



THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

*Winter 2009 Volume Ten Issue One*

## *Financial Stability for Families, Stronger Outcomes for Children*



*Landmark child welfare  
legislation promotes lifelong  
families for youth in care*

*FosterClub All-Stars create  
change through personal  
stories*

*United Way President &  
CEO talks family  
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times*

*National Adoption Day  
builds momentum toward  
permanence*



## *From the Executive Director's Desk*

*The signs are everywhere, whether at the grocery store, the gas pump, or the checkbook. The cost of living in America is increasing, while the value of wages and personal assets fall. As the troubles of Wall Street burden those living on Main Street, the challenges of the nation's already vulnerable children and families grow perilously worse. Cash-strapped government agencies at all levels will have to make difficult decisions about whom and how to help those in greatest need for services and supports.*

*This edition of Voice focuses on the critical issue of stability for children. We know that financial difficulties can lead to sometimes unmanageable stress for families and can be at the root of children entering foster care. Poverty also can be a cause of safety risks to children that result in findings of child neglect. To help families build a base of financial security, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, including Casey Family Services, is investing in initiatives that strengthen families, including Rural Family Economic Success and the Financial Stability Partnership with the United Way of America. When families can provide for themselves with community supports, children are more likely to remain at home and achieve more positive outcomes.*

*In addition to these pocketbook issues, the Casey Foundation is also promoting the stability and continuity of family relationships for children and youth in foster care. We do this through the direct service work of Casey Family Services and our leadership within national campaigns aimed at building public will for children in need of families. Although National Adoption Day and federal adoption incentives have contributed to a dramatic increase of children adopted from foster care in the past decade, the number of children freed for adoption is increasing, challenging us all to find the adoptive families these youngsters so need and deserve.*

*Despite the challenges in the economy and in the foster care ranks, there are strong signs of hope. Last month, President George W. Bush signed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. This landmark legislation will promote permanent families for children in foster care through relative guardianship and adoption and improve access to education and health care. It also offers to American Indian tribes, for the first time, direct access to federal child welfare funding.*

*As we enter this holiday season, I wish you and your family the best and I invite you to consider how you might help those in need within your community in the coming weeks.*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raymond L. Torres".

Raymond L. Torres  
Vice President, The Annie E. Casey Foundation &  
Executive Director, Casey Family Services

Raymond L. Torres de Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services con Esther Ross, un pariente cual su hijo estuvo en cuidado de crianza antes de voler a retornar a su casa.



## Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo

Las señales se ven por todos lados, sea en la bodega, la gasolinera, o en la chequera. Se va subiendo el costo de vida en América, mientras el valor de los salarios y bienes personales van bajando. Mientras los problemas financieros de Wall Street pesan sobre los que viven en Main Street, los desafíos van empeorando peligrosamente para los niños y familias ya vulnerables. Las agencias gubernamentales casi quebradas tendrán que tomar decisiones difíciles sobre quienes de la gente de escasos recursos recibirán los servicios que necesitan y como se les podrá apoyar.

Esta edición de Voice pondrá el enfoque en la cuestión de la estabilidad para los niños. Nos damos cuenta que la dificultad de la vida puede causar presión a veces casi insoportable y puede ser la raíz de problemas para niños entrando al cuidado de crianza temporal. La pobreza puede ser la causa de riesgos de seguridad y resultar en el descuido de los niños. Para ayudar a que construyan una base de seguridad financiera, la Fundación Annie E. Casey, incluyendo Casey Family Services, se está invirtiendo en iniciativas que fortalecen a las familias; entre ellos se encuentran Rural Family Economic Success (Éxito Económico para Familias Rurales) y Financial Stability Partnership (Asociación para la Estabilidad Financiera) con el United Way of America. Mientras las familias tengan acceso a los apoyos comunitarios, es más probable que los niños queden en la casa familiar y logren resultados positivos.

Además de estas cuestiones del bolsillo, la Fundación Casey sigue promoviendo la estabilidad y continuidad de las relaciones familiares para los niños y jóvenes en cuidado de crianza. Se hace esto por medio de los servicios directos de Casey Family Services y nuestro liderazgo dentro de las campañas nacionales, a fin de alcanzar el apoyo público y comunitario para los niños que necesitan familias. Aunque el Día Nacional de la Adopción y las incentivas federales para la adopción hayan contribuido a un aumento dramático de niños adoptados en esta década, el número de niños listos para la adopción va aumentando a la misma vez, desafiando a todos nosotros a buscar y a encontrar las familias adoptivas que estos jóvenes necesitan y merecen.

A pesar de los desafíos en el campo económico y en el sistema de cuidado de crianza, hay señales fuertes de esperanza. El mes pasado el Presidente firmó el Acto de la Promoción de Lazos para el Éxito y el Aumento de Adopciones (Fostering Connections to Success y Increasing Adoptions Act). Esta legislación destacada promoverá familias permanentes para niños en cuidado de crianza por medio de tutela de parentesco y adopción y mejorara su acceso a la educación y al cuidado de salud. También se les ofrece a los Americanos Nativos por primera vez el acceso directo a financiamiento federal para el bienestar de niños.

Al entrar en esta época de las fiestas invernales, les deseo lo mejor a ustedes y a sus familias. Les invito a que consideren como puedan ayudar a las personas necesitadas en su comunidad en las semanas siguientes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raymond L. Torres".

Raymond L. Torres  
Vice Presidente, Fundación Annie E. Casey &  
Director Ejecutivo, Casey Family Services

“THERE IS NEVER DISAGREEMENT THAT EVERY CHILD NEEDS A FAMILY. ONCE PEOPLE LEARN ABOUT PERMANENCE, A LIGHT BULB GOES ON AND THEY WANT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.” – KATHLEEN STROTTMAN

## NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY: MOMENTUM GROWS FOR ADOPTION OF FOSTER YOUTH



With proclamations issued by the White House, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, more than a dozen state governors, and the cities of New York and San Diego, National Adoption Day observations set a new record in 2008.

In its ninth year, the national campaign – spearheaded by a coalition comprised of the Alliance for Children’s Rights, the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Children’s Action Network, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and the Freddie Mac Foundation – celebrates the importance of lifelong family connections for children and youth in foster care by assisting local entities in hosting and publicizing adoption-related events.

The Coalition garnered major media attention at the national and local levels, and a new television public service announcement ran in major markets across the country. The Coalition also enlisted broad support for its key messages, including the need for post-permanency assistance, from such diverse and influential groups as the

National Governors Association, National Association of Social Workers, National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of Foster Parents, more than 215 members of Congress, and the National Football League. In addition, the Coalition has partnered with the Children’s Defense Fund to reach out to faith-based organizations.

As a result of the partnership and its members’ work in communities throughout the country and in the halls of statehouses and Congress, the number of children adopted from care continues to rise each year.

“We wholeheartedly support National Adoption Day and are proud to say we’ve been part of its tremendous growth,” says Raymond Torres, vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and executive director of Casey Family Services. “This partnership has been invaluable in creating a national groundswell of interest in and support for adoption from foster care.”

More than 4,000 adoptions were finalized

on National Adoption Day, which took place November 15 and brought together volunteers from family courts and state child welfare agencies to expedite the adoptions of children in foster care. In addition, activities encouraged public support for the 129,000 children in foster care who are free for adoption.

Rita Soronen, executive director of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, founding member of the National Adoption Day Partnership, is humbled by the group’s influence.

“National Adoption Day has a tremendous impact on the children,” Soronen says, noting that more than 20,000 children have been adopted from foster care throughout the history of National Adoption Day. “Second, media coverage leading up to National Adoption Day and follow-up stories afterward energize and educate the public. Third, research conducted as part of National Adoption Day – for example, last year’s survey about adopting foster children – continues to inform national, local, and state policies,” she added.

### *Working together*

The national coalition, and the local and state organizations it engages, is a vital component of National Adoption Day.

“Coalitions are best when they bring together a wide variety of organizations to work on a specific goal,” says Kathleen Strottman, executive director for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. “The National Adoption Day Coalition is especially strong because its focus is clearly helping children find families.”

