



THE DIRECT SERVICE AGENCY OF  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Voice

*Fall 2009 Volume Ten Issue Three*

## *States Slow to Extend Foster Care for Older Youth*



*CWLA President & CEO  
Christine James-Brown talks  
White House Conference*

*KIDS COUNT Data Book  
highlights need to bolster  
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*Former foster youth  
require supports during  
military service*

*Advocates promote  
accurate Census count  
of poor families*



*Below: Casey National Spokesperson Victoria Rowell, left, and former Secretary of State Dr. Madeleine Albright receiving the Sandra Day O'Connor Award from the Arizona Foundation for Women.*

## *From the Desk of Raymond L. Torres*

*A year has passed since Congress passed the bipartisan Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, ushering in the most significant changes to child welfare policy in more than a decade. Yet the climate of economic insecurity and dramatic budget cuts has slowed implementation of the law's provisions in many states.*

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation has made implementation of this important legislation a major policy priority. To advance implementation, Casey Family Services has partnered with child welfare commissioners and directors throughout the states that we serve, sponsoring policy sessions on the permanency-related provisions of the Act. On a national level, the Foundation recently joined leading philanthropies to form a national resource center to offer guidance to public systems interested in leveraging provisions in the law to help children in foster care achieve permanence and stronger outcomes (see page 5).*

*These strategies underscore Casey's commitment to connecting foster youth with lifelong families, addressing issues of racial inequity within child welfare systems, and supporting older youth as they prepare for adulthood.*

*The anniversary of the Fostering Connections Act coincides with the 20th anniversary of KIDS COUNT and its annual KIDS COUNT Data Book (see page 6), and serves as a reminder that quality data is essential to the effective implementation of lasting reform.*

*Data will play a significant role in shaping future reform efforts, including a possible 2010 White House Conference on Children and Youth. Our interview with CWLA President & CEO Christine James-Brown (see page 10) illustrates how her organization hopes the conference will galvanize not only child welfare, but the nation.*

*As we look to 2010, we urge states and advocacy organizations alike to push for the implementation of the Fostering Connections Act and the realization of the passion and vision behind it.*

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

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



*Izquierda: En la boda de Victoria Rowell y Radcliffe Bailey – desde la izquierda – Bailey, Rowell, Raymond Torres y Lee Mullane, directora de comunicaciones de Casey.*

*Derecha: En la boda de Holly, una de las jóvenes previamente en hogares de crianza – desde la izquierda – Torres, Michelle (hermana de la novia), Holly, y Ginny O'Connell, anteriormente trabajadora social de Casey.*

## *Del Escritorio de Raymond L. Torres*

*Ha transcurrido un año desde que el Congreso en forma bipartidaria aprobó el acto sobre la adopción Promoviendo Relaciones que Llevan al Éxito... (en inglés, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act), introduciendo los cambios mas significantes en una década de la política sobre el bienestar del niño. Sin embargo, el clima de inseguridad económica y los recortes dramáticos en el presupuesto han retrasado el cumplimiento de las estipulaciones de esta ley en muchos Estados.*

*La Fundación Annie E. Casey ha tomado como prioridad la promoción de esta legislación. Para ponerla en marcha, Casey Family Services se ha aliado con comisarios y directores del bienestar del niño a lo largo de los Estados donde trabajamos, patrocinando reuniones sobre las estipulaciones relacionadas con la permanencia encontradas en el acto. Hace poco, la Fundación se juntó con organizaciones filantrópicas a nivel nacional para formar un centro nacional de recursos, el cual podría ofrecer consejos a los sistemas públicos interesados en la promoción de las estipulaciones de la ley que ayudarán a que los niños en cuidado de crianza logren la permanencia y otros desenlaces favorables (vea pagina 5).*

*Estas estrategias subrayan el compromiso de Casey, fortaleciendo lazos con familias permanentes, dedicándose al problema de la desigualdad racial dentro de sistema de bienestar del niño y apoyando a los jóvenes en el camino hacia su mayoría.*

*El aniversario del Acto Promoviendo Relaciones que Llevan al Éxito (Fostering Connections) coincide con el 20avo aniversario de KIDS COUNT y el Libro de Datos anual KIDS COUNT (vea pagina 6), y sirve para recordarnos que los datos creíbles son elementos imprescindibles para las reformas perdurables.*

*Los datos confiables tomarán un papel importante en dar forma a los esfuerzos para una reforma futura, incluyendo posiblemente una Conferencia programada por 2010 de la Casa Blanca sobre Niños y Jóvenes. Nuestra entrevista con la Presidenta y CEO de CWLA, Christine James-Brown (vea página 10) ilustra como su organización espera que la conferencia no sólo impulse el bienestar del niño, sino a toda la nación.*

*Al mirar hacia el año 2010, urgimos al estado y organizaciones de ayuda a promover la implementación de la Ley "Fostering Connections Act" con el fin de llevar a cabo la visión y pasión de su propósito.*




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





# FOSTERING CONNECTIONS OFFERS PROMISE OF EXTENDED CARE, BUT WILL STATES OPT IN?



STUDIES CLEARLY SHOW THAT YOUNG PEOPLE WHO  
REMAIN IN CARE BEYOND AGE 18 ARE BETTER OFF THAN  
THOSE WHOSE SUPPORT IS ELIMINATED.

Like many 20-year-olds, Vermont native Rosa Huestis has faced bumps in the road trying to establish a career path, pick the right college, and hold down a part-time job. For a young person raised in foster care with no permanent family to lean on for emotional and financial support, those struggles could have been insurmountable. But because she lives in a state that extends foster care support up to age 22, she has received critical help meeting her expenses and mapping her next moves.

Vermont provides a range of supports including extended foster care, housing support, case management, and financial assistance for education, job searching, and other services. Case managers called youth development coordinators help young people to develop a plan focused on pursuing productive goals, including education, employment, counseling, and training.

“It would have been really hard these last couple of years to do everything I’ve done living on my own. If I didn’t have the extra funding coming in, there is no way I would have made it,” says Huestis. “It’s really

tough for a kid my age to make it without some kind of help, especially with the economy as bad as it is.”

Huestis left her last foster home at age 18, moved in and out of an aunt’s home a few times, lived with friends for a while, and worked part time. With financial support and guidance from the state’s youth development coordinators, as well as Casey Family Services’ Vermont Division, Huestis finished high school and completed some coursework at the College of St. Joseph in Rutland, Vermont, before relocating to Burlington. Her Casey social worker helped her reconnect with a former foster mother with whom she is living temporarily while she looks for work and prepares to go back to college. A Vermont farm girl at heart, Huestis plans to combine her love of horses with a career as a therapist, incorporating horseback riding into therapeutic treatment.

Without the extended help, Huestis notes, “I probably would have ended up dropping out of high school to work full time. I’m glad that [Casey and the state] were there to

support me in whatever I decided to do.”

Like Vermont, a handful of states already have been providing foster care support to youth ages 18 and older. Now the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 offers federal matching funds to encourage more states to follow suit.

Studies clearly show that young people who remain in care beyond age 18 are better off than those whose support is eliminated. The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth compared the outcomes of young people from Wisconsin and Iowa, where youth are discharged from foster care at age 18 or 19 at the latest, to those in Illinois, where care is extended to age 21. By age 19, the Wisconsin and Iowa youth no longer in care were far more likely to have dropped out of high school, experience homelessness, be arrested or incarcerated, or become pregnant. In contrast, Illinois youth who received support beyond age 18 were far more likely to have pursued postsecondary education and to be employed.

In a June 2009 Chapin Hall issue brief, entitled “Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Weighing the Costs to Government Against the Benefits to Youth,” Clark M. Peters, Amy Dworsky, Mark E. Courtney, and Harold Pollack provide preliminary estimates of the potential costs to government – and benefits to young people – if states opt to extend foster care to age 21. They provide compelling evidence that, based on the increase in postsecondary educational attainment associated with allowing youth to remain in care up to age 21 and the higher earning power that postsecondary education commands, lifetime earnings would increase an average of two dollars for every dollar spent on keeping foster youth in care beyond age 18.

