



THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

*Summer/Fall 2008 Volume Nine Issue Two*

## *The Possibility, Power, and Priority of Lifetime Families*

*National Convening  
advancing youth permanence  
practices and policies*

*Subsidized guardianship  
moving forward across  
the country*

*Honorable Eileen Willett  
reforming courts with a  
focus on lifelong families*

*Differential response  
showing promise  
in supporting families*





## *From the Executive Director's Desk*

*This is the time of year when many of us are settling into the routine of the new school year. Our sons and daughters are making friends, learning new and challenging subjects, and acquiring the skills needed for a lifetime of success.*

*Regrettably, however, another school year means a new set of challenges for far too many young men and women who are growing up in foster care without the stability and support of a committed lifetime family. These youth, who may experience multiple moves within the year, will be busy adjusting to new families and starting over in new schools – certainly not the foundation for academic and social success needed for future opportunities. For these reasons, and many others, nearly half of all foster youth who age out of the system do so without a diploma.*

*A bad situation in the best of times. For teens in the current sinking U.S. economy, it is a prescription for disaster.*

*Youth who are, or have been in the foster care system tend also to experience the juvenile justice system – in alarming numbers, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2008 KIDS COUNT Data Book Essay. For too long, this system has focused on interventions that effectively sever the family relationships that, if strengthened, might help these youngsters avoid delinquency and benefit from a lifetime of supports.*

*Of course, for too long, the foster care system has had a similar concern – focusing too exclusively on the safety of children, while not prioritizing equally the need for family. In May – at the start of National Foster Care Month and just before Mother's Day – the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services joined with Casey Family Programs to underscore the importance of family by hosting the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence in Washington, D.C. More than 575 child welfare leaders, attorneys, judges, policymakers, researchers, journalists, youth, and parents from more than 40 states attended. They came because they shared the belief that every child and youth in foster care needs and deserves a lifelong connection to a family. And today, because of that shared belief, we are part of a growing movement to rethink and reshape the way society addresses the needs of this country's most vulnerable children and youth – by focusing on the power of family in guiding the trajectory of young lives.*

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

Raymond L. Torres (izq.) con el Congresista Jim McDermott (D-WA) en la Convocatoria Nacional sobre la Permanencia para Jóvenes 2008 en Washington, D.C.



## *Del Escritorio del Director Ejecutivo*

*Estamos en la época del año cuando muchos estamos acomodándonos a la rutina nueva del año escolar. Nuestros hijos e hijas están haciendo amistades, aprendiendo materias nuevas y desafiantes y adquiriendo las destrezas indispensables para el éxito en la vida.*

*Sin embargo, desafortunadamente, otro año escolar da lugar a otros desafíos para demasiados jóvenes en cuidado de crianza, sin que tengan la estabilidad y apoyo de una familia comprometida con ellos para siempre. Esos jóvenes, enfrentando cambios múltiples al ajustarse a familias y escuelas extrañas – no encontrarán la base imprescindible para el éxito académico y social necesario para su futuro. Por estas y otras razones, casi la mitad de los jóvenes que egresan del sistema de crianza por llegar a su mayoría, lo harán sin diploma.*

*Es una situación mala en los mejores de los tiempos, pero para jóvenes en esta economía lenta en los Estados Unidos, es una receta para desastre.*

*Los jóvenes que están, o han estado, en cuidado de crianza tienden a encontrarse en el sistema juvenil de justicia – en números alarmantes, según un artículo en el libro de datos sobre jóvenes de Casey 2008 KIDS COUNT. Por un tiempo demasiado largo, este sistema se ha enfocado en intervenciones que sirven efectivamente para romper las relaciones familiares, las mismas relaciones que, si fueran fortalecidas, podrían ayudar a que estos jóvenes se salven de la delincuencia y tengan los beneficios de apoyo a lo largo de sus vidas.*

*Por supuesto, por demasiado tiempo, el sistema de cuidado de crianza ha enfrentado una preocupación similar – enfocando exclusivamente en la seguridad de los niños, sin dar una prioridad igual a la necesidad de los jóvenes para una vida familiar. En el mes de mayo – al principio del Mes Nacional de Cuidado de Crianza y antes del Día de la Madre – La Fundación Annie E. Casey/Casey Family Services se juntaron con Casey Family Programs para subrayar la importancia de la familia al patrocinar la Convocatoria Nacional sobre la Permanencia para Jóvenes 2008 en Washington, D.C. Más de 575 líderes en el campo de bienestar de niño, abogados, jueces, autoridades encargados de determinar políticas, investigadores, periodistas, los jóvenes mismos y padres y madres de más de 40 estados asistieron. Vinieron porque compartieron la convicción de que cada niño, niña y joven necesita y merece lazos familiares permanentes. Y, hoy por esta convicción compartida, somos parte de un movimiento creciente para re-pensar y re-formar la manera en que la sociedad responda a las necesidades de los niños y jóvenes más venerables – enfocando en el poder de la familia guiando la trayectoria de vidas jóvenes.*


Raymond L. Torres

Vice Presidente, Fundación Annie E. Casey &

Director Ejecutivo, Casey Family Services



# THE 2008 NATIONAL CONVENING ON YOUTH PERMANENCE



*From left: Youth advocates Krista Penrod, Iowa, and Mary Lee Kimmins, Tennessee, sharing their experiences during the youth plenary of the National Convening.*

## THE POWER, POSSIBILITY, AND PRIORITY OF FAMILIES FOR A LIFETIME

While child welfare professionals, and society at large, have long held that children need families to thrive physically, emotionally, and materially, the movement to ensure that all children in foster care have a family for a lifetime is gaining momentum. For child welfare leaders, youth, parents, and advocates, the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence – sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs – offered an opportunity to share experience, knowledge, and tools.

“The 2008 National Convening is one of the largest gatherings of practitioners, policymakers, and consumers focused solely on the need for permanence for older youth in foster care,” said Raymond L. Torres, vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and executive director of Casey Family Services. “More than 575 participants from more than 40 states and counties, as well as five American Indian tribes, came together to make permanent families for youth a priority.”

As evidence continues to mount on the hardships experienced by youth who age out of foster care without families and the number of these youth grows annually, the need to reform systems is greater than ever.

“For two decades, permanence has been this country’s official child welfare policy, but only rarely has it been our predomi-

nant and prevalent focus,” said Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “If we do nothing else at this Convening, [child welfare systems] have to stop pretending that there is such a thing as independent living for 18 year olds without family. We need to embrace an authentic and effective focus on restoring and recreating enduring families for every kid who enters the foster care system.”

Family permanence is a key theme of both the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs’ work with young people in foster care. Both organizations are dedicated to reforming systems and offering technical assistance across the country.

The Convening’s peer-led learning sessions and courageous conversations addressed the importance of raising awareness about why these youth need family, implementing practice strategies that help them achieve and sustain lifelong relationships, and promoting policies for system reform. In fact, more than 100 participants served as panelists and presenters during the two-day event.

“Our presenters really are the people who are doing the important work throughout the country, and we have so much to learn from them,” said Convening Co-Chair Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice at Casey Family Services. “It’s inspiring, and that inspiration is what is needed to create effective change for children and families.”

The need to impact policies and inclusive practices that support families and the issue of racial equity were raised as priorities throughout the Convening. There were multiple opportunities for participants to learn from policymakers on the national

level, including an in-depth session on the foster care agenda in the 110th Congress. In addition, during a reception at the Convening, the sponsors honored key leaders who are champions of change in child welfare: Anne Holton, first lady of Virginia; U.S. Representatives Jim McDermott (D-Washington) and Charles Rangel (D-New York); and U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).

Toward the end of the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence, participants engaged in a planning process with members of their respective county, state, and tribal teams to develop action steps that will advance permanent families for youth in foster care.

The planning session served to focus participants on the work still to do, as David Berns, executive vice president of child and family services at Casey Family Programs, reminded the participants.

“As great as the presenters were, and with all of the interactions we had, it is all for naught if we don’t go back and do something with what we’ve learned and talked about,” he said. “This Convening is a call to action. Our youth and young adults gave us recommendations; we all planned things as small groups, and moving this work forward is what the Convening is all about.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs already are planning the next National Convening for May 2010 in Washington, D.C.

*To learn more about the Convening, presenters, and resources, visit [www.youthpermanence.org](http://www.youthpermanence.org).*

"TODAY YOU WERE PART OF OUR CONVERSATION, NOW GO BACK TO YOUR STATES AND HAVE THIS CONVERSATION WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE THERE. INCLUDE YOUTH, ENCOURAGE AND EMPOWER THEM, BRING THEM TO THE TABLE, AND YOU WILL MAKE CHANGES. THEY WILL HELP YOU MAKE THE CHANGES." – MARY LEE KIMMINS

## YOUTH VOICES AT FOREFRONT DURING NATIONAL CONVENING

Just as sound permanency practices begin by listening to youth, so did the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence begin with five youth from across the country speaking at the opening plenary session. They shared the power of family in their own lives and how lifelong relationships for youth require their active participation in permanency planning and advocacy for system reform.

"These youth advocates are inspirational and demonstrate through their own stories how child welfare professionals can engage and empower young people to create systems that prioritize families for all children in foster care," said Sarah Greenblatt, director of the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice at Casey Family Services and Convening co-chair. "They show us how all youth can serve as effective agents of change."

The panelists represented a wide range of experiences with the foster care system and different ways of utilizing youth in advocacy work. Three of the five panelists, for example, are alumni of the foster care system and

today work as peer advocates. One youth currently is in foster care. While never in care herself, another panelist became an advocate after seeing the system's impact on her American-Indian family and friends who had experienced foster care. Together, these young people highlighted several models of youth engagement.

While their paths to advocacy varied, all of the panelists stressed the importance of family in their lives.

For Krista Penrod – a chapter facilitator of Elevate, a youth-driven program for foster youth in Iowa – her desire for connection became strongest after she had left the foster care system. "At age 18, I realized that I did need family," she said. "I was adopted two months later by a family that I had developed a connection with while in foster care. On my adoption day, I realized, as we all headed to the courthouse, that no matter how old I'd become, I would be part of that family, that I'd be there forever."