Soronen agrees. “We each bring a different element to the celebration and follow-up efforts that help communities stay engaged,” Soronen says. “Not only does it help to finalize thousands of adoptions, but the fact that multiple organizations are working together through the Coalition makes a statement about the importance of adoption.”

### *Support for permanence*

An important aspect of National Adoption Day is encouraging the adoption of foster children and promoting other ways to help foster youth achieve lifelong, supportive connections. When people learn about foster care and permanence, they are generally moved to action.

“There is never disagreement that every child needs a family. Once people learn about permanence, a light bulb goes on and they want to do something about it,” says Strottman. “You learn about all the foster kids waiting to be adopted, for example, and you think about what you can do. If you ask yourself honestly, you’ll find a way to take action. That’s how National Adoption Day got started. Judge Michael Nash from Los Angeles, California, said, ‘Why are all these kids waiting? Let’s open up the court on Saturday and get them families.’”

On the community level, National Adoption Day provides a focus for celebrating adoptive families and encouraging others to get involved. “As part of a community, individuals have even more power to change. For example, if you divide the number of churches by the number of foster children waiting to be adopted, you will have something like three churches for

**“WE GIVE POLICYMAKERS OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN FROM KIDS AND PROFESSIONALS, TO VISIT THE COURTS, AND TO HAVE FOSTER YOUTH INTERNS IN THEIR OFFICES. I LOVE BRINGING TOGETHER THE MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WITH THE VOICELESS.” – KATHLEEN STROTTMAN**



every foster child. When you look at it that way, it becomes a question of not what to do, but how to do it,” says Strottman.

### *Changing national policies*

Bringing the adoption experiences of individuals and communities to policymakers can lead to profound national change. “Knowledge is power,” says Strottman. “We are trying to give Congress the knowledge it needs to use the power it has to help others.”

“National policymakers have tons of passion and commitment, but they lack the face-to-face experiences where they can gather information,” she continues. “That’s what we do. We give policymakers opportunities to learn from kids and professionals, to visit the courts, and to have foster youth interns in their offices. I love bringing together the most powerful people in the world with the voiceless.”

### *Future of National Adoption Day*

The National Adoption Day Coalition has established – and met – ambitious goals. Within eight years, the campaign

achieved its goal of events in all 50 states. Encouraged by this success, the coalition would like National Adoption Day to become something like Earth Day, a day that is celebrated each year as a way to check progress and motivate people.

“We also would like to be a coalition that loses its purpose,” says Soronen. “We could celebrate what has been accomplished instead of what needs to be done.”

“Everyone involved in this effort – from the courts to the families – has been absolutely dedicated to National Adoption Day,” adds Torres. “But to find forever families for all children in foster care, we need more people to get involved. Our efforts already have shifted the needle toward permanence, but we need to do even more to keep educating people and motivating more of them to become lifelong families for these children.”

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

# FOSTERCLUB ALL-STARS: YOUTH VOICES FOR PERMANENCE



The 2008-2009 FosterClub All-Stars are a dozen “foster kids” from across the country who are dedicated to helping others by sharing their experiences and advocating for effective policies and practices.

These leaders – Christopher, Nikki, Cashmere, Katie, Wendy, Andromeda, Miguel, Julia, Brandon, Michael, Sade, and Naomi – are compelling voices for change. Each focuses on particular issues and experiences, but they are all firsthand permanency experts.

produced *Getting Solid*, a guide to permanence written by youth for youth. “It’s a great tool, and it has been a great experience for the young people who led the workshops and worked on the publication,” says Bodner.

FosterClub is taking a similar approach with “It’s All Relative,” which is about relationships with biological families. “This is another example of the importance of support after awareness-raising,” says Bodner. “If we are going to encourage foster kids to think about and develop safe relationships with their biological families, we have to support them.”

### *All-Stars are born*

The first group of All-Stars came together when FosterClub was asked to present at a conference in Montana. “We didn’t have enough staff or volunteers to host a conference in another state so I brought along young people who had spoken at our conference in Oregon,” says Bodner.

Right away, she realized the youth’s impact. “They were much more effective because there were no trust barriers between the youth at the conference and the young people who were speaking,” she remembers.

### *Influencing foster kids, adults, and policymakers*

Over time, other benefits clearly emerged. “The All-Stars visibly demonstrate that you can be successful after foster care. This is transformative for kids in foster care. The 100 youth sitting in the room think, ‘This kid’s story is just like mine. I can get there, too.’”

At the other end of the spectrum, “the All-Stars instantly changed the perspectives of the adults,” says Bodner. “As we have moved into policymaking, we have found that

*Above: Celeste Bodner, FosterClub executive director, and Nicole Dobbins, former All-Star and FosterClub staffer, at a recent retreat.*

tying the personal stories of our All-Stars to proposals really helps to forward change.”

The All-Stars also get better access. On a recent trip to Washington, D.C., 20 of FosterClub’s 32 Capitol Hill visits were with senators or representatives rather than their staff, an extraordinary number.

Other organizations have begun to realize the impact that youth can have on policy and people. “We think it’s fabulous that youth engagement has grown so much,” says Bodner. “But it can be damaging if it’s not done well. Young people who are going to speak about their stories need training before and support after the experience.”

Each All-Star serves for a year. They come to Oregon and live together for three months of training before nine months of public speaking and other work.

In addition to founding the All-Stars, FosterClub is a national network for young people in foster care that includes Web sites, events, and publications “designed for youth, powered by youth, changing life in foster care.” FosterClub began as a “kitchen table” project in 1999 when Bodner created a Web site where foster youth could connect with each other. “I realized that the issues foster kids face are not bound by geography. It doesn’t matter if you’re in downtown Detroit or rural Washington. Abandonment is abandonment. The site was a way for them to learn from each other to connect.”

*To learn more, visit [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com).*



*Above: Members of the 2008 class of FosterClub All-Stars during the summer orientation session.*

### *Permanence and other issues*

In 2005, the All-Stars began leading a permanency workshop, “Getting Solid,” that consistently has been one of the most popular sessions at events held throughout the country, such as Casey Family Programs’ It’s My Life Conference. “When we started, some of the All-Stars had achieved permanence; some hadn’t – some didn’t even know what it was,” recalls FosterClub Executive Director Celeste Bodner. “After spending a year talking about permanence, three of the 2007 All-Stars went back to the people in their lives and asked to be adopted.”

In addition to the workshop, FosterClub

## NFCC NAMES KATHI CROWE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Kathi M. Crowe is uniquely qualified to be the new executive director of the National Foster Care Coalition. An alumna of foster care, Crowe has worked in child welfare, especially adolescent and out-of-home care, for more than 35 years. Most recently, she was deputy director of FosterClub, Inc. Crowe also was a consultant to child welfare agencies, including Connecticut and Rhode Island, for 18 years and taught in the Master of Social Work programs at the University of Connecticut and Rhode Island College.

“The National Foster Care Coalition has been essential to improving foster care, in terms of building public support and promoting policy reform,” says Raymond Torres, vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and executive director of Casey Family Services. “The Coalition is fortunate to have Kathi to lead our efforts to improve the outcomes of children and youth in foster care.”

### *The Coalition grows*

The National Foster Care Coalition advocates for the needs of foster children and their families. It includes child welfare organizations, youth-serving agencies, corporations, foundations, and youth advocates. Originally known as the National Foster Care Awareness Project, the Coalition was formed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, the Child Welfare League of America, and other organizations in 1998. In 2006, it was incorporated as an independent nonprofit.

An original board member of the Coalition, Crowe is very familiar with both the membership and the issues. “I have watched it grow,” she says. “The 40-plus members are good, solid organizations that are commit-



“THERE’S A LOT OF COMMITMENT IN CONGRESS TO CHILD WELFARE REFORM, AND THE COALITION CAN HAVE A STRONG IMPACT ON POLICY.”

– KATHI CROWE

ted and engaged. Everyone is on the same page. Each member organization does different things, but we come together around the common issues of foster care.”

