

casey family programs

hope



building communities of
hope

Safe Children | **Strong Families** | Supportive Communities





Every child deserves a community of hope

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From Jim Casey to Communities of Hope

Shelia Evans-Tranum
CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Jim Casey, the founder of Casey Family Programs, figured it out so many years ago.

While running his then-fledgling company, United Parcel Service, he noticed that the work performance of the young messengers he hired could be traced back to whether they grew up in stable families. Before many had drawn the connection, Jim Casey realized that strong families affected everything around him, including the success of his own business.

That is why, in 1966, he combined the wealth he had earned through UPS with the compassion in his heart to endow Casey Family Programs with a mission to improve the lives of America's most vulnerable children – those separated from their families through no fault of their own and placed into foster care.

For more than 45 years, Casey Family Programs has built our work around Jim Casey's core belief that children do best surrounded by the security, love and support of a stable family. Thanks to his generosity and foresight, we have been able to invest nearly \$1.8 billion since 1966 in programs and services to benefit children and families in the child welfare system. And we are far from done. Casey Family Programs is investing at least \$1 billion in this decade alone to support our 2020 Strategy for America's Children, a goal to safely reduce the number of children in foster care 50 percent by the end of the decade while

improving the education, mental health and employment outcomes of vulnerable children.

The work of Casey Family Programs has taken on many forms over the years. We work directly with children in foster care and their families to ensure that those children are raised in safe, loving and permanent homes. We work as partners with child welfare systems and other organizations in communities across America to improve practices and policies so that fewer children will experience the pain of abuse or neglect and the trauma of forced family separation. We develop and support innovations that successfully move children out of foster care and into safe, permanent families.

Through our 2020 Strategy, which we launched in 2006, we have helped influence the national dialogue about child welfare. The focus no longer is exclusively on responding to family crises, but also on strengthening vulnerable families before those crises hit. Recent reforms in child welfare practices and policies have helped to safely reduce the number of children in foster care in America. Since 2006, this nation has experienced a 19 percent decline, from 505,000 to 408,000, according to federal data. This progress can be credited to the attentive and exhaustive efforts of child welfare agencies and their community partners. Credit also goes to the many parents who made the changes necessary to raise their children safely, and to the many relatives who stepped up to raise kin, thereby preserving important family connections.

While this progress is encouraging, the time has come to ask: Can we build upon this momentum so every child in America grows up in a community that gives them hope that they can succeed?

At Casey Family Programs, we believe this is not only possible, but also essential. For children to have their best chance to succeed, they need strong families – and strong families flourish within communities that are brimming with hope.

We at Casey Family Programs do not profess to have all of the solutions for improving the lives of America's children. To the contrary, we believe that the best answers rest within the communities where those children live.

In this report, you will read about communities across America – in regions as diverse as the Pacific Northwest, the Deep South, the Mid-Atlantic and the Rocky Mountains – that have identified their strengths and adopted a team spirit to come together under a shared vision to do what's best for vulnerable children and their families. As you will discover, the communities of hope that they have built reflect the unique qualities and values of caring citizens.

The common thread is that each community has the desire to help children. It is up to us all – as members of our communities – to uplift this desire by getting involved instead of standing on the sidelines. Be assured that Casey Family Programs is committed to that future by partnering with communities and investing in their desire to build hope for children.

I believe Jim Casey would approve.

Shelia Evans-Iranman



Every Child Deserves **a Safe, Stable and Nurturing Family**



William C. Bell, Ph.D.
PRESIDENT AND CEO

Have you ever wondered what the world looks like through the eyes of a vulnerable child?

Is it a world filled with limitless possibilities and a belief that tomorrow will be better than today? Or is it a life constrained by fear, maltreatment, lack of opportunity and a sense of isolation?

No children in America should feel oppressed by despair. They should have the love, support and safety of a permanent family and other caring adults that allow them to dream – and dream big. They should be blessed with a vision of hope and the opportunities that hope brings.

Hope isn't an idealistic concept. It's a reality limited only by the level of commitment that each of us has to ensure that it exists for all children in America. Casey Family Programs believes all children in America deserve to be raised in safe, healthy and supportive communities – communities that nurture the hope that lies within all children about what they can achieve.

Every child deserves a community of hope.

Child welfare systems play a vital role in keeping millions of children safe from harm each year. But in America, when we deliberate about the welfare of our children, we tend to focus too narrowly



on those government systems charged with child protection. And yet aren't we all accountable for the welfare of America's children? Isn't it the responsibility of a broad coalition of government agencies, nonprofits, businesses, faith-based institutions, communities and individuals to provide hope to children?

Casey Family Programs' 2020 Strategy for America's Children focuses on safely reducing the need for foster care in America and improving outcomes for children by enhancing the functioning of child welfare systems. The current system was built on the notion of rescuing children from crises instead of preventing the crises from occurring in the first place. Over the 100 years since the creation of the federal Children's Bureau, we have learned that to truly and fully protect our children, we must address the strength of their families and the safety of their communities.

