELPING ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Groundbreaking policies enacted in recent years have dramatically increased the number of children being adopted from foster care. That's the good news.

The bad news is that too many families aren't getting the help they need to cope with the circumstances of these adoptions. The abuse, neglect, loss, and trauma experienced by many children who later become adopted pose special challenges that are surmountable, but only if addressed in a thoughtful, skillful, and preemptive way.

Casey Family Services sponsored a lively and timely forum in

Washington, D.C., December 3–5 to help increase public understanding, share creative strategies, and reshape adoption policies in ways that help families get this critical assistance.

The National Post-Adoption Services Conference 2000 drew more than 500 participants to the nation's capital from across the country, including parents and adopted children, child welfare workers, social services professionals, education and mental health experts, judges, and policymakers. It was the first national conference on post-adoption services.

Casey Family Services, the branch of the Casey Foundation that provides

direct services, offers a wide array of programs to help children and families involved in or at risk of entering the foster care system. Its post-adoption services include comprehensive counseling, support groups, case management, training, and advocacy for people who have adopted children and need help keeping their families together.

Since holding a regional meeting on post-adoption services in 1995, Casey Family Services has been deluged with requests for a follow-up session. Because of its unique history and expertise in post-adoption work, the

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OAKLAND CITIZENS RALLY FOR SMALL SCHOOLS

Oakland High School students wave banners in a show of school pride at an October action that drew 800 people. Parents, youth, and teachers rallied to demand that the mayor, school superintendent, and school board members support building three small schools in the San Antonio district of Oakland, California, the target neighborhood in the Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative in Oakland. The action was organized primarily by Oakland Community Organizations and the Roosevelt Village Center.



CAROL HIGHSMITH

2001 NATIONAL FAMILIES COUNT HONOREES ANNOUNCED



Eight organizations—each a pioneer in developing innovative family-strengthening strategies—have been designated as 2001 honorees in FAMILIES COUNT: The National Honors Program.

Now in its second year, FAMILIES COUNT provides a \$500,000 award to each honoree for exemplary work to connect families to the opportunities, services, and relationships they need to succeed.

CASEY CONNECTS

Winter 2001

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The 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.

“We can think of no better way to celebrate National Family Week—observed during Thanksgiving week—than to honor groups effectively addressing the struggles facing parents raising families in tough neighborhoods,” said Casey President Douglas Nelson. “We will not change the future of our most at-risk children until we change the present for their parents.”

The organizations, which will receive their awards at ceremonies in their communities, are:

AVANCE, of San Antonio, which helps parents acquire the skills they need to raise successful children. Programs include parenting classes, literacy, GED and college courses, career counseling, and job training.

Babyland Family Services, of Newark, the first infant day care center in the state, encompassing parenting classes, adult education, job training, and community support in eight low-income areas of Newark and East Orange.

Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, of El Paso, founded more than 30 years ago by a group of mothers frustrated by the lack of health care in the barrios. Today, La Fe is a neighborhood anchor, offering low-cost health care and challenging the conditions that undermine family success.

Family Services Research Center, of Charleston, S.C., developers of Multi-systemic Therapy, an intense regimen to help parents succeed with highly troubled youth by keeping youngsters at home; involving friends, schools, and communities; and teaching coping skills.

Freeport West, of Minneapolis, a multifaceted youth development organization that strengthens families and community networks by building bridges between formal and informal systems of assistance.

Highbridge Community Life Center, of the Bronx, which helps residents of the South Bronx become self-sufficient through housing, healthy youth development, job readiness, and employment.

Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families, of New York City, which provides a family support center, parenting classes, health care services, and computer training to help families succeed so that children can thrive.

Self-Help, of Durham, N.C., one of the nation's leading community development financial institutions, provides more than \$700 million in loans to low-income and minority residents to buy homes, start businesses, and expand community resources.

For more information on FAMILIES COUNT, go to www.aecf.org.



Babyland Family Services, founded 30 years ago, now serves 750 children in eight northern New Jersey centers.