“This is an important time for child welfare,” says Crowe. “There’s a lot of commitment in Congress to child welfare reform, and the Coalition can have a strong impact on policy.” The Coalition plays two major roles: sharing information with child welfare practitioners about what’s happening in Congress and keeping lawmakers informed about “best practices” that should be incorporated into child welfare reform and legislation.

### *Promoting permanence*

Crowe notes that there is broad public support and political will for foster care reform. “This means that more children will be able to find permanence,” she explains. National Foster Care Month provides a particular focus for the Coalition’s efforts to promote policies and public engagement around the importance of finding a permanent connection for every child.

This year’s National Foster Care Month was a partnership of 17 national child welfare organizations, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services.

“The Casey organizations have taken the lead on National Foster Care Month and its effort to create public will,” says Crowe.

“We want to expand that even further so we can keep foster care issues in the press and public eye throughout the year.”

“For 20 years, National Foster Care Month has provided an excellent focus for celebrating foster families, educating people about the issues, and ensuring that all foster children and youth have lifelong connections so they can reach their full potential,” says Torres. “The Coalition is essential to continuing and extending those efforts throughout the year so we can make a lasting difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families.”

“On the legislative front, we are pleased with the passage of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008,” Crowe says. “We will be working with our members to help implement the historic child welfare reforms.”

### *Telling the foster care story*

In addition to building political will and public education around National Foster Care Month, the Coalition is developing state-level teams which can be available for a variety of activities from legislative visits and letter-writing campaigns to public speaking and community outreach.

Crowe notes that it is very important to involve as many people as possible in foster care reform. “Bringing youth forward is especially compelling,” she notes.

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

# AMERICAN INDIAN CHILD WELFARE:

## CROSSING THE FINANCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVIDE



Daryle Conquering Bear, a former foster youth and Oglala Sioux tribal member, describes his experience in foster care: “I wasn’t able to participate in the cultural events that I had looked so forward to because I was placed in state foster care, far away from my community. As a result, I often feel like an outsider in my own tribe. During my time in foster care, I read books about ceremonies and events that I should have been experiencing first hand. Today, at events like pow wows, I feel like a spectator, not a participant.”

American Indian and Alaskan Native children, such as Daryle, are overrepresented in the nation’s foster care system at more than 1.6 times the expected level, and they are more likely than children of other races/ethnicities to be identified as victims of neglect.

The key to solving these enormous challenges is two-fold: providing appropriate financial support to strengthen current child welfare programs in tribal communities, and making sure non-American Indian child welfare professionals have the cultural knowledge and understanding to provide

appropriate support and services for this community.

### *The financial problem*

Federal funding for child welfare services in tribal communities has been a patchwork of finance streams, most of which were discretionary and provided little support. As a result, tribal governments have been significantly limited in their ability to provide services, often forced to react to immediate crises rather than respond to core issues that put children at risk in the first place.

There is, therefore, the need for a greater balance between programs that fund services after children have been removed from their families, and programs that fund family preservation services, to help reduce the disproportionate number of tribal children in foster care, according to David Simmons, director of government affairs and advocacy for the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA).

Recent data reveal that approximately two-thirds of American Indian and Alaskan Native children in foster care are placed by

state child welfare agencies, while one-third to 40 percent are placed in foster care by tribal authorities.

With two-thirds of the 563 tribes in America having less than 1,500 members, these small, interconnected communities have the social network and the desire to provide foster care for their children who need help, Simmons also points out. Almost every one of the federally recognized tribes in the United States offers basic child welfare services.

But with a preponderance of low-income households in these communities, willing families often can’t manage the financial burden of foster care, and governing tribes don’t have enough resources for needed social services to support foster families. All too often, Indian children are pulled into the state welfare system where they not only face unknown family circumstances but cultural mores that are far different from their own.

### *The cultural problem*

In addition to inadequate federal funding,



WHEN BIRTH FAMILIES ARE INVOLVED IN PROBLEM SOLVING WITH THEIR CHILDREN, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO REMAIN COMMITTED TO THE PROCESS.



cultural misunderstanding and miscommunications exacerbate the problems. Tribes, for example, may be unable to deal effectively with an Indian child welfare case when a state sends official notice. Confusion may result when state social workers fail to get a timely response, contributing to a misunderstanding about the tribe's desire or willingness to take action.

In addition, when a non-Indian social worker interacts with a client from the Indian community, both may misjudge the other's actions based on learned expectations.

The challenges for Indian children in the welfare system can be different from other children in similar circumstances. According to a reference guide published by NICWA entitled "Cross Cultural Skills in Indian Child Welfare: A Guide for the Non-Indian," "Indian children must learn how to fit into a bicultural world and how to deal with racism and prejudice within the dominant society. They must balance the teachings of their elders with the negative stereotypes and materialistic messages present in the media. They must cope with an educational system that often does not match their cultural values. And they must overcome serious economic and social problems on their reservation."

NICWA urges a thorough Indian-focused assessment of child welfare cases. If non-Indian norms or values are used to judge the family's economic, social, and psychological situation, the assessment will be inaccurate and lead to inappropriate interventions.

#### *Emerging opportunities*

Efforts today to support Indian child welfare programs follow decades of financially inadequate and culturally insensitive pro-

grams, dating back to the nineteenth century. Even in the late 1970s, for example, 85 percent of American Indian and Alaskan Native children placed in out-of-home care were placed in non-Indian homes or institutions.

In response to overwhelming evidence from Indian communities that the loss of their children meant the destruction of Indian culture, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, which was designed to protect Indian families and the integrity of Indian culture, while enabling tribes to reassume jurisdiction over child welfare matters. The first federal legislation on permanency planning, the Act was financially insufficient to be effective.

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**"PROVIDING MORE SERVICES WITHIN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES WILL ENSURE THAT OUR CHILDREN HAVE SAFE, PERMANENT HOMES AND STAY CONNECTED TO THEIR CULTURE." – TERRY CROSS**

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Tribes in most states are the only government that has authority to provide services to their children and families and to adjudicate child welfare proceedings. This is part of inherent tribal sovereignty, which was explicitly recognized in the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. Tribes have done their very best to provide these services and exercise their authority despite inadequate federal resources for tribal programs.

"Giving tribes direct access to federal child welfare resources is the most important

thing the federal government can do to help American Indian and Alaskan Native children and families in crisis," said Terry L. Cross, executive director of NICWA and member of the Seneca Nation of Indians. "Providing more services within tribal communities will ensure that our children have safe, permanent homes and stay connected to their culture."

On October 7, 2008, President Bush signed into law groundbreaking child welfare legislation, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. For American Indian and Alaskan Native children under tribal care, the law allows, for the first time since enactment of the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Program in 1981, the authority for tribal governments to apply directly for and operate the program in their communities.

For children who have to be removed from their homes because of child abuse and neglect, access to Title IV-E, the federal government's largest source of child welfare funding, is critical to their ability to find a permanent home.

The ultimate benefit of this legislation, therefore, is to give American Indian and Alaskan Native children the opportunity to attain the permanence and support that all children in this country are entitled to and need.

"Implementation of this law will transform child welfare services for thousands of American Indian and Alaskan Native children. Tribes will be able to pay for foster and kinship care, recruit and train caregivers, and most important, ensure the safety, sense of belonging, and well-being of their children," says Cross.



**BRIAN A. GALLAGHER,  
PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
UNITED WAY OF AMERICA**

Close-up

*Brian Gallagher became president and chief executive officer of United Way of America in 2002 and immediately transformed the national organization from a focus on fundraising to a commitment to community impact. A longtime member of the United Way system, Gallagher emphasizes bottom-line results and community change.*

*Gallagher began his career with United Way in 1981 as a management trainee, and, today leads nearly 1,300 local United Ways across the country. He most recently served as president of United Way of Central Ohio in Columbus, where he created a family housing collaborative that combined low-cost housing with day care and job training to break the cycle of homelessness. Gallagher received a bachelor's degree in social work from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, and a Master of Business Administration from Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.*

*In 2007, United Way launched its Financial Stability Partnership, a nationwide initiative designed to help low- to moderate-income individuals and families achieve financial stability. The partnership provides economic and educational support programs and resources to help vulnerable families increase their income, build their savings, and effectively manage finances. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a member of the partnership.*

**VOICE:** *What led your organization to address the systemic issue of economically vulnerable families? In what way does this represent a new approach to solving community problems?*

**GALLAGHER:** Fundamentally, we were making progress as a movement. Fundraising had increased, and local United Ways were showing progress on the issues they were addressing. But it was disturbing that against some of the most important social concerns in the country, we didn't seem to be making progress. We felt that we had to take a hard look at how we were addressing community problems.