Section 201 of Fostering Connections offers a financial incentive for states to extend care to foster youth up to age 21, provided that youth:

- complete high school or a high school equivalency program;
- enroll in postsecondary education or a vocational school;
- participate in a program designed to overcome barriers to employment;
- work at least 80 hours per month; or
- pursue none of these activities because of a medical condition.

But implementation of Section 201 is optional, and child welfare advocates are concerned that the federal support, slated to start in October 2010, won't be enough to sway budget-strapped states to ante up the required matching funds. The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services has joined with eight other foundations to promote and track implementation in states across the nation (see page 5).

Ten years ago, the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program of 1999 doubled the funding then available to states for what was known as the Independent Living Program, designed to provide transitional support for young people leaving foster care at age 18. Since then, although the number of kids aging out has risen by 50 percent, Chafee funding has not increased.

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– ROSA HUESTIS



Estimates of how many states offer extended foster care support past age 18 vary widely, depending on how such support is defined. But assistance that includes strong case management, support to stay in a foster care home or other housing, and help with education, employment supports, and other services is extremely rare, according to Raymond L. Torres, vice president of the Casey Foundation and executive director of Casey Family Services.

With the benefits of extended support now well documented, opting for the extra federal help “would have been an easy deal in other times, but in this climate, it’s very tough sledding,” says Gary Stangler, executive director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. “Even when states realize they only have to come up with roughly half the funding to receive the federal match, those are funds they still don’t have.”

The Initiative has created a tool to help states develop a clearer picture of how much extending care would cost, especially when factoring in the savings associated

with avoiding homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, and loss of workforce productivity.

#### *Permanency concerns*

Section 202 of Fostering Connections requires that youth between ages 18 and 21 receive help developing a plan that addresses specific options for housing, health insurance, education, continuing support services, workforce and employment services, and opportunities for ongoing mentoring at least 90 days prior to their exit from foster care.

But some feel the law does not go far enough to emphasize the importance of continuing to seek a permanent, lifelong family connection for young people.

“While we are concerned that we need to keep kids in care longer so that they can receive support, that doesn’t negate the necessity of finding permanence for older kids, including such options as adoption, kinship care, and guardianship,” says Robert Geen, director, manager, family services and systems, policy, research, and

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communications at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

“What concerns me is that the law acknowledges that our state child welfare systems have not succeeded in finding families for these young people, whether through birth family, relative guardians, or new adoptive families,” adds Sania Metzger, director, state-level child welfare policy reform for the Casey Foundation. “We’re pleased that the new law requires child welfare agencies to develop a plan that addresses specific needs 90 days before young people exit care, but it does not spell out that youth need to be reconnected with family or someone who will be in their life forever.”

Even when care is extended beyond age 18, Metzger emphasizes, permanency planning needs to be vigorously pursued to find a lasting family connection that can provide the kind of continuing support and nurturing young adults still need to be successful.

“No matter their age, young people still want to become part of a family, and there’s no substitute for that,” Metzger explains. Reunification with a birth parent is an important option to consider for older youth, she notes, especially since many return to a parent when they exit or run away from foster care. In certain circumstances, some jurisdictions, including California and Nevada, allow reunification for older youth even after a termination of parental rights.

Another issue that states need to address if they opt to extend care under Fostering Connections is how best to encourage young people to stay in care – or to come



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– SANIA METZGER

back into care if they chose to leave at age 18 – so that they can reap the benefits of the extended support. “Even if a state offers to cover board and care payments for a youth beyond age 18, few youth may choose the option if the state does not engage them effectively,” says Geen.

Maggie Reilly, deputy division director of Casey’s Vermont Division, says she and other staff from youth-serving agencies, as well as youth, testified before the state legislature on the benefits of extending care beyond age 18 before the state adopted the practice.

“We worked permanence into the expectations from the beginning,” says Reilly, who notes that the state provides support for young people to live with a supportive

adult and also requires a “permanency pact” to be completed as part of each young person’s plan. The pact is an explicit statement of what a caring adult can do to support a young person and help him or her achieve specific goals. The state also allows youth who have been adopted at ages 16 and older extended access to support services to eliminate any disincentive to adoption.

“We are a state that has attempted to keep this issue on the forefront,” Reilly says. “And it’s made a huge difference for a lot of kids.”

*To learn more about extending care for young people, visit the Fostering Connections Resource Center at [www.fosteringconnections.org](http://www.fosteringconnections.org).*



# FOUNDATIONS SHOW SUPPORT FOR FOSTERING CONNECTIONS IN STATES

A new coalition of nine well-respected foundations recently announced the creation of a national resource center to advance the implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and its provisions.

The coalition, comprising the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Casey Family Programs, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Duke Endowment, Eckerd Family Foundation, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Sierra Health Foundation, Stuart Foundation, and Walter S. Johnson Foundation, reflects its members' understanding that timely and effective implementation of Foster Connections can positively impact the lives of millions of vulnerable children and families.

"The Fostering Connections Resource Center serves as a clear signal to federal policymakers that commitment to this new law is both deep and widespread," according to Rob Geen, director, manager, policy, research, and communications at the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Center for Effective Family Services and Systems.

Announced on October 7, 2009, to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the law's enactment, the resource center provides timely and reliable tools and information on all aspects of the Act in order to ensure that state and local decision makers receive maximum support as they plan for and carry out its implementation. Managed by Child Trends and the Finance Project –

independent, nonpartisan research organizations – the Center offers a wide range of resources to support implementation of Fostering Connections, including:

- *Web site.* A user-friendly Web site houses reliable, nonpartisan data and resources on all aspects of Fostering Connections in a central location. The Web site helps visitors stay informed of federal regulatory activity; learn about best practices and state approaches to implementation; participate in webinars and online discussion forums; and discover events and conferences hosted by the Center and its collaborating organizations.
- *Information, Tools, and Assistance to State Leaders.* The Center prioritizes the information needs of decision makers. As such, staff and partners will offer tailored and customized tools and information where gaps exist in the field. These products are developed and disseminated on a regular basis and include policy and budget analyses, notices and summaries regarding federal guidance, toolkits, research briefs, and model legislation. The Center also provides and brokers technical assistance to state leaders and coordinates support with national organizations and state leaders.
- *Stakeholder Networks.* To stay abreast of decision makers' information needs, the Center hosts and manages national networks of state-based and local stakeholders to identify and respond proactively to key questions and concerns in the field, to identify best practices, and to assist in the

delivery and dissemination of implementation resources. The Center's networks are aligned with the six major areas of the Act – adoption, kinship care, older youth, tribal child welfare, health, and education.

State policymakers are grappling with a wide variety of challenges, particularly those brought on by today's uncertain economy. A Congressional hearing held September 15, 2009, examined progress to date. The recession has hindered states from focusing fully on implementing the new opportunities afforded by Fostering Connections, according to hearing participants. In addition, new requirements for coordination across state systems responsible for education, health, and child welfare, for example, have proved difficult to develop.

The Center serves a wide audience of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Act, including governors; state legislators; tribal leaders; state and county administrators of child welfare, health, and education; judicial leaders and state court personnel; case workers and other direct service providers; foster and adoptive families; relatives of children in care; children's advocacy organizations; and other professionals in the children's community who provide input into program and policy development.

*For more information about the Fostering Connections Resource Center, visit [www.fosteringconnections.org](http://www.fosteringconnections.org).*

# LATEST *KIDS COUNT* DATA BOOK HIGHLIGHTS NEED TO BOLSTER DATA ON CHILDREN



Knowledge is power. And knowledge based on sound data is particularly powerful when it comes to shaping policies to improve the lives of the nation's most disadvantaged children and families.

