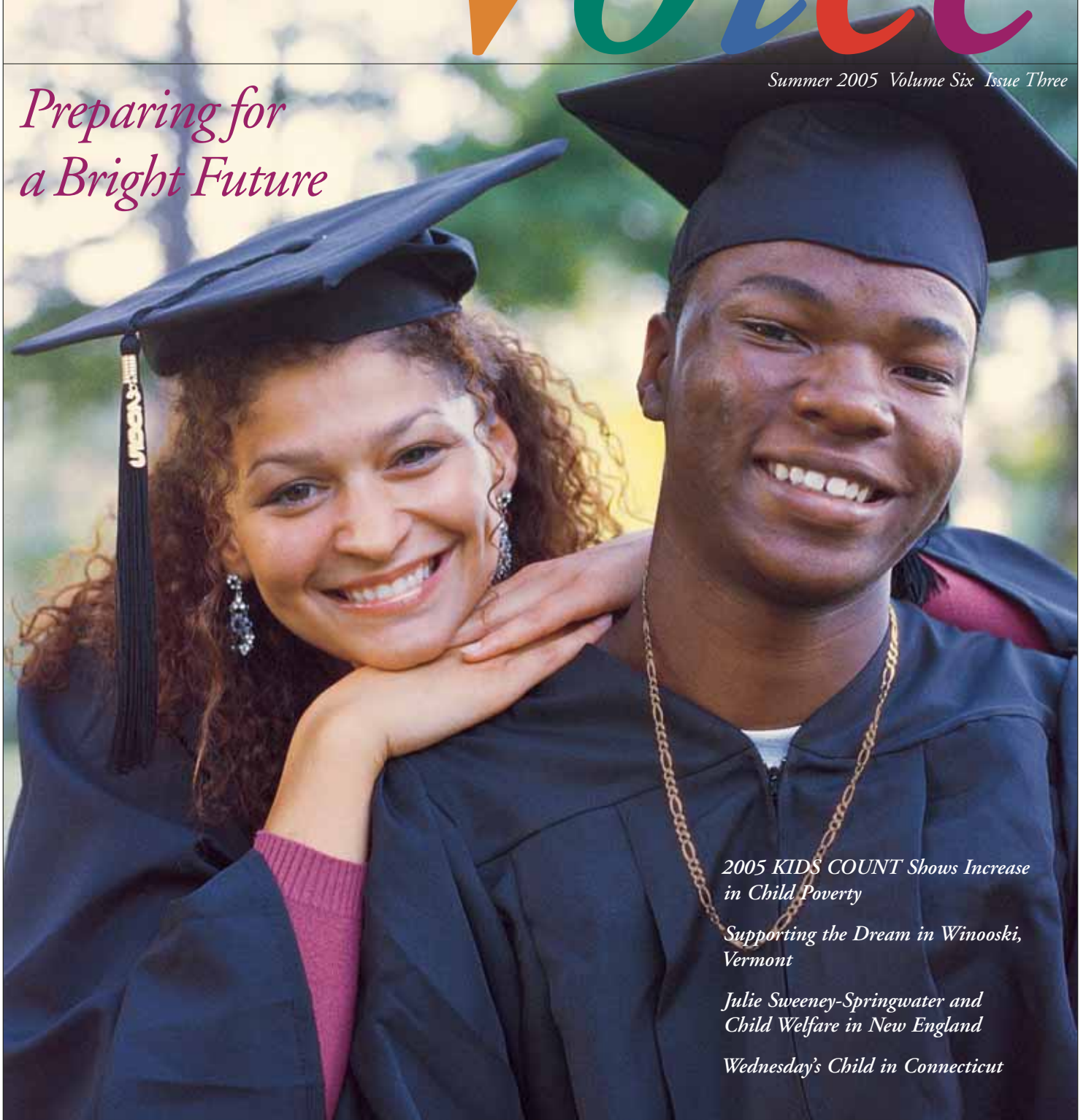




# Voice

*Summer 2005 Volume Six Issue Three*

*Preparing for  
a Bright Future*



*2005 KIDS COUNT Shows Increase  
in Child Poverty*

*Supporting the Dream in Winooski,  
Vermont*

*Julie Sweeney-Springwater and  
Child Welfare in New England*

*Wednesday's Child in Connecticut*



## *From the Executive Director's Desk*

*Summer days are anything but lazy days for Casey youth busy preparing for important transitions in their lives. For Michael, Vanessa and many other foster youth, spring marked the culmination of their high school years, a milestone that was celebrated at graduation ceremonies in communities across New England and in Baltimore, Maryland.*

*Forty-six young men and women served by Casey attended graduation ceremonies this past spring. Some were concluding their college careers; others were about to embark upon them; still others were completing training for a variety of trades or planning to join the military. And as I signed their certificates of achievement—something I look forward to doing every year—I was reminded that their accomplishments are clear evidence of courage, determination and resilience.*

*It is very rare that any young person can successfully navigate the challenges of adulthood without the support and guidance of caring adults. Regrettably, for thousands of U.S. teenagers exiting state foster care systems at the age of 18, “emancipation” brings no joy of freedom—only uncertainty and loneliness. In fact, outcomes have shown the cruel toll of disconnection on the lives of these former foster youth, according to a 1991 Westat report, the only nationally representative study available:*

- *Education—dropout rates hover at about 50 percent*
- *Pregnancy—60 percent of females had become a parent by age 23*
- *Mental health—a disproportionate number of foster alumni have mental health disorders*
- *Economics—38 percent had stayed employed two to four years after leaving care*

*To discuss these and other issues, several of our foster youth visited the Connecticut Legislative Building to share their personal stories and views with state officials and lawmakers during Casey's recent Youth Advocacy Day. They spoke of the importance of family connections, and their voices were heard.*

*We know that all children need and deserve lifelong family connections. And Casey Family Services will continue to work to ensure that when these young people “emancipate” from foster care, they do so unafraid, with the right life skills preparation and connection to caring adults.*

Raymond L. Torres



Raymond L. Torres (a la izquierda), director ejecutivo de Casey Family Services, con Sania Metzger (a la derecha), directora de política de Casey, y Lydia Martínez, representante del estado de Connecticut, en el Día de Apoyo a la Juventud.

## Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo

Los jóvenes de Casey se encuentran muy ocupados durante el verano preparándose para transiciones importantes en sus vidas. Para Michael, Vanessa, y muchos otros jóvenes bajo cuidado sustituto, la primavera marcó la culminación de sus estudios secundarios, un hito que se celebró con ceremonias de graduación en comunidades de toda Nueva Inglaterra y en Baltimore, Maryland.

Esta primavera, cuarenta y seis jóvenes atendidos por Casey asistieron a las ceremonias de graduación. Algunos concluían sus carreras universitarias, otros estaban próximos a embarcarse en ellas, y había quienes finalizaban su capacitación para diversas ocupaciones o planeaban prestar el servicio militar. Mientras firmaba los certificados de rendimiento, algo que todos los años espero con ansiedad, vino a mi memoria que sus logros son un claro testimonio de valor, determinación y adaptabilidad.

Difícilmente puede un joven sortear con éxito los desafíos de la adultez sin el apoyo y la guía de adultos bondadosos. Lamentablemente, a miles de adolescentes estadounidenses que a la edad de 18 años dejan los sistemas de cuidado sustituto, la “emancipación” no les trae ningún goce de libertad, sólo incertidumbre y soledad. De hecho, los resultados reflejan el cruel desamparo que cobra víctimas en las vidas de estos jóvenes que anteriormente se hallaban bajo cuidado sustituto, según un informe de Westat del 1991, el único estudio nacional representativo disponible:

- Educación: tasas de deserción que rondan el 50 por ciento
- Embarazo: el 60 por ciento de las mujeres habían quedado embarazadas a los 23 años
- Salud mental: una cantidad desproporcionada de ex alumnos que pasaron por hogares de crianza padece trastornos de salud mental
- Situación económica: el 38 por ciento había continuado empleado entre dos y cuatro años después de dejar los hogares de crianza

Con el fin de analizar éstos y otros temas, varios de nuestros jóvenes bajo cuidado sustituto visitaron la Cámara Legislativa de Connecticut para compartir sus vivencias y opiniones personales con funcionarios y legisladores estatales durante el Día de Apoyo a los Jóvenes de Casey. Hablaron sobre la importancia de los vínculos familiares, y sus voces se hicieron escuchar.