Between the ages of 5 and 18, Joshua David Conner of Tennessee lived in 42 different

*Above, from left: Youth advocates Lupe Tobar, Arizona; Cheniece O., Connecticut; and Julia Charles, North Carolina, with Victoria Rowell, actress and foster care advocate, and Celeste Bodner, executive director of FosterClub. Below: Joshua David Conner, a youth advocate from Tennessee.*



foster homes, an average of three moves a year. Claiming he "didn't want to hear the word 'family,'" when he aged out of care, Conner spent a few years in Florida before returning to Nashville and finding, by chance, his forever family and being adopted at age 22.

"The greatest thing permanence brought me is stability," Conner said. "I have a





home base. It means so much knowing that I have a place where I can go and talk about good days and bad. It's so moving and so powerful to have that family no matter where I am."

For plenary co-facilitator Mary Lee Kimmins, a recent law school graduate and fellow with the Youth Transition Funders Group, permanence offered her a chance to enjoy the emotional milestones that many take for granted. "Family wasn't about my childhood, but about the rest of my life. I wanted to know that I'd have a place to go during college breaks, that I'd have a dad to walk me down the aisle when I got married, and that when I have kids of my own, they'd have grandparents. Even today, at 26 years old, my parents are there to support and encourage me. Permanence has meant everything to me. It's made me what I am."

In child welfare systems, however, the path to permanence is not an easy one for youth, requiring both self-advocacy and the support of peers.

For example, Cheniece O. is a youth advocate from Connecticut; her history of educational instability led her to take action in her home state. "Growing up in foster care, I changed homes, and when I changed homes, I changed schools," she said. "This was difficult for me academically and socially. At the end of every school year, I'd have to find my transcripts from past schools to prove I could move up to the next grade. In my freshman year of high school, I attended three different schools and my transcripts were lost."

**"IT MEANS SO MUCH KNOWING THAT I HAVE A PLACE WHERE I CAN GO AND TALK ABOUT GOOD DAYS AND BAD. IT'S SO MOVING AND SO POWERFUL TO HAVE THAT FAMILY NO MATTER WHERE I AM."** – JOSHUA DAVID CONNER

Entering her junior year of high school this fall, Cheniece took her story to the state legislature, looking to create change and schooling lawmakers on the challenges foster youth face in earning an education. As part of a youth advocacy group with Casey Family Services, she talked with policymakers during a legislative briefing and inspired the state assembly's deputy majority leader to draft legislation – with input from Cheniece – on school stability.

Educational instability is not uncommon for foster youth. It's an issue that led April Curtis of Illinois to start a peer-advocacy organization for high school- and college-age youth. The 22 year old comes to her current position with the Uhlich Children's Advantage Network already having formed the Statewide Youth Advisory Board for Illinois. She serves as board president and has been appointed youth advisory liaison to the director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. In addition, she was awarded the Kids to Kids National Service Award from the Child Welfare League of America, an organization for which she served as a board member.

"These stories made me realize that foster youth need someone to be there for them as they move through schools. They need help to make transitions into high school and college," she said. "We've created a program to do that. We would tell someone like Cheniece that tracking down transcripts shouldn't be her job. We focus on holding the hands of youth through these changes and teaching them to advocate for themselves."

In addition to Curtis, both Conner and Penrod train youth in foster care to advocate for themselves in terms of their own needs for family and services, but also to help move forward community and policy agendas that support all youth in care. For example, Penrod and Elevate recently held an event to help prepare youth for adulthood by renovating 16 apartments for foster care alumni using community volunteers and donations while raising awareness about the needs of transitioning youth.

For Conner, who is involved with the Oasis Center in Tennessee, the experience of peer advocate has really been one of peer educator. "The single most powerful thing we do is break down the system for kids in foster care. We tell them how things work, who is important in their process as they move through the system, what is a permanency team, and how can they apply their strengths to help them achieve what they want."

For Lee Kimmins, her desire to be adopted required her to go over her caseworker's



*Above left: Raymond Torres, Casey leader, addresses participants. Above, right: Convening participant.*

head. Ready to be adopted by a former social worker, her then current caseworker tried to convince her to wait to be adopted so she would be eligible for tuition waivers and other benefits. In an effort to jump start her adoption, Lee Kimmins stood up for herself. “I called up the commissioner, and the next week we were in the judge’s chambers signing the papers,” she said.

She says finding the courage to call the commissioner was the first step in acquiring the skills she has honed while serving on youth boards and youth development programs, such as those sponsored by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. “What if no one ever told me that I could advocate for myself? We need to empower youth and teach them to advocate for themselves, to use their stories and passion to make a difference in their own lives and those of others.”

Lee Kimmins has since applied her skills and testified before Congress to change federal law regarding financial aid, allowing foster youth who are adopted as teens to apply for support as individuals without having to consider the financial means of the adoptive parents, removing a disincentive for the adoption of older children and youth from care.

In addition to the opening youth plenary, the National Convening offered other opportunities for young people to engage with child welfare professionals. National Convening organizers made sure that youth voices were integrated fully throughout the event in Washington, D.C., having young people from foster care participate on state teams, workshop presentations, and in planning for future action.

Following the first set of learning sessions, however, the youth in attendance asked for an opportunity to meet on their own.

“The young people wanted to create a safe space for honest conversations with each other and to enjoy this unique opportunity to learn from each other,” explained Brandy Hudson, a youth engagement specialist with the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Family to Family initiative.

**“WE NEED TO EMPOWER YOUTH AND TEACH THEM TO ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES, TO USE THEIR STORIES AND PASSION TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR OWN LIVES AND THOSE OF OTHERS.” – MARY LEE KIMMINS**

When the young adults were asked to define what family permanence means to them, adoption, legal guardianships, and reunification were mentioned, but many expressed a need for permanence to be defined in terms of the emotional relationships they have.

Helping to guide these courageous conversations between professionals and young people, the youths collectively offered four recommendations regarding permanence. They charged practitioners to:

- redefine permanence to include emotional connections;

- involve youth in National Convening planning;
- address disparities in permanency outcomes for both older youth and youth of color; and
- continue permanency search beyond emancipation.

“This doesn’t mean that adoption, guardianship, and reunification doesn’t work, it just means that after their experiences, they don’t trust permanence at this moment in their lives,” Hudson explained. “However, all of the young people agreed they needed a lifelong connection, whether that came with a piece of paper or not. For child welfare professionals, the challenge is to have conversations directly with youth about these feelings, and to develop their ‘buy-in’ to achieve legal permanence.”

These conversations are essential to young people in moving forward their own permanency planning, but are also a critical element in influencing larger change, according to Mary Lee Kimmins as she closed the youth plenary.

“Today you were part of our conversation; now go back to your states and have this conversation with the young people there. Include youth, encourage and empower them, bring them to the table, and you will make changes. They will help you make the changes.”



## YOUNG PEOPLE NEED FAMILIES: PRACTICE STRATEGIES TO MAKE PERMANENCE A PRIORITY

*Excerpts from an essay prepared by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs. To access the full essay, visit [www.youthpermanence.org](http://www.youthpermanence.org).*

While we often think of youth in foster care as being without families, the truth is considerably more complicated, and that makes crafting child welfare policy and practice very difficult.

Foster youth may have been subjected to abuse and neglect. They may have had to leave their homes because of their sexual orientation, behaviors, or other issues. They also may have parents who love them but who can't care for them for any number of reasons. They may have kin who would like to help but can't afford to, or family friends who could raise them but only with assistance to meet the educational, behavioral, or other special needs common to young people touched by poverty, family instability, and the dislocations of foster care.

### ***Hypothesis: Strengthen family relationships, improve outcomes***

The Casey family of organizations believes several practice strategies focused on

strengthening family relationships are worth testing to see if they can keep young people from being stalled in foster care, running away from care, or aging out without family connections. In recent years, we have been testing these strategies through our work at the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

The strategies are not meant to stand alone. Also they can't be implemented successfully without careful attention to environmental stresses such as poverty and discrimination, whether due to race, national origin, or sexual orientation. But we believe the ability of youth to benefit from traditional services often is hampered by their disconnection from family. We believe effective permanency practice builds a young person's family connections, prepares him or her for adulthood, encourages resilience in the face of grief and trauma, and meets needs common to all young people, e.g., education and health care.

### ***Promising strategies***

Our work leads us to believe in the promise of these permanency practice strategies:

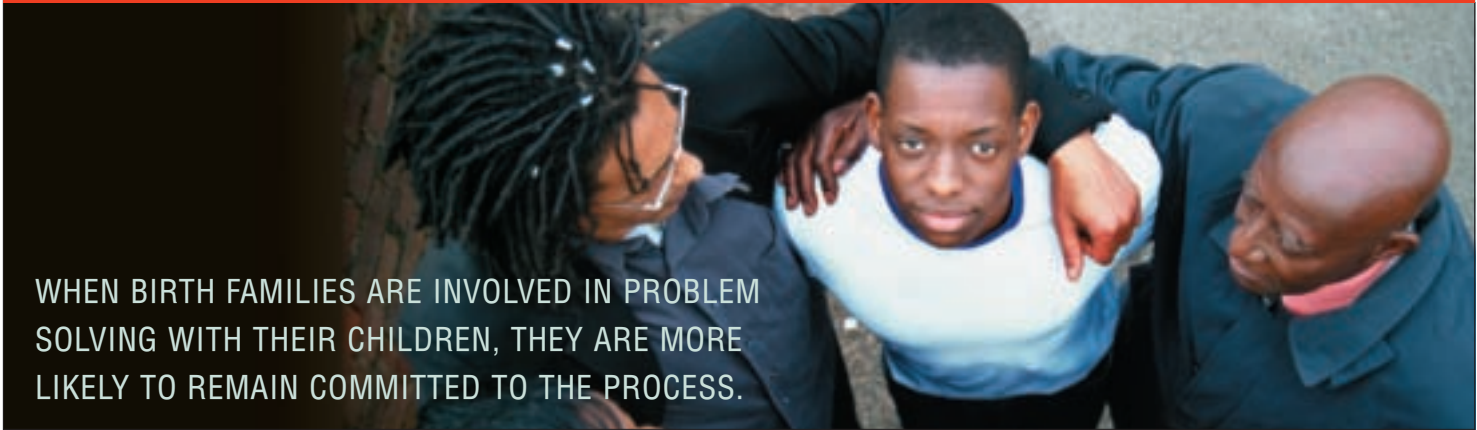
- Involving young people in their own case planning and decision making;
- Reconsidering the role of birth family;
- Teaming to strengthen or build permanent family relationships; and
- Building strong partnerships with the courts.

