



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 7, 2009

Contact: Marci Bransdorf (301) 257-7348
marcibransdorf@gmail.com

Lee Mullane (203) 401-6932
lmullane@caseyfamilyservices.org

Foundation Leaders to States: Youth in Foster Care Can't Wait

New Resource Center Launches on First Anniversary of Fostering Connections Act, Will Help States Implement Legislation to Improve Child Well-Being

[Washington, DC] A coalition of child welfare, adoption, healthcare, and education leaders announced today a nationwide effort to fully implement the Fostering Connections Act, the most comprehensive federal reforms to child welfare policy in over a decade. The announcement, which includes the launch of a new resource center, was made on the first anniversary of the passage of the law that requires safe, permanent families for foster youth, and improvement in their overall well-being, by addressing healthcare needs and educational stability.

The new Fostering Connections Resource Center will provide nonpartisan, timely, and reliable information to support state and local decision makers as they move forward with implementation of the Fostering Connections Act. The Resource Center is a one-stop-shop for a range of data, online tools, and technical support on all aspects of the Fostering Connections Act. The Resource Center also provides access to national networks of state-based and local stakeholders organized according to the six major topic areas of the law – adoption, kinship, older youth, tribal child welfare, health, and education. Through its networks, the Resource Center will disseminate materials and provide ongoing expertise to state policymakers and administrators.

“As we work to assure that every child who is waiting to be adopted from foster care is placed with a permanent family, the implementation of the sweeping policies of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act at the practice level within each state is critical,” said Rita L. Soronen, executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. “We are pleased to be a partner organization in the launch of the Fostering Connections Resource Center to assure that states have access to expert technical assistance and accurate information.”

The Resource Center is the product of a coalition of nine sponsoring foundations who are committed to improving lives of vulnerable children and families, and recognize that timely and effective implementation of Fostering Connections can positively affect the lives of millions of children and families. The Fostering Connections Resource Center coalition includes the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Duke Endowment, Eckerd Family Foundation, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Sierra Health Foundation, Stuart Foundation, and Walter S. Johnson Foundation.

“The Fostering Connections Act can change the face of foster care in this nation. The Resource Center is a clear sign to federal policy makers about the field’s enthusiasm for and commitment to the new law, and, more importantly, to giving kids in care the best opportunities for success,” said Patrick McCarthy, senior vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.”

-- MORE --

“The number of youth who leave foster care by ‘aging out’ has grown every year since 2001, and the percentage of all foster care exits that are ‘aging out’ has nearly doubled in the last decade. This has added to the daunting challenge of implementing this far-reaching federal legislation. Very few American youth have completed high school by 18, the age at which the vast majority of youth are forced to leave foster care, without families or the supports we take for granted for our own children. These young people cannot wait for the economic recovery: we have to begin transforming this system now, and this resource center is another valuable tool for the states to accomplish this,” said Gary Stangler, executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

Managed by Child Trends and The Finance Project, the Fostering Connections Resource Center will serve governors, state legislators, tribal leaders, state and county administrators of child welfare, health and education, judicial leaders and state court personnel, case workers and other providers, foster and adoptive families, relatives, child advocates and others.

“Eckerd Family Foundation is supporting this coalition of funders and the Fostering Connections Resource Center because the education of our young people in foster care is a crucial framework for future success,” said Jane Soltis, program officer at the Eckerd Family Foundation. “We believe the time has come for the silos of education, child welfare, services for those with disabilities and the judiciary, coordinate their efforts so that the challenging and sometime dismal education outcomes for youth can be turned around.”

“Congress took a bold and important step a year ago by passing the most important federal child welfare legislation in at least a decade,” said Cari DeSantis, executive vice president of public affairs and communications for Casey Family Programs. “Casey and our consortium partners are committed to removing any barrier to implementation of the Fostering Connections Act. None of us want a child to wait a minute longer than necessary to live in a safe, loving and permanent family home.”

The Fostering Connections Resource Center includes a website (www.fosteringconnections.org) providing reliable, non-partisan data on all aspects of the law and customized tools created by experts. The center’s national networks of state-based and local experts will address states’ challenges to implementation, identify what is working, assist in the delivery and dissemination of resources, and provide technical assistance to state leaders. The center will keep the provide avenues for ongoing discussion of important implementation issues.

While some progress has been made toward implementation of the law in its first year, many states have reported difficulty with fulfilling the obligations of the Act, such as new requirements for state child welfare agencies to coordinate with local education agencies and state health plans. Among the most immediate requirements in the Act are provisions calling for better oversight of children’s health care needs, educational stability, and connection to family members. These provisions call upon systems to work together on behalf of the foster children they serve.

“Sometimes all it takes is someone to invest in you for you to see that you are worth investing in,” said Greta Anderson, a University of Wisconsin-Stout student and a 2009 All-Star with FosterClub, a national network for youth in foster care. “This is what Fostering Connections can do for youth coming from the system.”

For more information about the Fostering Connections Resource Center or to arrange an interview with coalition partners, please contact Marci Bransdorf at (301)257-7348 / marcibransdorf@gmail.com or Lee Mullane at (203)401-6932 / lmullane@caseyfamilyservices.org.