Sabemos que todos los niños necesitan y merecen vínculos familiares de por vida. Y Casey Family Services continuará trabajando para garantizar que, cuando estos jóvenes se “emancipen” del cuidado sustituto, lo hagan sin temor, con la adecuada preparación en las habilidades para la vida y con el vínculo con adultos bondadosos.

Raymond L. Torres

# MOVING TOWARD ADULTHOOD: FOSTER YOUTH AT GRADUATION



As Michael walked across the stage during his high school graduation this past spring, he searched the crowded auditorium for those who helped him realize this victory: his foster parents and social workers. He resisted the urge to wave his diploma in the air since he's the type of kid who doesn't like drawing attention to himself. As he returned to his classmates, however, he was unable to suppress his joy as a big smile broke out on his face.

This year, Michael is one of 46 Casey Family Services foster youth who donned caps and gowns and graduated. These impressive and resilient youngsters beat the odds for children in state care.

Across the nation, about 50 percent of the youth who will "age out" of foster care this year will do so without a diploma. More important, many youths are without a family within which to learn the skills needed to transition successfully into adulthood.

The journey was not an easy one for Michael, who entered foster care at the age of 6. During his freshman year, the Connecticut teen was in a program that helped him learn to manage his behavior more effectively. Then Michael returned to public school for his sophomore year.

"Sophomore year was the hardest," Michael reflects. "There was a lot of fighting. I didn't

get along with the other kids. I like to hang out with different types of people, not just one clique. That bothered some people."

In addition to the social and discipline issues, Michael wasn't challenged in his school work, facing a common stigma. "Coming from foster care, people view you negatively, saying you can't do as much as the other kids," he says. "They try to put you in special education classes. My foster mother and I fought to have me placed in mainstream classes. When I was, I proved that I could do what other kids did."

In his senior year, Michael earned four As and a B on his report card.

*Across the nation, about 50 percent of the youth who will “age out” of foster care this year will do so without a diploma. More important, many youths are without a family within which to learn the skills needed to transition successfully into adulthood.*



*Foster youths Michael and Vanessa are among 46 youngsters served by Casey Family Services to graduate this year.*

Children in foster care face significant barriers in receiving the education and services they need to successfully transition into adulthood. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, these youths have higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness and are more likely to drop out of school.

Typically survivors of child abuse and neglect, foster children also score lower on standardized tests when compared with the general population. The Chapin Hall Center for Children reports that a considerable percentage of children in care have a learning disability. In a study of youth in three states, nearly half required special education services at one point in their life.

For Michael, the difficulties of his sophomore year started to disappear when he made significant connections with his peers and the adults in his life.

“My senior year was the best year of all,” he says. “The people who were mean to me in my sophomore year matured and became friendly. The work was tougher, but I finally had teachers who cared about me not just as a student, but as a person.”

When asked what it meant that someone cared, Michael reflects on his biology teacher from junior year. At first, the two butted heads, but, eventually, a mutual respect developed. “She stayed after school to help me, and she didn’t need to do that,” he says. “She reached out to me. She even stopped teaching a class and talked with me one time when I was upset. She made me feel like I was important.”

In contrast to Michael and his academic work, Vanessa was “never that into high

school.” The tall, outgoing and community-minded girl from Hartford, Connecticut, did her work but admittedly slacked off. “I was disillusioned,” she says. Despite that, she graduated this past spring and will be college bound this fall.

While she was popular and very engaged in extracurricular activities, Vanessa felt that being a youth in foster care did separate her from the other students.

“When you’re a foster kid, you have a different set of priorities, at least for me,” she says. “You have all of these home problems. Your foster family is always a work in progress. School is secondary because you don’t have the same security as other kids.” Having been in care most of her life, Vanessa was placed with her current foster family during her freshman year of high school.

With these distractions, a traditional educational setting didn’t engage Vanessa fully. It didn’t provide information in a way that was useful to her. “I learn by applying knowledge to my own life,” she explains.

Vanessa found much more success and fulfillment in her life skills group at Casey.

“Learning how to run a business or manage my finances just seemed more useful to me, and I learned a lot that will help me succeed in college,” she says.

Training in life skills, those tangible and intangible skills needed to be independent, is offered to all adolescent foster youth at Casey Family Services. It’s an additional support that shows students they can succeed in learning and helps them bolster their own academic performance at school.

Vanessa’s plans for college include majoring in social work at Saint Joseph College near Hartford, Connecticut. “I’d like to give back some of the things I learned,” she says. “It would be nice to make life easier for other kids.”

This fall, Michael is headed to Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts, to major in business administration.

The state of Connecticut provides financial support to foster youth who attend college full time, helping make their higher education easier. Rather than “age out” of the system, these youths voluntarily remain under the state’s care to receive financial support past their 18th birthday.

While Vanessa plans to move out on her own during college, she knows she can stay connected to her foster family. “I know that they are there for me,” she says.

As Michael heads off to college in the fall, his foster family will continue to provide a strong foundation.

That connection was evident on Michael’s graduation day, as the family cheered for their son and all that he had accomplished.



# 2005 KIDS COUNT SHOWS INCREASE IN CHILD POVERTY

National trends in child well-being are no longer improving in the rapid and sustained way they did in the late 1990s, according to the 16th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Among the negative trends: The number of children who live with parents facing persistent unemployment has grown by more than one million since 2000. These parents often face issues such as domestic violence, depression, substance abuse and prior incarceration that make connecting to the workforce especially difficult.

“The nearly four million children living in low-income households where neither their parent(s) nor any other adult in the household worked at all in the previous year is an alarming increase,” says Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “The best way to improve the future for America’s most disadvantaged

kids is to improve the financial security of their parents today.”

What lies behind the inability of more than two million parents to enter and succeed in the workforce? According to *KIDS COUNT*’s accompanying essay, “Helping Our Most Vulnerable Families Overcome Barriers to Work and Achieve Financial Success,” families are challenged by the sobering realities of domestic violence, depression, substance abuse and prior incarceration. While none of these individual barriers prevents work, the cumulative impact of multiple burdens severely limits workforce success, the essay concludes.

Solutions highlighted in the essay present examples of public and private initiatives that address the needs of persistently unemployed families by:

- Linking domestic violence screenings to other services offered by public welfare caseworkers, such as child support and employment training
- Offering culturally sensitive screenings and counseling for adults with mental health issues
- Improving the employment skills of adults recovering from addictions
- Providing training and job placement assistance for parents returning from prison

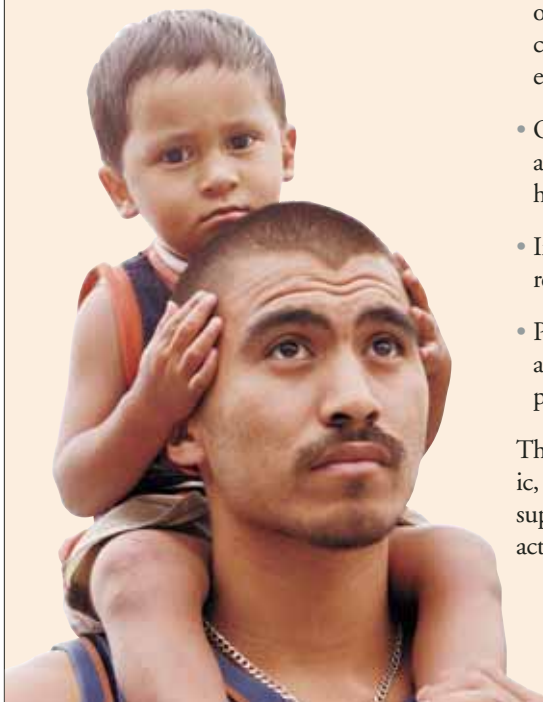
The Foundation advocates a more systematic, comprehensive and integrated way of supporting vulnerable parents. Its call to action seeks to:

- Enhance the screening and assessment of low-income adults to uncover barriers to employment
- Improve data collection and analysis of adults with serious employment barriers
- Increase the emphasis on case management and combine services that address employment barriers with employment-focused activities
- Increase the help given to persons transitioning from incarceration back into the community and encourage community-based organizations, faith institutions and local governmental agencies to support formerly incarcerated people seeking jobs

“Too many parents want to work their way out of poverty but are unable to do so,” concludes Nelson. “The futures of too many kids, as a result, are severely compromised. As a nation, we can and must do a better job in helping the parents of nearly four million kids connect to a job, become self-sufficient and find a path out of poverty.”

KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of America’s children. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children.

*The 2005 KIDS COUNT Data Book and full essay are available online at [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org) or you can call 410.547.6600.*



# Casey as Community Partner:

## SUPPORTING THE DREAM IN WINOOSKI



As the sun rises in the early morning, a group of 20 young adventurers climb out of their sleeping bags to embrace another day exploring New England's beautiful northern woods. Unlike most camping trips to the region, this journey won't have the kids escaping the heat in shorts and tee shirts; they will be bundled in scarves, mittens and puffy fleece jackets to fight the cold. This is winter camping in Vermont, where you notice your breath in the air, not black flies.

More important, with the support of Casey Family Services and other agencies, these kids are seeing their own potential to succeed in life. It's a unique experience for youths growing up in one of the state's most challenged communities.

More than 45 youths and 36 college-age mentors had the rare opportunity to participate in a two-day Winter Adventure Camp hosted by DREAM Program, Inc., a mentoring and adventure organization based in Winooski, Vermont. With snow on the ground, these campers spent their days sledding, cross-country skiing, playing broomball on a frozen lake and enjoying countless snowball fights. To help protect against the region's famously frigid temperatures, campers enjoyed a heated canvas tent, an A-frame shelter and cold-weather sleeping bags, all of which helped create unique journeys for all the youth.

The DREAM Program and its innovative programming represent an exciting era of partnership in Chittenden County, Vermont's largest and most diverse region. Recognizing the opportunity to collaborate with community leaders to support this area of high need, Casey Family Services has relocated its Waterbury (Vermont) office to

Winooski, making it the division's state headquarters.

Despite a revitalization effort in downtown Winooski, Chittenden County's children have some of the poorest outcomes in the Green Mountain State. In fact, 25.7 percent of all children in state care are from this county alone.

"Casey Family Services wanted to reach out to a larger community," says Nita Lescher, director of Casey's Vermont Division. "It feels right to be part of something new. Winooski is writing an exciting new chapter for itself, and we are doing the same for the division and the agency. It seems fitting to break new ground together here with our neighbors."

Toward that end, Casey supported the DREAM Program's Winter Adventure Camp, helping the grassroots organization purchase winter gear and equipment.

Founded in 1999 by students from Dartmouth College, DREAM pairs college students with children living in subsidized housing projects in Vermont. "We're unique in that we assign each college to a particular housing development, which allows a sense of community to grow between mentors and families," explains Mike Loner, the organization's new executive director.

DREAM combines best practices from both mentoring and community development programs to create a unique experience for the college students and the children.

"The long-term relationships that develop between the children and mentors are the foundation of our program and provide a means for children to engage in positive risk

taking," Loner says. "When children succeed at a new challenge, like snowshoeing, it expands their comfort zone and builds their confidence, and they will be willing to try new things. That's our theory of change. We're showing kids how really powerful they are and what they can do."

For Casey, the relationship with DREAM is just the start of the division's efforts to



*During Winter Adventure Camp in Vermont, youth and their mentors enjoy broomball in addition to a number of other fun activities.*

embrace its new community. "Winooski is a city with deep roots and a lot of personality," Lescher says. "The people who live here have a strong commitment to the community and develop enduring connections to each other. That's why we're such a good fit. Casey is committed to ensuring that children who grow up in foster care have the opportunity to put down roots, develop healthy identities and establish lifelong connections themselves."

*To learn more about the DREAM Program, visit [www.dreamprogram.org](http://www.dreamprogram.org).*

# Sunshine Growers Greenhouse

As Luke lists the plants he sells in his New Hampshire greenhouse – coleus, geraniums, grasses, impatiens, petunias, verbena – you can feel his pride in Sunshine Growers, his latest venture.

As he continues the list – butterfly bush, delphinium, foxglove, sedum, shasta daisy – you realize just how much work the new greenhouse has been for this 17-year-old foster youth.

“There were definitely problems: We had some trouble getting the greenhouse completed. Then the heater didn’t work, which really set back planting,” concedes Luke.

Sandy, his foster mother and Sunshine Growers partner, agrees. “The big thing is that this is a learning experience,” she says. “So when we had the greenhouse all set but then the heater didn’t work, we had to figure out what to do. You can learn from the good and the bad.”

How did Sunshine Growers get started? “I just have a lot of respect for greenhouses,” says Luke. “We have a garden in our back

yard, and I saw the potential for a greenhouse business. I work after school at a really big propagation facility – it has four to five acres under glass – so I know how that end works, too.” In addition to his work and gardening, Luke takes a horticulture class and is a member of Future Farmers of America. He also has raised bees and chickens.

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## WITH HIS ENTREPRENEURIAL GUSTO, LUKE WAS ABLE TO FIND A USED GREENHOUSE, SOMEONE TO HELP REFURBISH IT AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM CASEY FAMILY SERVICES TO BUY PLANTS.

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As a result of his motivation, this is Luke’s second entrepreneurial effort in recent years. He also sells greeting cards that feature his own designs and photography.

With this entrepreneurial gusto, Luke was able to find a used greenhouse, someone to help refurbish it and financial support from Casey Family Services to buy plants. “He just has drive, and he is incredible with numbers,” says Sandy.

Picking which plants to grow was one of the many challenges Luke faced in launching this new business. “For a lot of the stuff, we were blindfolded. I didn’t really know what people would buy,” he says. “I ordered

merchandise from Canada based on what I thought would work. I guess I did okay because some plants are already sold out.

“My favorite thing is certainly not dead-heading petunias,” Luke says ruefully of his work to remove spent blooms, “but I get kind of excited when I see a plant has rooted in the pot because that means something you have raised is now ready to sell.” He remembers that five days before the grand opening, it didn’t look like any of the marigolds would be ready. “But then, the grand opening came, and they had rooted in the pot!”

He already is at work on the fall season. “I went through the catalog and ordered 500 mum cuttings in six different colors,” Luke says. Likewise, Sandy is thinking about ways to increase sales. “We are really off the beaten path. So we have to figure out how to get people to come here or how to take our plants to people.” Sandy and Luke are considering taking their flowers – and other products, including Luke’s cards – to farmers markets in the area. “I think that would be a good experience,” says Sandy.

“You could certainly make the connection between this and being in foster care,” Sandy continues. “Luke is putting down roots and is starting to grow.”

*To learn more about Sunshine Growers or to purchase Luke’s cards, contact Casey Family Services at 203.401.6940 or [info@caseyfamilyservices.org](mailto:info@caseyfamilyservices.org).*





## A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR PARENTS ON CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN THROUGH PLAY:

# Play WITH YOUR KIDS

*Play with Your Kids* is a recently published book created by the Providence (Rhode Island) Children's Museum to support families in playing and learning together. This how-to guide encourages parents and children – especially those separated by the courts – to relax and have fun while learning how to interact in a way that is safe, enduring and loving.

The upbeat, easy-to-read publication, authored by Janice O'Donnell, executive director of the Providence Children's Museum, incorporates techniques developed by Families Together, a collaborative program of the museum and the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Families Together helps parents and children build communication skills and repair damaged relationships through shared play.

For all families, playing together is important. For those in foster care, play can take on a new meaning during visits with birth parents, because it's an opportunity for children to feel secure during a difficult time.

"We understand how stressful it is to be a parent, especially parents whose kids are in the [child welfare] system," explains O'Donnell. "There are so many 'shoulds' given to parents, the fun with their children can be brushed aside. This book shows them a way to let their hair down."

Heidi Brinig, a social worker with the museum, established the relationship between DCYF and the Providence Children's Museum in the early 1990s. With advice and guidance from DCYF social workers and administrators, other child welfare professionals and funding from private foundations, Families Together



was launched in 1992. Since that time, the program has served more than 800 families from all over Rhode Island. Referred to the program by their DCYF caseworkers, parents and children make a series of visits to Providence Children's Museum over a period of several months. Guided by one of several therapists on the Families Together staff, families engage in healthy play activities and communication necessary for successful reunification.

"The nurturing environment contrasts sharply with institutional settings or fast food restaurants where court-separated family visits traditionally take place," says Brinig, who directs the program. Families Together sees a family interact for periods of time, offering therapists and caseworkers a more complete picture of the family.

