

A publication sharing ideas and insights



THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING
30 YEARS
of building lifelong family connections.

Voice

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A photograph of a young man with short dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a bright yellow vest. He is looking out of a window with a metal frame, his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a blurred view of a city street.

Addressing the Needs of Older Children and Youth in Foster Care

*2006 National Convening on
Youth Permanence:
Promoting Families for Life*

*Massachusetts DSS
Commissioner on Reforming
Child Welfare*

*Journalist Judy Woodruff
Searching for Generation Next*

*Rural Family Economic Success:
Supporting Homeownership*



From the Executive Director's Desk

In this special issue of Voice, we present several articles that relate to the importance of lifelong family connections. One is an interview with respected journalist Judy Woodruff, who is traveling the country to speak with young people from all walks of life. She tells us that a common thread runs throughout their stories: the importance of family relationships.

Many studies have shown that children do well in strong families. Yet each year more than 20,000 youth continue to “emancipate” from foster care, disconnected from family members or caring adults. Too often these young people find themselves cast adrift, without sufficient education to find good jobs, without the means to find a decent place to live, and without the life experience to make responsible decisions.

It's no surprise that studies, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT, tell us that an alarmingly high number of these youth become homeless, parent children too soon, and/or become involved with drugs or crime.

But it is good news that, increasingly, policymakers and practitioners alike are recognizing that existing foster care laws may be doing a disservice to these vulnerable youth, and change is needed. Several states—California and Massachusetts, for example—are leading the way to ensure that every youth in foster care achieves the highest possible level of legal permanence before leaving foster care.

Strong family relationships serve as an anchor for all of us throughout our lives, and they endure for generations. Most of us may take these relationships for granted, but for hundreds of thousands of youth in foster care, having a family to count on for a lifetime is a luxury far out of reach.

This year, for the first time, the Casey Foundation, including Casey Family Services, will host the National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington, D.C. Building on four years of success in California, the convening will open the dialogue to national leaders, adding a research roundtable and policy briefing as pre-convening activities.

Achieving family permanence for youth is possible, it's powerful, and it should be a national priority. The convening offers a special opportunity to gather those who touch the lives of families and children. The result, we hope, will be a clear call for a national movement to achieve timely family permanence for all of America's youth in foster care.

Raymond L. Torres

Raymond L. Torres (central), director ejecutivo de Casey Family Services, con la familia Strong durante la celebración del 2005 Día de Adopción Nacional en New Haven, Connecticut.



Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo

En este volumen especial de “La Voz”, nosotros presentamos unos artículos sobre la importancia de los lazos familiares que perduran durante toda la vida. Judy Woodruff, periodista destacada, va viajando por todo el país hablando con toda clase de jóvenes. En nuestra entrevista, ella nos cuenta que el hilo que ensarta todas sus historias es la importancia de los lazos familiares.

Muchos estudios demuestran que los niños florecen en familias estables. Sin embargo, cada año mas que 20,000 jóvenes siguen “emancipándose” del custodio temporal, desconectados de familiares o adultos cariñosos. Demasiadas veces, estos jóvenes se encuentran sueltos, sin la educación necesaria para conseguir buen empleo, sin los medios para encontrar un lugar decente para vivir, y sin la experiencia vivida para tomar decisiones responsables.

No nos sorprende que los estudios, incluyendo lo de Annie E. Casey, KIDS COUNT, indican que un numero alarmantemente alto de estos jóvenes terminan desamparados, que tienen niños demasiado pronto, y/o que se enredan en las drogas o el crimen.

Pero son buenas las noticias que tanto los políticos como los practicantes reconocen que leyes actuales puedan ser perjudicial a jóvenes vulnerables, y que un cambio es necesario. Algunos estados, entres ellos California y Massachussets, han tomado un papel de liderazgo para asegurar que cada joven en cuidado de crianza logre el nivel mas efectivo de permanencia legal antes de egresar del sistema.

Los lazos fuertes de familia sirven como ancla para todos nosotros durante nuestras vidas y perduran durante generaciones. Algunos de nosotros los toman por dados, pero para cientos de miles de jóvenes en cuidado de crianza, contar con el apoyo familiar es un lujo muy fuera de su alcance.

Este año por primera vez, la Fundación Casey, incluyendo Casey Family Services, patrocinará la Convocatoria Nacional de la Permanencia Juvenil en Washington, D.C. Construyendo sobre los cuatro años de éxito en California, la Convocatoria extenderá el dialogo a los líderes nacionales, agregando a las actividades previas a la Convocatoria una mesa redonda de investigación y una sesión informativa.

Lograr la permanencia juvenil es posible, es poderoso y debe ser una prioridad nacional. La Convocatoria ofrece una oportunidad para reunirse todos los que están comprometidos con las vidas de las familias y los jóvenes. Esperamos que el resultado llegue a ser una llamada clara a un movimiento nacional para lograr la permanencia de todos los jóvenes en cuidado de crianza en América.

Raymond L. Torres

NATIONAL CONVENING ON YOUTH PERMANENCE TO SHOW THE POWER OF FAMILIES FOR LIFE



Nearly a decade after the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act strengthened the focus of public child welfare on safety and family permanence, leaders from across the country will join together in September, in Washington, D.C., to advance the practice of helping older children and youth in foster care have families for life.

The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence will take place from September 12 to 15, at the Renaissance Washington, D.C. Hotel, in the nation's capital. Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct service agency, Casey Family Services, the convening will promote research, policy, and practice strategies for increasing the number of older children (ages 11 to 12) and youth (ages 13 to 18) who leave foster care with the enduring family relationships they need to be successful and fulfilled in adulthood. Thirty-seven other organizations have signed on as supporting organizations.

Convening cosponsors include Casey Family Programs, the Dave Thomas

Foundation for Adoption, the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Hite Foundation, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and the Stuart Foundation.

Invited child welfare leaders, including commissioners and directors, attorneys, judges, and youth from nearly every state, as well as representatives from tribal and national organizations, are expected to number more than 400. Scheduled for the convening are a research roundtable, a policy briefing, and a learning opportunity for practitioners.

Permanence is both a value and a practice goal. Proponents believe that for youth in state care to be successful and emotionally healthy in adulthood, they need to leave the system in a planned manner that connects them to a lifelong family, according to Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice and a convening organizer. "When professionals understand the benefits of a permanent family connection for a youth, then the real work of making these types of relationships possible begins," she says.

Permanence for children and youth can be achieved in several ways, with legal family relationships being the most secure outcome, Greenblatt says. Legal permanency options include reunification with birth and extended family, placement with relatives, guardianship, and adoption.

Yet, according to Greenblatt, as many as 20,000 teenagers annually "age out" of foster care. Exiting the system as an older adolescent without a permanent family relationship is correlated with a range of adverse outcomes for young adults. Having a family relationship for a youth is a key success variable.

Making Youth Permanence a National Priority

"The need to pursue family relationships for older children and youth has been abandoned for many in foster care," Greenblatt says. "The convening is an opportunity to help develop strategies and interventions that build family relationships for these youth—families they can count on now and in the future."

Greenblatt offers the following example: In many states, a 12 year old can consent to his or her own adoption. If that child says no to a particular adoption option, the permanency plan changes from adoption to an alternative planned living arrangement. Rather than continuing the family work, the focus shifts to preparation for independent living. "It's easier to meet a youth's basic needs, helping him or her get ready for adulthood, rather than engaging in the more complex work of building family relationships. An integrated approach is needed," Greenblatt says.

Meeting Our Policy Obligations to Youth

The convening also will examine the public policies that present disincentives to permanence for older youth. The convening's policy briefing on September 13, "Achieving Family Permanence: Unfinished Business for Youth in Foster Care," will examine policy solutions aimed at removing barriers that prevent or delay family permanence for older youth in foster care. It also will highlight the implementation of current and innovative state and local policy reforms. U.S. Representative Danny K. Davis (D-IL) will be the guest speaker. Panelists include MaryLee Allen from the Children's Defense Fund; Judge Patricia Macias of the 388th Family District and Associate Court; John Mattingly, commissioner of New York City's Administration for Children and Families; and others.



“The convening is an opportunity to help develop strategies and interventions that build family relationships for these youth—families they can count on now and in the future.”

“This is a unique opportunity to reach out to both practitioners who are attending the convening, and to elected officials and Congressional staffers involved in developing legislation and regulations that can support older youth in securing permanence,” says Sania Metzger, Casey Family Services’ policy director.