### ***Involving young people in their own case planning***

"Nothing about us without us." That's how foster youth describe their desire for full involvement in their own case planning and, indeed, in the design of programs and services meant for them. More and more, child welfare systems are seeing the efficacy of such an approach: When youth are fully involved, permanency decision making improves, young people are more satisfied with the results, and their ability to succeed as adults is enhanced.

Youth engagement is inherent in the social work value of client self determination.





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

Both the National Association of Social Workers and the International Federation of Social Workers identify self determination as core ethical responsibilities for practitioners. Youth engagement also is supported by Youth Development Theory.

### *Reconsidering the role of birth families*

Birth parents of youth in foster care are too often judged harshly. Yet child welfare agencies are rethinking how they interact with these people who are key in the lives of youth, most often by increasing opportunities for parents to:

- Stay involved in their children's lives through reunification;
- Plan for adoption or guardianship;
- Support youth in clarifying personal relationships and histories;
- Shape agency policy and program design; and
- Help other parents touched by the child welfare system.

A wide range of benefits accompany efforts to involve family in planning, achieving, and sustaining youth permanence. When birth families are involved in problem solving with their children, they are more likely to remain committed to the process, persevering when the work becomes difficult. Family engagement has been found to improve child welfare decision making by giving case workers access to more information and giving birth families the opportunity to “buy into” the process. Also the planning process is enriched when family members can share values that reflect racial, ethnic, religious, or other heritage.

Several approaches show promise:

- Involving parents and family members in planning from the start,
- Finding and engaging fathers, paternal family, and other relatives,
- Assessing a parent's changed circumstances, even after termination of parental rights, and
- Considering openness in adoption pre- and post-legalization.

### *Teaming to strengthen or build permanent family relationships*

In the last several decades, child welfare practice has been influenced by restorative justice models that put the people most involved in a problem or situation at the center of decision making.

From one idea, many have grown. Today, while many agencies use a team model of some sort, there is tremendous variation. These differences relate to the purpose and goals of the decision-making process, the timing and frequency of meetings that grow out of the process, and the amount and type of preparation prior to meetings. Who facilitates the process, who participates, and who makes final decisions varies from one model to another.

Teaming models include, but are not limited to, two promoted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (the Permanency Teaming Approach used by Casey Family Services and Team Decision Making used by the Foundation's Family to Family Initiative); Family Team Conferencing (used by Casey Family Programs); Family Group Decision Making; and the McGill Action Planning System.

Teaming strategies that focus on family permanence have been found to stabilize young people's placements and reconnect them with their parents or, if that isn't possible, with kin or other adults known to them.

### *Building strong partnerships with the courts*

In order to make real changes for adolescents in care – to connect them with families before they age out – child welfare, juvenile justice, and legal communities are continuing to experiment with inclusive and collaborative practice approaches. These support the integration of youth and family voices in the judicial process and also target the needs of foster youth in juvenile justice systems.

Increasing cooperation among child welfare agencies, the courts, and tribes is crucial to improving permanency outcomes for young people. Concurrent and intertwined with reform-oriented trends have been efforts to strengthen the opportunities for parents and young people to be well represented in their court cases and to have their ideas about permanence heard.

Among the jurisdictions to watch:

- Illinois' Circuit Court of Cook County is piloting a Child Protection Mediation program for 13 of its child protection courts.
- New York City's Center for Family Representation, Inc., and its Community Action Teams (CAT) work with families in a new way. CAT provides parents with a team of helpers: not only a lawyer, but also a social worker and a parent advocate.
- The New Mexico Tribal-States Judicial Consortium works to facilitate communication between state and tribal judicial systems in child abuse and neglect cases.



## THE HONORABLE EILEEN WILLETT, ARIZONA

Close-up

*Eileen Willett was appointed Arizona Superior Court Commissioner in May 1998. She was assigned to the juvenile division of the Maricopa County Superior Court when she was appointed Superior Court Judge in October 1999. Since then, she has served in the juvenile, criminal, and family law divisions. In June 2006, she was appointed as juvenile presiding judge. Prior to serving on the superior court, Willett was Chief Administrative Law Judge for Worker's Compensation, Child Labor, and Occupational Safety and Health Agency cases.*

*In 2002, Willett received the Distinguished Public Lawyer Award from the Maricopa County Bar Association. She currently chairs the Arizona Department of Corrections Advisory Board and serves on the Dean's Advisory Board for the Arizona State University College of Human Services.*

*Willett spoke at the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence about the leadership required to advance lifelong families for youth in foster care.*

**VOICE:** *As a leader in instituting permanency-focused reforms, what has surprised you about this work?*

**WILLETT:** It surprised me that we haven't listened to our children in the past as directly as we currently are. How could we have missed that? How could we not have talked with our children directly? Everything we have done, we've done for them, but without them.

**VOICE:** *Why did it take so long for the children to be heard?*

**WILLETT:** From a judicial perspective, it is because of the size of the docket. Time is a limited resource in court. It's easy to forget we are dealing with a child, not just a case. When we bring a child to the table, it changes the whole conversation. If you watch a hearing without a child in it and you watch a hearing with a child in it, the whole dynamic is different.

**VOICE:** *How would you characterize the national attitude toward permanence?*

**WILLETT:** I think people just don't know. When I speak to groups that are not direct-

ly involved with the child welfare system, they have no idea the number of children who need permanent connections or the reality of a foster child's life. The public does not realize that when child welfare systems take a child out of a dangerous situation, we are challenged to help that child find permanent relationships.

**VOICE:** *When did an emphasis on permanence come to your court system?*

**WILLETT:** When I became the juvenile presiding judge, the issue of youth permanence was raised within the first week. The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence really brought it home. I remember one young man talking about how he slept in his car during spring break at college because he was ashamed to tell his roommates he was in foster care. This was a young man who was very successful by all of our standards – college-educated, articulate, and independent – and still had no one.

We have a three-pronged approach: education, data collection, and community

collaboration. The first part involves teaching judges that every single child needs a permanent placement. We now have youth panels for new judges because youth tell their story better than anybody ever could. Every year we also have a conference that incorporates youth voices.

**VOICE:** *How does data collection help to promote permanence?*

**WILLETT:** We developed mechanisms to help judges better track youth in the system. We now have "case aging reports" so judicial officers can target the children who have been in the system the longest.

**VOICE:** *The third prong of your permanency approach is community collaboration. How does that work?*

**WILLETT:** We bring everyone to the table. We currently are doing a collaboration that includes everyone who is involved with the children in our community. We meet monthly and work on different issues.

We also try to make children comfortable in court through the Court Orientation for Dependent Youth program (CODY), which

**“WE HAVE YOUTH PANELS FOR NEW JUDGES BECAUSE THEY TELL THEIR STORY BETTER THAN ANYBODY EVER COULD.”**



we put together by collaborating with all the stakeholders. We invite them to court after hours so they have a chance to see the courtroom and the judge, try on the robe, and sit on the bench. All the players in the process are there: an attorney that represents parents, an attorney that represents children, a case manager, an attorney general, and a foster youth alumni. One foster care alumna even brought her dog to make youth feel more comfortable. We have a very relaxed orientation, feed them pizza, and get their input on how we can do this better.

We give each child a workbook that has all the personalized information they need to navigate the system and advocate for themselves. We do these sessions at least once a month. Our goal is to have every single child in the system come through CODY.

**VOICE: What is the judge's role in helping kids attain permanence?**

**WILLETT:** The judge makes sure that everyone's sights are focused on permanence. The judge also makes sure that social workers and advocates are looking for people that are appropriate placements for each developmental stage. If the child came into the system when they were very young, caregivers who were not appropriate then may work now that the child is older.

**VOICE: Have you seen the court's view on birthparents change through this permanence education?**

**WILLETT:** We are working hard to make sure that if mom and dad are not going to provide a safe environment, the court will look for other people in the extended fam-

ily – maybe an uncle or aunt – so that the child can maintain a relationship with their family that is safe. I hope our system has expanded its search for people who could have a permanent connection with a child.

**VOICE: How many children do you have in your system right now?**

**WILLETT:** We have about 5,900 children in the custody of our child welfare system in Maricopa County. The number goes up and down, but about 4,800 to 5,000 are in the court or child welfare systems.

**“WE ARE WORKING HARD TO MAKE SURE THAT IF MOM AND DAD ARE NOT GOING TO PROVIDE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT, THE COURT WILL LOOK FOR OTHER PEOPLE IN THE EXTENDED FAMILY SO THAT THE CHILD CAN MAINTAIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR FAMILY THAT IS SAFE.”**

**VOICE: Is one racial group overrepresented in your jurisdiction?**

**WILLETT:** In our jurisdiction, we have a large number of Hispanic children in the system, but we also have a large number of Hispanic people in our community. So, in terms of disproportionate representation, African-American and Native-American children are overrepresented in our jurisdiction.

**VOICE: What are you doing about disproportionality?**

**WILLETT:** One of our top goals is to eliminate disproportionality in juvenile court. We are collaborating with Child Protective Services to generate ongoing data for our judges because the first thing you need to do is to demonstrate a disproportionate relationship. The other piece is training. We trained juvenile judges, court leadership, and probation staff in “Undoing Racism” from the People's Institute and in social cognition. The data and the training have opened up some conversations that we have not had before. Training has raised awareness for the entire court.