"The Families Together program has changed DCYF's practice by helping social workers better understand and engage in experiential learning with parents during visitation," explains Brinig. "A supportive

learning environment for family visitation helps parents develop a sense of their own competence and gain skills in caring for and managing their children."

Jim Gannaway of Casey Family Services' Rhode Island Division believes that the concepts used by the museum have created a balanced model that is valuable to all social workers and agencies performing supervised visits. "The quality and focus of visitation can have a direct and beneficial impact on achieving permanency for children," Gannaway says.

O'Donnell asserts that play helps everyone in the family relax and feel closer and more connected to each other. *Play with Your Kids* is a treasure chest of simple and silly, warm and wonderful ways that parents and children can strengthen their bond, express difficult feelings, learn to solve problems and just have fun together.

*Play with Your Kids* is available in English and Spanish. Contact Heidi Brinig at 401.273.5437, ext. 131.



## JULIE SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER

# Close-up

*For the past 11 years, Julie Sweeney-Springwater has headed up the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors. Members of the 21-year-old association are commissioners, directors, deputy commissioners and assistant directors of state child welfare agencies. The association functions as a collective for developing and implementing effective policies and for promoting competent child welfare practices. Sweeney-Springwater's background includes work in child welfare in the United States and abroad. She has lived and worked in Okinawa and has provided consultation in the Netherlands. A wife and mother of one son, Jeffrey, 13, she also holds the position of assistant clinical professor at Boston University, where she is the director of the Human Services Management Certificate Program.*

**VOICE:** *The New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors is well-known and well-respected in this region. Could you tell us about its history and purpose?*

**SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:** The association is a consortium of the leadership of the six state government agencies providing child welfare services in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Public child welfare agencies in New England are state funded and administered. Member agencies provide a variety of programs to children and families; however, each agency has a different functional design. While all are mandated to provide child protection services, several provide mental health and juvenile justice services. Connecticut also provides substance abuse services to vulnerable children and families.

**VOICE:** *What is the purpose and work of the association?*

**SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:** It's an ongoing forum for members, staff and guests to:

- Share information pertinent to policy, practice and operational issues
- Identify economic, social and political trends that may impact service delivery
- Discuss research, funding or shifts in approach that may affect practice
- Create networks among staff counterparts in member agencies
- Form linkages with regional and national groups that share similar goals
- Generate communication between agencies
- Help strengthen agency and staff capacity

**VOICE:** *How does the association accomplish those objectives?*

**SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:** We follow a multi-part strategy, including association meetings. These meetings focus on topics agreed upon through member consensus; are held quarterly in locations throughout New England; and are attended by members,

agency staff, guests and speakers. In the last year, topics have included permanency for older youth, the recommendations of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, child welfare financing options and judicial issues.

Twice a year, we publish *Common Ground*, the association newspaper. It features articles on innovative programs, research, practices and new legislation and is distributed to a readership of approximately 8,000.

We also operate the New England Child Welfare Training Directors Association, which is composed of the six state agency training directors and the directors of IV-E partnerships in five New England states. The training association holds two meetings per year to explore the development, delivery and evaluation of training and professional development programs for agency staff, as well as foster and adoptive parents.

Jointly convened conferences have been sponsored by the association in collaboration with several partners. Sessions have focused on transitioning youth in foster care to independence; exploring collaborations



between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and child welfare agencies; re-engineering foster care systems; and enhancing the science of early childhood development. Not long ago, we joined Casey Family Services in co-hosting a roundtable on the Pew Commission's blueprint for reform.

*VOICE: Where are you located?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* Since its start, the association has been housed at the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston. In 1984, the commissioners met at the center to work on a federally funded project. They found the experience both productive and enjoyable and decided to find a way to keep the contact and collaboration among the managers of the state departments going. The center agreed to provide the home.

*VOICE: How did you decide to come to the association?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* My background is in public child welfare, which always has been my passion. While working at the Massachusetts Department of Social Services in the 1980s, I first learned of the association. When I later joined the association's training directors' group, I became even more familiar with the organization's value. In 1994, I graduated with my Master's of Social Work from Boston University, and the director's position was available.

I believe in not reinventing the wheel. So when I came across an organization whose mission was to provide a forum for sharing information and perspectives, it resonated with me.

*VOICE: How is this association distinct from other associations in child welfare?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* I have yet to come across one that is similar. There are statewide organizations – in Ohio, for example, where county organizations belong to a consortium known as the Public Children's Services of Ohio. But we're different because we're regional.

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**ONE OF OUR UNIQUE STRENGTHS IS OUR ABILITY TO BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT FUNCTIONAL MANDATES ACROSS STATE LINES TO SHARE INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, DIALOGUE AND STRATEGIES.**

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*VOICE: Is there an interest in replicating what the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors has accomplished?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* At the annual Commissioners' Roundtable, an event sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Child Welfare League of America, people are always expressing interest, and I frequently get calls from organizations that have a national focus and would like to develop a regional membership. To some extent, though, funding is a barrier to replication.

*VOICE: To what do you attribute the longevity and success of your association?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* Part of our success is due to the fact that we historically have had committed and strong leadership. The current president is Massachusetts Department of Social Services Commissioner Harry Spence, an insightful and innovative commissioner and a strong advocate for permanency. Another factor is that the New England states are in very close geographic proximity. We can drive a few hours and get together for a day. That's just not easy in other parts of the country.

*VOICE: As director, what are your goals?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* I have to say that the association was very strong when I arrived, thanks to the commissioners and directors without whom the association wouldn't exist. Its mission was solid and hasn't changed dramatically. What does tend to change is the nature of the work in the field.

For example, the economy was strong in the 1990s, but it was followed by a very difficult time with a profound negative effect on state budgets. As this occurred, the federal reviews moved toward requiring states to meet specific benchmarks in the safety, permanency and well-being of children. It has become challenging to deal with these new priorities during times of fiscal restraint.

*VOICE: Did the association view increased collaboration with organizations outside of state agencies as one way of coping with increasing pressures?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* We've been strengthened by our work with organiza-

*“I see a greater commitment to delivering services at the community level. Our members are working to create community-based networks that provide strengths-based services to children and families locally.”*



*(Left to right): Sania Metzger, Esq., Casey Family Services director of policy; Helen Jones-Kelley, Pew commissioner; Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director; and Julie Sweeney-Springwater, director of the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors.*

tions such as the Kennedy School of Government; the Annie E. Casey Foundation, including Casey Family Services; and the Carlisle Foundation.

One of our unique strengths is our ability to bring together people with different functional mandates across state lines to share information, technology, dialogue and strategies.

As a result, the association has become connected with institutions of higher learning, foundations, nonprofits, resource centers and the like. On a national level, we're meeting with commissioners and directors of states across the country. We also meet regularly with state finance and administration people. For the last 16 years, we've hosted meetings for training directors of child welfare. We've had a very successful collaborative relationship with the National Network for Child Safety in Ohio. Together, we have held focus groups, reviewed trends, facilitated communications and conducted leadership training.

*VOICE: What new trends do you see in the field?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* I see a greater commitment to delivering services at the community level. Our members are working to create community-based networks that provide strengths-based services to children and families locally.

Frequently, the real challenge is trying to figure out how to work much more effectively across a variety of systems – juvenile justice, mental health and domestic vio-

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## BECAUSE THE PRACTICE OF CHILD WELFARE IS ALWAYS EVOLVING, WE'VE SEEN A METAMORPHOSIS IN HOW TO DELIVER PERMANENCY SERVICES AND HOW TO VALUE PERMANENCY AS A GOAL.

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lence, for example. Families with complex needs often present with a variety of needs and issues requiring more than a single response. For one organization to respond, a complex network is needed.

*VOICE: Has there been improvement in your view?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* Yes. For example, in Massachusetts and in other states, there has been a focus on domestic violence and sexual abuse, and state child welfare agencies have placed experts in regional child welfare offices.

*VOICE: Both Casey Family Services and the grant-making arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation have placed a high priority on achieving permanency, especially for older children and youth in foster care. Is that a priority shared by the association?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* I came into the field in 1973, and even then, practitioners and policymakers were talking about permanency. People always have been convinced that the best thing for children and youth is a lasting connection to a family. What has changed in the discussion is that there has been clarification – a kind of crystallization of the permanency options.