Practices that Show the Possibility

Helping youth in foster care form permanent connections with family and other networks of caring adults is a key theme of the Casey Foundation’s work. Casey has been working toward the goal of permanence 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.

From this work and that of grantees and partners nationwide, the Casey Foundation has compiled significant evidence showing that greater permanence—and other improved outcomes—are available in child welfare, according to Foundation Senior Associate Wanda Mial, adding that the following strategies can be invaluable:

- Expand and improve services and engage community partners to prevent children from entering the foster care system whenever possible.
- Conduct greater outreach to relatives and make subsidies more available for kin willing to care for foster children.



- Strengthen efforts to recruit and support foster and adoptive families for older youth.
- Examine state and local child welfare systems for racial bias, and develop new strategies to eliminate disparate treatment of children and families of color.
- Undertake intensive, creative team planning for permanence that is individualized to the circumstance of each youth and grants young people a central role in planning their own futures.
- Make extensive use of subsidized guardianship as a permanency option for older children.
- Eliminate the use of “long-term foster care” or “emancipation” as case goals for adolescents in the foster care system.

The convening will offer an opportunity for participants to learn from one another as peers. A host of plenaries, learning sessions, and planning meetings are on the agenda, with topics that include: youth involvement, the California experience of implementing youth permanence, team planning

and decision making, effective court and legal partnerships that benefit foster youth, and ways to develop mutually beneficial relationships with journalists.

Advancing the Promise: From California to the Nation’s Capital

The convening was first presented in 2002 by the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) with primary funding from the Stuart Foundation. Its purpose was to assemble practitioners and officials from other states in order to improve practices in California. Since its start, the convening has grown steadily, becoming a larger national event.

“We’re excited by the opportunity to carry this vision forward with our cosponsors. We intend to keep the momentum of permanence for older children going for many years,” declares Greenblatt.

“It’s our hope that participants will walk away from the convening with a belief that permanence is possible and a plan to make it a priority in every state,” Greenblatt says.

CONVOCATORIA NACIONAL SOBRE LA PERMANENCIA JUVENIL PARA DEMOSTRAR EL PODER DE LA FAMILIA POR LA VIDA



Una década después de que el Acto de Adopción y Familias Seguras fortaleció el enfoque del bienestar infantil sobre la seguridad y la permanencia, los líderes a lo largo del país se juntarán en Washington, D.C. en Septiembre, para avanzar las practicas de apoyo a los jóvenes en cuidado de crianza para que tengan lazos familiares durante toda la vida.

La Convocatoria Nacional de Permanencia Juvenil 2006 se realizará desde Septiembre 12-15 en el Hotel Marriott Renaissance Washington en la capital de la nación. Patrocinada por la Fundación Annie E. Casey y su agencia de servicios directos, Casey Family Services, la Convocatoria promoverá la investigación, la elaboración de políticas y las prácticas estratégicas para aumentar el número de niños (de 11-12 años) y jóvenes (de 13-18 años) egresando de cuidado de crianza con los lazos perdurables familiares necesarios para su éxito como adultos. Ya firmaron treinta y siete organizaciones como organizaciones de apoyo.

Se incluyen entre los co-patrocinadores: Casey Family Programs, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, la Fundación Freddie Mac, la Fundación Hite, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, y la Fundación Stuart.

Se espera la presencia de más que cuatrocientas personas, incluyendo líderes de asuntos de bienestar infantil, comisionarios, directores, abogados, jueces y jóvenes de casi todos los estados, y también representantes de organizaciones nacionales y tribales. El programa incluye conversaciones sobre la investigación, una sesión informativa sobre la política, y una oportunidad de aprendizaje para practicantes.

La permanencia es tanto un valor como una meta práctica. Los proponentes creen que los jóvenes bajo cuidado estatal, para que logren tener vidas exitosas y emocionalmente sanas,

necesitan egresar del sistema en una manera bien planeada con lazos familiares fuertes, según Sarah Greenblatt, director de Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice y una organizadora de la Convocatoria. “Cuando los profesionales comprenden los beneficios de los lazos permanentes familiares, entonces en este momento comienza el trabajo verdadero para hacer posible este tipo de relaciones para los jóvenes,” dice ella.

Se puede lograr la permanencia para niños y jóvenes en distintas maneras, dice Greenblatt, y el desenlace mas seguro es tener relaciones familiares con base legal. Las opciones de la permanencia legal incluyen la reunificación con familias biológicas, la ubicación con parientes, la tutela y la adopción.

Sin embargo, según Greenblatt, casi 20,000 jóvenes egresan del sistema de cuidado de crianza por motivo de edad (“aging out” en inglés). La salida del sistema de crianza de los adolescentes mayores sin que tengan relaciones familiares permanentes lleva consecuencias adversas para ellos. Contar con una relación familiar estable es un factor clave para que un joven tenga éxito en la vida.

Permanencia Juvenil – una Prioridad Nacional

“Se ha abandonado la necesidad de promover relaciones familiares para los niños mayores y jóvenes en cuidado de crianza,” dice Greenblatt. La Convocatoria ofrece una oportunidad para desarrollar estrategias e mediaciones que puedan construir relaciones familiares con estos jóvenes – familias con las cuales ellos pueden contar ahora y en el futuro”

Ofrece Greenblatt el ejemplo siguiente: En varios estados, un niño de 12 años puede dar consentimiento a su propia adopción. Si este niño dice no a una opción particular, el plan de permanencia cambia desde la adopción

hacia un arreglo planeado y alternativo de vivienda. En lugar de continuar con el trabajo con la familia, el enfoque cambia hacia la preparación para la vida independiente. “Es mas fácil responder a las necesidades básicas de un joven, ayudándole a el o a ella a que se preparen para la vida adulta, que comprometerse a la tarea mas compleja de construir relaciones familiares. Se necesita una planificación mas integrada,” dice Greenblatt.

La Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, junto con el Proyecto de Permanencia Juvenil de California (CPYP), Casey Family Programs, y el Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative promovieron un plan integrado a la permanencia y a la preparación para la vida adulta, en su publicación “A Call to Action” en 2005. Se espera que la Convocatoria lleve a cabo el valor de esta visión a nivel nacional.

Cumpliendo con Nuestras Obligaciones para con los Jóvenes.

La Convocatoria también examinará las políticas públicas que sirven para desincentivar el plan de permanencia para jóvenes. La sesión informativa “Logrando Permanencia Familiar: Tareas Pendientes con los Jóvenes en Cuidado de Crianza” (“Achieving Family Permanence: Unfinished Business for Youth in Foster Care”) examinará las soluciones políticas dirigidas a eliminar los obstáculos que impiden o demoran la permanencia familiar para los jóvenes en cuidado de crianza. Dará relieve a la implementación de las reformas políticas actuales y creativas a nivel estatal y local. El orador de honor sera Representante Danny Davis (D-IL). Los locutores incluyen, entre otros, MaryLee Allen del Children’s Defense Fund, Patricia Macias, Juez de la Corte del Distrito 388 y John Mattingly, Comisario del Children and Family Administración de la Ciudad de Nueva York.



“La Convocatoria ofrece una oportunidad para desarrollar estrategias e mediaciones que puedan construir relaciones familiares con estos jóvenes—familias con las cuales ellos pueden contar ahora y en el futuro.”

“Esta es una oportunidad única para comunicar con los trabajadores/practicantes en la Convocación y a los oficiales elegidos y ayudantes involucrados en el proceso legislativo que pueden apoyar a los jóvenes buscando permanencia,” dice Sania Metzger, una directora de Casey Family Services.

Prácticas que Revelan Posibilidades

Un tema clave en el trabajo de la Fundación Casey es la formación de lazos permanentes con familias y otras redes de adultos cariñosos. Ha dirigido sus esfuerzos a la meta de permanencia por medio de Casey Family Services y también por la Iniciativa: Familia a Familia, que ayuda a los estados y comunidades crear redes locales de cuidado de crianza, el Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative que ayuda a conectar jóvenes egresando del sistema con empleos, servicios, y adultos cariñosos, y otros esfuerzos para reformar los sistemas públicos y los servicios de bienestar de niños a lo largo del país.