**VOICE: How do you promote guardianship as a path to permanence?**

**WILLETT:** There are two different types of guardianships: permanent child welfare guardianships and consensual guardianships. We moved consensual guardianship out of the probate court to juvenile court and created a community services unit – that included a liaison from child protective services, someone from the regional behavioral health entity, a mediator, and a bilingual court guide – to help navigate the system. Once we did that, our numbers just skyrocketed. It has not only been a diversion from the child welfare system, it has kept children in kinship care.

**VOICE: What do you see as some of the challenges that still need to be overcome?**

**WILLETT:** I think that we will always have the challenge of resources. Limited resources makes it more difficult to achieve some of our goals, but it also challenges us to be more creative and collaborative.



# KIDS COUNT CALLS FOR URGENT JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORMS

**National trends in child well-being have improved slightly since 2000, according to the 2008 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released June 12 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. However, attention to those youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system is critically needed.**



This year's essay accompanying the *Data Book* release, "A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform," discusses developments in the nation's juvenile justice systems – a system that impacts nearly one million of America's youth each year and confines almost 100,000 kids on any given day.

"These young people caught up in the justice system face some of the worst odds of any group of kids in America for maturing into successful adults," according to Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "Kids who get involved with juvenile justice end up facing the prospect of low educational achievement, of earning less pay and finding less work, of failing to form lasting families, and of increased risk for health and substance abuse problems. They also face the heightened probability of future arrests and incarceration as adults."

Raymond L. Torres, vice president of the Casey Foundation and executive director of Casey Family Services, notes that these outcomes mirror the warnings offered by child welfare professionals for youth who age out of the foster care system without a legal connection to family. "There's no coincidence here," he says. "For many youth who age out of state care, the path to adulthood often involves juvenile justice, and the predictors for both systems are sadly similar, if not the same: disconnected families and poverty."

The essay highlights recent research and reforms that provide the basis for a fundamental, urgently needed transformation. These findings point to a juvenile justice system that fails to help delinquent children and youth at enormous costs to society and the economy, as well as communities, particularly those of color.

"As a society, we cannot credibly proclaim our country as a leader in issues related to opportunity, justice, equality, and enlightenment while we continue to tolerate juvenile justice policies, programs, and practices that routinely fail to recognize that children are different from adults," Nelson says.

In 2006, the estimated daily count of detained and committed youth in the custody of juvenile justice facilities was 92,854. In the same year, two out of three (66 percent) of all youth in custody were there due to a non-violent offense and the ratio of rates of youth of color to white youth in custody was three to one. The essay makes the case for keeping youth out of the adult justice system, reducing incarceration, ensuring safe institutions, and eliminating racially disparate treatment.

"The state and federal government must take a much closer look at the problems that are entrenched in the juvenile justice system," says Nelson. "These problems often include harsh or abusive conditions; pervasive disparities in the treatment of youth by race and ethnicity; and disproportional

tionate sanctions for minor and predictable misbehavior. We know – and there is evidence to prove – that with effective interventions, system reforms, and more effective policies, the system can produce better outcomes for young people."

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book's* essay challenges local and state-level jurisdictions to develop a starting point for change.

The Foundation affirms a core fact that youth are different from adults and, therefore, need and deserve a separate system of justice that reflects their developmental status.

More than two decades of research from scholars has expanded the understanding of causes of delinquency and the developmental pathways that lead young people into and out of delinquency, such as the economic instability of families and barriers to opportunities. As a result, there are several lessons that states and the nation must consider in order to move forward, such as giving families a critical role in resolving delinquency and reforming practices that blur or ignore the well-established differences between youth and adults.

Of course, diverting youth from adult correctional systems to juvenile justice systems is a first step in a reform movement, according to Bart Lubow, the Casey Foundation's director of programs for high-risk youth. In many cases, the juvenile justice system is

routinely overresponding to minor offenses and locking up far too many kids for far too long.

“There is a disturbing and increasing propensity to prosecute minor cases in the juvenile justice system that provides no benefit to public safety, but instead puts kids in harm’s way,” Lubow says. “Casey’s Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) has indisputably delivered evidence that reform is indeed possible.”

JDAI helps localities safely reduce reliance on secure detention and is now the nation’s most widely replicated juvenile justice reform initiative. It repeatedly has demonstrated that jurisdictions can safely lower the number of kids locked up. States such

Additional reforms recommended by the Annie E. Casey Foundation include:

- implementing policies and interventions that are age appropriate for the child;
- reducing reliance on secure confinement;
- increasing reliance on effective community-based services;
- ensuring safe, healthy, constructive conditions of confinement;
- keeping children and youth out of the adult justice system; and
- reducing racial disparities.

“The core credibility of the system is undermined by its disproportionate representation of youth of color,” Nelson says.

school dropout rate, and teens not in school and not working;

- One area had no change: infant mortality rate; and
- Four areas have worsened: low-birth weight babies, children living in families where no parent has full-time year round employment, children in poverty, and children in single parent families.

These national trends are not on par with the well-being improvements that were seen at the end of the 1990s, with little change since 2000. The report cites that more children are living in relative poverty in the United States than in any other economically advanced nation.



as California and Louisiana have reduced statewide reliance on youth incarceration in recent years without compromising public safety or increasing juvenile crime.

“Although the juvenile justice system is at a critical stage, its problems can be overcome to yield a far more efficient and fair system that will support youth,” Lubow says.

A key reform strategy is to have juvenile justice systems better enlist and engage families to play their roles as primary influences on their children. Program models, according to the essay, are available to better involve parents, for example, in planning court dispositions for their children. Not surprisingly, when families are involved in this kind of planning, youth do better.

“Indeed, many observers wonder whether the system’s problems aren’t partly a manifestation of official indifference to the populations served.”

The essay finds that progress can be made with a strong commitment to reform by diverse agencies and constituents. State and local leaders must find an entry point for their efforts. They should focus on a particular problem or issue, whose solution requires the adoption of policies and programs that can influence other components of the system. Jurisdictions must collect and analyze data in order to hold systems accountable.

In addition to the call for juvenile justice reforms, the 19th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* indicators, which provide an overall analysis of child well-being, also show:

- Five areas of improvement: child death rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, high

The results are greatly troubling for child and family advocates who acknowledge that child poverty rates are the sentinel predictors of overall child welfare. Furthermore, there is considerable reason to worry that the weakening of the economic condition of children and families has worsened since the last available data in 2006.

“The recent rise in unemployment, the lack of growth in entry-level wages, and the broader economic recession doubtlessly has pushed even more American kids into poverty than we currently are measuring,” says Nelson. “This trend warrants serious concern for all of us, including the next administration.”

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



## Subsidized Guardianship Advancing in the United States

As practitioners and policymakers work to prioritize lifelong families for youth in foster care – while at the same time reduce both the disproportionate number and disparate outcomes of minorities within the system – the national spotlight on subsidized guardianship has shone brightly in recent months.

This summer, the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and the Children's Defense Fund hosted a symposium with teams of caregivers, advocates, and child welfare professionals from jurisdictions that currently do not provide guardianship subsidies. They came to learn from leading states that are offering these funds to meet the needs of children and youth in foster care for equitable permanency outcomes as of 2008.

"This symposium served as a working session that offered policy analysis and funding strategies to state agencies for supporting children placed with guardians as well as children in the care of relatives who are not in the child welfare system," explains Sania Metzger, director of policy at Casey Family Services. "Just as important, we wanted to review the use of subsidized guardianship as a strategy for addressing racial disparities in permanency outcomes."

Although guardianship was recognized as a permanency option by the federal Adoption

### WHEN SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP IS AVAILABLE, PERMANENCE OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IS INCREASED.

and Safe Families Act of 1997, child welfare agencies today still rely on a variety of state revenues because there is no dedicated federal funding available for guardianship in the same way as adoption. According to research from Mark Testa, director of the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois, this distinction means that legal guardianship has taken a back seat to reunification, family preservation, and adoption in terms of permanency outcomes for children.

But the damaging impact of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system has garnered critical attention, resulting in a 2007 report on racial inequality from the U.S. Government Accountability Office. "As we look at this issue, subsidized guardianship has proven to be an effective policy and practice solution," Metzger said.

Generations United estimates that if payments were available to families providing subsidized guardianship, an additional 20,000 children in foster care could exit the system to

live with kin, helping to lessen disparate permanency outcomes for children of color.

Twelve states and Puerto Rico have yet to implement subsidized guardianship.

While the absence of these funds creates a hardship for states and jurisdictions, American-Indian tribes – without federal Medicaid monies – are at even greater disadvantage to find kinship funding.

The financial pressures facing relative caregivers who assume the role of legal guardians for children are significant. Carolyn Jackson, founder of a support group for relative caregivers in New Haven, Connecticut, explained that housing and child care are persistent challenges for the members of her group, Grandparents on the Move. Even she, an advocate for caregivers, struggles with the realities of raising her grandchildren, especially faced with finding a larger apartment.

"Housing is a major issue for me, as well as many others, and it doesn't matter if you work or are living on a fixed income," says Jackson, who is raising three children age 8 and younger. "If you don't get housing subsidies, it makes it hard to afford adequate housing, especially in Connecticut, where the rents are high. I have a job, but I consider myself working poor. I still need help. I want to live in a neighborhood that is clean and safe, where my grandchildren can play outside, and in an area with good schools."

Symposium participants stressed the supports guardians require in helping their children overcome the emotional hurt that often is involved when parents are unable to care for their own sons and daughters. Liv Gray, a youth from Vermont living with her grandmother through guardianship, retold how her own hurt often caused her to lash out at the one person who was there for her. "It took me time to realize that my anger about the situation was not my grandmother's fault, but that she had made a commitment to me, and that commitment has allowed me to do so much with my life."