For the last 20 years, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has armed policymakers with the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, an annual state-by-state compendium of information and statistical trends on the well-being and needs of the nation's children.

Based on data compiled in the years ahead of the economic downturn, the 2009 *Data Book* shows that national trends in child well-being have improved slightly since 2000, yet about 900,000 more children are living in poverty. During this decade, the percentage of children living in poverty has fluctuated between 17 and 19 percent.

The *Data Book* also shows reductions in infant mortality; child deaths; teen deaths; teen births; high school dropouts; and teens not in school and not working. But these are offset by a rise in low-birth weight babies; children in families where no parent has

full-time, year-round employment; children in single-parent families; and children in poverty.

"KIDS COUNT offers slightly more good news than bad for children, but some trends are headed in the wrong direction," says Laura Beavers, coordinator for the national KIDS COUNT initiative. Noting rising unemployment in 2009 and the lag time in gathering data, she anticipates that conditions for children will likely worsen, because high unemployment drives up child poverty. "We're not going to see the recession's impact in most states until 2010."

New Hampshire is among three states ranking the highest overall. Connecticut is among five states showing the greatest improvement between 1999-2000 and 2006-2007, whereas Maine and Vermont are among six states with the biggest drop in rankings.

### *Stronger data systems needed*

In the annual essay accompanying the *Data Book*, "Counting What Counts," the Foundation acknowledges gains in data collection, analysis, dissemination, and use,

but underscores the need for broader, more accessible data to better assess children's well-being, measure the impact of public programs, and develop policies to help vulnerable children and families.

"Better futures for children will not occur simply by combining better data, strong data analysis, and an increased use of new technology," says Douglas W. Nelson, Casey's president and CEO. "But by counting what counts in the lives of children and families, we can better hold ourselves accountable to meet the needs and boost the outcomes for less-fortunate children."

The essay recommends:

- Compiling more complete data, including by income and race, so disparities can be better identified and addressed. "There are so many places within public systems where outcomes diverge for kids and families of different races," says Beavers.
- Producing longitudinal data – tracking a child's progress or problems over time rather than providing a snapshot of a child on one day.



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- Integrating data from several systems – enabling programs and agencies that work with children and families to better share information, assess needs, address multiple issues, and improve service coordination.
- Ensuring that data are clearly understood and can be compared across communities.
- Providing easy access so data don't go unused.

The report highlights troubling gaps and shortcomings in two areas: population data that capture children's needs, characteristics, and well-being; and performance data that measure the effectiveness of government-funded programs. The essay urges federal leaders to address problems with the National Vital Statistics System and with the U.S. Census, which determines how billions of program dollars are distributed. The 2010 Census should be fully funded, properly managed, and well promoted, the essay argues, to ensure that communities don't lose out because they are undercounted.

"The Census continues to fail to count millions of U.S. residents, most often children and residents of low-income communities, urban and rural," says Beavers.

Extending the length of the Census Bureau director's term to provide more continuity and ensuring that funds targeted for outreach efforts in minority communities aren't cut are potential solutions.

The essay also calls for an overhaul of the U.S. poverty measure, which is used to determine eligibility for government programs and to guide policy making. The current 1960s-era measure sharply underestimates families' costs, income, resources, and benefits. "The way we define and monitor

poverty is completely outdated and doesn't gauge the impact of our major anti-poverty programs, which is a big concern now with the recession," says Beavers.

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– DOUGLAS W. NELSON

In addition, state and local decision makers need to expand the use of information technologies, the essay notes. Examples include:

- A family finding program that uses Internet search capabilities to find and engage relatives of children in foster care, identifying and nurturing strong relationships that can lead to permanent family connections.
- Child welfare workers who use tablet PCs, laptop computers operated with a digital pen instead of a keyboard or mouse, that automatically enter handwritten notes into case files or a state's automated database. Workers would no longer need to retype meeting notes and could check email and work from any remote location, using the tablet PC's Internet access.
- Casebook, a system under development by Casey for use by public and private child welfare agencies, will include individual-

ized online profiles of children, granting access only to authorized users. Case files will be automatically updated by linking electronically to child service agencies' data systems. Agency staff will be able to communicate and track progress online through this system, which also will generate reminders.

The essay also cites state innovations, such as a Florida data warehouse that links educational data with other types of data; South Carolina's use of data to examine the special health care needs facing its children; and data used by the Chicago public schools to determine when students are most likely to drop out and then design appropriate intervention strategies.

The *Data Book* encourages child advocacy groups to strengthen their use of data, highlighting successful efforts by state-level KIDS COUNT grantees. Advocates are urged to fill data gaps – especially in areas such as family assets and workforce development – by creating benchmarks and neighborhood indicators and using community mapping and local "report cards" to raise awareness of child well-being trends.

"When decision makers rely on clear and accurate data, the result is stronger policies, more targeted and effective programs, and better accountability with public dollars," says Raymond L. Torres, Casey Foundation vice president and Casey Family Services executive director. "While the need to cut spending in this economic downturn is pressing, the long-term benefit of supporting better data for the improvement in child outcomes cannot be overstated."

For more information about this year's KIDS COUNT Data Book, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

# ACCURATELY COUNTING POOR COMMUNITIES: A CHALLENGE FOR THE 2010 CENSUS

Getting an accurate count in the 2010 Census is important for all Americans, but ironically, those most likely to be missed stand to lose the most from an inaccurate Census.

The government relies on decennial Census data to make critical decisions about how to distribute more than \$400 billion in federal funding to states and localities each year, and a significant share of those funds support programs that help needy communities. Particularly in today's economy, the loss of aid to poor communities could push already vulnerable families to the limit, increasing their risk of involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Federal programs that allocate funds based in part on Census data include:

- foster care Title IV-E funds;
- child welfare services state grants;
- family violence prevention services;
- community-based child abuse prevention grants;
- juvenile justice and delinquency prevention allocations;
- community development block grants;
- emergency food assistance;
- transitional assistance from homelessness;
- state children's health insurance; and
- very low- to moderate-income housing loans.

Census data also are used to determine the number of representatives a state gets in the U.S. House and to enforce the Voting Rights Act.

"Communities that are not counted accurately will not get their fair share of political power or public funds," says Casey Senior Fellow William O'Hare.

## WHILE THE STAKES OF THE CENSUS ARE HIGHER THAN EVER FOR COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING TO RECOVER FROM THE ECONOMIC CRI- SIS, OBTAINING AN ACCURATE COUNT WILL BE ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING IN 2010.

While the stakes of the Census are higher than ever for communities struggling to recover from the economic crisis, obtaining an accurate count will be especially challenging in 2010.

The numbers of minorities and immigrants, groups that historically have been hardest to count, have increased significantly since 2000. Moreover, 2000 Census data reflect a net undercount of one million children under age 10. Minority children – who are missed at a significantly higher rate than non-Hispanic white children – increased from 41 percent of all children in 2000 to 47 percent in 2008. Children generally are

overrepresented in communities that are hard to count.

Today, more children are living in families with one or more undocumented immigrants, a group likely to fear government surveys in the current political climate. The number of children with at least one undocumented immigrant parent increased from 3.9 million in 2003 to 5.5 million in 2008.

The housing and mortgage foreclosure crisis also has caused more families to experience homelessness, share housing with other families, or live in other temporary housing situations that make it more difficult to obtain an accurate count.

At the same time, funding for outreach is more limited than in the past, and many community groups that traditionally mount public awareness campaigns to educate residents about the importance of being counted now lack the resources to do so.

"In an economy where community-based organizations are facing tough financial challenges and workers are being laid off, organizations do not have money to promote Census 2010 participation," says Sandra Avila, a consultant who serves on a Casey Foundation work group exploring how and where the Foundation can most effectively support such efforts.

### *Casey's role*

Earlier this year, the Foundation released a set of policy recommendations on how to



improve the nation's data on children and families, a topic that also was the subject of the 2009 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* (see page 6).