Casey Family Services, en conjunto con sus socios a nivel nacional, ha recopilado pruebas convincentes demostrando que un nivel más alto de permanencia – y otras consecuencias positivas – se encuentran en el sistema del bienestar de niños, según Wanda Mial, asociada de la Fundación. También ella agrega que las estrategias siguientes son muy importantes:

- Ampliar y mejorar los servicios y juntarse con socios comunitarios para evitar, cuando sea posible, que los niños entren en el sistema de cuidado de crianza.
- Establecer comunicación con parientes y hacer disponibles subsidios financieros a los que estén dispuestos a cuidar a los jóvenes en cuidado de crianza.
- Fortalecer los esfuerzos para reclutar y apoyar familias dispuestas a cuidar a jóvenes mayores.



- Examinar los sistemas de bienestar de niños estatales y locales por prejuicios raciales y desarrollar estrategias nuevas para eliminar el tratamiento desigual de niños y familias de color.
- Iniciar a nivel del equipo una planificación intensiva y creativa para la permanencia basada en las circunstancias individuales de cada joven, y asegurarle a cada uno un papel central en su futuro.
- Utilizar la opción de tutela subsidiada para niños mayores.
- Eliminar el uso de “cuidado de crianza a largo plazo” o “emancipación” para adolescentes como metas por parte de los trabajadores sociales en los sistemas de cuidado de crianza.

La Convocación ofrecerá una oportunidad para el aprendizaje mutuo entre los participantes. El programa incluye una variedad de plenarias, sesiones de aprendizaje y reuniones de planificación. Los temas incluyen: la participación juvenil, la experiencia de California, la planificación y la toma de decisiones a nivel del equipo, asociaciones legales

que beneficiarán a los jóvenes, y como promover relaciones productivas con periodistas.

Llevando a Cabo la Promesa: Desde California a la Capital de la Nación

La Convocación fue inaugurada en el 2002 CPYC (California Permanency for Youth Project) con financiamiento inicial de la Fundación Stuart. El objetivo fue juntar practicantes y oficiales de otros estados para mejorar las prácticas en California. Desde aquel entonces, se ha crecido a un ritmo constante, llegando a ser un evento nacional.

“Estamos emocionados por la oportunidad de llevar adelante esta visión junto con nuestros co-patrocinadores. Esperamos que la idea de la permanencia para jóvenes siga ganando fuerza durante muchos años,” dice Greenblatt.

“Esperamos que los participantes llevarán de la Convocación la convicción que la permanencia es posible, y un plan para llevarla a cabo como prioridad en cada estado,” dice Greenblatt.



HARRY SPENCE, COMMISSIONER, MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Close-up

Harry Spence was appointed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) in November, 2001. He is a former deputy chancellor for operations for the New York City Public Schools; a governor-appointed receiver for the bankrupt city of Chelsea, Massachusetts; and a court-appointed receiver for the Boston Housing Authority. Spence has led sweeping changes at DSS by abolishing a “culture of blame” and fostering a “learning organization” that is now focused on permanence for every child. Currently, Massachusetts has more than 9,450 children in placement, a majority of whom are age 12 and older.

VOICE: *What changes have you implemented to achieve permanence for kids – especially older youth?*

SPENCE: Four years ago, we began to look at the system through the lens of permanence. We worked with our provider networks, in part because we were concerned about having an overreliance on residential placement, which was a source of kids aging out of care. We reorganized our purchased services to enhance their focus on permanence. That meant moving to a system where we keep kids as close to home as possible, creating permanency incentives for everyone involved in the system, and making a systemic commitment to permanence as a goal for children.

Another initiative was “Working with Families Right from the Start,” a 90-member committee that looked at the entry into care and the ways in which we could look at permanence from the outset. Our traditional entry process had an overwhelming focus on safety. That focus on safety needed to continue, but also be combined with a focus on permanence.

The third change is our “teaming” approach. The staffing model in child welfare has been one social worker responsible for a number of cases. With the teaming approach, for example, we assign cases to a group of five social workers, with a supervisor. They’re able to assign resources within the group as needed. We think it’s a more effective way of organizing the work and will make a big difference in the quality of decision-making, the support that the workers feel, and the state’s ability to achieve permanence for kids.

VOICE: *Have you expanded prevention services, so children don’t have to enter care?*

SPENCE: Central to the intake process is a belief that if we work collaboratively with the majority of families, we will not need to remove as many kids. The reorganization of our service system is directed toward delivering services immediately because we know that if we provided services within a day or two, we often wouldn’t have to remove the child. One way we hope to reduce the number of children in care is by moving to a Differential Response System. Under this effort, we hope to be able to provide support and services to many families without charging them with neglecting their children, as we do now. It allows families to receive community-based supports without

the necessity for a formal finding of abuse or neglect.

VOICE: *What do you think the public expects from its child welfare system?*

SPENCE: We’ve really got three public expectations of child welfare that pull the system in different directions. The public insists that DSS work to prevent atrocities to children, and there’s zero tolerance for failure. Countering that first expectation is another that mandates that we support families (with minimal intervention) to improve their parenting in order to keep children safe; but these two expectations are in complete contradiction, since we cannot ensure safety while maintaining our distance with vulnerable families. There also is a permanency expectation from the community. People believe that the outcomes for youth in the child welfare system should not be any worse than for other children.

All three have some reasonable and appropriate element to them, but when each is made absolute, it is what I call the Bermuda Triangle of child welfare.



PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM SHOULD NOT BE ANY WORSE THAN FOR OTHER CHILDREN.

VOICE: *Child welfare systems routinely come under fire when a child in care sustains injuries or dies, which leaves communities and officials wanting to place blame. How does DSS respond to crisis?*

SPENCE: Since I got here, I have said publicly that I will not punish error, that I will defend error. I won't defend negligence, I won't defend dereliction of duty, but error occurs in everyone's life all the time. Therefore, we need to become a learning organization in which we review our mistakes and create a culture of change and lessons learned.

Fifteen years ago, in the medical world, practitioners moved to reduce fatalities by making the culture of hospitals one where the acknowledgment and analysis of error is constant. So, we've said we're going to take that kind of approach.

This question of how we build learning organizations is critical. And I think that's the real challenge we face, because child welfare ought to be the most exciting, rich, complex, intellectually stimulating, emotionally powerful work that anyone could do. DSS ought to be the center of services for children, and others ought to be excited about what we're doing. And I think the possibility for that is very real, but we've got to learn how to be learning organizations.

VOICE: *Do you have supports for youth who have "aged out?"*

SPENCE: For a number of years, Massachusetts had a provision for helping youth ages 18 to 22, but they had to be high-performing kids to qualify, either in college or some form of job-training. We realized those are the kids who least need the assis-

ance. It's the other kids, the ones who aren't so high-performing, who would benefit most from continued supports. We decided a performance requirement wasn't necessary, but we have established standards for those who will receive ongoing support, because between ages 18 and 22, youth should be making some progress toward becoming an adult. We're not looking to build dependence on the state, but rather to use our support to help kids transition into adulthood more successfully.

CHILD WELFARE OUGHT TO BE THE MOST EXCITING, RICH, COMPLEX, INTELLECTUALLY STIMULATING, EMOTIONALLY POWERFUL WORK THAT ANYONE COULD DO.

VOICE: *What other changes are you making for older youth in care?*

SPENCE: We're redefining our service goals. Our Group on Adolescent Permanency has made its recommendation to eliminate both independent living without a family connection and long-term substitute care as acceptable outcomes.

And all 29 [DSS] offices in the state have been involved in our first home-grown breakthrough series on how to improve our achievement of adolescent permanence.

We've invited other states in New England to join us, and we're looking at everything from how kids in care can become the major resource for identifying possible permanency solutions, to how to work on genograms and access family history.

VOICE: *Have you changed your foster and resource family recruitment strategies?*

SPENCE: Yes. We're developing regional strategies for recruitment. We recently mapped the location of our foster families around the state, and we found that they are clustered around DSS offices. Therefore, the families are not necessarily where the kids are—they're where our staff are. So we need foster families to be where our kids are. We need to recruit geographically. Also, to help kids feel a sense of continuity when they enter care, we need to recruit with ethnicity and religion in mind. We've also adopted the Washington State approach of using foster parents as stipend-paid recruiters. Today we have these "foster parent ambassadors" in every office, and it's working wonderfully.

We also are recruiting foster families specifically for adolescents, based on a model from Pat O'Brien, the executive director of You Gotta Believe in New York City. The families are asked to pledge to keep a foster child no matter what until that child achieves permanence.