To support these types of needs, participants highlighted a long list of additional community-based services that would aid relative caregivers both inside and outside the child welfare system, including: guidance in navigating school and judicial systems, legal



GENERATIONS UNITED ESTIMATES THAT IF PAYMENTS WERE AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES PROVIDING SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP, AN ADDITIONAL 20,000 CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE COULD EXIT THE SYSTEM TO LIVE WITH KIN.



assistance, mental health services, parenting training, respite, wellness, and self-care.

An alumna from foster care and a kinship provider herself, Pennsylvania's Sharon McDaniel-Lowe called on symposium attendees to acknowledge the need for relative caregivers to focus on themselves, as well as their children. At A Second Chance, the agency she founded and today leads, McDaniel-Lowe encourages caregivers to renew themselves emotionally and physically.

#### *Federal landscape*

As Congress returns in September, it has an opportunity to increase supports for children living with relatives.

"Representatives and Senators have heard the voices of caregivers and youth being raised by their grandparents," says MaryLee Allen, director of child welfare and mental health at the Children's Defense Fund. "The Fostering Connections to Success Act passed unanimously in the U.S. House in June, and, on September 10, the Senate Finance Committee passed the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Act. Both will promote permanent families for children."

Both bills would require notice to relatives when children are about to enter foster care so they can intervene early, help children

leave foster care to live permanently with relatives when they cannot return home or be adopted, and support Kinship Navigator programs to link children with relatives, in and outside of foster care, with the assistance and supports they need. The Senate's bill will move on to a negotiation process to reconcile with the House bill.

Similar legislation that would increase support for kinship caregivers includes the Kinship Caregiver Support Act, which has been referred to the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities; and the Invest in K.I.D.S. Act.

#### *Research showing guardianship's effectiveness*

According to Dr. Sandra Stukes Chipungu, a professor at Morgan State University, kinship care can reduce the trauma of out-of-home placement for children, allow for more contact with birth parents and siblings, maintain a child's family history and culture, support greater placement stability, and result in lower re-abuse rates.

When subsidized guardianship is available, research indicates that the overall permanence of children in foster care is increased, according to Rutledge Hutson, the director of child welfare policy at the Center for Law and Social Policy.

Also at the symposium, Rob Geen, vice president for public policy and director of

*From left: Dr. Sharon McDaniel-Lowe discusses recent advancements in Congress regarding subsidized guardianship with a symposium participant..*

child welfare research at Child Trends, cautioned that researchers still don't know how many children are living with relatives in and outside of the child welfare system, making it harder to identify them for supports.

#### *State strategies to grow subsidized guardianship*

While the federal government continues to debate subsidized guardianship funding, several states are making significant progress:

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services expanded its Subsidized Guardianship Waiver Demonstration Program statewide to provide an enhanced service package of transition services for children with guardian placements. Through the demonstration program, the state obtained record guardianship placements and decreased its foster care rolls.

In Massachusetts and Connecticut, subsidies for guardians match those for foster parents. In addition, Massachusetts established guardianship as a key strategy in achieving permanence for youth and currently 20 percent to 25 percent of youth in Massachusetts state care are in guardianship arrangements.

# RECONNECTING YOUNG FATHERS TO OPPORTUNITIES AND FAMILIES



Lieutenant Governor of Maryland Anthony G. Brown captivated an audience of more than 500 participants at the 2008 Young Fathers Conference held earlier this summer in the City of Baltimore:

**"Of all my responsibilities, the one that's at the top of my list is being a father," Brown said. "Fathers are the bricklayers to our children's foundation. They look to us for love and guidance, and we must be there to ensure they receive it."**

The conference, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and the Maryland Department of Human Resources, engaged community activists, educators, policymakers, social work practitioners, and parents in a discussion of the importance of fathers and ways to connect them with broad community supports, according to Raymond L. Torres, vice president of the Casey Foundation and executive director of Casey Family Services.

"Responsible fatherhood is an important focus of Casey's efforts to support vulnerable children and families in being emotionally and financially sound," Torres said. The economic and social challenges in today's society, he added, make the need for effective fathers even stronger for the well-being of the community.

While the ability of community leaders to reinforce the importance of fathers' involvement in healthy child development is one strength of the conference, the other is its ability to link young fathers to services and supports. "We need these young men – many of whom face real challenges in employment and relationships – to take steps and align themselves with people, resources, and tools to strengthen and forge permanent

family connections," said Darryl Green, the conference chair and a male involvement coordinator with Casey Family Services' Baltimore Division.

In a keynote address at the event, Dr. Na'im Akbar, a critically acclaimed author, scholar, and psychologist, challenged fathers to be responsible and accountable, and to provide leadership within their families. "We need young men to move from 'I' to 'we,' as we come together as a community of fathers," he said. "As a father, you can no longer be selfish; the focus always has to be on the child and his or her community."

A morning panel discussion on the issues of permanence, commitment, and responsibility, involved young fathers – Brandon Briscoe, Andre Collins, and DeAndre Williams – who spoke of their parenting journey. All three men shared the importance of community supports – particularly of community mentors – in helping them to be present in the lives of their children, even when experiencing ups and downs in their own lives. They also shared the hurt of being raised without fathers themselves.

"Our young panelists are powerful examples of how a commitment to being a good father is the first part of the parenting equation," Green said. "It also takes a team of individuals and supports to help them realize that commitment. These are youngsters who have few role models of how to be a father and fewer opportunities to be financially stable providers, so it is important to connect them with mentors who can give them a vision of success."

Other speakers included Torres; Tony Cipollone, a senior advisor at the Casey Foundation; Salima Siler Marriott, the

deputy mayor for community and human development in Baltimore; Mary LeBeau, project manager with the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice; and Dana E. Ross, president of purEquality Entertainment, LLC.

For Ross, a documentary filmmaker, the stereotypes of young fathers, particularly African-American fathers hide the powerful truth that there are many active and engaged fathers playing strong roles in the lives of their children. "When I was a child, my mother passed away, and her sisters immediately stepped forward to raise me, assuming my father wasn't willing to do what was needed," she shared. "Instead, he raised me and has been a lifelong support for me. There are many fathers out there meeting their responsibilities, and we need to tell their stories to cast aside the stereotypes."



Participants appreciated the message of empowerment, and hoped it would lead to an impact. "This has been a great discussion, but like many other discussions, it needs to lead to concrete action in our community," said George Van Hook, a commission member on the City of Baltimore's Public School Board. "I have been inspired today to do more than I did yesterday. I hope others will do the same thing."

# BEHIND BARS, MOMS TURN TO GRANDMOTHERS FOR HELP WITH THE KIDS



In steadily rising numbers, women with children are going to prison and leaving the care of their kids to their own mothers. For grandmothers already struggling to make ends meet, the responsibility becomes a burden almost too great to bear. And this is a trend of growing concern from coast to coast.

More adults in America – more than one in 100 – find themselves behind bars today than do men and women in any other country in the world, according to a report released in February by the Pew Center on the States. Imprisonment of men and women has gone up steadily over the past three decades and now totals almost 1.6 million.

According to the federal Bureau of Justice statistics, the number of women in prison rose 57 percent from 1995 to 2005. The pattern has continued. The FBI reports that more than 2.4 million women were arrested in 2006, and women now account for the fastest-growing segment of the prison population. This growth rate is outpacing that of men going to prison in every state, according to a report by the Institute on Women & Criminal Justice.

In the last 10 years, more than 75 percent of women put in prison have been mothers, says the Women's Prison Association. Nationally, most of these inmates are young, unmarried women of color with few job skills and significant substance-abuse problems. More often than not, they have been incarcerated on drug convictions. The Bureau of Justice points to an 88 percent

increase in the number of imprisoned mothers between 1991 and 2002. For about half of those mothers, their own parents are the only safety net for their children.

But caregiving under these special circumstances can be overwhelming. Grandparents have reported a variety of stress-related illnesses. These have included depression, diabetes, hypertension, and more. In articles for the journals "Health and Social Work" and the "Journal of Mental Health and Aging," researchers Esme Fuller Thomson and Meredith Minkler described their analysis of survey data. They showed that three-quarters of African-American grandparents who were caring for grandchildren were also alone – widowed, divorced, separated, or never married. Almost half were poor, and all were likely to be caring for an average of eight children.

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## IN STEADILY RISING NUMBERS, WOMEN WITH CHILDREN ARE GOING TO PRISON AND LEAVING THE CARE OF THEIR KIDS TO THEIR OWN MOTHERS.

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Some grandparents also have difficulty in obtaining the health care they need. Accessing financial aid, public assistance, legal supports, and adequate housing can be a mystery.

When Diane DiDonato, age 62, of Providence, Rhode Island, took in her two-year-old granddaughter two years ago, she knew she needed help. "I felt very isolated,"

she recalls. "All my friends were in very different situations, and we grew apart." DiDonato's therapist referred her to Casey Family Services' Rhode Island Division, where she found therapeutic services for her grandchild, and quickly made new friends with other grandparents like her. In 2006, Casey social worker Ileana Valentin-Lopez encouraged DiDonato and six of her friends to found the Grand Divas, giving them ongoing support and a place to meet. Today this growing network of dynamic grandmothers has expanded in a number of ways.

"Now the day with the Divas is my day. We exercise, have fun, and eat good food....and by helping one another, we help ourselves. There is nothing else like this in the state of Rhode Island," she says.

To date the Divas have hosted workshops for grandparent caregivers on depression, self-esteem, beauty for the mature woman, financial stability, meditation and yoga, as well as leadership and health. Recently, the group received grant funding to provide 15 low-income families in the area supportive training in stress and health management. Another grant from a local foundation allowed them to provide grants in turn to poor families. "We'll provide enough for that pair of sneakers their child needs, or the book, or the \$50 they need to enroll their child in an activity such as baseball," DiDonato explains. "There are so many families in need now," she adds.



**“THEY HAVE BUILT TRUST AMONG THEMSELVES AND ACROSS CULTURAL BARRIERS BY SHARING THEIR STORIES, STRUGGLES, TEARS AND TRIUMPHS.”**



The Grand Divas also have built a close working relationship with the Casey Foundation’s Making Connections initiative in Providence as well as another nonprofit in the city, the Family Life Center. This organization provides the previously incarcerated and their families with pre-release and long-term services and supports.