Research conducted by Casey and others, specifically the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis, shows that in families with more assets, domestic violence and divorce decreased, chronic illness rates fell, and kids were more likely to stay in school and get good grades.

The government once offered a safety net, and the market created jobs, even for those with only a few years of high school or a diploma. You could sustain your family, and the social service sector filled the gaps. This social contract has changed as a direct result of the economic revolution: We moved from an industrial economy to a global knowledge economy, and it changed everything.

The government was changing its role, and the jobs that were created didn't allow you to sustain yourself or a family if you had only a high school diploma. The United Way asked what we needed to do in partnership with others to create stability for individuals and families.

**VOICE:** *Did this recognition come from the local United Ways?*

**GALLAGHER:** It worked both ways in our movement. We are big and small at the same time. Local United Ways are like individual social laboratories. We saw what issues communities were wrestling with and how local United Ways were addressing them, but we

also took a look at the macroeconomic social issues. That's why we have partnerships with Casey, national corporations, and academic institutions.

**VOICE:** *What is the United Way's role within the Financial Stability Partnership?*

**GALLAGHER:** We have the ability to bring special interests into collective action because we have relationships with businesses and organized labor, community- and faith-based organizations, rich and poor people, nonprofit organizations, and the government. We think we can bring like-minded organizations together to create a consensus strategy. Casey, for instance, was one of the earliest funders of the financial stability work in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) effort. It brought leadership and early funding.

“WE ARE STARTING TO SEE EITC AS A PORTAL INTO BROADER FINANCIAL STABILITY WORK.”

**VOICE:** *The country's economic outlook is grim. With the mortgage crisis, falling retirement assets, credit card debt at an all-time high, and an uncertain job market, how can the typical low- or middle-income family realistically build financial stability?*

**GALLAGHER:** We think you advance the common good in a community and in the country by creating more opportunities for people to live a good life. To do that, you have to focus on education, income, and health. You have to have a short- and long-term focus on all three.

Job number one is stabilization. We need to make sure the thousands of people who don't take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) begin to take advantage of it. Thousands aren't taking advantage of child health insurance programs, and we need to remedy that.

In the longer term, we need to make sure more kids stay in school, so that they graduate ready for the next stage of training and can start to build their income and savings, which will help them develop assets.

**VOICE:** *Family Economic Success has long been a major part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's portfolio in support of children and families. Promoting the federal Earned Income Tax Credit is central to this work. What is the United Way doing to promote this as an asset-building resource for families?*

**GALLAGHER:** Nearly four years ago, the Internal Revenue Service told us the United Way was its largest national partner in the EITC outreach effort. Local United Ways

are working with partners on the ground to promote Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites and direct outreach into communities. There are now 166 local United Ways that participate in one of those formal outreach efforts. In addition, about 300 United Ways are part of tax-preparation coalitions.

“WE THINK YOU ADVANCE THE COMMON GOOD IN A COMMUNITY AND IN THE COUNTRY BY CREATING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE A GOOD LIFE. TO DO THAT, YOU HAVE TO FOCUS ON EDUCATION, INCOME, AND HEALTH.”

Second, we launched an initiative with Bank of America. In the first year, we focused on 30 major cities to increase EITC outreach. It resulted in more than 200,000 completed returns, valued at \$270 million. Bank of America is increasing its investment over the next two years to \$2.5 million. We need to promote more aggressively the availability of EITC as an income builder.

**VOICE:** *How have local United Ways and community funders responded to the new focus on financial stability?*

**GALLAGHER:** Increasingly, local United Ways are working on issues of financial stability. As a next step, United Way has to assess its work in a larger context. Instead of having local affiliates approaching similar issues hundreds of different ways, we study what they are doing and develop a national approach. When we work that way, we take advantage of the momentum of the local affiliates in the field and they, in turn, are incredibly excited by it.

**VOICE:** *Will the Financial Stability Partnership function as a stand-alone campaign, or will lessons learned from the initiative be integrated throughout the organization's work?*

**GALLAGHER:** We will be integrating the lessons on financial stability into all of our work. The shift that we have gone through – from defining ourselves as a fundraising organization to becoming a community change organization – demands that approach. We will keep going back to our vision of advancing the common good.

We have been guilty in the past of one-offing things into an initiative. For instance, we worked with Casey in the past on early childhood development, and we didn't change the way we allocated and invested our resources in communities based on that focus. Instead we set that off to the side. We are not going to make that mistake with

“WE WILL BE INTEGRATING THE LESSONS ON FINANCIAL STABILITY INTO ALL OF OUR WORK. THE SHIFT THAT WE HAVE GONE THROUGH – FROM DEFINING OURSELVES AS A FUNDRAISING ORGANIZATION TO BECOMING A COMMUNITY CHANGE ORGANIZATION – DEMANDS THAT APPROACH.”

our work around education, income, and health. We are going to integrate each of our initiatives as a core part of how we do our work.

**VOICE: Including in the local allocation process?**

**GALLAGHER:** Yes. It will affect the entire organization. Local resource distribution has changed, and will result in changes in whom we partner with on the local level. We are incredibly serious about transforming to advance the common good in the communities where we operate by focusing on our three areas. The whole business structure and processes have to change.

**VOICE: In terms of financial stability work, these changes are significant, because United Ways are very influential in their communities.**

**GALLAGHER:** As big as we are, if we don't integrate what we say are our key priorities and focus, we minimize our impact dramatically. But if we change how we work, our structure, and our processes, we will have a \$4 billion enterprise that can have significant impact in local communities and nationally.

**VOICE: Do you foresee future work with the Casey Foundation?**

**GALLAGHER:** We continue to talk about what comes after the EITC outreach work. We are starting to see EITC as a portal into broader financial stability work. That's why



we are working with Casey and others on the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. I think you'll see us working together on how we integrate our work around financial stability and economic self-sufficiency into other areas, such as early childhood development and education efforts. It's my perspective that those issues are completely related.

**VOICE: If I am fortunate enough to be financially stable, what can I do today to support the financial stability of my neighbors?**

**GALLAGHER:** Three things. First, you can make a financial contribution. Local United Ways are molding these financial strategies into investment products, so maybe a donor gives to EITC outreach, job training solutions, or truancy reduction.

Second, you can advocate on behalf of policies that are focused on families who are in greatest need.

Finally, you can volunteer either through your workplace or through your local United Way. There are tens of thousands of people working as volunteer tax preparers at VITA sites across the country. So you can give, advocate, or volunteer.

*Since the launch of the Financial Stability Partnership, United Way has announced national 10-year goals in the areas of education, income, and health. One of these goals is to cut the number of working families that lack financial stability in half by 2018. To learn more about Goals for a Common Good, visit [www.liveunited.org/goals](http://www.liveunited.org/goals).*

## LESSONS IN LIFE FROM A TOUR IN IRAQ



Kevin Lapointe's hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts, means more to him now than ever. After returning in July from a year of duty in Iraq, he shows the kind of appreciation for life expressed more often by those well beyond his 21 years.

"Life is not very long," Lapointe says. "From seeing the culture, the little the Iraqis have, you can't give up on your life. You have to use it for something relevant. What would you like people to say about you after you go? What do you want to be remembered for? Those are the questions I think about and that's how I want to live my life."

That outlook, no doubt shaped by his military experience, was not born of it. Overcoming the challenges of growing up in the Lowell projects helped to plant the seeds of maturity – and gratitude – early in Lapointe's life.