Recommendations specific to the Census ranged from helping hard-to-reach communities educate residents on the benefits of being counted to making the Census Bureau an independent agency and extending the director's term to five years to ensure continuity in Census preparations. With bipartisan support, the Senate has since confirmed Dr. Robert Groves, a respected expert in the field of survey methodology, as the new Census Bureau director.

The Foundation, meanwhile, is partnering with several national organizations working to promote the Census in hard-to-reach areas, such as the Funders Census Initiative; the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO); the Frontera Asset Building Network, which is particularly well positioned to conduct outreach in vulnerable communities on the U.S.-Mexican border; and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF).

LCCREF is working with several organizations to ensure a fair and accurate Census, including NALEO; the Asian American Justice Center; the National Congress of American Indians; the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); the Census Project, a collaboration of census stakeholders representing a broad range of organizations and issue areas; and Nonprofits Count, a network that

**“IN AN ECONOMY WHERE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS ARE FACING TOUGH FINANCIAL CHALLENGES AND WORKERS ARE BEING LAID OFF, ORGANIZATIONS DO NOT HAVE MONEY TO PROMOTE CENSUS 2010 PARTICIPATION.”**

— SANDRA AVILA

distributes a variety of tools and materials to help nonprofits use their contacts and services to promote an accurate count.

This work is crucial to ensure that groups leery of responding to a government survey, such as undocumented immigrants, understand that the information they provide is confidential and that they cannot be personally identified from their responses. Groups like NALEO, for example, have been diligent in mounting Spanish-language television and radio campaigns urging Hispanic communities to be counted. Next spring, the group will air programs explaining in detail how to fill out census forms.

In 2000, the Census form for the first time included a specific category to identify foster children in the household. These data primarily identified children living in non-kinship foster care homes rather than those living with relatives or in institutional or group settings. But they confirmed what the American Community Survey and other foster care data sources show: Households

where foster children live are more apt to have lower incomes, higher child-to-adult ratios, and greater economic and social challenges than the general population.

The 2010 Census does not include a specific question to identify foster children, although the questionnaire asks whether foster children, among other groups, were omitted from the response about how many people live in the household. Census workers may follow up with those who indicate they've omitted foster children or other categories of boarders to ensure that all are counted.

Ensuring the best possible count may be trickier, and budgets to do so tighter than ever, but advocates have shown strong leadership to meet the challenge.

“The budget crisis has forced organizations to be more innovative about how they are doing this kind of outreach, and that's the silver lining,” says Avila.

*On the Web: To locate resources mentioned in this article, visit our online bookmarks at [www.delicious.com/caseyfamilyservices](http://www.delicious.com/caseyfamilyservices) and click on the “census” tag.*





## CHRISTINE JAMES-BROWN PRESIDENT AND CEO, CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Close-up

*As president and CEO of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Christine James-Brown is guiding the venerable organization through a unique period of risk and opportunity. The nation's deep economic turmoil and the 2008 passage of landmark child welfare legislation have challenged the nation's oldest and largest child welfare organization to help member agencies redefine what it means to serve at-risk families. As part of that effort, CWLA is supporting legislation that would create a White House Conference on Children and Youth in 2010.*

**VOICE:** *CWLA has made a 2010 White House Conference on Children and Youth a very public priority. Why?*

**CHRISTINE JAMES-BROWN (CJB):** CWLA sees itself playing a leadership role around policy and practice. We have more than 600 public and private agency members representing every state, which gives us credibility to play that role.

Primarily, we want to ensure that all the critical voices are brought to the table during the conference. We want to stimulate discussion and engagement on a grassroots level across the country on how to improve outcomes among vulnerable children.

**VOICE:** *Do you have any preconceptions about what a White House Conference should accomplish?*

**CJB:** It is wide open, except that we need to overcome the tendency to talk about child welfare children and families. Our view is that families in the system represent the vulnerability of all fragile families. Some end up in the system; many do not. We need a stronger understanding of what it means for families and children to be vulnerable in this country.

Also, we believe in the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child." The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 is helping us send

**"PRIMARILY, WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT ALL THE CRITICAL VOICES ARE BROUGHT TO THE TABLE DURING THE CONFERENCE. WE WANT TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION AND ENGAGEMENT ON A GRASSROOTS LEVEL ACROSS THE COUNTRY ON HOW TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AMONG VULNERABLE CHILDREN."**

that message, because the legislation requires greater coordination among education, health, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems. Therefore, we hope the conference can spark a stronger commitment to collaboration and coordination.

**VOICE:** *Where does the legislation that would create the White House Conference stand?*

**CJB:** There has been some movement. Our intent is to formulate a true public-private approach. We've been reaching out to the administration. If we can convince the U.S. Children's Bureau leadership to partner on developing a conference, that would help move any agenda that comes out of the conference.

**VOICE:** *Why do you think there is so much separation among the systems and organizations that serve children and families?*

**CJB:** Money. In a situation where everyone is grabbing at limited resources, it makes collaboration difficult. Collaboration can be expensive, and it's longer term. So if you're working with a short-term agenda, it's difficult to understand and appreciate the power of collaboration. That's one of the reasons we will focus on community engagement, to help ensure that the White House Conference results in all stakeholders articulating a 10-year vision with shared accountability.

It's difficult for people to see that we want to share leadership of the conference. CWLA does not want to own it. I'd love for leaders to start saying to their boards, we are sponsoring a call for the White House Conference, because that creates ownership — among all participants.

“LEADERSHIP IS TRUSTING IN THE PROCESS; IT’S GOING TO LEAD YOU TO THE RIGHT PATH. THE MORE YOU GIVE AWAY AND COLLABORATE, THE STRONGER IMPACT YOU CAN POTENTIALLY HAVE.”



**VOICE:** *As a leader, is it intimidating to consider giving up your own agenda for the next 10 years to follow a vision that resulted from collaboration, and isn't necessarily your own?*

**CJB:** No, because that's leadership. Leadership is trusting in the process; it's going to lead you to the right path. The more you give away and collaborate, the stronger impact you can potentially have.

**VOICE:** *Do you think your members are looking for CWLA to provide leadership through case-level expertise and professional development or policy leadership?*

**CJB:** That is a critical question. I understand the CWLA mission as focusing on policy and practice leadership, but interest in member services is very strong right now. When you're a CWLA member, you're buying policy and practice leadership for the greater good, and that's a very different relationship than the one between a business and a trade association where your membership buys so many hours of this and receives discounts here and there.

We're seeing some erosion of membership, primarily due to the economy, and there's some pressure to focus more on member services, but I think that could be an accident waiting to happen. The strategic advantage that we offer is strong leadership in policy and practice. It is what our brand represents and if we back away from it, I'm not sure where it's going to go.

“OUR VIEW IS THAT FAMILIES IN THE SYSTEM REPRESENT THE VULNERABILITY OF ALL FRAGILE FAMILIES. SOME END UP IN THE SYSTEM; MANY DO NOT. WE NEED A STRONGER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN TO BE VULNERABLE IN THIS COUNTRY.”

**VOICE:** *Fostering Connections was the most significant child welfare legislation in more than a decade. As you move forward, what is next on that policy agenda for the field and CWLA?*

**CJB:** We need to make sure, particularly in this economic environment, that what the Fostering Connections Act enables us to do is realized, including work with education and other systems. We need to examine policy areas where systems intersect. That's a lot to do. The legislation is too strong a foundation not to realize its full benefit.

Within that same context, Fostering Connections offers opportunities to develop a better understanding of the issues of kinship care and disproportionality as a field, as well as workforce issues. It really opens the

door for us to continue our work in these arenas. At the same time, we can benefit from paying attention to what's happening in other fields that could benefit child welfare.