When asked about the success of the Grand Divas, Casey’s Valentin-Lopez says, “Quantifiably, we can look at the growth in membership, and qualitatively, we can look at the growth in the members’ confidence, and the strengthening of their relationships with one another and their grandchildren. They have built trust among themselves and across cultural barriers by sharing their stories, struggles, tears, and triumphs.”

The Grand Divas and other caregiver support groups help families cope. More such groups are needed. The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) was enacted in 2000 as part of the federal Older Americans Act to allow for all area agencies on aging and local community service providers to offer supportive services, including organization of support groups. These services may not be widely available, however, because only 10 percent of the funds may be used for this purpose.

This is a reality that makes locally formed networks all the more critical. In the last three years that she’s been a member of the Grand Divas, Vice President Grace Brown says she has seen rapid growth as the word has spread – and membership has doubled. “We seem to be doing things that are meaningful,” she added. “I know that there’s a great deal of interest in this kind of thing. When I’ve been in other cities, other grand-

mothers have said that they wish they had something like it. And to that, I say: ‘Start it!’ ”

Fellow Diva DiDonato says it would be easy to start a group like this. Just start small, she suggests, and have a couple of people come to your house. Being associated with an agency like Casey Family Services has been a help, too, she notes.

In Los Angeles, for example, Kinship in Action, brings together grandparents as well as other relatives caring for children of kin. In Lansdowne, Virginia, and in congregations across the country, Angel Tree, a faith-based organization, provides mentorship and support for families of incarcerated parents, with a special focus on helping meet the needs of children.

And in New Haven, Connecticut, Grandparents on the Move has become a strong, unified voice for support and change. “I didn’t expect that I’d have to be doing this...Having this support group is very helpful,” says Lettie Downs of New Haven. “I keep the schedule on my refrigerator.”

*For a comprehensive list of resources for grandparents who care for kin, as well as a Spanish version of this article, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).*



## WALKING IN MY PURPOSE: A CONVERSATION WITH DR. SHARON MCDANIEL-LOWE

*Dr. Sharon McDaniel-Lowe is the founder, president, and CEO of A Second Chance, Inc., a Pennsylvania-based nonprofit agency that provides safe, secure, and nurturing environments for children who are being raised by their relatives or close family friends in kinship care. In her role as a provider, advocate, and national leader, McDaniel-Lowe draws upon her own experience in foster care and as a kin caregiver.*

*Throughout her career, McDaniel-Lowe has worked to improve opportunities for youth in foster care. Before founding A Second Chance, Inc., in Pittsburgh, she had been a child protection services caseworker, a permanency services administrator, and a director of adoption services. In addition to her work in direct services for youth in kinship care, she serves on several state and county task forces, as well as on the boards of Casey Family Programs, Casey Family Services, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. She is a former board member of the Black Administrators in Child Welfare and was a panel member for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Advisory Kinship Care Panel.*

**VOICE:** *The Child Welfare League of America recently released a study by the Philadelphia Children's Hospital that showed better outcomes for children who were raised with kin as compared to children who are raised in foster homes. What was your reaction to that study?*

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** I found it both interesting and timely. A Second Chance did a similar, though smaller, "mini-study" with the Black Child Welfare Administrators Association in March of this year and found parallel results. We found that the number of services needed in traditional foster care was far greater than what is needed in kinship care situations, and there is more stability in kinship care families.

**"WE FOUND THAT THE NUMBER OF SERVICES NEEDED IN TRADITIONAL FOSTER CARE WAS FAR GREATER THAN WHAT IS NEEDED IN KINSHIP CARE SITUATIONS, AND THERE IS MORE STABILITY IN KINSHIP CARE FAMILIES."**

**VOICE:** *How did A Second Chance come into being and how has it changed?*

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** We started A Second Chance, Inc., in 1993, and, in 1994, we began accepting referrals. During the 1980s, the country had begun to outsource. I said to myself: "I want to own my own agency to work with youth." So I went back to school to earn a master's in public administration.

Not long after that, I responded to a Request for Proposals for Allegheny County. I told myself: "I can do this." I knew what was wanted and what the problems were. I got funded. I just believe that I was on a journey, on a mission and walking in my purpose.

I'm proud of the organization's growth, which also has been frightening in some ways. When I started in October 1994, I thought I had prepared (from a budgetary and infrastructure perspective) for about 300 intakes for the whole year. We opened on October 1, and by December 1, we had taken in 350 children. I didn't know the county had that kind of backlog, that kind of need. I became the driver, transportation aide, and janitor – whatever I had to do. And we all worked around the clock. We grew from a staff of nine to approximately 30 in a couple of months. By the first year, we had more than 75 staff members.

**VOICE:** *What in this work has been the source of your greatest pride?*

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** We've been able to keep youth safe. We've not had any maltreatment or deaths. We've been able to restore family. Working toward the "kinship triad" – caregivers, children, and birth parents – is so remarkable and rewarding. My mantra is to keep youth and families safe, work well with them, and see my theories of youth-centered services actually working.

**VOICE:** *What does the future hold for A Second Chance and for you?*

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** We recently hosted seven state teams, many associated with the Casey Foundation's Family to Family initiative. We have a curriculum that we think is the best in the nation in terms of working with the kinship triad. So, one of my goals is to ensure that every jurisdiction, every state,

**“WE MUST DO BETTER IN PROVIDING FOR SIBLING VISITATION AND IN FOSTERING SIBLING CONNECTIONS... WE NEED TO SUPPORT AND VALUE THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT SIBLINGS HAVE – THEY ARE THE LONGEST LASTING RELATIONSHIPS THAT CHILDREN HAVE BEYOND THEIR PARENTS. ”**



has access to this curriculum, and that they have the technical assistance they need to put it to work. Now I have to try to find resources and an infrastructure to do that.

And for me, I want to continue to grow and develop and continue my work with foundations. My association with Casey Family Programs and the Annie E. Casey Foundation through Casey Family Services and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative has been some of the most satisfying and rewarding work of my life. I tell people I've had a voice at three of the five Casey organizations. To have that, to have people so well respected willing to listen to me, is so remarkable and profound. A goal for me in serving on the Casey boards is to advance the work and to join us together as one family. The National Convening on Youth Permanence was a time to see us together and talking the same language – it was awesome.

**VOICE: What do you see as the greatest challenges facing child welfare now and to come?**

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** Child welfare financing, I think, is one of the most complex and difficult issues we are and will be facing. We're looking at the multi-trillion dollar deficit in this country, and we're trying to do more with less. The funding stream is restrictive, and I expect it to become more so. There will be a need to be more creative... particularly as more young people are exiting. For example, how do we use federal Title IV-E

**“SO THE HOPE IS THAT EVEN WHEN YOUTH HAVE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES, THEY WILL FARE BETTER IF THEY HAVE POSITIVE PEOPLE AROUND THEM.”**

when it is so strictly defined? We're failing youth who are transitioning, and we have to find a way to restructure our financing so we can be more fluid and flexible and responsive to changing conditions in child welfare.

**VOICE: What are some of the forces from your own background that gave you the drive and energy to do this work?**

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** I was a child in the system from the age of 5. I exited at age 21 when I graduated from college. My mom had died when I was two, and my father made the decision three years after her death that he was not able to adequately parent three young children. My sister was a year older than me, and my brother was a year younger. So my dad looked in his network and made a decision to place my brother with a maternal aunt and my sister and

me with non-relatives who were part of his extended network. My dad had to make a decision that was an unselfish one for him. It had to be very difficult.

Once I graduated from college, I read my file and there I developed a greater appreciation of what my dad had to go through. He tried to keep the family together until he no longer could. But he did manage to have a voice in decisions that were made about us. Had those who were protecting us not asked my father what he wanted, and had he not insisted that his voice be heard, my experience may have been very different.

Today I share a very positive relationship with my father. It took a long time but when I went through my own development, I was able to reconcile. So the hope is that even when youth have negative experiences, they will fare better if they have positive people around them.

**VOICE: How well do you think child welfare addresses the needs of siblings in care today?**

**MCDANIEL-LOWE:** We're still failing these kids. We must do better in providing for sibling visitation and in fostering sibling connections. I have a policy at my organization that if siblings are not able to be placed together in kinship care, they must talk with each other twice a week and visit once a week. We need to support and value the relationships that siblings have – they are the longest lasting relationships that children have beyond their parents.



ESSAY

# PERSPECTIVES

## MENDING BROKEN FAMILIES



by Lynne Varner, Editorial Columnist,  
Seattle Times

*Editor's Note – The following article originally was published in the Seattle Times following Varner's participation in the 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence.*

If congressional lawmakers could see the great potential of foster-care reform in 23-year-old Julia Charles, improvements in this flawed multibillion-dollar system would be swift.

Charles is a poised, engaging recent college graduate and the author of a soon-to-be-published book on her experiences. We met during a two-day gathering of hundreds of young people in or emerging from foster care. The theme was creating a sense of permanency amid the impermanence of foster care.

But wait. If Charles is so impressive, doesn't the child-welfare system deserve applause over reform? No. This young woman, inheritor of a bright smile and heartbreaking childhood, had to navigate a path littered with the many failures and mistakes of the multibillion-dollar federal and state network designed to be de facto parent to 513,000 foster-care children.

This was the system's first failure for Charles: Police cars in front of her home and a plastic trash bag meant to hold her childhood were how Charles and her siblings were informed that they were leaving their parents' house, never to return. Cramped in a social worker's cubicle until a 3 a.m. placement was found was the way Charles said goodbye to her siblings, taken away one by one as foster homes were found.

**“HE TOLD A ROOMFUL OF WET EYES THAT HE WOULD RATHER BE THE SON OF A WOMAN HELPED BY AN ARRAY OF SERVICES WHO TURNED HER LIFE AROUND, THAN THE FOSTER SON OF STRANGERS.”**

States such as California and New York have made impressive strides reducing foster-care rolls, but every day, another 850 children nationwide find themselves in the system. Many still have a good chance of enduring experiences similar to Charles'.