The only boy in the only Caucasian family in the neighborhood, he was a frequent target of bullying – even being held at gunpoint – which caused anxiety and depression. But a family resource center established by Casey Family Services became a safe haven where Lapointe soon discovered and developed his natural leadership skills. His eventual success as a youth mentor and leader made the obstacles in his life seem less overwhelming, and instilled in him a

desire to lead by example, a desire he put to the test in his role as lead gunner in Iraq.

"I had three other people in my truck. We would be on duty anywhere from two to 20 hours a day in an armored vehicle. As lead gunner at the top of the head vehicle, my job was to spot any danger and make split-second decisions about the course of action. When you have to make decisions that can end people's lives – or make them safe – you have to make the right choices."

Lapointe credits the military with developing the confidence to make such critical decisions and the assertiveness to take any action circumstances required. With the rules of engagement changing constantly in the tumult of war, he relied on his perceptions and instincts.

Under such pressure, Lapointe admitted that he tried to think of his family minimally. With a grave practicality, he explains, "You can't do what we had to do and think about your family at the same time. But being away for so long and knowing the danger and stress I was under, I realized how important they were to me."

Even amidst the excitement of seeing his loved ones again, he had to work to readjust to family relationships and life at home. "When I came home I was afraid to share what I'd seen with my family. I didn't want to be different from what I had been. But I was still thinking in survival mode. I was

nervous and uptight, especially around loud noises. I came home around the Fourth of July, and that was really hard. The fireworks were very unnerving."

These kinds of trauma are common among veterans from the war. But what isn't so common about this young soldier is what he learned from his tour of duty. In combat, Lapointe fulfilled his role with patriotic dedication. But he took far more than battle tactics with him when his tour was over.

"Sometimes I thought of [Iraqis] as less than us," he admits with his usual candor, "but then I realized they just weren't as knowledgeable – they hadn't had the opportunities. The Iraqis will walk for days just to get books. They love to learn. We have so many kids who drop out of school. The freedoms we have, the mobility – we don't even think about it. Freedoms have become so much more precious [to me]. Things that take us a few minutes or hours take days in Iraq."

Looking to his future with the same serious desire to make his life count, Lapointe sees a clear career path in law enforcement, an area that will afford him opportunities to serve and to lead. "I want to return something to people who made a difference for me. The Iraqis had so little. We don't realize that no one else has what we do. We take so much for granted."



## Helping Economically Struggling Rural Families

As the United States copes with an unprecedented financial crisis, the struggles and numbers of the nation's working poor are sure to grow. In fact, a study from the Working Poor Families Project – funded by a number of national philanthropies, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation – estimates that one in four working families with children are now headed by low-wage earners, numbers based on 2006 data, well before the current economic downturn.

As the study reports, families and individuals are working harder than ever and still struggling to make ends meet – let alone move ahead.

### *Struggling for safety and security*

For low-income families in rural areas, sometimes one thing, such as a working vehicle, can make the difference in helping caregivers provide for their children.

Pat M., a 62-year-old woman, is the permanent guardian for her 14-year-old granddaughter Alisha in New Hampshire, a state with rental cost increases of more than 50 percent in the past two decades. Suffering from severe diabetes and unable to walk very much, Pat relies on having a car to transport Alisha – a survivor of parental abuse who had

### FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS ARE WORKING HARDER THAN EVER AND STILL STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET – LET ALONE MOVE AHEAD.

lived in seven different homes over the years – to an array of support services. These services are needed to treat Alisha's severe psychological problems resulting from the abuse. Pat also needs a car for such routine travel destinations as school resource meetings and medical appointments.

“The car rotted away and couldn't run anymore,” Pat explains. “If I couldn't get a new car, I would have to move to Manchester where there is public transportation. But Alisha is fragile and needs stability, and moving would have been devastating for her.”

Pat, who lives on state disability income, sought help through Casey Family Services' Family Resource Center in Franklin, New Hampshire, and was approved to participate in an Individual Development Account (IDA), a matched savings account that enables low-income families to save, build assets, and enter the financial mainstream.

“I wasn't sure I could do it, but I was able to put away \$425,” she says. The IDA was able to more than triple that sum through its matching funds program. With the money, Pat was able to buy a 1995 Mercury Sable with 100,000 miles.

“There's no way I could have stayed in Franklin without the help I got to buy this car,” Pat says. “Now Alisha can continue to go to the school she has gotten used to, and she's feeling safer everyday.”

Casey Family Services has used the Casey Foundation's Rural Family Economic Success (RuFES) approach in New England to help families become financially stable. RuFES helps families attain economic stability by avoiding the crises that too often split families apart. The RuFES strategies help families meet their current needs, save for unexpected expenses, and build wealth. These goals are characterized by the slogan “earn it, keep it, grow it,” which translates to increasing income, stabilizing finances, and acquiring assets.

For these economically fragile families in New Hampshire, Casey Family Services is collaborating with the Franklin Asset Building Coalition to provide a variety of services and support to people in need of financial assistance. Through this coalition and Casey's Family Resource Centers (FRCs), rural families in the area have access to:

- Information and referral services. In collaboration with the Franklin/Hill School District, Casey operates three family resource centers to serve working families with children. In addition to a range of services and activities for children and parents, including leadership and skills development for teens, FRCs provide financial information, counseling, and referrals to resources that can help with budgeting, first-time home ownership, transportation, and financial goal setting.
- Free income tax preparation for families who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit. Through the EITC, full- or part-time workers who earn up to \$34,500 and have more than one child could be eligible to receive a tax credit of up to \$4,300. But many families don't know they qualify, and

THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT THE WORKING POOR AND THEIR ABILITY TO PARENT EFFECTIVELY CAN BE EVEN MORE ENCUMBERED FOR RURAL FAMILIES, WHO OFTEN ARE DISCONNECTED GEOGRAPHICALLY OR SOCIALLY FROM SUPPORT SERVICES DESIGNED TO PROVIDE HELP AND GUIDANCE.



those who can claim the credit often lose much of the return to high tax-preparation fees. To offset these problems on a larger scale, the Casey Foundation launched a national initiative to educate families about EITC, working with Volunteers for Income Tax Assistance (VITA). By leading a VITA site at the FRC in Franklin, Casey provides crucial help at tax time for working families who qualify for the EITC, as well as money-management resources.

- The “Smart CD.” A certificate of deposit offered by Franklin Savings Bank (a coalition member) helps families save for college or first-time home ownership.
- The Individual Development Account. Casey is a community partner with a state-wide agency that administers this program through which income-eligible savers can receive up to \$6,000 in matched money (\$12,000 for two savers in a single household) for accumulated savings. Funds can be used for first-time home ownership, college, a small business, or for a vehicle purchase (up to \$3,000 for a single saver or \$6,000 for a couple).
- Financial education. Conducted by coalition members, these offerings

include courses at the University of New Hampshire (example: “Making Money Work for You”) and first-time home ownership classes conducted by CATCH Neighborhood Housing. Also available are programs sponsored by America Saves, a nationwide campaign supported by a coalition of nonprofit, corporate, and government groups that help individuals and families save and build wealth. These programs include the “Roll Your Change Challenge” and “Emergency Savings Challenge.”

Financial assistance can help families make significant gains. For example, Michelle B. came to Casey for help with her tax return. She was able to receive the EITC tax credit, and has split her refund into three accounts: a checking account to meet her current bills; \$500 into an IDA for her continuing education; and \$100 into a Smart CD. The IDA and the Smart CD qualify her for matching funds amounting to \$1,700 – a three-one match of \$1,500 from the IDA, and \$200 from the Smart CD.

Her IDA also requires at least 12 hours of financial education each year, which she meets in a variety of ways. She took the 10-hour “Making Money Work for You” class at the university two years ago, and continues her work online through the

FDIC’s “Money Smart” program, which provides computer-based instruction for people in rural areas who have little or no access to classroom training.

“Michelle was able to get her life on solid ground with this help,” says Cary Gladstone, community liaison for Casey’s New Hampshire Division. “With a job, some savings, and enrollment in college, she’s on her way to a brighter future.”