JIM GRAHAM



From left: Tonya Allen, Diane Benjamin, Giselle John, Olgen Williams

A NOTE OF RECOGNITION

COMING UP TALLER. Giselle John came here from Trinidad and Tobago to escape an abusive situation at home and wound up in foster care when the living arrangement her mother set up fell through. While she faced a number of difficult personal and legal battles in the system, John eventually found an outlet that helped her through these struggles and changed the course of her life.

That outlet was *Foster Care Youth United*, a journal written by and for young people growing up in foster care.

Introduced to this publication while taking an independent-living skills workshop, John soon became one of its most prolific contributors. “I kept writing and writing until I got everything out of me—I was just churning out the articles,” says John, who now attends college and works for the organization that publishes *Foster Care Youth United* and another youth publication called *New Youth Connections*.

Youth Communication, a Casey grantee in New York City, recently won a \$10,000 award from the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. More than 200 highly regarded programs competed for 10 Coming Up Taller awards, which recognize programs that use the arts to help young people learn and grow.

Youth Communication recently also received an outstanding achievement certificate from the Parents’ Guide to Children’s Media for its latest anthology of teen writings, *The Struggle to be Strong: True Stories by Teens About Overcoming Tough Times*.

MAKING BEAUTIFUL MUSIC. In Casey Foundation circles, Diane Benjamin is best known as director of Minnesota KIDS COUNT. But when she’s not overseeing the state assessment of child well-being, Benjamin can often be found making music.

The Denver Women’s Chorus commissioned Benjamin \$5,000 to write an oratorio on breast cancer that has become the centerpiece of its 2000 season. The seven-movement choral and instrumental piece, which intersperses stories and songs that capture women’s experience with the disease, has been performed in several Denver venues and in other cities as well. Its Minneapolis debut at a synagogue to benefit the Women’s Cancer Resource Center featured 38 women, many of them touched by breast cancer.

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* ran an article last month chronicling Benjamin’s musical career, which began with compositions she fashioned as a small girl at the piano. A friend with breast cancer convinced Benjamin to apply when she

heard the Denver Women’s Choir was commissioning a major work.

Benjamin’s child advocacy work has often put her in the public eye, but her increasing renown in the music world is attracting a different kind of attention. “All of the media training and public relations skills I’ve learned through KIDS COUNT have really helped,” she said.

DOING SOMETHING GOOD. The Casey Foundation has long valued Tonya Allen’s leadership in the Rebuilding Communities Initiative in Detroit. Allen’s organizing talents have now grabbed the attention of *Rolling Stone* magazine—and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Rolling Stone recently awarded Allen one of its Do Something BRICK Awards, an honor bestowed on nine young activists under the age of 30. The award comes with \$10,000—and a shot at a \$100,000 grand prize—to support her community-building efforts. Allen also recently accepted a new job as associate program officer with the Mott Foundation, where she’ll work on community education issues.

As director of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative for the Warren/Conner Development Coalition, Allen worked to help neighborhood groups in Detroit’s east side apply for grants,

organize around school improvements, and get children immunized.

“She’s truly been involved in helping the community take charge,” Willie Mae Gaskin, president of a neighborhood block club, said in an interview with the *Detroit News*.

BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR. Community centers helped keep Olgen Williams out of trouble when he was a young boy, and now, as executive director of the Christamore House in Indianapolis, he gets to return the favor.

“As a youth, I benefited from places like this, so just seeing the place filled up with young people gives me a lot of satisfaction,” says Williams.

The United Neighborhood Centers of America recently inducted Williams into its hall of fame and honored him with one of its Alumni of the Year awards, which recognize community center “graduates” making outstanding contributions to society.

Williams was one of just seven people to receive the award, including such notables as former U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisolm of New York and U.S. Rep. Stephanie Tubbs of Ohio. “I was very honored to be in that class of people,” he said.