The second failure of the system was the lack of a replacement for Charles' family. It wasn't until she was an adult that Charles was adopted and had a person to call – she blushes happily – “Mommy.”

Not so for the bulk of the 25,000 teenagers turning 18 and on the cusp of leaving foster care. Raised by “a business,” as some call the child-welfare system; they are set adrift in the world armed only with frayed ties to blood kin and legally restricted ties to foster parents.

No surprise many end up homeless, incarcerated, or dead. At the very least, they grow into college students in search of a place to return during school breaks. They crave siblings to banter with and a parent to walk them down the aisle. They crave what most of us take for granted.

An important start would include rethinking federal laws that give states more money for foster care and less money for the programs that would prevent abuse and neglect. This backward strategy likely made sense to the lawmakers who made foster care an important and sustaining part of the Security Act of 1935. But now it simply encourages foster-care placement over other alternatives.

A quiet, solemn youth from Connecticut named Earl makes my point. Earl and his siblings were reunited with their mother after she kicked a drug habit and regained custody. All's well that ends well? Not quite. Earl's mother, Esther, had a single meaningful contact with the authorities, who removed her children. On her own, Esther found the mental-health and addiction services that turned her life around.

Listening to Esther, I wondered how many other parents ordered to get clean were unable to navigate the system and ended up permanently losing their kids. That would have been a life-damaging thing for Earl. He told a roomful of wet eyes that he would rather be the son of a woman helped by an array of services who turned her life around, than the foster son of strangers.

It is simple. We need foster care's safety net. Start small. Help parents be better parents. Encourage foster parents to be more than temporary shelter. Everyone needs family.

## POLICY CORNER

# KEEPING AT-RISK CHILDREN SAFE AND SAFELY AT HOME: DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE



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

*The State of Connecticut recently issued a request for information (RFI) about differential response (DR) – a*

*promising sign of progress in the use of this important child welfare reform. The RFI is in preparation for building the infrastructure needed to implement a formal differential response program in Connecticut. If funded, the program would be the second of its kind in New England, following Maine. – Ed.*

A national movement in support of differential response policy may be gaining strength if the attendance and the enthusiasm expressed for this policy at the first and second annual differential response conferences sponsored by American Humane is evidence.

Traditionally, the child welfare system responds to reports of possible abuse or neglect with the same set of protocols for all reports, regardless of the severity of the report. Yet the majority of reports are less severe cases involving families under stress and in need of help. These families traditionally receive no help until their problems escalate through a cycle of worsening difficulties and repeat reports; eventually, some of them lose their children to the system.

Differential response – also known as dual track or alternate response – makes a wider set of family-based responses available to the child welfare system. Already implemented in several jurisdictions across the country, differential response is widely seen as crucial in addressing racial disproportionality

in child welfare systems, according to the Alliance for Racial Equity supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Connecticut's Department of Children and Families states that "Differential Response offers services to family members without having to conduct and/or complete a traditional investigation or formally substantiate allegations made in a report. At the heart of Differential Response is the belief that families will respond more favorably to receiving services if they are approached in a non-adversarial, non-accusatory way."

Connecticut may be on the way to joining more than a dozen other states now using a recognized differential response model. According to a 2006 national survey conducted by the American Humane and the Child Welfare League of America, 15 states employ the eight elements used to characterize the model. These elements are: at least two responses; decisions based on level of risk, previous reports, type of maltreatment and age of the victim; procedures to change tracks; codification of the policy; voluntary acceptance of services; services offered without a formal abuse or neglect determination; and removal of a parent's name from the child abuse registry. Partnerships with stakeholders, including parents and community service providers, are also an essential component of DR programs.

Since 1998, more than 30 states have experimented with innovative front-end child protective services reforms, although all of them do not adhere to the emerging DR model. Eleven DR states, however, have

implemented statewide programs, while Ohio is also currently developing the infrastructure to do the same.

Dr. Tony Loman of the Institute of Applied Research in St. Louis, Missouri, evaluated statewide DR programs in his home state, Minnesota, and several other states. According to him, one family's experience with DR in Minnesota offers a poignant example of this policy's efficacy and its ability to address poverty-related neglect reports in particular.

Loose and weak floorboards in a mobile home triggered a report to the Minnesota state central registry on a single mom. The agency response to that neglect report, as described by Loman, was an excellent example of the differential response system's capacity to tailor and deliver customized support, minimize trauma to the child and parents, and avert court intervention.

Sitting down with the mom, the "assessment" worker quickly confirmed that the risk of harm to the child could readily be eliminated by the immediate repair of the floorboards. Mom had the skills to do the repair work herself and the "assessment" worker had access to flexible funds (provided by the state and originally by the McKnight Foundation) to cover the cost of the needed construction materials.

Foundations, research institutions, and universities are well positioned to help evaluate the various differential response policies being implemented across the nation. The U.S. Children's Bureau recently released a Request for Proposals notice to establish a national resource center on differential response. Sounds like additional rigorous evaluations are on the way.

## ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

# CHANGING THE ODDS



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

It is time to reconsider the use of the term “beating the odds” when used to describe youth and adults who have experienced foster care. The deck is stacked against those who were in foster care, no doubt. Children from foster care often have experienced serious neglect, prenatal alcohol or drug exposure, and physical or sexual abuse. Those of us who haven’t shared the experience cannot understand the hole that is created in a heart when the very basic needs of love and belonging are not met by those who should love us, or when the nurturing basics of food and comfort are missing.

When the government steps in, a life is often saved. But the state rarely qualifies as a good parent. Barriers to success are created by multiple placements, education interruptions, the absence of normative childhood experiences, and low expectations. When a young adult steps forward with a measure of success, the well-intentioned response is: “Wow! He beat the odds.”

It is dehumanizing to compare a human life to the process by which we spin the roulette wheel or gamble on a horse with less-than-favorable odds. And unlike the simple win-or-lose options of those games of chance, life outcomes are much more complex. Success in life is not all or nothing – there are examples all around us of people whose personal success in one area of life is mitigated by weakness in another.

One alumna writes, “I do feel proud of myself for having ‘beat the odds.’ I am not dead. I am not in prison. I am not continuing cycles of child abuse or addiction. I did make it through college. I do have full-time employment and health insurance. I am happy and healthy and live a wonderful life. But, I did not beat all the odds,” she continues. “I still struggle to make sense of what happened to me as a child. I never found a permanent mom and dad of my own, and that continues to break my heart. Externally, I may be labeled as having beat the odds, but I see every person (whether from care or not) as both flawed and victorious.”

**“I STILL STRUGGLE TO MAKE SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO ME AS A CHILD. I NEVER FOUND A PERMANENT MOM AND DAD OF MY OWN, AND THAT CONTINUES TO BREAK MY HEART.” – FOSTER CARE ALUMNA**

Another alumna concurs, “Using the term diminishes many of the battles that we still face. While some foster youth may ‘successfully’ navigate the system, many of us walk away scarred, with emotional and psychological problems. Though many of us have ‘beaten the odds’ by finding a job, going to college, or getting into a healthy relationship, our continual struggles are ignored.”

There is a double-edged sword in the application of this label. While congratulating one individual, it simultaneously reinforces negative stereotypes about youth from care.

“I see this kind of expression as a backhanded compliment, one that is quite horrible,” explains one alumna. “It’s like society is saying we have made it this far regardless of this ‘defect’ of being a foster kid. Nobody should be seen as a ‘success story’ for having not met somebody’s negative expectations of them based on the fact that they lived in foster care,” is how another alumna sees it.

As taxpayers who fund the system, advocates who push for change, and service providers working in child welfare, we must not allow the fact that some alumni do succeed to be held up as an example in any way that diminishes our accountability to change the odds.

One alumna writes, “We say, ‘If she can do it, why can’t others?’ instead of, ‘How can we make it so that being successful is not so difficult?’ We need to stop placing the burden on the individual to ‘beat the odds.’ Instead, we should be looking at programs, policies, and resources that change the odds and allow everyone to achieve. We need to supply true stability, love, validation, sufficient material resources, and unqualified respect to foster youth. We need to prepare them for a strong and healthy life in a vastly deeper and more comprehensive manner than we have been doing. And we need to give them a safe place to come back to and rest and receive unqualified and constructive support when they need it in their young adult lives.”

That’s a practice that changes odds.

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



## National Foster Care Month in May and Beyond

# View from Washington



by Robin Nixon, Former  
Executive Director, National  
Foster Care Coalition

*Editor's Note – This is Robin Nixon's last contribution to Voice in her role as executive director of the National*

*Foster Care Coalition, a position she left on July 1. Her "View from Washington" column has been an important mainstay both for this magazine and the larger child welfare field. We wish Robin the best as she moves on to her new position as Eastern Region Director for Americorps, and hope that she will again lend her unique insights to this publication in the future.*

May marked the 20th anniversary of National Foster Care Month, a collaborative effort to bring attention to the challenges and potential of children and youth in the foster care system. This year's theme, as it's been for the past several years, was "Change a Lifetime" for a child or youth in foster care.

It's also a time of recognizing the many people who work to make a difference in the lives of foster children by serving as foster parents, relative caregivers, mentors, advocates, social workers, and volunteers.

I am privileged to meet people each year who are dedicated to, and passionate about, making a difference in the lives of foster children and youth; each one strengthens my faith in the ability of one person to create positive change on behalf of children.

This spring, I met a woman in Arkansas as we waited for a shuttle to the airport. Sherry was an attorney, working as a birth-parent representative in the family court. She had only been doing it for three years, after having spent 30 years as an accountant. Once I told her what I did, she asked me to answer a question that had been bothering her.

Why, she asked, did the courts terminate parental rights so quickly, as if that would open up a "bright, beautiful new future" for these kids? In her experience, it just seemed to cause as many problems as it solved. I told her that yes, indeed, there was a lot of attention to that issue, and that people in Washington are spending a lot of time advocating for policies and funding to provide more prevention and reunification services to try to keep families together.