Because the practice of child welfare is always evolving, we've seen a metamorphosis in how to deliver permanency services and how to value permanency as a goal. I'm happy to say we're continuing to move forward.

*VOICE: Do you see continued collaboration with Casey in the future?*

*SWEENEY-SPRINGWATER:* We're looking at options for following up our recent roundtable on the Pew Commission's recommendations for foster care reform. That kind of collaboration with Casey working with the association and agencies is one of the most valuable forms of collaboration. This has helped us bring together stakeholders across the region to look at cutting-edge issues and practices – across disciplines and jurisdictions.

# LINDA GOLDENBERG

## BRIDGEPORT

## DIVISION DIRECTOR



*Linda Goldenberg joined Casey Family Services seven years ago as a social worker in the Family Connections Program, providing permanency planning and support to families affected by HIV/AIDS. Coming from a management position for a large New York City agency, Goldenberg enjoyed the opportunity to work directly with families again, though she quickly rose through the ranks to serve as a team leader and then deputy director for Casey's oldest division. Three years ago, she was named director and now oversees a comprehensive array of services and outreach efforts in one of Connecticut's most diverse and vulnerable communities.*

***VOICE:*** *In May, several youths from Bridgeport and Hartford had the opportunity to speak with Connecticut lawmakers about their experiences in foster care. How do you think the process affected these youths?*

***GOLDENBERG:*** It was empowering for them to share their stories, both the successes and the struggles. It was gratifying for them to know they were heard. I don't think when we started this project that the youth really felt that the legislators would listen to them. It meant a lot to them that the representatives and commissioner from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) pledged to look into their concerns. It gave them hope that people really do care.

More important, the experience was educational, and we hope it will keep youth involved in their communities.

***VOICE:*** *The youths consistently talked about wanting to be with siblings while in care. What are the challenges in this? How can we shift practice?*

***GOLDENBERG:*** Connecticut has not been consistent in maintaining connections to the family and siblings. When we place a child with a Casey foster parent, we make every effort to keep them together, sometimes two or three children at a time. However, there is a lack of foster families, and sometimes siblings can't share the same placement. If that happens, the state and providers, including Casey, need to make every effort to ensure that visits are taking place.

***VOICE:*** *What role do you see Casey playing in Connecticut?*

***GOLDENBERG:*** Because we are Casey's oldest division, I think there is a wealth of experience to share. As the direct service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey places an emphasis on offering training and technical assistance to our partners in the state.

In Bridgeport, we have offered a variety of training initiatives for child welfare professionals in adoption issues. We've conducted at least 10 training sessions for DCF staff, as well as for educators and other providers, to help them understand the unique issues around adoption. This advances the concept of permanency for youth. We are working with the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, DCF, the University of Connecticut and Southern Connecticut State University to develop a post-master's certificate program in adoption to increase the number of adoption-competent professionals in the state. We're also working with DCF and the University of Connecticut

Health Center to develop a statewide post-adoption program to support families using a model similar to one used by Employee Assistance Programs.

***VOICE:*** *Bridgeport is a very high-needs community within a very wealthy region. How do you think your community-based programs, such as financial literacy, are being received?*

***GOLDENBERG:*** Our tax clinics are helping return needed money back into the community. For the 2003 tax year, we helped low-income families submit 105 returns that produced \$178,300 in refunds, including \$68,645 through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). For the 2004 year, with 276 returns filed, refunds totaled \$712,473, of which \$131,621 was from EITC. These refunds can be the start of financial independence for some of these families.

We're the "Family Resource Center without walls." Our work with a local community group, Residents Addressing Community Concerns, is evolving. After three years of facilitating this group, with the assistance of the grant-making arm of the Foundation, the group has elected leadership and is taking on a life of its own. Most recently, members are advocating for a neighborhood park since there is no safe place in this particular area for families and children to spend leisure time. The group is establishing a voice for this community.

What we're really doing with these community initiatives is keeping children out of state care by strengthening the family unit.



## YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY AT CONNECTICUT'S CAPITOL

### *Someone to Care – a Place to Belong*

*Former and current foster youths are joined by Casey Family Services Executive Director Raymond L. Torres (center) during Youth Advocacy Day.*

Providing direct services to vulnerable families is the first part of Casey Family Services' mission and is a critical driving force for the agency. Equally important is the second part: to effect better public policy for children and youth in the child welfare system. On May 2, 2005, 18 former and current Casey youths climbed the steps of the venerable Legislative Building in Hartford, Connecticut, to share their message of change with lawmakers.

As part of Casey's Youth Advocacy Day, young people talked about maintaining family connections, especially among siblings, who often are separated when children are placed in state custody. Attending the discussion, led by state Representative Lydia Martinez of Bridgeport, was a group of legislators that included House Majority Leader Christopher Donovan, key state representatives, senators, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families Darlene Dunbar, Connecticut's Child Advocate Jeanne Milstein, child welfare professionals and state officials.

"If we're going to advocate for change and improve the lives of youth in care, we need to hear from the young people who are directly affected by the system," says Sania Metzger, director of policy for Casey Family Services. Six young people – three from Bridgeport and three from Hartford – were selected to give two-minute presentations

during the event, and a "support team" of 12 additional teens took part in a discussion with legislators. The youths were trained on how to craft their messages, listen attentively and respond to questions.

Youth speakers touched upon issues such as knowledge about their rights, postsecondary education, child care and the effect of multiple placements. But the focus of the day was clear: the need to stay in contact with family – particularly brothers and sisters – who often are the only link a youth in care has to his or her birth family.

One teen, Jessica, explained that although she was placed initially with her siblings, the placement disrupted, and they were separated. Since then, the relationships were severed when adoptive parents of two siblings refused to allow contact with her. "That's been really hard because it's my own family," she said.

Sixteen-year-old Dahanne told about meeting his siblings for the first time at a brother's funeral and the second time at his mother's funeral. "Not just for me but for all kids in foster care, we should be able to see our biological families so we can find out about our background," Dahanne said. "Why does somebody have to die in my family for me to see my brothers and sisters?" he asked.

Summarizing what was heard by all, Casey Family Services' Executive Director

Raymond L. Torres noted the importance of family connections: "You can do the best work you are able to do at your agency with life skills, but if the youngsters don't have a family they can rely on once they leave the foster care system, then you really haven't done a good job."

At the end of an open forum between the audience and the youth, one state senator – who had admitted to limited knowledge of



*(Left to right): Darlene Dunbar, commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families, and Legislative Program Manager Debra Korta listen to youth share their experiences of living in foster care.*

foster care issues at the beginning of the event – expressed openly that she had heard an important message that day. She learned that kids in care only want what all kids want: a family to turn to when the going gets tough. She promised to "put these issues front and center" when it comes time to draft legislation.

“So far away...”

# We Never

*Massachusetts Division Social Worker Vichenny Keo-Sam stands in front of a mural painted by the children from Casey's Family Resource Center.*



“Without learning, life is meaningless to me,” Keo-Sam says. She remembers a friend driving her along Boston’s famed Charles River when she spotted Boston University. “I want to go there,” she declared. She made that dream a reality, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in 1994. She finished out the decade by earning her master’s degree in social work while serving as a foster parent to five children and working as a day care provider.

Casey Family Services became her first job following graduate school in 2000. She mostly works with Cambodian families through the agency’s Family Resource Center, providing counseling, interpretive services, assessments and service referrals.

Keo-Sam and her husband, Phanath Sam, own their Lowell home and share it with their three boys, ages 10, 8 and 5.

She attests sadly that her most difficult life experiences were not in Cambodia: “The hardest part of being here is feeling that you don’t belong in either country.” Having left Cambodia at such an early age, Keo-Sam no longer feels a part of her birth nation. “In America, I feel like an outsider, too, because of the color of my skin and my accent.”

Reflecting back, Keo-Sam speaks of destiny, a kind of rhythm to her life. “My life is like a journey, and I feel that it’s orchestrated from up above. Someone up there is telling me what my journey is, what I need to learn. I feel that what has happened to me was all meant to be, including the people I’ve met and the places I’ve been. It’s what’s led me to my work here at Casey, as well.”