**VOICE:** *CWLA is synonymous with child welfare. When you work with other systems, does your brand give you instant access or is education about the organization and the field required?*

**CJB:** There's always a need for education, and there's not a clear line between child welfare and everything else. We can't talk about poverty separate from poor school performance, because there are so many places where these issues intersect, and making those connections can be a powerful result of the White House Conference.

*To learn more about CWLA, visit [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org). In addition, listen to "On the Line with CWLA," the organization's weekly podcast covering a range of child-related issues.*



# SIX TIPS FOR RECRUITING FOSTER PARENTS



Children and youth are the heart of any foster care and adoption agency; parents are the foundation. Data from 2004, however, shows that there are roughly five times the number of foster children as licensed foster parents, and that pool of foster parents has continued to shrink.

Since the passage of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, public agencies have been shifting practice from foster care placements to a focus on connecting children to lifelong families, also known as permanence. This evolution has required agencies to attract parents willing to make a lifelong commitment to a child, as well as families who can provide a temporary haven for children reunifying with birth parents.

The move to greater permanence at Casey Family Services, for example, placed a priority on recruitment. “In helping youngsters achieve permanence, Casey now relies on parents to be resources on planning teams and bridges to lifelong family,” says Eliot Brenner, Ph.D., deputy executive director for Field Operations.

There is no silver bullet to resolve the recruitment conundrum. Successful recruitment requires strategic planning, relationship building, and creative thinking. The following guidelines highlight six effective strategies for garnering inquiries and converting them into families for youth in foster care.

## *Use data to make decisions.*

Data can help you make informed decisions

about recruiting families best qualified to meet the needs of youth in care. According to Denise Goodman, Ph.D., of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Family to Family initiative, “Every agency should collect two sets of data: information about the children and information about the families in your system.” Family to Family literature suggests developing a profile of young people who need families by grouping children according to age, gender, ethnicity, neighborhood of origin, and special needs. A similar profile of current families can help recruiters tailor messages to those families best equipped to parent the children in the agency’s care.

## *Know your target audience.*

To effectively target a specific audience, consider their interests and lifestyle. For example, research shows that women consider fostering more than men, and CNN recently reported that the number of single black women who want to adopt is increasing. Talk to people in your target demographic to find out where they shop and work, what sources they turn to for information, and what hobbies and community activities interest them. Be sure to talk to current families about what influenced their decision to foster or adopt.

## *Involve current foster and adoptive parents.*

Resource parents can play a valuable role in recruiting new parents. A Foster Family-based Treatment Association survey found that nearly all responding agencies used foster parent referrals (88 percent) and word-

of-mouth (77 percent) to recruit parents, ranking them among the most effective recruitment tools.

## *Engage teens in their recruitment.*

The Successful Adolescent Adoptions study, conducted by the Center for Child and Family Studies at the University of South Carolina, found that, although older teens can be more focused on independence than adoption, they also can be a tremendous asset when engaged in their own permanency planning. Teens tend to become more receptive to adoption when they know adults who show an interest in their future.

## *Use technology and other search tools.*

Many children and youth in foster care lose touch with their families. Utilizing casefile mining and Internet technologies, family search and engagement projects nationwide have identified family members who can provide lifetime connections to kin who have experienced foster care.

## *Welcome prospective parents.*

Jeff Katz of the Listening to Parents project reports that, for every 1,000 people who call an agency seeking to adopt a child, only 36 do so. “Far too many agencies view their primary response in adoption as screening out “bad” parents rather than recruiting good ones.”

*On the Web: To locate the resources mentioned in this article, and many more, visit our online bookmarks at [www.delicious.com/caseyfamilyservices](http://www.delicious.com/caseyfamilyservices) and click on the “recruitment” tag.*



# Hip-Hop Therapy Offers Healing Alternative

**“SOME KIDS NEVER TALK ABOUT PAST TRAUMA IN TRADITIONAL THERAPY, BUT THEY’LL WRITE ABOUT IT IN A SONG.”**

— AUDRA HOLMES-GREENE



“You guys can be young legends.” Those words from a respected mentor inspired several youth from the Bridgeport Division of Casey Family Services to form a hip-hop group performing songs about their experiences in foster care.

Like the lives of the group’s members, the rise of Young Legends has not followed a straight trajectory. The group’s original sound engineer and mentor was murdered in 2005. “Dreams,” the song the group wrote and performed at his funeral, reflects his belief in their potential.

## *Creative therapy*

The group’s repertoire continues hip hop’s tradition of setting oral history to music, yet it’s the song writing process, firmly rooted in child welfare practice, that has helped group members change how they view their lives.

The social workers who manage Young Legends encourage members to consider five questions about identity, part of the 3-5-7 Model developed by child welfare expert Darla Henry and used by Casey to prepare youth to become part of a lifelong family.

The group then learns to transform their answers into lyrics, explains Audra Holmes-Greene, a Bridgeport team leader who initiated the clinical component of the program. “You have to create opportunities for self-expression that don’t overwhelm kids.”

Performance as an outlet for children in foster care to facilitate healing is taking hold. A well known example is Uhlich Voices, a rap

group of primarily former foster youth served by the UCAN in Chicago. The group, which has performed for foster youth nationwide, joined Young Legends onstage in 2006 during a Casey-sponsored youth conference.

## *Life lessons*

Young Legends offers a non-traditional approach to other life lessons, too. Teens enrolled in the group commit to 10-week sessions and meetings run two and a half hours. During the first hour, members discuss current issues in their lives. In the second half, they write.

“We listen to each other and offer constructive criticism,” says Shakeisha, a member since the group’s inception. “The group reminds me that criticism is okay, that you have to take things one step at a time.”

Young Legends also teaches public speaking, self-esteem, and teamwork. The group’s current sound engineer, David Gillan, a former Casey foster youth who now works for another child welfare agency, shows youth how to create a beat and teaches them the technical skills associated with recording music. Efforts have paid off with invitations to perform for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families and at a recent Casey youth conference.

## *Program origins*

Even before Young Legends, Bridgeport Division Director Linda Goldenberg provided a creative outlet for youth in care by establishing the Performing Arts Troupe,

which focused on social skills development and recently was featured in the *Journal of Youth Development*.

When Holmes-Greene was joined by Betty Wooten-McElveen, who now oversees the group, the pair quickly realized the program’s therapeutic potential. Yet, they also were aware that teens from minority groups often distrust therapy, a well-documented issue among minority populations with a history of abuse and unjustified incarceration.

“Encouraging youth to write lyrics is less threatening than asking them to engage in traditional therapy,” says Holmes-Greene. “Some kids never talk about past trauma in traditional therapy, but they’ll write about it in a song.”

## *Interwoven stories*

Although Young Legends is culturally diverse, the group’s members are unified by their experience in foster care. “We don’t always see eye to eye, but we talk it out. At the end of the day, we are each other’s backbones,” says Shakeisha.

## *A foundation of trust*

Trust is one of the hallmarks of Young Legends’ success, and staff work diligently to create a safe space for teens to open up. As youth shape their intensely personal stories into lyrics, staff help them remove identifying phrases while still communicating their innermost thoughts and feelings.

*Listen to a track from Young Legends at [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org).*

# INNOVATIVE CASEY PROGRAM HELPS REUNIFY FAMILIES



No one wants to be an inadequate parent, but sometimes the challenges of poverty, mental illness, and addiction derail parents who love their children. Child welfare systems can provide a safety net for children in these situations, placing children in foster care. Fortunately, such an intervention can serve as a turning point for parents who want to learn to better manage the stresses that placed their children at risk. The mechanism for strengthening families and returning children to their parents is known as family reunification.

For Tim and Ana, family reunification transformed their family life. After years of cocaine and alcohol abuse, the couple lost custody of their four young children in 2005. By the time child protective services intervened, Tim was unemployed and the family – including a son with severe autism – was homeless. “Before we lost the kids, nothing mattered to us,” Tim says. With the children in state custody, the couple found the motivation to change.