I also am inspired by the role young people play in changing a lifetime for their brothers and sisters in foster care. When I first started doing advocacy work and youth development training in the early 1990s, the idea of engaging young people as partners in our work was very new, and pretty disconcerting to many of my colleagues. "You want to bring young people to the committee meeting? Why? What will they do? They will not be comfortable participating in this kind of meeting!"

I had seen the light, so to speak, and continued to push the boundaries of what we understood to be the role of young people in program development, evaluation, and most important, advocacy. At the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), from 1994 to 2000, we began bringing young people onto advisory committees and work-

ing groups, and began laying out plans for the development of an ongoing youth leadership and advocacy group, which culminated in the National Foster Youth Advisory Council. CWLA also brought alumni of foster care onto its board of directors.

Young people played a critical role in advocacy efforts for the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. In fact, I can say with confidence that it would never have happened without them. They provided testimony to Congress, wrote op-ed pieces and letters to the editor, made phone calls and Hill visits, and knocked the socks off of every legislator with whom they spoke.

Almost 10 years later, I can't imagine any advocacy effort in child welfare that doesn't fully involve and engage the hundreds and thousands of youth in care and alumni of care who are passionately committed to seeing a better future for all of our nation's children in care. So Sherry from Arkansas, I salute you, and thank you for your work! And to the many young people whom I've come to know, admire, and rely on in this work, thank you so much for giving of yourselves so genuinely and tirelessly. National Foster Care Month lives year long because of you.

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

# Resource Corner

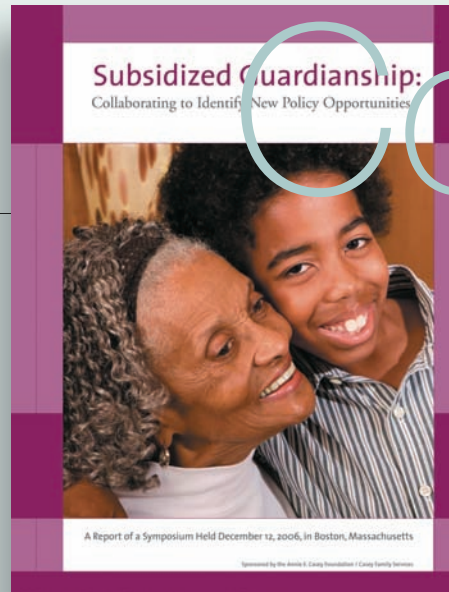
## *Implementing Evidence-based Practice in Treatment Foster Care: A Resource Guide*

The Foster Family-based Treatment Association (FFTA) recently released "Implementing Evidence-based Practice in Treatment Foster Care: A Resource Guide." It provides a broad range of effective practice tools, interventions, and comprehensive models specifically for the treatment foster care (TFC) provider, in addition to the methods used to apply these techniques to ongoing TFC services. The guide features a summary review with the most relevant evidence-based practices while pointing to additional, available resources. Casey Family Services Research Director Ben Kerman, Ph.D., and Senior Research Associate Gretta Cushing, Ph.D., both served on the committee charged with overseeing the guide.

The guide is available online at [www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org)

## *Foster Care Dynamics 2000-2005: A report from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive*

*Foster Care Dynamics* uses data from a sample of 348,695 children admitted to foster care for the first time between 2000 and 2005. This report provides a general overview of what happens when children are placed in foster care. The data include changes in the number of children in care, chances of entering care, placement type, movement, and exit rates. The report uses data from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive, a repository of administrative data provided by state child welfare agencies to Chapin Hall to support research and development in the child welfare field, with specific emphasis on children who are placed in foster care. Because of the large number



of children for whom data are collected and how the data are organized, the report provides a useful baseline for studying entry and exit patterns.

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

## *Foster Youths' Views of Adoption and Permanence*

In 2007, Urban Institute researchers conducted five focus groups with a total of 34 foster youth age 11 through 19 in New York City and Washington, D.C. This brief presents findings from the focus groups and provides insights into foster youths' perceptions of permanence, adoption, and recruitment. Using data collected from the youth focus groups, the study raised three important findings: foster care experiences influence youth's perceptions of adoption; youth have concerns and fears about adoption; and youth expect autonomy and want to feel empowered. The study's findings suggest that child welfare agencies and case-workers may have more to do in terms of educating young people about adoption and other permanency options.

To view this report's findings, visit [www.urban.org/publications/411609.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/411609.html).

## *Foster Care Alumni Resource Guide*

In July 2005, Casey Family Programs and Foster Care Alumni of America sponsored the Better Together Alumni Summit. The event brought together 100 foster care alumni leaders from across the United States to share knowledge, build leadership skills, network with each other, and further the alumni movement throughout the country. This resource guide is a follow-up to the summit, intended to help alumni, child welfare professionals, caregivers, and child welfare advocates celebrate the accomplishments of foster care alumni and alumni groups. It also provides context that unifies the efforts of foster care alumni in the alumni movement and shares lessons learned.

To view this resource guide, visit [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org).

## *Subsidized Guardianship: Collaborating to Identify New Policy Opportunities*

This document reports on the activities of a December 2006 symposium on subsidized guardianship, held in Boston, Massachusetts. The event, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Generations United, and Tufts University, brought together stakeholders from 12 states to share information about subsidized guardianship as a means to maintain permanent family connections for vulnerable children and youth. The report offers background on this permanency option, as well as policy recommendations for expanding access to subsidized guardianship throughout the country. Key to the work is understanding financial barriers to more universal application of this option.

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

## What the Media Say

### *Latino Children in Foster Care Highlighted*

Adoption advocates stress the need for Hispanic families to adopt or foster Latino children. “Less than 50 percent of Latino children in foster care are placed in Latino homes,” says Raymond Torres of the Casey Foundation, explaining that this can lead to self-esteem problems and identity confusion. “If the environment is different from what they know, they can become disconnected from what’s familiar to them – friends, neighborhood, and school.” This is why connecting a child to a lifelong Hispanic family is so important.

“America’s Forgotten Children”  
*Hispanic Magazine*  
April 2008

### *Former Conference Presenter’s Book Published*

After reading my winning essay, the public relations people for Casey Family Services asked me to be a presenter at their post adoption services conference and also address a Senate reception.

Hundreds of guests stood around the packed rotunda in the Russell Building on Capitol Hill. While the presenters made introductory remarks, the room reverberated with chattering and clinking glasses. I figured that nobody would pay attention to me, yet the minute I began, there was a hush. I concluded with a quote from Molière: “It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable.”



The silence made me think I had said something offensive until the echoing applause encouraged me to believe that some of the dignitaries might remember my story and protect children from a failing foster care system.

Ashley Rhodes-Courter  
Excerpted from *Three Little Words: A Memoir*  
Atheneum Books for Young Readers

### *Focusing on Hispanic Children during National Foster Care Month*

“When there are not enough foster homes, we end up placing more children in a single foster home than recommended or what is ideal,” said Raymond L. Torres, vice president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and

executive director of Casey Family Services. “National Foster Care Month becomes important because we do not have an adequate supply of foster homes [in this country]. We need to make a concerted effort to let the community get involved and let them know what types of supports there are for foster parents.”

“For the Love of Children”  
*Vista Magazine*  
May 2008

### *Children in Maine Facing Poverty*

A report released Thursday shows one in five Maine children under the age of 5 live in poverty, a problem made worse by a lack of federal money, child advocates said.

Maine KIDS COUNT, an annual report funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, identifies poverty and health insurance as areas needing immediate attention.

The report ... shows 20 percent of children under age 5 and 17 percent of children under age 18, living in poverty. For a family of three, an income of \$17,000 a year or lower is considered poverty level.

On the health care front, 10 percent of low-income children are without health insurance even though they are eligible for Medicaid, according to the report.

“Children in Maine Facing Poverty”  
*The Morning Sentinel*  
Augusta, Maine  
February 29, 2008



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

# 2008: 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.*

## September 12-17

The 13th International Conference on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma  
Institute on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma  
Town and Country Resort and Convention Center  
San Diego, California  
[www.ivatcenters.org](http://www.ivatcenters.org)

## September 13-14

Casey Family Services Foster Parent Conference  
“The Power of Family”  
Casey Family Services  
Boston Marriott Copley Place  
Boston, Massachusetts  
[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)

## September 15-17

Western Region Training Conference  
“It Takes Courage and Compassion to Serve Children and Families: Tools for Competence and Confidence”  
Child Welfare League of America  
Hilton Portland and Executive Tower  
Portland, Oregon  
[www.cwla.org/conferences/](http://www.cwla.org/conferences/)

## September 24-27

20th Annual ATTACH Conference  
“Developing Connections, Changing Lives”  
Association for Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children  
Embassy Suites Hotel  
Concord/Charlotte, North Carolina  
[www.attach.org](http://www.attach.org)

## September 21-24

Professional Development Conference  
The National Staff Development and Training Association  
Atlanta, Georgia  
[nsdta-atlanta.org](http://nsdta-atlanta.org)

## October 24-25

The 5th Biennial Adoption Conference  
“Identity and the Adopted Teen: Surviving the Crucible of Adolescence”  
The Adoption Initiative  
New York, New York  
[www.adoptioninitiative.org](http://www.adoptioninitiative.org)

## October 28-30

Alliance National Conference  
“The Power of Purpose, The Purpose of Our Power”  
The Alliance for Children and Families  
Baltimore, Maryland  
[www.alliance1.org](http://www.alliance1.org)

## October 30-November 2

2008 Annual Meeting  
Council on Social Work Education  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
[www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)

## October 31-November 2

It's My Life Conference  
Casey Family Programs  
Hollywood, California  
[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)

## November

*National Adoption Month*

## November 22

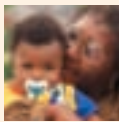
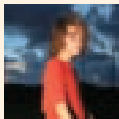
*National Adoption Day*



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

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