*by Gregory M. Simpson, Case Information System Administrator, Casey Family Services*

“I didn’t have the stomach to watch ‘The Killing Fields,’ ” confides Vichenny Keo-Sam, a social worker in Casey Family Services’ Massachusetts Division, about the now classic 1984 film. Living through the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians was enough. “When the Khmer Rouge came dressed in black, carrying rifles, in the 1970s, they told us no one was to remain in the villages.” Without a choice, her family moved into the jungle.

“To protect us from labor camps, my father hid us in the rice fields,” she says. At first unaware of what was happening, the atrocities became clear as Keo-Sam’s family walked endlessly through the jungle, sometimes up to their knees in mud, avoiding leeches, snakes and land mines. “I remember it was very scary,” she recalls. “I just held on to my mom.”

It was heartbreaking when Keo-Sam’s 2-year-old brother became ill and died during the flight from the family’s home.

Despite the loss and chaos, her parents and their four children reached a refugee camp on the border of Cambodia and Thailand. Her father wrote scores of letters looking for help and finally located a Chinese Catholic church in Brooklyn, New York, that brought them to the United States in 1982. Eventually, the family settled in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Like immigrants before her, Keo-Sam was determined to make the most of her new country. After graduating from Lowell Vocational Technical High School in 1987, she worked as a parent aide for the YWCA, serving Cambodian families at risk of child removal. During this time, she attended Middlesex Community College with a partial scholarship and started taking psychology courses.

## CASEY FAMILY SERVICES SPONSORS WEDNESDAY'S CHILD IN CONNECTICUT

Thanks to a unique partnership between Casey Family Services and WTNH-TV (ABC affiliate) in New Haven, Connecticut, seven children have found loving families willing to adopt them. Casey became the sponsor of "Wednesday's Child," a weekly feature about adoption that helps to find permanent, adoptive families for specific children in Connecticut foster care. "Wednesday's Child" profiles individual children who are waiting to be connected to a loving family. The heartwarming segments air every Wednesday during the noon and 5 p.m. newscasts.

According to Veronica Douglas, the segment host, "Wednesday's Child" went off

the air in November 2003 after running for about a year. When Casey moved its headquarters to New Haven, the organization soon began partnering with Douglas on a host of youth issues. As the relationship grew, the exciting opportunity for sponsorship developed.

Under the sponsorship agreement, Casey promotes the show, as well as general recruitment and other children and youth issues. The spots also are being used to promote the "One for One" foster parent recruitment campaign that supports a treatment foster care collaborative between Casey and the Yale Child Study Center.

"We hope to expand on the recruitment model we've created in Connecticut and explore similar opportunities with media outlets in our other division areas," says Lee Mullane, Casey's director of communications. WTNH is aiding that effort, distributing Casey's public service announcements to other New England stations within its LIN Television Network. "In this agreement, Casey and the station are equal partners in locating families for life for Connecticut's children. And that commitment unites us in making our campaign—and "Wednesday's Child"—a success in this state."

## BALTIMORE'S DARRYL GREEN HONORED AS ROLE MODEL

Recognizing his contributions as a role model to Baltimore's youth, Black Professional Men, Inc. recently honored Darryl Green with its prestigious Ray of Hope award. This honor paid tribute to Green for his work in bolstering and supporting young men.

"I am humbled and honored," Green says. "When you work in the community, in the trenches, you don't do it for the recognition, and you often think people don't notice."

The Ray of Hope awards are given to outstanding African American men from the Greater Baltimore area who have excelled in their respective professions and serve as role models to younger black men. Awards are given annually in the categories of education, government, medicine, business and community service. Black Professional Men presented the award on June 18.



*Joined by his daughter, Darryl Green, of Casey's Baltimore Division, receives the Ray of Hope Award for Community Service.*

"It is very special to be seen in that light in Baltimore by such respected men," Green says. "I've received several awards during my career, but to be singled out by the members of Black Professional Men is a true honor. This is a savvy group of men who are very dedicated to their community."

Since joining Casey in 2000, Green has worked exclusively with fathers, some as young as 16. He sees his role and that of his colleagues as helping to remove barriers that stand in the way of their being good fathers. Casey supports young parents through employment counseling, health and substance abuse services, education and financial literacy to strengthen their families.

Green used the awards ceremony as an opportunity to reflect on his own family. "I wanted to honor my parents and my wife," he says. "My mother showed me what service is. She was a foster parent and really developed my compassion for these youngsters. My dad worked at General Motors for 32-plus years but always had time to help others. My wife allows me to share my time. These are the people who taught me about giving to the community."



## Graduation and Foster Care

# View from Washington



by Robin Nixon, Director,  
National Foster Care  
Coalition

School is out for the summer, and my daughters couldn't be happier. It's been a long and challenging year, and we all could use some rest. We didn't have much time to slow down, though, because June was full of traditional springtime events for our extended family: graduations and weddings. I always think about young people in foster care when I think about graduation, especially graduation from high school. At a time when most young people are celebrating and planning a trip to the beach, many teens in foster care are wondering where they are going to live and how they are going to support themselves. Federal and state child welfare policy has created a perverse rite of passage, where turning age 18 has come to mean the end of support, the end of services and the end of caring rather than any kind of celebratory welcome to adulthood.

Federal Title IV-E funding, which reimburses states for some foster care costs, is available to cover foster care expenses for youth up to the age of 18 or up to the age of 19 if there is a reasonable expectation that the teen will finish high school by his or her 19th birthday. Thus, state policy has traditionally set the mandatory age of discharge at 18 or, alternatively, at the time of high school graduation. Many young people in foster care have found themselves accepting their diploma on Saturday and packing a suitcase (or putting their belongings in plastic bags) on Sunday. In other situations, I have heard desperately caring caseworkers tell a high school senior that he or she need-



### MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES ACCEPTING THEIR DIPLOMA ON SATURDAY AND PACKING A SUITCASE ON SUNDAY.

ed to fail at least one class during the spring semester so the student would be able to participate in graduation yet also stay in care because summer school would be required.

A number of states have tried to address this issue by extending foster care services to youth through age 20 or age 21. A few, such as Massachusetts and Connecticut, have gone even further by establishing policy that allows young people to stay in care until age 23 under some circumstances,

especially if they are in college. Recent research conducted by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago has demonstrated that young adults who remain in foster care until age 21 achieve significantly more positive outcomes than those who are discharged at age 18. This is common sense—the average American becomes economically self-sufficient at about age 26. Yet the vast majority of older youth in foster care still leave when they turn age 18.

When advocates were working with Congress to develop the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, the original proposal was to extend Title IV-E funding to age 21 for all youth in care. Unfortunately, this policy change was deemed too expensive for the legislation to have any chance of succeeding. If we look at the cost in terms of outcomes for young people's lives, however, not extending foster care seems the most expensive option of all. It's time to reconsider this alternative.

# MAKING THE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD



*by Ginny Stephan, Board Vice President, Foster Care Alumni of America*

Every spring, I scan my hometown paper for news about my alma mater's graduation ceremony. It's something that I take a great deal of interest in, perhaps because as a foster care alumna, I know just how difficult the educational journey can be for many of us.

A recent study of foster care alumni in the northwest United States by Casey Family Programs, an independent organization that shares the Casey legacy, reported that 84.8 percent of alumni who participated in the study earned a high school diploma or received their general equivalency diploma. That is quite remarkable – and is considerably higher than national studies that put the overall high school dropout rate at about 50 percent for foster youth.

Children come into foster care with heavy baggage. In the Casey Family Services Alumni Study from 1999, 65 percent of alumni who entered into care with Casey came from birth families with histories of substance abuse; 42 percent came from families with histories of criminal behavior; 43 percent came from families with mental illness. Eighty-six percent of alumni had been abused or neglected by the time they

**WE KNOW THAT A STABLE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT FOR KIDS PRODUCES POSITIVE RESULTS ... DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS, MAKING FRIENDS, STAYING IN THE SAME SCHOOL ALL ARE VITAL IN PROMOTING SUCCESS FOR THESE KIDS IN CARE.**

entered a Casey home. These are enormous obstacles to overcome in a lifetime, even without the added pressures of school.

After reading several alumni studies, I am convinced that one of several key factors leading to high school graduation is stability. Yet most foster children have numerous placements, and some may never stay more than a year in any given home. We know that a stable and secure environment for kids produces positive results. All children

need consistency. Developing relationships, making friends, staying in the same school all are vital in promoting success for these kids in care. When a foster child can stay with one foster family, he or she is more likely to form a network of support through friendships, teachers, coaches and mentors.