The Christamore House, founded in 1905, offers an eclectic range of services in Indianapolis’s Westside, from programs for preschoolers and senior citizens to bicycle repair shops, children’s theatre, youth scholarships, GED classes, and conflict resolution. The organization partners with food pantries and other sources of help and also lends a hand to smaller community centers, donating books, computers, and other items.

The United Neighborhood Centers, based in Cleveland, was first founded in 1911 by Jane Addams, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and pioneer in the settlement house movement.

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POST-ADOPTION CONFERENCE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

organization seemed ideally suited to help support people toiling to meet the demand for services spurred by the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act and an earlier mandate by President Clinton to double the number of adoptions by 2002.

“We’re in the process of redefining our work in the special-needs area, and we very much welcomed the opportunity to meet with folks across the country to look at these different models,” said Eileen Crummy, adoption administrator for the State of New Jersey.

Conference participants shared their views on creative approaches and crucial next steps to improve policy and practice.

A survey released by the American Public Human Services Association showed that many states provide certain kinds of therapy, crisis intervention, residential treatment, and support groups that may be used to support adoptive families, but services like parent training, educational support, child care, and day treatment are not uniformly offered nor are they necessarily tailored to adoptive families.

The commonly held belief used to be that once an adoption was complete, the role of adoption professionals should end, and the less said about the adoption from that point on the better. Today, there is widespread recognition that families need up-front and ongoing support to ensure the success of adoptions involving special-needs children.

“Children who have experienced severe neglect and abuse, who have been in foster care or in orphanages abroad for a period of their lives, carry with them emotional and psychological challenges that most parents are ill-equipped to meet on their own,” said Raymond Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services. Providing these supports is “a common-sense investment in the future.”

“This work is essential to preparing families and children and putting services in place instead of waiting for a crisis to hit,” said Betsy Abrams, lead clinician in the post-adoption program in the Rhode Island division of Casey Family Services. The last session of the conference featured an electronic polling session that will form the basis of a call for action and subsequent efforts by Casey Family Services to shape a policy agenda on adoption.

Today, there is widespread **RECOGNITION**
that **FAMILIES NEED SUPPORT** to ensure
the success of **ADOPTIONS INVOLVING**
special-needs children.

NEW GROUP OF CASEY FELLOWS NAMED

A top manager of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, a senior officer at the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency, and the director of a San Francisco agency that serves young children are among the 10 innovators selected for the Casey Foundation's fifth Children and Family Fellowship class.

"We believe these individuals have the vision and capacity to implement major reforms that will benefit large numbers of children and families," said Casey Foundation President Douglas Nelson.

The 2001 Fellows include:

Teresa Markowitz, president of On the Mark, Inc., a private consulting firm that helps improve management and accountability of human service agencies. She is the former commissioner of children and family services for the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, where she directed the redesign of the state's child welfare system.

Theresa Mayberry-Dunn, chief operating officer for the Centers for New Horizons, Inc., a network of programs that provide employment, health, and family-strengthening services in the Greater Grand Boulevard neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.

Molly McGrath, early childhood services director at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, where she helps the state better understand and respond to the developmental and mental health needs of 15,000 young children in foster care.

Myriam Monsalve-Serna, former director of the Family Center at Abriendo Puertas in the East Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, a project of the Casey Foundation's Urban Children's Mental Health Initiative. In that capacity, she created partnerships between human

services providers and networks of "natural helpers" to offer quality care to all residents.

Guitele Nicoleau, currently finishing her Ph.D. in education at Harvard University. A seasoned advocate for Haitian Americans, she has focused on AIDS-related discrimination and preventing HIV transmission among youth.

Robert Velasco, II, is in charge of information technology practices and public information services that advance the national welfare reform program as the director of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Information Network Division in the Office of Family Assistance at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.

Sandra Wilkie, senior policy associate at the Family Investment Trust in St. Louis, the leading organization in Missouri's strategic initiative to improve the lives of children and families. Wilkie works with communities and human service agencies to develop and sustain programs that help kids and families succeed.