The need for these services is clear. From 2004 through 2008, Casey Family Services-sponsored and supported VITA sites have seen tremendous growth. In the past five tax seasons there has been a 187 percent increase in tax returns filed and a 155 percent increase in EITC realized by low-income families. In 2008 alone, these VITA sites completed more than 5,000 tax returns and brought in more than \$2.8 million in EITC tax credits.



## MAURICE AGRESTA, CASEY FAMILY SERVICES BOARD OF ADVISORS

*Maurice Agresta, tax counsel and vice president of public affairs at UPS, recently joined the advisory board of Casey Family Services, the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. UPS and the Foundation share a similar heritage, both founded by businessman and philanthropist Jim Casey.*

*Starting at UPS in 1986, Agresta worked on the company's international expansion. A tax leader for many years, he became the vice president of tax at UPS in 1994 and has been involved personally in negotiating domestic and foreign advance pricing agreements, large case mediation, and the trial, appeal, and final settlements of one of the biggest cases in tax history. He is a member of the American Bar Association and vice president of the southeast region Tax Executive Institute, the premier association of tax executives.*

*A champion of vulnerable children, Agresta also serves on the board of Foreverfamily, an organization focused on maintaining family connections between children and their incarcerated parents by facilitating visits and social supports for those left behind when a parent enters prison.*

**VOICE: What challenges exist in children remaining connected to a parent in prison? How does Foreverfamily facilitate these enduring relationships?**

**AGRESTA:** The first challenge is distance. It is common for states to imprison individuals far from their home communities, supposedly to make it more difficult to continue the negative connections that may have facilitated criminal activity. Unfortunately, family relationships also suffer. It is almost impossible for children, who clearly do not own a car, to get to their

imprisoned parent. If a child lives with a grandmother, aunt, or foster parent, it is a lot to expect them to drive 150 miles regularly. If the family doesn't have a car, the challenge is even greater.

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**“WHEN I HEARD THE STORIES OF THESE CHILDREN, I REMEMBER ASKING MYSELF, ‘HOW COULD ANYONE LET A CHILD GROW UP WITHOUT HER MOTHER AROUND?’”**

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The second challenge is bureaucracy. There is a significant amount of paperwork in advance of a visit and strict rules that must be followed during the event. This burden typically falls on caretakers who may find the process too troublesome to complete.

If no one helps, there is a strong chance that these youngsters will not see their parents for six years, the average detention for a woman. Can you imagine being 5 years old, and not seeing your mother until you are 11 years old? Those must seem like incredibly long years for these children.

Foreverfamily supports the children and their caretakers by arranging transportation, helping with paperwork, preparing kids for the actual visit, and offering social and educational supports throughout the year.

**VOICE: What interested you in this work with Foreverfamily?**

**AGRESTA:** I came into contact with Foreverfamily six years ago. I was serving

on the grant committee for the UPS Foundation, which helped fund the agency. At that time, I didn't realize how hard it was for a child to visit with his or her parent in prison. When I heard the stories of these children, I remember asking myself, ‘How could anyone let a child grow up without her mother around?’

This realization moved me to become more involved, to spend time with the kids and the staff. I wanted to make sure that these kids got a hug and some direction from their parents who were in prison, to know that mom was still there, and the relationship would continue.

I also think that this work helps the moms and dads, too. To see their kids once a month gives parents something to look forward to and gives them the sense that they are still responsible for their children. To not see your child for several years would seem like a part of you is missing, and that feeling won't help you find the right path.

**VOICE: Is there a plan to expand Foreverfamily beyond Atlanta and Louisville, Kentucky?**

**AGRESTA:** There was a plan to grow Foreverfamily nationally, and I was working with the executive director and other board members in supporting that effort. However, the realities of the economic situation have led us to alter these plans in the short term. Rather than expanding the organization to other communities, the focus will be on sharing and replicating the model with others, though keeping an eye on long-term growth.

Currently we are exporting the procedures and experiences from our 20-plus years of working with children and families to other

**“FOREVERFAMILY SUPPORTS THE CHILDREN AND THEIR CARE-TAKERS BY ARRANGING TRANSPORTATION, HELPING WITH PAPERWORK, PREPARING KIDS FOR THE ACTUAL VISIT, AND OFFERING SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.”**

organizations. In the coming year, we will be training agencies in Seattle, Washington, and Austin, Texas, so that they can function with the best practices that we've established.

**VOICE:** *When a child's parent enters prison, does the child go into foster care?*

**AGRESTA:** Often, it is preferred that children are placed with a relative, though that's not always possible, so Foreverfamily serves a significant percentage of kids placed in foster care. In these cases, it's even more important to help birth parents maintain a connection with their child.

As Casey Family Services knows from its own work in foster care, children with consistent relationships with important adults are more likely to experience positive outcomes. I look forward to learning more about Casey's focus on family permanence and how the lessons and practices in helping foster children achieve lifelong families may translate to our work with Foreverfamily, and vice versa.

**VOICE:** *What led you to join the Casey Family Services' advisory board?*

**AGRESTA:** Child advocacy and family support are close to my heart, and these passions come from my own experiences coming to this country at age 19 from Italy.

When I first arrived in America, it was a difficult time. My lack of English initially was a challenge, and despite my education in Italy, I had to take the most manual and difficult work to get through the day and survive. It took a lot of determination and effort to get to a place where I no longer struggled.

Because I did it for myself, I believe that adults can make a difference in their own lives and pull themselves up from difficult situations. However, I also recognized from my life that children are at a total disadvantage. They often are not in a position to help themselves, to get themselves out of danger, to remove themselves from poverty. For this reason, my charitable efforts have focused on children.

**“AS CASEY FAMILY SERVICES KNOWS FROM ITS OWN WORK IN FOSTER CARE, CHILDREN WITH CONSISTENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH IMPORTANT ADULTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE POSITIVE OUTCOMES.”**

Through my work with UPS and the UPS Foundation, I had the opportunity to meet Douglas Nelson, the president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who invited me to join the board of advisors.

**VOICE:** *How do you see the current financial crisis impacting the nonprofit community?*

**AGRESTA:** After the September 11 attacks, there were the same types of discussions about whether charitable organizations would suffer. And, they did in the short term. The economy picked up again, people found themselves able to donate, and public and corporate giving has returned to previous levels.



Of course, I expect charities will be hurt even more deeply by the current economic crisis. While September 11 saw a dramatic reduction in giving, it was the result of a single event. However, in today's environment, there is a new wave of economic concerns hitting every day. People are wondering if they are okay. There is concern about retirement nest eggs, which will only get worse as people receive their 401k and other investment statements in the coming months. As people worry about themselves, giving will decline.

**VOICE:** *What opportunities should nonprofit organizations try to leverage?*

**AGRESTA:** If Wall Street recovers initially and people feel that their jobs are secure and the economy will recover further, I think people will feel even more compelled to give to charities. With more empathy about the struggles of others, individuals will want to help those who still might have trouble making it. Nonprofits would do well to remind people that now is not the time to cut down on giving, but to actually be more generous, because the needs of vulnerable children and families – those already living on the edge – will be even more acute.

RESEARCH

# PERSPECTIVES

## SUCCESSFULLY REDESIGNING AN APPROACH TO FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICE: LESSONS LEARNED

Working with state agencies in Maine and Connecticut, Family Reunification Services at Casey Family Services created and used a research-based reunification program to help children achieve permanency outcomes faster, with more stability, and more safety. The results of a five-year evaluation overseen by Drs. Barbara Pine and Robin Spath of the University of Connecticut highlight a number of strengths for further practice development.

### *Building a research-based intensive reunification services model*

Casey's early work in Family Reunification built on long-standing experience in intensive case management, clinical intervention, and facilitated parent-child visitation. Reflecting on the successes and challenges at Casey dating back to 1989, as well as the states' own emerging priorities, a collaborative program design team assembled representatives from Connecticut and Maine child welfare agencies alongside Casey practice leaders and researchers from the University of Connecticut.