Another key factor is continuity in casework. When workers change, foster children may feel a sense of rejection. Many times, they do not understand why their caseworker has moved on. A foster child might view this change as one more person who thinks he or she is too overwhelming to work with. We know that foster children are more successful when they have a consistent team working to help them improve their lives.

A third key to helping foster children succeed is mentoring. Foster Care Alumni of America is now establishing a program called FosterMentor. We are doing this because we know that foster youth need foster care alumni and others to be mentors. Relationships do not come easily to foster youth, so mentors who truly want to share their hearts and lives and encourage these kids to dream are critical.

When we ensure that these factors are in place for all foster youth, I have no doubt that we will see the percentage of children who succeed in high school increase at my alma mater and at all other schools as well.



## POLICY CORNER

# IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE: AN UPDATE



by *Sania Metzger, Esq.*,  
Director of Policy, Casey  
Family Services

*A child may lose four to six months of academic progress with each move to a new school.* – U.S. Department of Education

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago and the university's law school recently co-hosted a two-day conference for legal advocates to share their strategies – successful and unsuccessful – for applying the federal McKinney-Vento educational protections to youth in foster care. Protections include a child's right to choose a school; remain in one's school of origin; enroll in classes immediately; and receive funds for transportation costs.

The conference, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and organized by the Juvenile Law and Education Law Centers of Pennsylvania, opened with an overview of a recent Chapin Hall study on youth in foster care in the Chicago Public Schools. The findings were disheartening:

- Children in foster care are two times as likely to be a year older for their grade than other Chicago Public School students.
- Students in out-of-home care between the sixth and eighth grades were classified for special education three times as often.
- Fifty-five percent of children in out-of-home care had dropped out of a Chicago Public School compared with 36 percent in the general student body.

Disrupted educational placements caused by changes in out-of-home placement often

prevent students in foster care from receiving timely enrollments, appropriate assessments and accurate school records, according to the Child Welfare League of America. Changes in school placements also remove youth from important peer and adult relationships and valued extra-curricular activities at a time when the child already is coping with the stresses of removal from home, family and community.

The conference showcased how child advocacy coalitions, and state child welfare and educational agencies have pursued a variety of legislative, administrative and litigation strategies to lessen school disruptions.

### *Legislative Approaches*

As reported in a previous issue of *Voice*, California enacted AB 490, which affords new educational duties and rights on behalf of youth in out-of-home care. Following a similar strategy, Virginia enacted Chapter 343 to address school enrollment of youth in foster care during its 2005 legislative session. Virginia outlined methods and encouraged local social services agencies and school divisions to improve educational stability.

### *Memoranda of Understanding*

Conference attendees learned of successful and ongoing efforts pursued by state and local child welfare and education leaders to work collaboratively to enhance the academic success of youth in foster care. Counties in Florida and New York, as well as the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut, are among a handful of governmental entities that have agreed to formalize their commitment to improve educational outcomes of students in state custody in a Memorandum of Agreement.

Regulatory changes at the agency level also are being explored to establish educational rights for youth in care.

### *Transportation: A Surmountable Barrier*

At the end of the day, the most significant barrier to extending McKinney-Vento type educational protections to students in foster care was the issue of transportation. For “homeless” youth covered under McKinney-Vento, transportation costs to and from a youth's school of origin are to be paid by the state and local educational district.

But agency lines of accountability are not as clear regarding the responsibility to pay transportation costs for a student in foster care – not even when a determination has been made that it is in the student's best interest to remain in his or her “school of origin” despite the student's new foster care placement being in a different school district.

A series of thoughtful questions emerged from the discussions: When students reside in rural areas, what becomes a reasonable distance to travel to the school of origin? Is there a way to incentivize the transportation responsibility for foster parents who may have more than one school-age child placed in the home? Can Title IV-E funding be used to cover the necessary transportation costs to maintain a student in foster care in his/her school of origin when in the student's best interest?

According to Mark Courtney of Chapin Hall, these transportation issues involve a small number of Chicago youth and could be resolved easily to support the education of children in foster care.

*To learn more about the Chapin Hall study, visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org).*

## WHAT IS ... A CLINICAL MODEL?

# DIALOGUE

*Sharing Perspectives on Research, Practice and Policy*



by Gretta Cushing, Ph.D.,  
Senior Research Associate,  
Casey Family Services

Not another school suspension! As Christopher's foster mother describes a recent episode that included yelling at the teacher, threatening his peers and slamming his books on the classroom floor, you wonder, as his social worker, why he is behaving this way. What is causing this? And, most important, what should you and his foster mother and others working with him do to get him to stop? The answers to these questions depend on your clinical model.

A clinical model is a theoretical formulation that provides guidance and information about what psychopathology is, what causes it and what needs to change in order for improvement to occur. It provides possible explanations and predictions about behavior that can help practitioners choose interventions and test hypotheses.

The medical model highlights the role of physiological characteristics such as neurochemistry in regulating emotions and behavior. The development of problems with temper and aggression might be understood as caused by a malfunctioning of the neurotransmitters that regulate this behavior. According to this model, the intervention must target the neurochemistry involved in impulse control and aggression in order for change to occur, and, therefore, medications would be advised.

In contrast, cognitive behavioral models emphasize the role of learning via principles of classical conditioning and social cognition. Imagine that Christopher's teacher had just announced that the next classroom activity would involve each child reading aloud for the class, a task that Christopher associates with humiliation and anxiety.

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### A CLINICAL MODEL ... PROVIDES POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS AND PREDICTIONS ABOUT BEHAVIOR THAT CAN HELP PRACTITIONERS CHOOSE INTERVENTIONS AND TEST HYPOTHESES.

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When he throws a severe temper tantrum, he is removed from the classroom and is spared having to perform the dreaded task. Christopher's temper tantrum is reinforced by its consequences because he has learned that he can avoid the task by acting this way. According to this model, Christopher's appraisal of himself and how others perceive him in that situation also play a role, and his perceptions may be based on faulty beliefs or distortions. Imagine he believes that others think he is stupid when he reads aloud, and that thought results in his feelings of humiliation and anxiety. In order for change to occur, interventions that address both the environmental contingencies of the temper tantrum and the cognitive distortions that underlie Christopher's behavior are indicated.

Family systems models emphasize the role of the family relational context. Imagine that Christopher's outburst results in an otherwise estranged foster father coming back to the family home to help out, or perhaps his foster mother, who spends hours grieving the absence of her husband, is temporarily distracted and thus is attentive when she comes to the school to meet with Christopher, his teachers and her husband. According to this model, Christopher's temper tantrums serve a purpose for the family, and this function needs to be addressed in order for Christopher's behavior to change.

Because behavior is influenced by so many elements, more than one clinical model may be useful. Christopher may reduce his outbursts if his foster mother attends to him during times when he is behaving in a positive way or if his foster father schedules time to be involved with him on a regular basis. His behavior might improve if he begins to perceive reading aloud in class as less threatening or if he learns that a consequence of the tantrum will not include a reprieve from the task. He may benefit from medication that improves his ability to control his impulsiveness. Each of these hypotheses was generated by reflecting on Christopher's problems and a specific clinical model. In this way, clinical models can be useful tools for considering the multifaceted nature of emotional and behavioral problems among youth and in choosing interventions most likely to result in change.

# Resource

# Corner

## Reviews

### *Youth Who Run Away from Substitute Care*

The plight of adolescents who run away from state care has received increased attention in recent years. The Chapin Hall Center for Children has conducted the largest study to date of this population, including analysis of 14,000 youths and interviews with foster parents and child welfare professionals. This report focuses on trends in runaway behavior over time, the characteristics of runaways and their self-reported reasons for running. A number of factors are associated with the likelihood that a youth would run: age, race, gender, mental illness, substance abuse, placement type and stability, and the presence of a youth's sibling in the home. An issues brief also offers recommendations to reduce runaway behavior for children in care.

A web conference, "Missing from the Child Welfare System: Runaways and Others," associated with the March 2005 report, also includes audio and PowerPoint presentations by Mark Courtney, lead author of the study; Caren Kaplan from the Child Welfare League of America; and Bryan Samuels, director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

To download the report and view the web conference, visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org).