Ann Woodward, senior community services officer at the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency, where she designs, implements, and manages programs and services assisting more than 10,000 residents of low- and mixed-income apartment buildings.

Norman Yee, executive director of Wu Yee Children's Services, a private agency that offers a wide range of advocacy and human services to young children and their families in San Francisco.

Patricia Zuluaga, program manager for the city of Hartford's Maternal Infant Outreach Program, where she established a successful program that integrated services among more than 100 providers throughout the city.

"The broad range of talents and experiences these individuals possess will create a powerful and diverse learning community," said Donna Stark, director of the Fellowship program.

Back row, from left: Guitele Nicoleau, Molly McGrath, Robert Velasco, II, Teresa Markowitz, Myriam Monsalve-Serna, Theresa Mayberry-Dunn, Ann Woodward, Sandra Wilkie. Seated: Patricia Zuluaga, Norman Yee.





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RESOURCE CORNER

All publications listed below can be ordered from the Foundation website (www.aecf.org) or by calling 410.223.2890, unless otherwise noted.

Transforming Neighborhoods into Family-Supporting Environments: Evaluation Issues and Challenges

The third in a series of reports on Casey Foundation research and evaluation conferences, based on the 1999 forum, addresses issues such as understanding families and neighborhoods, helping communities analyze and use data, accommodating long timeframes for interventions, and maximizing the use of evaluations.

The Indy Story: Urban Systems Reforms and Community Revitalization in Indianapolis During the Stephen Goldsmith Years (1992-1999)

Plagued by a crumbling infrastructure, disenfranchised neighborhoods, crime, substance abuse, and urban sprawl, Indianapolis experienced a dramatic revitalization during the 1990s under the leadership of then-Mayor Stephen Goldsmith. This report chronicles the urban systems reform, community building, and neighborhood revitalization that have attracted the attention of policymakers and civic leaders.

Lessons From the Field: Community Anti-Drug Coalitions as Catalysts for Change

Published by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), this document provides insights into the organization, operation, sustainability, and impact of community anti-drug coalitions across America. The report offers case studies of eight exemplary coalitions and a cross-site analysis examining their leadership, outcomes, planning, institutionalization, and diversification of funding sources. Copies may be obtained from CADCA by calling 703.706.0560 or contacting info@cadca.org.

Strengthening Families: Looking at Community Through a Different Lens.

This article appeared in the Fall/Winter 2000 issue of the United Way magazine *Community*. It addresses the growing belief that it is necessary to weave together human development and community revitalization to improve the prospects for both. Our *Making Connections* initiative is cited, as are several United Way efforts that seek to build strong communities and support families. The article is available on our website, www.aecf.org. The magazine can be ordered from the United Way by contacting Nancy Mason: 703.836.7112, ext.537, or nancy.mason@uwa.unitedway.org.

Restoring Fathers to Families and Communities: Six Steps for Policymakers

Produced by the Social Policy Action Network with Casey support, this guide was developed to help inform state and local officials about what they can do to help fathers help their children. Each step includes a menu of policy options and examples of what states, communities, and nonprofits are doing to promote responsible fatherhood.

Welfare Reform: Next Steps Offer New Opportunities: A Role for Philanthropy in Preparing for the Reauthorization of TANF in 2002

This paper was coauthored by Mark Greenberg, senior attorney at the Center for Law and Social Policy, and Michael Laracy, senior associate at the Casey Foundation. It reviews the history of the current welfare legislation, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and highlights issues likely to emerge in the reauthorization debate. It also suggests a range of activities for foundations interested in shaping future welfare and anti-poverty policies. Copies may be obtained from the Neighborhood Funders Group by calling 703.448.1777.

INSITES

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FAMILY TO FAMILY FOSTERS CONNECTIONS BETWEEN KIDS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

On any given day, more than 500,000 infants, children, and youth live in foster care in the child welfare system, double the figure in the 1980s. Child welfare employees feel like they are working harder with less successful results, finding foster or adoptive parents seems more challenging, and children are staying too long in temporary situations.