At first, the Maine Division of Casey Family Services temporarily placed the children with foster parents trained to work with families engaged in reunification, while Tim and Ana worked to reverse the family’s downward slide. Eventually, the staff facilitated the children’s return home, surrounding the family with a team of caring individuals and professionals focused on helping Tim and Ana create a safe and stable home for their kids.

In Casey’s New Hampshire Division, a new family reunification service offered Marie the respite from daily parenting she needed

to address a long and untreated slide into depression. For this single mother, mental health issues led to an unsafe home environment for her two children. As a result, the 6- and 7-year-old girls were placed in a foster home.

## *The reunification process*

Casey’s approach to reunification engages families, Casey staff, state child welfare professionals, and community-based

7-year-old Joe who is autistic and nonverbal. The children’s foster parent was another important resource for the family.

“Joe’s foster mom was very involved and showed Ana how to keep her home life calm,” Kita says. “For example, Ana learned that when her son became agitated, she could calm him by holding his hand and looking into his eyes. These small strategies can show big results for families.”

## CASEY’S APPROACH TO REUNIFICATION ENGAGES FAMILIES, CASEY STAFF, STATE CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONALS, AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE PROVIDERS IN ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS THAT ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN INVOLVED.

service providers in active partnerships that address the needs of the children involved. These reunification teams work to identify family strengths and needs, establish the expectations and responsibilities of parents, and clarify the court’s role in determining whether children return home.

Services provided may include supervised visitation; case management; individual, couples, and family therapy; parenting education; identification of community supports to enhance self-sufficiency; and limited financial assistance – all designed to improve parents’ ability to address the concerns that brought their children into care.

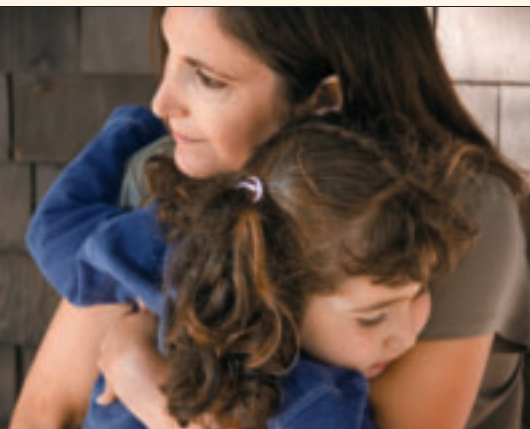
For Tim and Ana, Casey social worker Becca Kita tapped a number of resources to facilitate the reunification process, including drug and marriage counseling, as well as parental education and school services, especially for

According to Kristina Stevens, a senior associate for program development at Casey, research shows that when families have the tools and resources to parent effectively, the incidence of child abuse and neglect can be reduced. “By building relationships and strengthening certain ‘protective factors’ within the family, team members can recognize signs of stress that previously triggered concerns and help parents handle that stress more effectively.” Protective factors include parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and the child’s social and emotional development, and concrete support in times of need.

“MY CASEY SOCIAL WORKER AND THE OTHER TEAM MEMBERS HELPED ME FOCUS ON THE RIGHT THINGS, INSTEAD OF ON WHAT BRINGS ME DOWN. “THEY SHOWED ME WHAT I COULD ACCOMPLISH, HELPED ME ORGANIZE MY LIFE, AND KEPT MY MORALE UP, SO I COULD GET MY KIDS BACK AND BE A MOTHER.”

— MARIE

THE REUNIFICATION TEAM WORKS TO IDENTIFY FAMILY STRENGTHS AND NEEDS, ESTABLISH THE EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS, AND CLARIFY THE COURT’S ROLE IN DETERMINING WHETHER THE CHILDREN RETURN HOME.



Stress is not uncommon for vulnerable families. For example, as Marie began receiving treatment for her depression, the single mom lost her job. Without an income, she wouldn’t have been able to secure a suitable apartment for her family, a condition for reunification with her daughters. However, the Casey-facilitated team quickly helped connect Marie with supportive housing services, allowing her to find a safe, though transitional, home for her family to reunite.

While the team supports families, the responsibility for change belongs to parents, who must work hard to prove themselves. Tim and Ana acknowledge that losing their children showed them the necessity of getting on a solid path.

With intensive treatment and comprehensive support, the couple no longer abuses drugs or alcohol, Tim found a job he loves, and the couple maintains a safe living environment. As a result, their children returned home this summer. “Reunification was tough, but I’m a poster child for doing whatever was necessary to get our kids back,” says Tim.

However, the work doesn’t stop when the children return home. Casey is providing post-permanency services to Tim and Ana as they begin parenting again, explains Kita. “With the children back in the house, we visit the family regularly and often to help them solve problems,” she says. “As the family gains strengths and confidence, visits will be less frequent.”

Casey’s active engagement with families from the start of the reunification process is central to the agency’s success,” according to Julie Skinner, a Casey team leader in New Hampshire. “It’s important to establish a respectful working relationship with the family while identifying their strengths and service needs.” Once a referral has been made, a reunification team meets with the family to begin discussing goals and available services.

“The skills and expertise of our staff are a critical part of our successes,” notes Stevens. “Our reunification staffs in Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire are committed to building on the strengths of families and forming positive relationships with them, as well as state and community partners, and maintaining our focus to keep the

reunification process moving forward, measure progress, and achieve mutual goals.”

For the parents in the program, the goal is getting their children home. “The reunification team put all its services in place to help us get our kids home,” says Ana. “Their help means a great deal to us. We wouldn’t be where we are today without that support. And now the future looks good.”

Marie agrees. Through reunification services, she learned to cope with her depression, allowing her to parent more effectively. “My Casey social worker and the other team members helped me focus on the right things, instead of on what brings me down,” she says. “They showed me what I could accomplish, helped me organize my life, and kept my morale up, so I could get my kids back and be a mother.”



## YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

# TACKLING LIFE'S CHALLENGES



Editor's Note: *The debate surrounding the use – or what some would say is the overuse – of psychotropic drugs for foster children and youth diagnosed with disorders and conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, continues. In fact, studies have revealed that youth in foster care covered by Medicaid receive psychotropic medication at a rate three times that of youth who are on Medicaid due to family income. In the following essay, former Casey foster youth Maryellen Santiago, social worker and yoga instructor, offers an alternative through meditation, yoga, and understanding the workings of the brain.*

Like many current and former foster youth, I always dreaded going to therapy sessions despite how often I was told, “It would be good for you.” During my freshman year in college, I started exploring yoga to help calm my anxieties about papers and exams. My concentration improved dramatically. My anger and anxieties released, and I gained greater control of my thoughts and emotions.

Soon after graduating with a master's degree in social work from Columbia University and working for New York City's child welfare system, I realized that something was missing in the way that case workers help children and youth deal with emotional issues. I found that foster youth rarely understood their emotional reactions or mental diagnoses, and many lacked even a basic understanding of how physical and mental exercises could relax their minds and bodies.

**“I’VE SEEN THAT FOSTER YOUTH CAN LEARN TECHNIQUES TO HELP BREAK NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HABITS AND BUILD NEW HABITS.”**

– MARYELLEN SANTIAGO

So, instead of being guided to discover and build their ability to control and regulate themselves, too often youth were placed on a regimen of psychotropic medicine. I came to believe that if these children and youth were taught about how their brains function and given techniques for monitoring their thoughts, emotions, and responses to stress, their behavior would improve without the need for as many – or any – psychotropic medications.

Many foster youth have hidden talents, and the desire for employment and education. Yet, many are blocked from realizing their potential and aspirations by fear, doubt, and erosion of their willpower. In

my role as a social worker and mentor, I often have found that foster youth naturally gravitate to opportunities that require physical movement and discussions about their sense of self. I've seen that foster youth can learn techniques to help break negative emotional and physical habits and build new habits.