### *A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood*

This comprehensive paper, published by Casey Family Services, examines the need to assure that all youth in foster care have both family relationships they can count on for a lifetime and the skills that prepare them to navigate the adult world. "A Call to Action"



establishes an integrated and customized practice framework along with specific indicators of change for youth, families and the child welfare system. Lauren Frey, project manager with the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, was the primary author and collaborated with staff from the grant-making arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the California Permanency for Youth Project, Casey Family Programs and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

To review the paper, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).

### *Asking the Right Questions: A Judicial Checklist on Education*

This questionnaire provides a field-tested checklist that juvenile and family court judges can use to make inquiries regarding the educational needs of foster children and youth who are under their jurisdiction. Developed by Casey Family Programs, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and Team Child, the checklist will assist judges in positively impacting the educational outcomes of these youth and helping to prepare them for adulthood.

To learn more, visit [www.ncjfcj.org](http://www.ncjfcj.org).

### *Adopte1.org*

This past spring, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched the first national public service campaign in Spanish to encourage the adoption of children in foster care. Currently, about 523,000 children are in foster care in the United States, including 91,000 of Hispanic origin. Of these youths, approximately 16,000 are eligible for adoption. To support recruitment efforts in this growing community, the Collaboration to AdoptUSKids launched Adopte1.org, a Spanish-language version of Adoptuskids.org, to help guide prospective adoptive parents through the adoption process.

Visit the website and view the public service announcements at [www.adopte1.org](http://www.adopte1.org).

### *Assessing the New Federalism: Eight Years Later*

Assessing the New Federalism is a multi-year Urban Institute project, funded in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and designed to analyze the transfer of responsibility for social programs from the federal government to the states, focusing primarily on health care, income security, employment and social services. "Assessing the New Federalism: Eight Years Later" synthesizes much of what the project has learned so far through an intensive research effort, including a national survey of 40,000 American families, case studies, budgetary analysis and a database of evolving state welfare rules. These findings offer a comprehensive picture of those leaving welfare and provide answers to questions about how well states have responded to federal reforms.

To view the full report, visit [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org).

# What the Media Say

# Media

## *National Foster Care Month*

National Foster Care Month promotes awareness of the foster care system and encourages people to get involved as foster parents, mentors and volunteers. It also honors the thousands of foster parents who have made a difference in the lives of children. For more information, visit [www.fostercaremonth.org](http://www.fostercaremonth.org).

“The Intelligence Report”  
*Parade Magazine*  
May 8, 2005

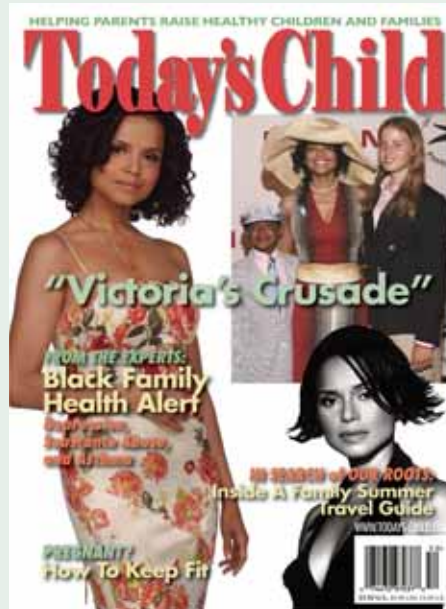
## *A Loving Home in Maine*

*Parents* readers Ellen and Bill County of Auburn, Maine, have adopted six foster children over the past 16 years: Billy, 18; Rose, 17; Albert, 12; Tyler, 8; Rylee, 7; and Joshua, 5. “We became foster parents after being married for only one year,” Ellen says. “We fell in love with each child who came into our lives, and we wanted to provide each one with a permanent and loving home.”

“The Power of Parents”  
*Parents Magazine*  
May 2005

## *Hispanic Children in Foster Care*

“In the last 10 years, we have experienced an increase in the number of children coming into the foster care system, which is why we are encouraging Hispanic families to help us by providing the stability of a home. In the United States right now, there are 91,000 foster children who are Hispanic, and, whenever possible, we want to place



these children with Hispanic families who can help them maintain their language and culture.”

Raymond L. Torres  
Executive Director, Casey Family Services  
Univision Network  
May 16, 2005

## *Graduating from High School*

When Becky Downs used to get angry, it was impossible to reason with her. ... Yesterday, Downs graduated from Merrimack Valley High School. She was accepted at every college she applied to. ... Downs credits Casey Family Services with getting her through those tough years. It wasn't until she was paired with [Donna] Duclos, a foster parent, that her behavior began changing. She was 16 when she went to Andover [Massachusetts] to live with Duclos, and Duclos made it clear in no

uncertain terms that nothing Downs did was going to make Duclos give her up.

*Concord Monitor*  
June 19, 2005

## *Casey as a Support System for Parents*

Casey was there for Jacqueline Barrows and her husband Tony when they decided to join the ranks of African American foster parents seven years ago. “My support comes from Casey,” she says, noting some of the challenges of parenting foster children with special needs—mostly emotional—that develop after the traumatic experiences they go through. “It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of patience, it takes a lot of work and it's something you've got to really dedicate yourself to—it's almost a full-time job within itself.” But the Barrowses say the work is worth it, and Casey Family Services is there to ease the burden.

*Today's Child Magazine*  
Summer 2005

## *Advocate and Actress*

“I am an advocate and an activist, and that is unavoidable for me. I saw so much injustice as a child, and I never forgot. ... I am wired in a way that I will never stop working in this field of foster care and adoption.”

Victoria Rowell  
National Spokesperson, Casey Family Services  
*Today's Child Magazine*  
Summer 2005

# 2005: Important Dates

## August

### August 7-13

14th Biennial IFCO World Conference  
 “To Honor the Child  
 (from Birth through Independence)”  
 International Foster Care Organization  
 and Partners in Foster Care  
 Madison, Wisconsin  
[www.fostering.us](http://www.fostering.us)

### August 23-25

2005 Meeting of States and Tribes  
 “Cultivating Change: New Approaches to  
 Improve Outcomes in Child Welfare”  
 Hyatt Regency Crystal City  
 Arlington, Virginia  
 Children’s Bureau/USDHHS  
[www.statetribemeeting.com](http://www.statetribemeeting.com)

### August 25-28

NACC National Children’s Law  
 Conference  
 National Association of Counsel for  
 Children  
 Los Angeles, California  
[www.naccchildlaw.org](http://www.naccchildlaw.org)

## August

### August 26-28

2005 Youth Leadership Conference  
 National Child Welfare Resource Center  
 for Youth Development  
 Glorieta, New Mexico  
[www.nrcys.ou.edu](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu)

## September

### September 19-23

Child Forensic Interview Clinic  
 American Professional Society on the  
 Abuse of Children  
 Portsmouth, Virginia  
[www.apsac.org](http://www.apsac.org)

### September 21-24

National Independent Living Conference  
 “Growing Pains”  
 National Independent Living Association  
 Atlanta, Georgia  
[www.danielkids.org](http://www.danielkids.org)

## September

### September 28-30

New England Regional Training  
 Conference  
 “Sparking a Renaissance: Making Children  
 a National Priority”  
 Child Welfare League of America  
 Providence, Rhode Island  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

## October

### October 3-6

Mid-Atlantic Conference on Child  
 Abuse & Neglect  
 The Maryland Children’s Alliance  
 Ocean City, Maryland  
[www.mcaca.org](http://www.mcaca.org)

### October 17-19

2005 National Public Agency Roundtable  
 “Accreditation: The Path to Excellence”  
 Council on Accreditation  
 Little Rock, Arkansas  
[www.coanet.org](http://www.coanet.org)

## October

### October 27

Connecticut Conference on  
 Families Affected by HIV/AIDS  
 “Hear These Voices”  
 Casey Family Services  
 The Trumbull Marriott  
 Trumbull, Connecticut  
[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)

## November

### November 14-15

“It’s My Life” Youth Conference  
 The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey  
 Family Services, Casey Family Programs  
 and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities  
 Initiative  
 Baltimore, Maryland  
[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)

### November 19

National Adoption Day  
[www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org)

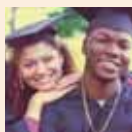


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# Voice

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*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 arm 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 quality 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 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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