VOICE: *But it's understood that the foster family is a "bridge family?"*

SPENCE: Yes. They make a commitment to that child for the duration of his or her time in care. Now, not infrequently, they end up being the permanent family for that child, which is a great outcome, but not

“Achieving permanence meant moving to a system where we keep kids as close to home as possible, creating incentives for everyone involved in the system, and making a systemic commitment to permanence as a goal for children.”



ty you have when you run an organization is to give people permission [to make change].

What’s also been striking is that this is the hardest work I have ever done. The challenge of the public’s complex, confused, and deeply charged views of child welfare has been the most difficult. On the other hand, we’ve had success with the elected leadership in this state. And in thinking about how you change the societal context and reframe the issues, I don’t think it’s done by trying to change the media. You change how people perceive an issue by determining what the political leadership understands and to what they will respond.

required. Often, the family takes an active role in the permanency planning for that child as well.

VOICE: *What is the role for community partnerships?*

SPENCE: Whether you’re talking about entering or leaving state care, the role of the community is crucial. And I say that because, as we thought about moving our system from residential care to one with community-based supports, we realized there are issues of both community capacity and acceptance.

We are striving to develop symbiotic relationships with teachers, because they can be the first ones to identify vulnerable families for preventive services. In turn, we can work with families and help to stabilize the children who are in their classrooms.

We also have sought partnerships with community schools because schools are a flash-

point for resistance about high-needs kids living in the community. So the question of the community’s commitment to these young people is crucial. DSS also is partnering with a nonprofit organization, Treehouse, to explore ways we can engage the community to support foster, pre-adoptive, and adopted children living in a given community.

VOICE: *In your leadership role, what have been your successes and challenges?*

SPENCE: For me, this reform effort has been huge in terms of thinking about organizational change. I used to think the task was to come in, figure out the charge, get a few like-minded people around you, and convince the organization what it needed to do. At DSS, I took a very different approach, basically, asking people: “If you could do the kind of practice you long to do, what would it be?” And the answers to that have come entirely from the department’s staff. I say to people now that the greatest authori-



Massachusetts DSS Commissioner Harry Spence at a National Adoption Day event.

A LIFELONG CONNECTION LEADS TO LOVE AND HEALING

Regina Louise, right, is embraced by her newly adoptive mother and former social worker, Jeanne Taylor.

Author, actor, and motivational speaker Regina Louise can hold an audience in the palm of her hand. With flashing eyes, she delivers her words in a cadence that quickens and slows as she drives each point home, sharing both the despair of growing up in foster care, and the joy of finding, at age 41, her own family for life.

Delivering a keynote at the 2006 Casey Family Services Interdivisional Conference in New Hampshire, Louise said: “I grew up in the same illegal, abusive foster home that my mother was reared in.” At age 11, she ran away, eventually wending her way through 30 foster home placements before being sent to a residential treatment center.

“There they fill you up with psychotropic drugs, and all you really want is for someone to put their arms around you and hold you,” she said. With loss and loneliness her companions in adolescence, Louise connected with a social worker, Jeanne Taylor, who became determined to take the child into her own home. But, state policy prevented Taylor from either fostering or adopting the little girl, and Louise eventually “aged out” alone.

Long after she had emancipated from California’s foster care system, Louise viewed her old case file. In it, she found more than a dozen letters from Taylor, none of which had ever been shared with her previously. Her file revealed words she had never seen before: “I love her and want to protect her.” As she faced her Casey audience, Louise held up the case file, reading descriptions of herself that clearly still hurt and anger her.

She continued reading, “‘Someone has led her to believe that she has an above-average intelligence when she is marginal at best.’

But I got into seven universities being marginal,” she retorted. Although she was terminated from her group home two weeks before she was to enter her college dormitory and was temporarily homeless, she coped, and eventually graduated.

Louise later wrote a book about her foster care experience entitled *Somebody’s Someone: A Memoir*. “When I wrote my memoir,” she commented, “my editor called it an indictment and told me I would need corroboration. I searched everywhere for that corroboration, and I can tell you, it was hard to find. Then they wanted pictures of me as a child. They said, ‘Every American child has pictures.’ And I replied, ‘Yeah, every child has the right to a picture,’ but I didn’t have even one.”

A LIFELONG FAMILY IS THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE HEALING. THIS IS A LIFETIME CONNECTION, AND IT HAS TAUGHT ME THAT LOVE IS NEVER WASTED.

She also became determined to find Taylor. “I looked everywhere, but I couldn’t find her,” she recalled. “Then, my book was published. I did an interview with a newspaper, and it was read by a former co-worker of Jeanne’s. The co-worker mailed the article to Jeanne who was then living in Georgia. On the third day of the tour, I had an email,” she said.

“I am so proud of you, sweetheart,” the message read. “Call me.”

Now a mother of two, Taylor told Louise that she still wanted to adopt her, 27 years after her first attempt to do so. “When I was finally able to visit her,” Louise said, “she handed me a treasure: a book, and in the pages I saw myself, at ages 10, 11, 14, and 16. After all these years she had held onto that photo album.”

Shortly thereafter, friends and attorneys facilitated Taylor’s adoption of Regina Louise. Taylor often travels now with Louise to her many speaking engagements, reinforcing the message that a family for life is a lifeline for many youth and adults alike. Recently Louise served as a spokesperson for National Foster Care Month.

“A lifelong family is the only way to achieve healing,” she said. “This is a lifetime connection, and it has taught me that love is never wasted.”

The 2006 Casey Family Services Interdivisional Conference was held in April. It was the largest such gathering to date and stimulated spirited discussions among more than 360 staff members about how to refine and implement the agency’s strategic shift to family permanence for all children and youth in foster care. Highlights included a keynote by Dr. Carol Spigner, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and former head of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, as well as an address by Board Member Emeritus Donald Layden on the legacy of Jim Casey and its relevance to Casey’s evolving permanence agenda. In addition, Patrick McCarthy, Annie E. Casey Foundation vice president for system and service reform, spoke on the importance of permanence in programs and activities across the Foundation.