I've had the privilege of studying sociology, psychology, social work, and various functions of the brain, but what tied all of these fields together for me, and helped create a noticeable change in my physical and mental well-being, was the introduction to a more holistic approach. I believe this kind of perspective has potential for use with foster youth as a complement to more traditional treatments. A quality holistic approach combines mind and body exercises to increase functionality of the brain and can awaken senses through stretching, breathing, and meditating.

The stress of multiple foster care placements and multiple transitions to new schools can very well throw physical and mental systems out of balance for foster children and youth. If more youth could learn to connect their minds and bodies, they could also learn to tackle life's challenges more effectively. Incorporating more creative styles in services designed to change negative physical and emotional patterns could lead to healthier and more empowered foster youth, and benefit our society at large.

## ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

# SUPPORTS FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH SERVING IN THE MILITARY



by Nathan Monell, Chief Executive Officer, Foster Care Alumni of America

For youth aging out of foster care, few job prospects offer the expert training, college tuition incentives, and pride that joining the military and serving one's country can provide. Military life offers guaranteed housing, food, income, health care, and training, plus a sense of self-respect and community. The all-encompassing nature of military life also offers a structured transition to adult independence, an important consideration for young people who do not have the support and guidance of loving parents.

But there are pitfalls. Foster youth experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at twice the rate of veterans. Basic training or overseas deployment is not for the faint of heart. One young foster care alumnus excitedly entered basic training only to confront an aggressive sergeant who slung one "your mama" insult after another, unaware that this particular trigger, often used to push soldiers' buttons, was causing intense pain. Words that simply would have challenged another youth broke this alumnus. He left foster care with a dream and returned following a nervous breakdown.

Similarly, a drill sergeant who inspected alumna Cleta Dunn's locker told her he did not trust soldiers who did not display family photos in their lockers. Cleta, who was

well connected to the alumni community, emailed Foster Care Alumni of America to ship overnight some photos. When deployed to Iraq, Cleta identified another alumna as her next of kin because her family situation did not present an acceptable alternative. Once deployed, she received care packages from the alumni community. And when it came time to take leave, an older alumna gave Cleta a place to go.

**"THE CENTRAL ISSUE IN (MILITARY) SUICIDES IS RELATIONSHIPS. IT'S BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS THAT REALLY MAKE THE DIFFERENCE."**

— U.S. ARMY CHAPLAIN LT. COL. RAN DOLINGER

Most foster care alumni do not enjoy the level of support Cleta experienced. When alumni in the military are depressed, injured, or scared, who do they turn to for help? Are they the only ones whom never receive letters and care packages? Who comes to greet them when they return home for leave? When alumni are sent to a hospital, who visits them? If alumni die serving their country, who attends their funerals?

Five soldiers attempt suicide every day. Last year, 140 ground troops killed themselves. How many of our troops lost to suicide are former foster youth? U.S. Army Chaplain Lt. Col. Ran Dolinger says the central issue in suicide is relationships. He told CNN, "People look at PTSD, they look at length of deployments... but it's broken relation-

ships that really make the difference." What if you enter the military with no significant relationships?

Congress should mandate better supports for foster youth who choose to serve their country. The next round of U.S. Department of Defense re-authorizations should call for:

- Training critical military leadership on the potential impact that abuse and neglect, and life in foster care, can have on a soldier's service.
- Better supports for alumni soldiers who wish to share their information with organizations that send care packages, connect soldiers with pen pals, and offer encouragement through their transitions as a soldier.
- Collaboration between the U.S. Children's Bureau and the Department of Defense to determine best practices for helping youth transition from foster care to military life.
- Research on the successes and challenges of foster care alumni who enlist to determine when the military option is appropriate for foster youth.

If a former foster youth decides he or she wants to serve our country, we need to be sure that experience serves the young person well. We honor each one who serves.

Join the alumni conversation at [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org).

## Foster Youth and Early Pregnancy

# View from Washington



by Kathi Crowe, Executive Director, National Foster Care Coalition

The disproportionately high rate of teen pregnancy among youth in foster care has long deserved

national attention. The issue recently gained momentum at a congressional roundtable, which kicked off a partnership between the National Foster Care Coalition, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. The group intends to provide the Obama administration and Congress with common-sense solutions to reduce the high pregnancy rate of youth in, and recently transitioning from, foster care.

Moderated by Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-Louisiana), the roundtable attracted more than 150 attendees, including Reps. Michael Castle (R-Delaware), Jim Cooper (D-Tennessee), Joseph Crowley (D-New York), and Danny Davis (D-Illinois), as well as senior policy staff from congressional offices, young people who have had first-hand experiences with foster care, and child welfare advocates.

Panelist Amy Dworsky from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago outlined findings from the "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth," a longitudinal study of young people making the transition from foster care to adulthood in three Midwestern states. According to

self-reports, one-third of the young women in the study of over 700 foster youth had been pregnant at least once by age 17 or 18; by age 19, that percentage had risen to nearly half. Of the 19 year olds who had ever been pregnant, 46 percent had been pregnant more than once. In comparison, Dworsky reported that the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy estimates that 31 percent of teenage girls in the general population become pregnant by age 20.

Hypotheses about why youth in and from foster care become parents earlier than their peers in the general population are as complex and varied as the young people they represent. Youth in foster care often move from home to home, and consequently may not have long-term relationships with caring adults who could engage them in honest conversations about sex and the pitfalls of teen pregnancy.

Youth in foster care also switch schools more frequently than the general population and may miss sexual education provided through the education system. Social workers, who may only see youth on their caseload once a month, are not likely to build the rapport necessary to discuss such intimate topics. In addition, foster parents, group home staff, and social workers may believe that teaching sexual education is not their role, or that they lack the training to provide appropriate guidance.

Many foster teens who become parents crave family, another critical factor that contributes to the high pregnancy rate. Throughout my 35-year career in child welfare, which includes directing a residential program for pregnant and parenting teens, young mothers in foster care have

repeatedly shared their desire to create a family of their own to love them.

Childhoods laced with emotional and physical neglect and abuse, often including sexual abuse, leave youth with damaged self-esteem that often leads to early sexual behavior. Some young parents choose to have children because they do not see a future beyond parenting. Without a clear educational or career path, early parenthood gives their lives a focus.

Reducing the pregnancy rate of youth in and from foster care will require a comprehensive strategy that includes:

- timely and appropriate sexual education delivered by trained and caring adults;
- access to appropriate health care; and
- stable placements to end the feeling of rootlessness experienced by young people in foster care.

The strategy also must assure that all young people have permanent relationships with caring adults. Youth in foster care need families to love and support them so that they do not fulfill their need for meaningful relationships by becoming teen parents. When youth have positive self-esteem, clear goals, and lifelong relationships with caring adults, they are empowered to make positive choices.

Visit the National Foster Care Coalition online at [www.nationalfostercare.org](http://www.nationalfostercare.org).



# Resource Corner

Discover more resources for child welfare professionals by becoming a fan of Casey Family Services on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/caseyfamilyservices](http://www.facebook.com/caseyfamilyservices)

## ***Building Family Relationships: Using the Permanency Teaming Process to Connect Young People with Family***

More child welfare systems are routinely involving families in case planning and decision making. At present, 45 states use some form of family-inclusion strategy. Through its direct service work in New England and Baltimore, Maryland, and technical assistance efforts, Casey Family Services is finding success with its Permanency Teaming Process. *Building Family Relationships* provides a description of this approach with guidelines for social workers and decision makers.

To learn more, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org) and click on "Family Permanence."