The redesign group reviewed research on child, parent, and service characteristics associated with successful reunification. Recognizing an oft untapped opportunity to improve the potential for reunification when families are first separated, the model refocused on early intervention with families experiencing first-time removals and employed a variety of services to improve teaming with families, other providers, and the state. Workers provided supported visitation services, educational and supportive groups including other peer families, enhanced clinical services, and greater access to concrete supports to ameliorate poverty-related threats to family connections.

### *Reunification achieved more quickly and with more stability*

The evaluation found that children served by Casey's Hartford, Connecticut, and Maine divisions achieved reunification faster, returning children home in just 39.1 weeks compared to 46.1 weeks through state agencies. In the two sites, 61.9 percent of children were reunified compared to 57.2 percent of children served by state agencies. Other benefits of Casey's services included:

- Fewer placements throughout their time in foster care, with only 35.1 percent of children with Casey experiencing more than one placement, compared with 59.3 percent of children in state care.
- Fewer reports of post-reunification maltreatment, with only 25.2 percent of Casey-served children being re-referred to child protection compared with 32.5 percent of state-served children.

### **EFFORTS TO BUILD STRENGTH-BASED RELATIONSHIPS WERE INTENSIFIED, AND FAMILIES WERE BROUGHT INTO THE PROCESS AS CO-PLANNERS WHOSE PARTICIPATION WAS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS.**

### *Applying the lessons learned*

The potential for reducing the trauma of extended separations, as well as the cost of extended foster care stays, spotlights a number of applicable lessons:

- Reunification rates are supported by timely and intensive services to families;
- Collaboration and teamwork among service providers are highly valued by participants as contributing to strong working alliances and positive outcomes;
- Standardized tools support comprehensive assessment, service planning, and case documentation;
- On-going assessment and reflection with participants during and after visits, as well as at team meetings, help improve progress monitoring and attention to emergent conditions;
- A dual emphasis on placement stability and permanency outcomes is important;
- Trained staff should emphasize positive working alliances with participating families and maintain manageable caseloads; and,
- Concrete services are a necessary complement to therapeutic interventions.

Since the completion of the evaluation, practice experts from the field have joined staff from the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice to provide local, regional, and national training and consultation. Researchers and administrators have presented and published on the promise of these collaborations. Finally, Casey Center staff are spearheading the development of comprehensive practice tools that integrate Casey research with other recent cutting-edge developments.

## POLICY CORNER

# FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO PERMANENCE: CONGRESS TAKES A GIANT STEP FORWARD



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

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 was signed into law in early

October against a backdrop of a worsening economic crisis in our housing, credit, and banking sectors. In the midst of this ongoing fiscal storm, Congress was nonetheless able to see the imperative of family connections and well-being for children and youth in foster care. The unanimous vote to enact H.R. 6893 was an impressive display of bipartisan and bicameral cooperation.

While “Fostering Connections” primarily promotes permanence through guardianship and adoption, it includes several key provisions to increase the likelihood that a child will grow up in his or her own extended family – when a return home isn’t possible. For example, under the long awaited “kinship guardianship assistance” provisions, states are given an option to receive Title IV-E reimbursement for a child placed with a kinship guardian. This reimbursement is at a matched rate not to exceed the existing state rate of foster care maintenance. Eligibility criteria require that the relative be a licensed foster parent who has cared for the child for six months, and that the child be eligible to receive Title IV-E based on the state’s AFDC requirements.

It is anticipated that the new kinship guardianship assistance option will increase the number of older youth and youth of color who achieve permanence since guardianship requires neither the termination of parental rights, nor legally impacts a child’s rights to remain connected to siblings, grandparents,

and other relatives – barriers to adoption articulated by some older youth. To prevent disincentives to kinship guardianship, this new law has incorporated an important legislative proposal advocated by U.S. Rep. Danny Davis (D-Illinois) and others that permits youth placed in guardianship after the age of 16 access to benefits under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act. They are also able to access Chafee Educational Training Vouchers, as are youth adopted at age 16 or older.

Of great significance are the provisions of “Fostering Connections” that have potential to address and reduce racial and ethnic disproportionality on the front end of the child welfare continuum and provisions that seek to close the disparity gap in child welfare services, treatment, and outcomes. These include the state option to receive federal reimbursement for kinship guardianship assistance, 30-day mandated notice to relatives of a child’s removal from home, and statutory authority to waive non-safety licensing requirements. These are provisions intended to maintain a child’s connection to his or her own family when removed from home.

Indian tribes are provided the option to directly access Title IV-B and Title IV-E funds or to continue to operate through tribal state agreements. Control over child welfare funding will increase tribal capacity to control the decision-making processes that can lead to removal and inappropriate placement outside of their family and tribe.

The major categories of reforms contained in the “Fostering Connections” law include:

- ensuring permanent placements with relatives with kinship guardianship assistance; notice to relatives; and licensing standards for relatives;

- reauthorization of the Adoption Incentives Program;
- the Adoption Assistance Program;
- Family Connections grants;
- placing siblings together;
- option to extend Title IV-E foster care, adoption, and guardianship up to age 21;
- improving the quality of staff working with children in the child welfare system;
- increasing access to federal Title IV-E funding to promote better outcomes for American Indian children;
- addressing children’s health and education needs;
- promoting educational stability;
- transition plan for emancipating youth; and,
- providing access to a parent locator service.

As noted by the Congressional Research Service report, the act responds to a range of policy concerns that have been consistently raised by the child welfare stakeholder, provider and advocacy communities, including those raised by children and youth who have been or are still in foster care.

The holiday season arrived early this year with the enactment of the Act. In many ways “Fostering Connections” advances the yet unfinished safety, permanence, and well-being agenda of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), but stronger policy reform is urgently needed. Such reform must address the need to support families, distinguish poverty from neglect, and provide front-end prevention and reunification services that will enable more at-risk children to grow up safely with their own parents.

## ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

# ONE CARING ADULT



by Nathan Monell,  
Executive Director, Foster  
Care Alumni of America

Resilient children are characterized by a common condition – they have the influence of a caring adult in their lives. We know from research that fewer than half of the children growing up in foster care can identify a caring adult who has stood beside them. This partially may explain the poor outcomes we too often see in the lives of youth who grew up in foster care and exited the system without a lifelong connection to an adult.

If you have genuine concern, you can have a lasting and influential role in the life of a child. How much does it cost us to encourage the spark within a child, to embrace the child that we see before us, or to create zones of safety where children know they are out of harm's way? How much good can we do when we make a lasting commitment to a youth in care? We underestimate our power to assist children and youth in care to overcome the adversity in their lives.

I love to talk to resilient alumni. Each of them has a story of at least one adult who cared.

Kevin Brown, who grew up in the Los Angeles County, California, foster care system, claims Carrie Wilson, his photography teacher, as his caring adult. After a high school basketball game, Carrie asked Kevin: "Are you going to college?" Kevin explained

he did not have a family or the money to go to school. She replied, "Oh, yes, you are going to college."

Just as a parent would for their own children, Carrie worked with Kevin every day for three months teaching him how to write essays, complete college applications, and apply for financial aid. She pointed him in the right direction and made him do everything himself.

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**"I FIND MYSELF SURROUNDED BY SUCCESSFUL AND RESILIENT ADULTS WHO ALL HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON – THE MOMENT IN TIME WHEN ONE CARING ADULT UNCONDITIONALLY SUPPORTED THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY."**

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Kevin was accepted at more than 20 colleges, raised more than \$150,000 in scholarship assistance and graduated magna cum laude from Clark University with degrees in both business administration and fashion design and merchandising.

For alumna Nicole Lavalée, her case worker Susan served as that special connection. "She was exceptional in my eyes," Nicole says. "I didn't show it every day, but deep down, I knew I was lucky. I have many fond memories of her, such as watching me graduate from high school and attending my wedding. Her humor and unconditional support could never be replaced. She is my role model!"

Samantha Jo Broderick has a hard time naming just one caring adult who made a difference. But Marlene Matarese was instrumental in helping Samantha Jo – who was aging out of the system after four years in care – recognize that the emotions she was experiencing were appropriate. "This is normal" became their shared mantra. Marlene was willing to push Samantha Jo, and used all the tools at her disposal to get her into Honors College. That experience gave the then teenager access to resources and perspectives she realizes now were invaluable. Samantha Jo also gained the courage to earn her master's degree and apply for a doctoral program.