IN SEARCH OF GENERATION NEXT

Judy Woodruff reports on America's youth

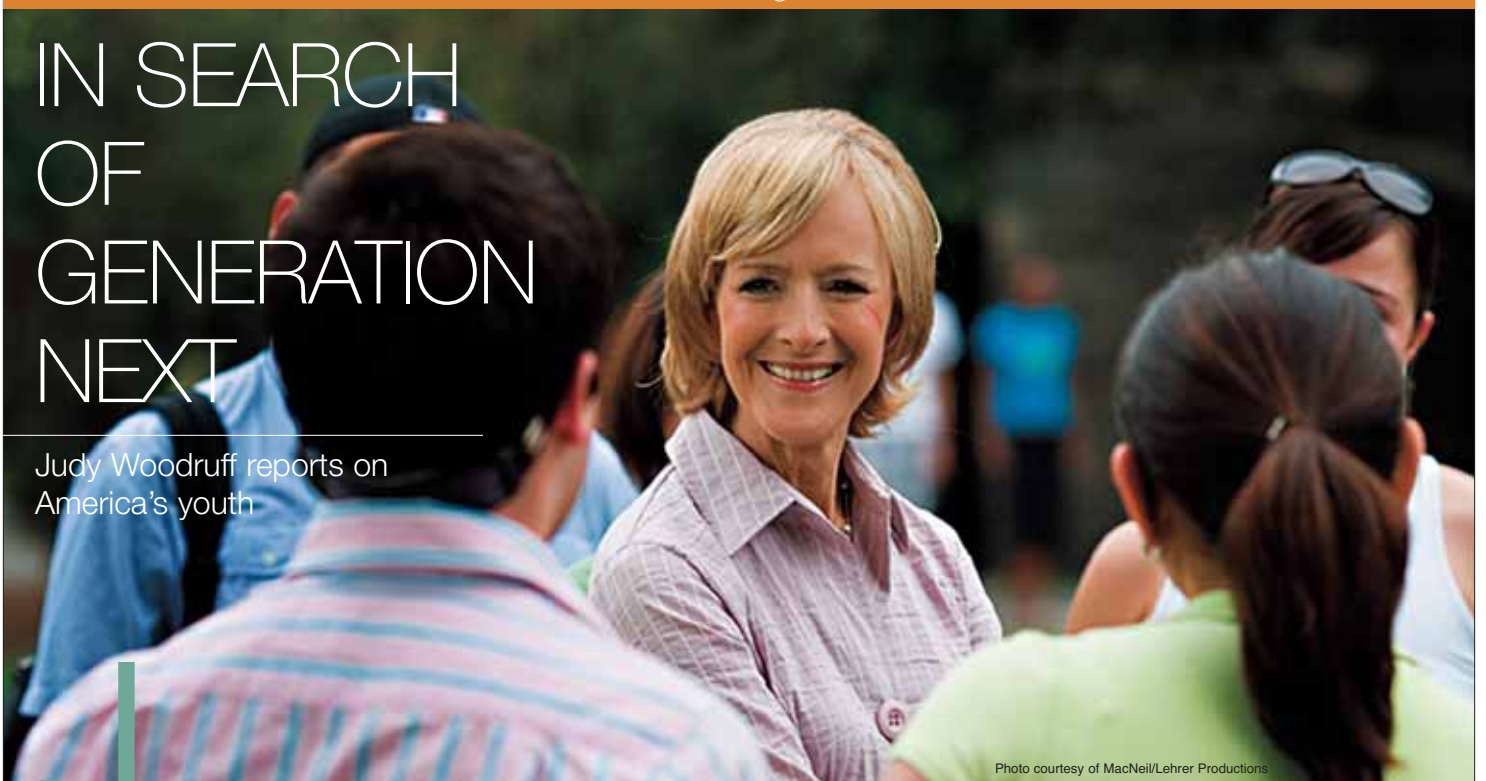


Photo courtesy of MacNeil/Lehrer Productions

Just one year ago, award-winning television journalist Judy Woodruff, long-time anchor for CNN and now a special correspondent on PBS's *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, engaged her colleagues and friends in a discussion about today's youth and how little we know about their views, values, hopes, and dreams.

These discussions led to an unprecedented media partnership to create a multifaceted, multidimensional series of reports on America's youth. "There are 42 million young people between the ages of 16 and 25," says Woodruff. "It's obviously an enormous challenge, and I'm very careful about not overpromising that we're going to reflect every nuance of this generation."

Distinct from Baby Boomers and different from Generation X, young people between the ages of 16 and 25 are what Woodruff and others have dubbed *Generation Next*. To find out more about this group, Woodruff and MacNeil/Lehrer Productions secured funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Annie E. Casey Foundation and joined with National Public Radio and *USA Today*. In August, Yahoo! joined the partnership to support the effort through its online news coverage.

The television reports will air first in September on the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* and culminate in January with a documentary on PBS. Print and Internet stories are already running. In addition, the "Generation Next: Speak Up Be Heard" website allows young people to share their views.

I HOPE WE ARE ABLE TO GET PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT THIS GENERATION IS SAYING THEIR HOPES, DREAMS, VALUES, AND PRIORITIES ARE; AND TO ENGAGE THEM IN PLANNING FOR THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE.

In late June, Woodruff set out with a PBS television crew and reporters from *USA Today* and NPR to interview youth in Birmingham, Alabama; Columbus, Ohio; Detroit; Leoti, Kansas; Los Angeles; and New York City, among other places. "We

were constantly looking at research, polls, and census statistics and trying to match that with what we were finding in terms of real people to go and talk with," she says.

Among those Woodruff consulted was Annie E. Casey Foundation President Douglas Nelson. "Doug said to me, 'Pay attention to those young people who are forgotten by others,'" Woodruff recalls. "He said, 'Don't assume that when you go into a city or community that the young people who are struggling are going to be easy to find.'"

Voice caught up with Woodruff and her crew in Los Angeles, just a few hours before she traveled to Salt Lake City to begin another series of interviews.

"So many of the young people just want to say something to somebody," Woodruff says. "They ask us, 'Why don't you listen to us?' We want to give young people a chance to talk with officials and interact with those who are in a position to influence the course of events in the nation.

"Their comments are not only poignant, they're telling," she continues. "It's a fact of life that politicians tend to focus most of their vote-gathering efforts on older groups

“There’s no question that family is the single most important predictor of future success in life for so many of these young people,” reports Woodruff. “It’s never a guarantee, but it just gives these young people a leg up. And for those children whose parents are just not there – either because they’re struggling economically or because they’ve had problems with drugs – coping is much harder.”

because they’re the ones who vote in larger percentages. Yet, between the elections of 2000 and 2004, we saw a greater increase in voter turnout among the age group of 18-24 than in any other demographic. Their percentage of participation rose 11 percent.”

Woodruff adds that the youth she has spoken with “have their own take on what’s happening in the world they see. They have witnessed what has gone on in much of our political decision making, and they wonder who is well served by that,” she says. “They’ve watched the news coverage of a good deal of scandal, and it’s not surprising that they have a fairly skeptical attitude toward politics. At the same time, they’re interested in learning more and getting involved. Most of them talk about the importance of voting.”

Having grown up in a time of relative prosperity, young people are facing vast uncertainty ahead, according to Woodruff. “For some, life has been good so far, but they’re wondering how to do as well as their parents did,” she explains. Many of them are interested in furthering their education, she notes, “but for all, the cost of education has skyrocketed, and many are coming out of school with enormous debt, worried about how to pay that debt.”

A mother of three children in their late teens and early 20s, Woodruff readily admits to a natural interest in young people. “I know that my family has been fortunate living in Washington, D.C., where we have been able to afford good education



Photo courtesy of CNN

Leading journalist Judy Woodruff looks closely at youth attitudes, aspirations, and values.

and some of the things in life that young people want to have,” she says.

“I’m quite aware that not all young people have those opportunities. I’m very interested in finding out how young people from all backgrounds and places – inner cities, suburbs, rural communities – see their own prospects,” she continues. “What are their values? Do they share the values of their parents or do they have different ideas? What are their thoughts about religion, the economy, the role of America in the world, the war in Iraq?”

What she is beginning to find out, she says, is that many young people tend to share the values of their parents, “which reminds us how important parenting is.” Woodruff reports that many of the young men and women have grown up in single-parent

households. “We know that the divorce rate has doubled in the last few decades. We’re seeing that young people are struggling with that reality.”

Wherever she has been, a thread of strong family connections has emerged. “There’s no question that if youth have the strong presence of family in their lives, it makes an enormous difference.

“At one end of the spectrum you have parents who are extremely engaged in their children’s lives. Educators even refer to these parents as ‘helicopter parents’ who are hovering all the time,” she continues. “On the other end of the spectrum, you have families that are torn apart by any number of difficult circumstances, and children have borne the brunt of that.

“Some young people have done well, praising the mother or father who raised them, but others show the strain.

“There’s no question that family is the single most important predictor of future success in life for so many of these young people,” reports Woodruff. “It’s never a guarantee, but it just gives these young people a leg up. And for those children whose parents are just not there – either because they’re struggling economically or because they’ve had problems with drugs – coping is much harder.”

For youth growing up in the nation’s inner cities, life is “definitely tougher,” Woodruff says. “We spent time in Columbus, Detroit, and New York City, and found that many inner city youth are working as hard as they



can to pull themselves out of poverty and hopelessness. I clearly remember two young men in Bedford Stuyvesant in New York City. They surprisingly were determined and optimistic, I thought, considering the tough circumstances they were in. They told us that they wanted to save up enough to start a business in music," she recalls.

things. The work ethic in that family is quite amazing."

But not all immigrant families and youth are doing as well, she acknowledges. "In Los Angeles, we will be talking with a number of young people who are Hispanic immigrants. One has been a member of a gang. He's a high school dropout who is now working,

He'll be introducing us to some of his friends who are still active in gangs," she says.

"I've asked several youth from immigrant families how it feels to be American. Some have said they don't spend a lot of time thinking about it. Others are thoughtful. Some don't feel accepted. Others have said they're so grateful for the opportunities the United States has offered them. Some are

conflicted," she adds. "They've seen economic opportunities here, but also social barriers, some of which are racially based."

Woodruff expresses her interest in finding youth who are disconnected from family and community. She recalls her participation in the 2004 KIDS COUNT Youth Summit supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "We are looking to find those young people," Woodruff explains. In New York City, she found a young woman who has been raised by her grandmother. "Her mother was a drug addict, and her father, a dealer. She told us she wanted no part of

that. She was fortunate to have a grandmother who was available to raise her," Woodruff comments.

In general, however, it is harder to find young people who are adrift, precisely because they're not connected to anyone. "If they don't participate in some community program, if they don't have any adults in their life, and if they're not connected through school, it's harder to identify them," Woodruff says.