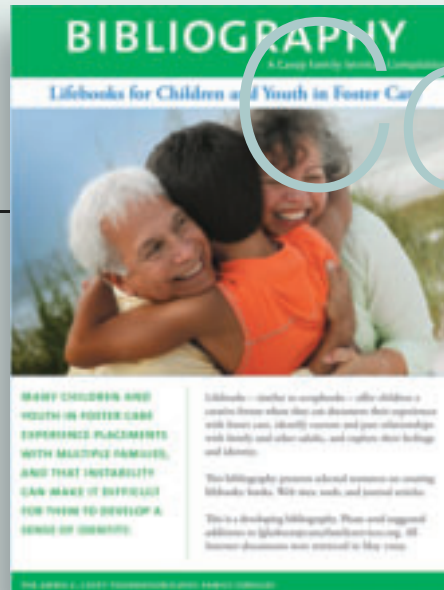
## ***The Permanence Bibliography Series***

Casey Family Services shares highlights from a growing body of literature on a number of strategies related to helping children and youth in foster care achieve and maintain family permanence. Recent releases from the bibliography series include "Lifebooks for Children and Youth in Foster Care," "Family Teaming Meetings as a Permanency Strategy," and "Family Finding as a Permanency Strategy."

To learn more, visit [www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org) and click on "Resources."

## ***Disaster Preparedness for Child Welfare Agencies***

This guide by the Annie E. Casey Foundation offers step-by-step recommendations and a compilation of resources to assist child welfare agencies with disaster



preparedness. Packaged with a companion CD, the guide is helpful for developing or revising an agency's disaster preparedness plan. The PDF includes live links to the recommended online resources.

To download the report and order the CD, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

## ***Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Weighing the Costs to Government Against the Benefits to Youth***

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 allows states to claim federal reimbursements for the costs of caring for supervising Title IV-E eligible foster youth until age 21. This issue brief from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago provides preliminary estimates of what the potential costs to government and the benefits to young people would be if states extended foster care to age 21. The analysis focuses on the increase in postsecondary educational attainment associated with allowing foster youth to remain in care

past age 18 and the resulting increase in lifetime earnings associated with postsecondary education.

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

## ***Reforming Child Welfare***

As former director of the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency, Olivia Golden led reform of a system in federal receivership. In *Reforming Child Welfare*, she employs her expertise to pinpoint the factors that lead to success. "Writing from the inside," she maintains, "makes it possible to analyze, in retrospect, what we thought we were doing, what it felt like, and what led us to good or bad choices." By sharing her experiences in this book from the Urban Institute Press, along with her analysis of the research literature and two case studies in Alabama and Utah, Golden imparts fresh insight on improving outcomes for imperiled children and families.

To order this book, set your browser to [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org).

## ***KIDS COUNT Data Center***

A new online, mobile phone-friendly Data Center showcases a number of child well-being measures included in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The site allows policymakers and children's advocates access to geographic profiles with information on education, economic well-being, immigrant families, and health, among other topics. The Data Center also offers customized maps, trend lines, and charts; data covering racial and ethnic groups; and city rankings.

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

## What the Media Say



### **New York Times Endorses Juvenile Justice Reform**

In the 1990s, states and localities began sending more and more children to juvenile lockups, often for months, while they awaited trial for nonviolent offenses or even non-criminal behavior like being “unruly.” This was a disaster. Children who spend time in detention are far more likely to leave school, suffer alcohol or drug abuse problems, or commit violent crimes as adults.

A far better approach... is to lock up only truly dangerous children and enroll the rest in community-based monitoring programs.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation gave a boost to this approach by underwriting juvenile justice reform projects in five states in the early 1990s. The experiments showed that closely supervising young offenders, instead of incarcerating them, did not increase the youth crime rate or the risk to public safety.

Communities that have been most faithful to the new model have registered the most impressive results.

“Locking Up Fewer Children”  
*The New York Times*  
August 13, 2009

### **Casey Study Looks at Health, Well-Being**

Even before the recession, the health and well-being of a significant number of American children were growing worse, according to an authoritative report issued Tuesday.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* by the Annie E. Casey Foundation concluded that

their situation changed only modestly during the boom years of this decade and by some measures declined.

“Our takeaway is that even going into the recession, the economic outlook for a lot of families was dire,” said Laura Beavers, the national KIDS COUNT coordinator.

“Recession Probably Will Leave Kids Worse Off”  
Carol Morello, Staff Writer  
*The Washington Post*  
July 28, 2009

### **Columnist Praises Connecticut DCF for Extended Foster Care Supports**

Her mother died when [Tina] was just 2. She never knew her father. She was 11 when she first entered the labyrinth of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. Sounds like the beginning of a hard luck story, one we’ve heard too many times.

And yet, there sat Tina Thomas one recent afternoon, surrounded by adults who all had the same open-mouthed reaction to how masterfully the 18-year-old worked a system that manages to break so many others.

In fact, that’s why I’d initially gone to the DCF office on Hamilton Street, to talk to her about a matched savings account program offered by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative for youths in foster care. Thomas used some of the savings to buy herself a laptop. But the rest, she wisely invested in certificates of deposit. She’s saving up, she told me, to buy a condo.

But first, Thomas is headed to American University to study international relations, thanks in large part to – you guessed it, DCF.

“The Brighter Side of DCF”  
Helen Ubiñas  
*The Hartford Courant*  
August 2, 2009

### **Vardalos Named 2009 National Adoption Day Spokesperson**

The National Adoption Day Coalition recently announced Nia Vardalos as a 2009 national spokesperson (joining actress/author Victoria Rowell). The Academy Award and Golden Globe nominated writer and actress is an advocate for U.S. foster care adoption.

“My goal is to raise awareness about foster family agencies who can connect prospective parents with the 129,000 legally free children waiting for a family,” Vardalos said. “I am pleased to spread the message that American foster care, while maintaining the highest level of screening, does not discriminate against applicants for reasons of income level, marital status or sexual orientation.”

*Yahoo! News*  
September 23, 2009

Learn about upcoming Casey-sponsored events by following us on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/caseyfamily](http://www.twitter.com/caseyfamily)) and becoming a fan on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/caseyfamilyservices](http://www.facebook.com/caseyfamilyservices)).

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

# 2010

## 2009-2010: 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.

### October 15-17

Third National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children  
“Many Things We Need Can Wait – A Child Cannot”  
National Center for State Courts  
Austin, Texas  
[www.ncsconline.org](http://www.ncsconline.org)

### October 19-20

Celebrate Networking: MANY's 21st Annual Conference  
Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth & Family Services  
Bedford Springs Resort  
Bedford, Pennsylvania  
[www.manynet.org](http://www.manynet.org)

### October 28-29

2009 Strengthening Families Leadership Summit  
“Creating Opportunities in Challenging Times”  
The Center for the Study of Social Policy  
Hyatt Regency Atlanta  
Atlanta, Georgia  
[www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net)

### October 29

New England Forum on Relative Caregivers (invitation only)  
“Fostering Connections, Implementing Change: Advancing the Agenda for Children and Their Relative Caregivers”  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services  
The Lenox Hotel  
Boston, Massachusetts  
[www.caseyfamilyservices.org](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org)

### October 30-31

2009 International Social Work Conference  
“Practical Considerations: The Nexus of Social Work and Law in International Child Welfare”  
International Social Service and University of Maryland School of Social Work  
Baltimore, Maryland  
[www.iss-usa.org](http://www.iss-usa.org)

### November 6-9

Council on Social Work Education 55th Annual Program Meeting  
“Bridging Rights, Culture, and Justice: Social Work as a Change Agent”  
Council on Social Work Education  
Grand Hyatt San Antonio  
San Antonio, Texas  
[www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)

### November 14-17

NAEHCY 21st Annual Conference  
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth  
Marriott Denver City Center  
Denver, Colorado  
[www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org)

### 2010

### January 25-27

Child Welfare League of America 2010 National Conference  
“Children 2010: Leading a New Era”  
Child Welfare League of America  
Marriott Wardman Park Hotel  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)



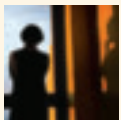
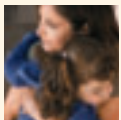


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# Voice

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