In diverse states and urban areas across the nation, agency leaders are addressing this challenge by rethinking their foster care systems. Many of these reforms have been spearheaded by a Casey initiative called *Family to Family*.

Designed in 1992, *Family to Family* focuses on recruiting a network of local foster parents, making better decisions about which children need to be placed in foster care, providing care that is neighborhood based and culturally sensitive, reducing the time children stay in out-of-home care, involving foster families in reunification efforts, and helping strengthen communities.

The program has been piloted in Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania,



Mildred Stewart, a Prince George's County, Maryland, foster parent, with her adopted son, Antwan, age 4. She and her husband, Samuel, also have three foster children. Stewart is president of the Prince George's County Foster Parent Association.

Ohio, and Maryland. Los Angeles County is in the early stages of implementation, and New York City has also embraced *Family to Family* principles. Based on the initiative's success, a number of new sites are joining *Family to Family*, including Illinois, San Francisco, Oregon, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, and Santa Clara County, California.

Like the Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative, *Family to Family* is grounded in the conviction that

children need strong families and networks of support in their communities in order to thrive. "The driving principles and underlying assumptions are essentially the same," notes John Mattingly, a senior associate at the Foundation. Several *Making Connections* cities, such as Denver, Louisville, and Detroit, are looking into adopting *Family to Family*. For a fuller description of *Family to Family*, go to www.aecf.org/familytofamily/.

COMMUNITIES DO THEIR PART

The setting was far from the traditional sterile agency office where foster children often go for supervised visits with their birth parents. This meeting was in a noisy Cleveland neighborhood center cafeteria, with community activities and sports going on all around.

The meeting was also unique in its personal dynamics. The children in the care of foster mother Theresa Williams* were dressed in their Sunday best and ready to see their birth mother and father with their foster mother joining in on the reunion—all one big family. For Williams, the old way seemed preferable because it kept the birth parents at a comfortable distance. But that was not the *Family to Family* way, a new program that she reluctantly agreed to try that involved all family members, along with concerned neighborhood, church, and school representatives.

Although the meeting got off to a rocky start, everyone's guard dropped as it became evident they all shared an interest in doing what was best for the children. Before long, there was a lively exchange about favorite breakfast foods, bedtimes, discipline, and hairstyles.

As the birth parents spent time alone playing with their kids, two caseworkers and the *Family to Family* coordinator sat with Williams at a discreet distance. Finally, Williams was enticed back into the family gathering and she took photos while everyone said their good-byes. It was a successful visit, although everyone knew the road to family reunification would still be difficult.

In this neighborhood, as in other *Family to Family* sites, the relationships being forged are strengthening not only the

families involved but the community.

"In addition to foster family recruitment, neighborhood centers are developing after-school programs, weekend programs, and respite care for foster families," notes Terry Ali, the administrator for neighborhood partnerships with the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services.

LaJean Ray, director of the Fatima Family Center in the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland for 14 years, says the *Family to Family* program she helped implement is all about making connections. "This is relationship work," she says, "and neighbors tend to support neighbors."

Whenever possible, foster parents are recruited from the neighborhood so the children can stay in familiar surroundings. "Everything is child and family driven, and those values are just what's right," says Ray.

**Not her real name.*

PARENTS SUPPORT PARENTS

As a bilingual interpreter and administrative clerk in New York City courts, Sandra Jimenez often encountered parents who were about to lose their children. She also rubbed elbows with the judges who had to make careful, often painful decisions to separate children from their parents. In the 15 years that she worked in the courts, Jimenez never imagined that she would depend on one of those caring judges to prevent her from losing a child.