Through these interviews, Woodruff has been struck by "just how articulate and thoughtful these young people are." When asked what she hopes the impact of the *Generation Next* project will be, she replies, "I hope we are able to get people in decision-making positions to pay attention to what this generation is saying their hopes, dreams, values, and priorities are, and to engage youth in planning for the country's future."

"This generation is 17 percent Hispanic, 14 percent African American, and 4 percent Asian. One in every five is the child of an immigrant. One in every 10 is the child of a parent who is not an American citizen," she notes. "I want decision makers and the American people to see that this generation is coming along at a time of enormous change in our country and in the world. We are giving them a complicated world to grow up in, with global warming, economic globalization, exploding technology, and war. We need to hear their views," explains Woodruff. "Every generation thinks they have something to say, but I think there's something really special about this generation and the times in which they're living."



Judy Woodruff tours the nation with the Generation Next production team.

Youth from immigrant families almost universally stressed the importance of education. "They see opportunity in the United States," she observes. "We met a family in Columbus, Ohio; the parents emigrated from Nigeria in the '60s and '70s. This is a family of relatively modest means, and the children have gone on to do remarkable

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY 2006 STUDY EXAMINES ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE



The National Adoption Day Coalition has commissioned the Urban Institute (UI) to study trends in adoption from foster care. The report, which will be issued in conjunction with National Adoption Day observances on November 18, 2006, will include a summary of state adoption legislation, highlights of model legislation, and state-by-state profiles.

“The research will provide a portrait of the national landscape of state adoption statutes, as well as an understanding of adoption legislation,” explains Rob Geen, speaking for the Urban Institute, “thus providing a variety of policy options for legislators interested in the issue of adoption.”

To complete the project, UI is working with the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) on a comprehensive assessment of state legislation related to adoption from foster care introduced over the past five years. The analysis will look at legislation and identify trends and themes in adoption and potential shifts in how states address adoption through legislation.

Using federal legislation to provide a general context, researchers will examine all adoption-related legislation passed or proposed by the states during the past five years. NCSL maintains a database on legislation enacted by states. The research team will use this database to identify adoption-related state legislation that has been enacted. The team also will review state legisla-



tures’ websites, conduct searches using a variety of Internet and newspaper retrieval tools, and examine publications that highlight adoption issues.

To supplement the state legislative analysis, the team will examine existing data on state adoption policies, with an emphasis on post-adoption services. The 2006 research will complement the 2004 and 2005

National Adoption Day studies, which examined prevalent barriers to adoption from foster care and looked closely at innovative adoptive parent recruiting practices.

National Adoption Day

National Adoption Day is celebrated every year on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. In 2005, judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare leaders, and advocates in 45 states and the District of Columbia finalized more than 3,400 adoptions of foster children. That year, 227 events were held throughout the country to finalize adoptions and celebrate families who adopt.

The Coalition’s founding partners are the Alliance for Children’s Rights, Casey Family Services, Children’s Action Network, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and the Freddie Mac Foundation. Joining as a new partner for 2006 is Jockey International, Inc.

CONNECTICUT COURT WINS NATIONAL INNOVATION PRIZE

Three years after Casey Family Services began collaborating with Connecticut’s probate court system to improve its services for children, the resulting reform effort is continuing to grow in influence. The New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court, which began as a limited pilot project and has since expanded into a statewide model, is now garnering national attention.

This summer, the nonpartisan Council of

State Governments named the New Haven court project as a recipient of its 2006 National Innovation Award. “This honor showcases how well the New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court is working to connect vulnerable families with needed community supports and to reach timely custody decisions,” says Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director.

Casey Family Services became involved with the project in 2003 when it launched an extensive study of how Connecticut han-

dled issues involving children through its probate courts. As a result of the review and its recommendations, the state moved cases involving family matters to a newly created New Haven Regional Children’s Court. In 2005, pleased by the pilot’s success, the state legislature approved and funded the creation of six additional regional courts.

The Hon. James Lawlor, Connecticut Probate Court administrator says: “This program has given hundreds of children better lives. If others copy Connecticut’s example, children all over the country will benefit.”

BROOKE AND JOE'S DREAM HOUSE:

RUFES HELPS RURAL FAMILIES BUILD A STABLE FUTURE

by Joy Duva, Deputy Executive Director for Planning and Policy, Casey Family Services; Cary Gladstone, New Hampshire Division Community Liaison, Casey Family Services; and Miriam Shark, Senior Associate, The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Brooke and Joe Noonan dreamed of owning their own home, but wondered how they would ever save enough for the down payment. Like many low-income rural families, they struggled to meet the costs of daily living but wanted to create a stable family life and a solid foundation for their children. With hard work, persistence, and a range of community supports, the Noonans have achieved their dream.

The Noonans are not alone. Too many rural families are working harder than ever but are struggling to make ends meet. They often are isolated and disconnected socially and geographically from opportunities and supports, and find it nearly impossible to move ahead, says Bob Giloth, director of Family Economic Success for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Casey Foundation believes that helping families attain economic stability means parents can avoid the crises that too often split families apart, and provide the brighter futures they all want for their children.

To promote this work, Casey has created a Rural Family Economic Success (RuFES) initiative to promote strategies that help families meet their current needs, save for unexpected expenses, and acquire assets. RuFES promotes financial stability by working toward three goals simultaneously: increasing income (“earn it”), stabilizing

finances (“keep it”), and acquiring assets and building wealth (“grow it”).

Across the country, RuFES-themed institutes are being held to bring these strategies to a wide range of policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and community leaders. Each institute is cosponsored by one or more local organizations. Participants hear presentations on a variety of promising practices, including strategies to help low-income families obtain and maintain cars, approaches to developing various types of affordable housing, and asset-building efforts, such as matched savings programs, that can give a boost to first-time home buyers.

CASEY AND THE RUFES PARTNERS RECOGNIZE THAT A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT IS REQUIRED TO STRENGTHEN RURAL COMMUNITIES AND HELP FOSTER BETTER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRAGILE RURAL FAMILIES.

In New England, Casey Family Services co-sponsored a RuFES institute last year in Concord, New Hampshire, with teams from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. With “Earn It, Keep It, and Grow It” as the participants’ guiding principles, they identified opportunities and committed to actions. Their plans included: helping a greater number of qualified families claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), connecting EITC and tax preparation to family

asset-building strategies, creating education and business connections to support employment readiness and career ladders, developing one-stop shopping options for RuFES-themed services and supports, and exploring opportunities for affordable housing.

For many vulnerable rural families, owning their own home is an elusive dream. They struggle with the basics: jobs that pay a living wage, transportation, and affordable housing. The Noonans were living in a two-bedroom apartment that they had outgrown. With their daughter in one room and son in another, Brooke and Joe literally were sleeping in the living room. “We couldn’t have people over anymore,” says Brooke. “There was no place to visit.”

Brooke and Joe participated in home buyer seminars put on by the Concord Area Trust for Community Housing, a partner in New Hampshire’s Individual Development Account (IDA) program. The Noonans learned how to reduce their debt and improve their credit score, but still felt that home ownership was out of reach. “My thought was, ‘Oh my God, my savings are never going to get us anywhere,’” says Brooke.

But a matched savings program made it possible for Brooke’s family to become homeowners. The IDA provides a three-to-one match of money that qualified savers put aside for homeownership, business ownership, or education. When a \$50 monthly deposit becomes \$200 through matching funds, the account grows to help with the down payment, closing costs, and other expenses like home inspection. The combination of their IDA and subsidies from both a New Hampshire-based housing organiza-

Too many rural families are working harder than ever but are struggling to make ends meet. They often are isolated and disconnected socially and geographically from opportunities and supports, and find it nearly impossible to move ahead.



and rural families improve their economic stability.

Through its Family Resource Centers, Casey offers education and supports to help families increase their employment potential. Additional family supports may include drop-in childcare, activities for parents and children, after-school and summer programs for youth, community service projects, and life skills and leadership development for teens.

In addition to its Family Resource Center in Franklin, New Hampshire, Casey leads a coalition that provides free income tax preparation aimed at families who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit. A financial information and referral effort at the center offers money management resources throughout the year. And, while the Noonans have their home, high housing costs make it more difficult for rural families to meet other expenses. They often are forced financially to live in even more remote areas, increasing the commuting distance to jobs and becoming further removed from formal resources.