Looking for a great return on your investment? I have never heard one adult say that they were sorry they invested in a lasting relationship with a child from foster care. Through Foster Care Alumni of America, I find myself surrounded by successful and resilient adults who all have one thing in common – the moment in time when one caring adult unconditionally supported them on their journey.

Ed. Note – This is the first in a series of columns by Monell that focus on permanent relationships for those who have experienced foster care.

*For more dialogue on this topic, visit the Foster Care Alumni of America blog at [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org).*

# Resource Corner

## *Recommendations of Youth and Young Adults from the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence*

How can child welfare better connect young people to family? More than 30 young people at the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence had a clear message: Include us. Their recommendations: redefine permanence to include emotional connections; involve youth in planning future Convenings; address disparities in permanency outcomes for older youth and youth of color; and continue permanency searches beyond emancipation.

To view the recommendations, visit the National Convening Web site – [www.youthpermanence.org](http://www.youthpermanence.org) – sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs.

## *A Reason, a Season, or a Lifetime: Relational Permanence among Young Adults with Foster Care Backgrounds*

This study by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago examines the supportive networks and relational well-being among youth who age out of foster care into adulthood alone. Key findings describe the distinctions that youth make between the role of adult versus peer support, the multiple roles and supports of inner-circle members, and the understanding of what sustains or threatens the permanence of important relationships for those surveyed. This report furthers a concept that familial-type support from a youth's inner circle is important and outlines implications for practice and policy.

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



## *Fostering HOPE: A Look at Foster Care in Oregon*

From filmmaker Ralph Cunningham, “Fostering HOPE” is a documentary that explores the heartbreaking issues too many of Oregon’s children are forced to face. The film focuses on Marion County, which serves as a model for bringing together government, business, and faith-based organizations around the needs of youth in foster care. “Fostering HOPE” includes interviews with staffers from law enforcement, social-service agencies, and the Department of Human Services, as well as foster parents and youth. Particular attention is paid to youth at risk of aging out of foster care.

To order this documentary on DVD, visit [www.fosteringhopethefilm.org](http://www.fosteringhopethefilm.org).

## *Evaluation of the Life Skills Training Program: Los Angeles County, California*

This Urban Institute report presents final process and impact study findings from one of four programs evaluated as part of the Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs. Impact findings were based on a two-year follow-up of youth in foster care in Los Angeles County, California, who partici-

pated in a random assignment evaluation of the life skills training program.

To view this report, visit [www.urban.org/children/welfare.cfm](http://www.urban.org/children/welfare.cfm)

## *The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation*

In America today, the gap between the rich and poor is the greatest ever recorded – larger than in any other industrialized nation. Millions of children are plagued by poverty, poor health, illiteracy, violence, adult hypocrisy, and injustice. As founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund, Marian Wright Edelman knows the suffering of vulnerable children. In “The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small,” Edelman asks what we truly value, and looks hard at what we can do to build a nation fit for *all* children.

To purchase the book, visit any major retailer.

## *Foster Care Adoption Awareness Toolkit*

Promote foster care adoption in your community with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption’s free *Foster Care Adoption Awareness Toolkit*. The kit provides ideas for awareness activities, media campaign resources, foster care adoption facts, and a call to action for community organizations and nonprofit groups. The toolkit features a post-adoption section and the Foundation’s *Step-By-Step Guide to Adoption*.

To order, visit [www.davethomasfoundation.org](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org).

# What the Media Say



### **Casey Launches Leadership Program**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Services have launched a leadership development initiative in New Haven, Connecticut, for executives and managers with the city's nonprofit and public sectors.

The Elm City Fellowship Program for Children and Families is a nine-month program that aims to increase the pool of leaders to create supports and systems that help families.

*"Program Helps Prepare City's Future Leaders"*  
*The New Haven Register*  
August 4, 2008

### **Granite State Moves to Limit Predatory Lending**

New Hampshire's legislation came about because the payday lending industry in particular targets people who lack access to those traditional resources and become desperate when a financial crisis comes along.

Free and low-cost services are available from Consumer Credit Counseling of New Hampshire and Vermont, the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, and Casey Family Services, among other nonprofits. Those who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit can also get an advance without waiting until next tax season that can give them up to \$140 a month added to their paycheck.

Cary Gladstone  
Community Liaison  
Casey Family Services  
"Letter to the Editor"  
*The Concord Monitor*  
August 16, 2008

### **Baltimore Focuses on Young Fathers**

Rarely are young fathers highlighted and celebrated. The 2008 Young Fathers Conference held at New Shiloh Baptist Church Family Life Center did.

"This conference is critical because it empowers fathers through providing resources and information that will increase their parenting skills and capacity," said Johnny Rice II, special assistant to the secretary for Maryland Department of Human Resources.

*"Casey Family Services Celebrates Young Fathers"*  
*The Baltimore Times*  
July 10, 2008

### **The Power of Mentors**

Mine is not just a foster care story, it's an American story. Anyone can achieve if you're given the right tools by people that cared about you. I was mentored not only by my foster parents, but my social workers and my ballet teachers. Whether sports, science, or classical arts, I was given an anchor and I was mentored and it was contiguous. When you give a child something to latch onto and foster it, anything is possible.

For me it was ballet. It was the scholarship with the American Ballet Theater and the Cambridge School of Ballet that really made it possible for me to study for more than eight years. What matters is that you give a child an opportunity to gain discipline because you can sink discipline into anything.

Victoria Rowell  
Actress and Author  
"Tavis Smiley" on PBS  
November 7, 2008

### **National Adoption Day**

This is a day when more than 350 courts are opening with all volunteer judges, attorneys, social workers, people who really care about these families and kids. The idea is to make it possible for everyone to come together on this day to speed through adoptions, to celebrate the love of families, and the power of family in these children's lives.

More than 4,000 kids will be adopted today, not only in all 50 states, but Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and Guam for the first time.

Lee Mullane  
Director of Communications  
Casey Family Services  
"Saturday Today in New York"  
WNBC  
November 15, 2008

For additional important dates, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).

# 2008-2009: Important Dates

*Voice* is published quarterly by Casey Family Services, the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, for child welfare professionals, advocates, providers, 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.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is 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 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](mailto:voice@caseyfamilyservices.org) or calling 203.401.6940.

## December 2

Community Forum  
“Educational Stability for Children and Youth in Connecticut: An Idea Whose Time has Come!”  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Connecticut Voices for Children  
The Lyceum Resource and Conference Center  
Hartford, Connecticut  
[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)

## December 3-5

Roundtable on Child Welfare Workloads  
“Time and Effort: Perspectives on Workload Roundtable”  
American Humane Association  
La Fonda Hotel  
Santa Fe, New Mexico  
[www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org)

## December 5-7

23rd National Training Institute  
Westin Bonaventure Hotel  
Zero to Three  
Los Angeles, California  
[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

## 2009:

### January 15-16

13th Annual Society for Social Work and Research Conference  
“Research that Promotes Sustainability and Builds Strengths”  
Marriott Hotel  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
[www.sswt.org](http://www.sswt.org)

### January 26-30

23rd Annual San Diego International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment  
Chadwick Center for Children and Families  
Town and Country Resort and Convention Center  
San Diego, California  
[www.chadwickcenter.org](http://www.chadwickcenter.org)

### February 23-25

2009 Child Welfare League of America National Conference  
“Children Today ... America's Future!”  
Child Welfare League of America  
Marriott Wardman Park  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

### March 8-10

Black Administrators in Child Welfare 2009 Annual Conference  
“Bridging the Gap for Our Children, Our Legacy”  
Black Administration of Child Welfare  
Renaissance Long Beach Hotel  
Long Beach, California  
[www.blackadministrators.org](http://www.blackadministrators.org)

### March 26

Fifth Annual Conference  
“Childhood Grief and Traumatic Loss: Restoring Joy to Children and their Families”  
Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
[www.ican-ncfr.org](http://www.ican-ncfr.org)



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

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