"I didn't start using drugs until I was 27 and going through a divorce," Jimenez recalls. In January 1996, she was arrested after selling two \$10 bags of heroin to an undercover cop. At her first court appearance, the judge, who had worked with her in Bronx Family Court, recognized her. "I had never felt that degree of shame," Jimenez says. The arrest, a short stay in detention, and the threat of losing

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Like the Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative, *Family to Family* is GROUNDED in the conviction that children need strong families and NETWORKS OF SUPPORT in their communities in order to THRIVE.

If you REALLY want to help the child, YOU HAVE TO HELP THE FAMILY.

FOSTER PARENTS KEEP FAMILY TIES ALIVE

Gisele Booker, who has taken in 15 children since 1993, has always worked to maintain healthy ties with birth parents.

“Most good foster parents didn’t need an official *Family to Family* program, because somehow we always made an effort to work with the family,” says Booker, one of several foster parents interviewed in Prince Georges County, Maryland. “But it’s better to have everyone making an effort to do the same thing. It has created more openness and removed the ‘us’ and ‘them’ category.”

Booker remembers when social workers were the only conduit between birth parents and foster parents. That system left too much room for distorted, missed, or mixed messages. “The worker can’t play each side against the other when the communication is direct,” she reflects.

Even when it’s not possible to pursue contact with a birth parent, family ties can be nurtured through grandparents, siblings, aunts, and cousins. Family members participate regularly in the life of the 7-year-old girl Booker adopted out of foster care. Good relationships with birth families also increase the odds that foster parents will stay in the child’s life after they reunify with their families. “I still see quite a few of my kids,” says Booker.

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Cheryl Rowland, who has had 20 foster children, tries to give the parents advice about how to get their children back. “If they’ll listen to me, I’ll talk,” she says.

“I hear that a lot of foster parents don’t want anything to do with the parents, but you’re really supposed to be helping both,” Rowland says. “If you really want to help the child, you have to help the family.”

Although contact may be sporadic and conversations strained—especially when there’s substance abuse—



HILARY SCHWAB

Gisele Booker, of Prince George’s County, with her adopted daughter, Christine, age 7. She and her husband, Ronald, also have one foster child. Booker is secretary of the Prince George’s County Foster Parent Association.

Rowland doesn’t feel the effort is wasted. “I think it helps them a lot knowing you are accepting them and not putting them down and just trying to help.”

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Mildred Stewart has had 10 foster children, but it’s never easy letting them go. The close relationships she’s developed with birth families help. One of the children Stewart took in came to her at 23 months and stayed till he was four and a half. “I still have lots of contact with him,” she says. “I baby-sit, we talk on the phone, his grandmother brings him to visit.”

Stewart believes an important part of her job is helping families reunite if possible. She helped the mother of one little girl disentangle herself from a relationship that was preventing her from getting her child back.

“I think parents should be given every opportunity to get their children back if that’s what they want,” says Stewart.

MARYLAND



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her infant daughter—the youngest of eight—pushed her into a residential drug treatment program.

After Jimenez’s arrest, her daughter was placed with a foster family through St. Christopher’s, Inc., one of the many private agencies that contracts with New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services to provide foster care and other services. Jimenez had 18 months to pull herself together or she would lose her parental rights.

“There I was, having to go before my former colleagues because I was about to lose my child to the system,” she recounts. “But they encouraged me. They kept saying, ‘You can do it,’ because they remembered another Sandra.”

Jimenez did get her daughter back, and within a year became a parent advocate at St. Christopher’s, helping parents navigate the

child welfare system, build on their strengths, and address their needs. The overarching goal of the advocates is to reunite parents with their children and promote healthier families. A parents’ bill of rights includes weekly telephone calls and visits with their children and the right to replace an unresponsive caseworker.

One of St. Christopher’s operating principles is, “When you give parents some responsibility or some sense of purpose, they begin to change to patterns of positive behavior,” notes Chris Pardo, associate executive director.

It is a principle echoed in *Family to Family* and one that Jimenez, now a special assistant to the executive officers, endorses. “We believe in helping families help themselves,” she says. “You strengthen the parent, the parent builds up the family, and the family builds up the community. It’s a chain reaction.”