RuFES participants in New Hampshire are exploring other ways to address the affordable housing issue. Examples such as the Noonans offer hope to all the organizations attempting to find solutions to the housing problem. There is a story of determined persistence, something low-income rural people need to bring to their effort at economic self-sufficiency. It was four years from the time Brooke and Joe first attended the home buyer seminar until they actually became homeowners. Casey and the RuFES partners recognize that a long-term commitment is required to strengthen rural communities and help foster better economic opportunities for fragile rural families.

tion and the U.S. Department of Agriculture were all part of their financing package.

The couple eventually found a four-bedroom home. There were some improvements to be made, but the Noonans knew from the home buying seminars that the important aspects, such as wiring and the house's foundation, were in good shape. "Every day that I drive into my driveway and see my home, I'm proud of what I have," says Brooke.

Traditionally, child welfare agencies have focused resources on the care and protection of abused and neglected children, and less on the needs of their families. The Casey Foundation promotes family-strengthening approaches as the best way to help children remain safe and at home. Within this framework, Casey Family Services, the Foundation's direct services agency and a child welfare organization, works with community partners to explore strategies that help both urban



NITA C. LESCHER, VERMONT DIVISION DIRECTOR

Prior to joining Casey Family Services as the Vermont Division's director, Nita C. Lescher worked with Casey as a consultant through the American Humane Association. The chance to lead a full range of permanency services in one of the nation's most beautiful states led her to relocate from Washington, D.C., to the Green Mountain State. Through its service delivery and its partnerships with other providers, the division is a key player in promoting families for life for children in the state's child welfare system.

VOICE: *In a state with only 65 people per square mile, what is it like to provide services?*

LESCHER: Service providers in Vermont believe in and practice collaboration; it's a wonderful environment in which to do our work. Relative to other states, there are fewer players, so providers tend to know each other and each other's work. We cross paths a lot professionally and in the community, so there's a sense of accountability. I've found that it's not uncommon for people in prominent positions, such as judges and agency directors, to sit on committees with social workers and consumers. Even the policymakers are accessible. The people here feel involved in the workings of their state government and believe that they can make a difference.

Because we do home- and family-based work throughout the state, which is quite rural, staff spend a tremendous amount of time on the road.

VOICE: *The Vermont Division relocated its Waterbury office to Winooski. Why was this community selected?*

LESCHER: We have worked in many communities throughout Vermont for 22 years. The town of Waterbury is an entirely different environment from Winooski, which abuts Burlington – the largest city in the state.

IT IS CRITICAL FOR FOSTER CHILDREN ... TO KNOW THAT THEY BELONG TO A DEPENDABLE FAMILY, THAT THEY CAN LET DOWN THEIR GUARD, AND EXPERIENCE THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE THAT COMES WITH FAMILY MEMBERSHIP.

Winooski has a long, rich history as a working class, immigrant community of Irish and French Canadians. It now has the largest, most diverse refugee population in the state. Situated on the Winooski River, it was once a thriving mill town. That industry failed in the 1950s, and the city has struggled economically ever since. In Winooski, we are part of a larger community of service providers that support the area's children and families. Twenty-five percent of the children and families served by the

Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) live in Chittenden County. With an office in Winooski, we are more accessible to that population and have a better chance of reaching the neediest of the state's residents.

VOICE: *What is it like to lead two offices in distinctly different communities?*

LESCHER: We offer a continuum of permanency services in both of our offices, which presents some interesting challenges, not the least of which is scheduling face-to-face meetings.

For about 18 years, the White River Junction office served as division headquarters and housed the bulk of the staff. Now the Winooski site, which is 100 miles north, is the designated headquarters, and staff are divided evenly between the two locations, serving families in communities almost as far south as the Massachusetts border and almost as far north as the Canadian border. Staff members always have been a tightly knit group, and we are working hard to maintain a sense of connectedness across those miles.

One of the other challenges is providing services that meet the needs of the different regions we serve. White River Junction is in Windsor County, which is far less populated than Chittenden, the home of the Winooski office. Across the division, staff members are incredibly committed to the children and families of Vermont, so they forge ahead, adjusting to location and programmatic changes with creativity.

In the Vermont Division, Casey staff members are known for making sure children and youth stay connected to their birth families, which has eased the transition to more permanence-focused work.



VOICE: *As Casey moves to emphasize the importance of lifelong family relationships, how has the Vermont Division responded?*

LESCHER: Very positively. While the move to greater permanence brings with it some changes in practice, everyone is enthusiastic about its driving principles. I just cannot imagine that anyone in the field would disagree that it is critical for foster children – many of whom have spent their lives in transition – to know that they belong to a dependable family, that they can let down their guard, and experience the unconditional love that comes with family membership.

In the Vermont Division, Casey staff members are known for making sure children and youth stay connected to their birth families, which has eased the transition to more permanence-focused work. When appropriate, we include birth family members on planning teams, and foster parents know that they will need to support birth family relationships.

VOICE: *In the spring, you joined the state in sponsoring a local convening on permanence issues. What was the impetus?*

LESCHER: Yes, we did. We are fortunate to work with a public child welfare agency that is committed to creating family connections for foster youth. The deputy commissioner from DCF initiated the statewide convening after attending the 2005 National Convening on Youth Permanence in San Francisco.

More than 250 private providers, educators, judicial staffers, state agency leaders, foster parents, and youth took part in the Vermont event. Representatives from all of these groups also served on the planning committee. Casey expects to cosponsor a follow-up event in the fall to review our collective progress toward achieving permanence for children and youth in foster care.

VOICE: *In September, the Annie E. Casey Foundation with Casey Family Services is hosting the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence. What promising practices do you see from Vermont and the Vermont Division that could be shared with other providers across the country?*

LESCHER: In the process of planning the statewide permanence convening, we identified more than a dozen promising practices, some specific to the state, others, national models. In March, DCF brought Kevin Campbell to New England to present his family finding work to public and private agency staff. Several districts are using Signs of Safety, a family-teaming model designed to identify and address safety issues through collaborative planning. Recently, DCF piloted Family Group Decision Making in one of its district offices and plans to expand its use throughout the state.

Throughout Vermont, social workers are using a variety of approaches, including family- and youth-centered permanency planning models, eco- and family-mapping tools, and genograms. Special reviews for children in care for more than three years also are conducted by an intra-agency team.

CLINICAL CORNER

PERSPECTIVES

FEELING AT HOME: ASSESSING EMOTIONAL SECURITY IN YOUTH AND FAMILIES



by *Eliot Brenner, Ph.D.,
Director of Clinical Services,
Casey Family Services*

In spite of efforts to attain legal permanence for every youth in foster care, there are times when families or youth are reluctant to make a legal commitment. Foster parents may hesitate for a variety of reasons, including conflicted loyalties between foster and birth children, or fears about the mental health needs of foster youth. At the same time, foster youth may be reluctant to endorse legal permanence because they feel different from other children in the family, or because they still feel committed to their birth parents.

Even experienced clinical social workers may have difficulty exploring the reasons behind this reluctance. If youth and foster parents have lived together for a long time, social workers may hesitate to discuss legal permanence because they do not want to jeopardize a stable placement.

For this reason, Casey Family Services is testing a pilot clinical assessment tool to help initiate discussions with youth and families in stable foster placements who are reluctant to move toward legal permanence. The Emotional Security Clinical Practice Tool has two versions: one for foster parents, and one for foster youth.

Both versions consist of 25 items that mirror each other. These items were selected to focus on the feelings and behaviors of parents and youth in regard to permanence, which Casey defines as “an enduring family relationship that offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership.”

Queries reflect most modern psychological theories, which hold that emotions have both an internal “feelings” component and a behavioral or expressive component. An example of a feeling item to which parents respond is, “I care deeply about what happens to this youth.” The complementary item for youth is, “My foster parent cares deeply about what happens to me.” An example of a behavior item is: “I expect to give and receive holiday cards or gifts with this youth just like everyone else in this family.”

me as well as other youth in the family.”

Casey recommends that social workers ask each youth and parent to complete the Emotional Security Clinical Practice Tool independently. Depending on the results, the social worker may decide to discuss the results with each parent, then with the youth, or with youth and parents together.

The Emotional Security Clinical Practice Tool already has had an impact on a family that was on the verge of asking their Casey social worker to remove a 16-year-old foster

CASEY FAMILY SERVICES IS TESTING A PILOT CLINICAL ASSESSMENT TOOL TO HELP INITIATE DISCUSSIONS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN STABLE FOSTER PLACEMENTS WHO ARE RELUCTANT TO MOVE TOWARD LEGAL PERMANENCE.

The items also are informed by attachment theory, which holds that most successful adoptions occur when parents “claim” the foster youth in their home, accepting the youth as a full-fledged member of their family, while the youth also accepts the parents as his or her own. For example, one item asks parents to respond to the statement: “I have done everything I can to make this youth feel he or she belongs to this family.” Youth respond to the statement: “My foster parents have done everything I need to make me feel like I belong to this family.” There are several items designed to capture claiming in families that contain other birth or adoptive children. An example from the parent version is, “I treat other youth better than I treat this youth.” The companion item from the youth version is, “Foster parents don’t treat

youth who had resided in their home for several years. The social worker asked the parents and youth to complete the Emotional Security Clinical Practice Tool. The assessment helped both parents and youth to recognize how deeply they cared for one another. This has led to the parents and youth planning together for life after high school, and discussing ways in which they can begin to make a permanent family commitment to one another.

To learn more about the Emotional Security Clinical Practice Tool, post an email to voice@caseyfamilyservices.org.

POLICY CORNER

SAFE AND STABLE FAMILIES FOR YOUTH: PROMOTING PERMANENCE



by *Sania Metzger, Esq.,
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Family Services*

Of the 523,085 children in foster care in 2003, 246,650 had a goal of being reunified with their parents. However, only 151,770 youngsters were actually reunited, according to the U.S. Children's Bureau. As the child welfare community looks to engage birth families as the preferred placement in helping youth achieve family permanence, there is room to improve.

To improve this, reunited families will require an array of preventive services and post-permanency supports. These are critical elements to keeping children and youth with their own parents and custodial caregivers.

The gap between the goal for reunification and the actual number of children who return to birth families raises concerns about the quality and availability of these types of family-strengthening services. Policymakers should be asking themselves the following questions:

- Are such essential preventive services readily available?
- Is federal funding adequate to ensure that services are available to carry out an early intervention in a family crisis?
- Does the lack of adequate state preventive services contribute to racial/ethnic disproportionality in child welfare?
- What services are needed to stabilize a teen who returns home?

- What supports does the parent or caregiver need as their child transitions back home?

Helping to illuminate some responses to these queries, the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence, September 12 to 15, will focus on addressing the needs of older children and youth in foster care. Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct service agency, Casey Family Services, the convening will feature a policy briefing, on September 13, on these critical issues. The emphasis will be on strengthening families, particularly minority families whose children are reunited at lower rates than their white counterparts in the system.

Deserving the lion's share of a policy review is the federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act (PSSF), which is the single largest funding source for preventive services: \$434 million in 2006 alone. Up for reauthorization this year, the act has four specific purposes: community-based family support, family preservation, time-limited family reunification, and adoption promotion and support.

In 2006, of the \$565 million authorized for the PSSF, Congress approved \$434 million: \$345 million in mandatory funds and \$89.1 million in discretionary funds. While Congress increased mandatory funds by \$40 million, it did not approve use of the \$200 million available in discretionary funding for the PSSF, according to the Child Welfare League of America.

Program guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services informs states that their allocation to the PSSF is expected to be at 20 percent for each of the program areas unless a state can provide a "strong rationale" for spending less.

Part of the 2006 PSSF reauthorization discussion by child advocates has centered on whether funding for this preventive program will be increased to its full funding level over the next five years, and whether or not all PSSF spending allocations will once again become mandatory.

Another part of the PSSF Congressional debate relates to how to spend the \$40 million increase in PSSF's mandatory level provided by the Deficit Reduction Reconciliation Act of 2006. The House bill (H.5640) seeks to expend the additional \$40 million in mandatory funding to enhance caseworker visits of children and families involved with child welfare, while the Senate bill (S. 3525) targets the \$40 million to families affected by the methamphetamine crisis in order to help reduce child maltreatment in homes impacted by the latest drug crisis.

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 also provided for an additional \$20 million per year through FY2010 for two new types of grants for the Court Improvement Program. The additional funds will be used to support training of personnel involved in child welfare judicial proceedings and to improve the timely consideration of abuse and neglect cases by family court.

This is one of a number of policy issues that demand greater discussion and understanding if policymakers are to be effective in reducing the number of children who need to enter foster care, and in improving the numbers of children who are successfully returned home. As any birth parent would tell us, achieving these goals hinges on available supports and family-strengthening services.

Resource Corner



2006 KIDS COUNT Data Book

The national and state-by-state study reports on the well-being of America's children and promotes discussion on ways to secure better futures for all kids. The Data Book ranks states on 10 key indicators and provides information on child health, education, and family economic conditions. This year, the Annie E. Casey Foundation also explores how early childhood development prepares children for success in school and life, and how to support family-based child care providers.

To learn more, visit www.aecf.org.

Undercounted, Underserved: Immigrant and Refugee Families in the Child Welfare System

Immigrant families constitute a large and growing proportion of all families. Almost one-fourth of all children in the United States are either immigrants or children of immigrants. This report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation focuses on the needs of immigrant and refugee children in the child welfare system. It includes extensive research, including a literature review, interviews with, and recommendations from, child welfare practitioners and experts.

To learn more, visit www.aecf.org.

A Child, a Family, a Future: Foster Care and Adoption in Connecticut

This documentary tells the real life story of Connecticut's foster care system. You'll meet children waiting for a family, parents waiting for a child, and the childcare professionals who work to bring them together. A "Connecting Our Communities" production for CPTV, the special was developed with the Village for Families and Children and funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services' executive director, is featured in the broadcast, which follows the lives of several children and families in Connecticut's child welfare system.

To order a DVD of this documentary at \$19.95 (including shipping), contact Caroline Deveau at 860.275.7288, or visit www.cptv.org/local.

On Your Own: Teens Write About Leaving Foster Care

For more than 10 years, young adults of *Represent* magazine have written about charging off to their own apartments only to learn how lonely they are, and to lose their jobs because of conflicts with their bosses. Foster youth stories are compiled in this book, which seeks to engage and prepare teenagers for the many changes they will face on the road to adulthood. Included are also worksheets and hands-on activities. Dr. Gerald Mallon, executive director of the National Resource Center for Foster Care

and Permanency Planning says this book is, "Indispensable! These stories show staff what teens are really thinking—and they make teens feel less alone."

To order this book visit www.youthcomm.org

Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men

Studies show that the United States is home to two to three million youth ages 16-24 who are out of school and out of work. Why are so many young people "disconnected," and what can public policy do about it? In *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, authors Peter Edelman, Harry Holzer, and Paul Offner offer analysis and policy prescriptions to solve the growing crisis. They carefully examine field programs and research studies and commend specific strategies to enhance education, training, and employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth; to improve incentives of less-skilled workers to accept employment; and to reduce the severe barriers faced by some youth. The result is a clear guidebook for policymakers as well as an important distillation for anyone interested in the plight of today's youth.

To order this book visit www.uipress.org

For additional important dates, visit www.caseyfamilyservices.org.

2006: Important Dates

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

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

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

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Extending the Conversation

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

September 12-15

2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence
The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services
Renaissance Washington, D.C. Hotel
Washington, D.C.

September 13-16

The 19th Annual National Independent Living Conference: "Growing Pains 2006"
Daniel Memorial Institute
St. Louis, Missouri
www.danielkids.org

October 3-4

Seventh National Structured Decision Making Conference: "Daily Practice for Performance Improvement"
The Children's Research Center
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
www.nccd-crc.org

October 12-15

"It's My Life" Conference 2006
Casey Family Programs
Seattle, Washington
www.casey.org

October 15-18

12th National Symposium on Juvenile Services
National Partnership for Juvenile Services
Las Vegas, Nevada
www.npjs.org

October 18-19

Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood: Rethinking the Safety Net for Vulnerable Young Adults

Chapin Hall Center for Children
Chicago, Illinois
www.chapinhall.org

October 18-20

Alliance for Children and Families 2006 National Conference
The Alliance for Children and Families
St. Louis, Missouri
www.alliance1.org

November: National Adoption Month

November 3

Family Focus 2006: A Focus on Adoption and the Family
The Adoption Center of the MidSouth
Memphis, Tennessee
www.theadoptioncenter.org

November 13-14

2006 Conference on Differential Response in Child Welfare
American Humane Association
San Diego, California
www.americanhumane.org

November 12-15

Finding Better Ways Conference: "Addressing the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth, and Families in the Child Welfare System"
Child Welfare League of America
Nashville, Tennessee
www.cwla.org

November 18

National Adoption Day



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

Voice

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