Casey Family Programs draws upon that lesson every day when we work directly with child welfare systems and communities across the nation. We see hope generated by child welfare leaders, elected officials, judges, advocates, parents and people in

communities who have refused to accept the status quo as the answer to the challenges we face. We hear hope in the voices of countless young men and women who have experienced foster care first hand.

Their collective wisdom has taught us that we cannot be satisfied simply to move children out of harm's way, from an unsafe home into a safer one. Instead, we must extend our hands and guide children into a place where hope prevails and a community of caring adults surrounds them.

We will not be able to address the challenges facing vulnerable children if we work separate and apart from the issues impacting their families and their communities. Our efforts for children need to be mobilized under a shared vision and a common goal. No system of government – child welfare, education, health care, mental health, juvenile justice or family courts – can work in isolation and expect to accomplish its goals for children. Similarly, no sector of a community – business, faith-based, philanthropic, political or nonprofit – can expect sustainable improvement in the welfare of

We must extend
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children to occur unless there is active and fully integrated involvement.

As we work together to build communities of hope, we also must empower those children and families we serve to find solutions for themselves and become architects for the change they seek.

There is no time to lose. Every minute that we as a society wait to address these problems means the loss of more families to the cycle of despair, the loss of more young lives to violence and suicide, and the loss of hope for far too many children in their own future and the future of their communities.

According to federal data, children and youth across America are being killed at the rate of approximately 32 every 24 hours – young lives taken by violence inflicted either by a family member, another youth or by their own hand.

During the past 24 hours in communities across this country:

- More than 2,000 children were confirmed as victims of child abuse or neglect.
- More than 820 children were removed from their families and placed in foster care.
- About 400,000 children and youth slept in a foster care bed.
- About 16 young men between the ages of 10 and 24 were murdered, almost all of them by another young man of the same racial and ethnic background.
- More than 7 million children woke up in a household where they and their families are surviving in extreme poverty on approximately \$2 per day. An additional 9 million children woke up in households existing below the poverty level – \$23,500 a year for a family of four.



- Approximately four children died as a result of child abuse or neglect, most of them under the age of 5.
- About 12 youth between the ages of 10 and 24 took their own life because death seemed to be a better outcome than to experience one more day of life as they knew it.

A life without hope is a life that appears to be not worth living. That is the statement one young person makes every two hours as they take their own life.

But there is a path toward hope. In the pages that follow you will see examples of how this path is being built in communities as diverse as the nation itself:

- In Salem, Ore., where a drug epidemic forged a community commitment to improve the lives of children and families.
- In the Mississippi Delta, where seeds of hope and transformation have been planted.
- In Richmond, Va., where men in the city jail are working to become the good fathers they never had.
- In Boulder, Colo., where visionary leadership is changing how government serves its most vulnerable citizens.

And finally, you will read how hope changed the life of one young lady because of the commitment and caring of others.

It is my belief that by working together home by home, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood, we will find a way to restore hope to the millions of children across America who struggle with life and death every single day.

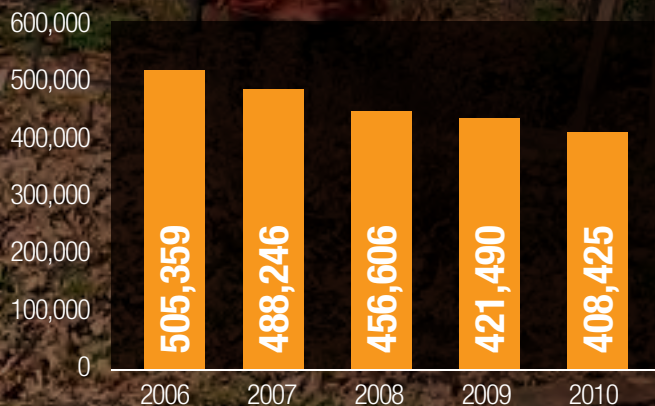
It is my belief that we will give back to them the faith that nothing is impossible for anyone in America who, with support from a caring community, is willing to work to achieve his or her dream.

A community of hope is a place where neighborhoods are safe and supportive, families are strong and, as a result, all of the children have the opportunity to live their lives to the fullest potential.

Working together, we can make it happen across America.

William C Bell

Overall number of children in foster care



The U.S. had **408,425** children in foster care on Sept. 30, 2010. This number represents a **19.2 percent reduction** since 2006.

Source: Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Communities of hope get built through coalitions of government agencies, schools, local businesses, nonprofits, philanthropies and faith-based organizations

community



An Unintended Consequence: Enterprising Oregon Community Builds Hope for Children

Diverse partners come
together under a shared
vision to foster hope

Nestled against a busy commercial stretch of Interstate 5 in the Pacific Northwest, the Oregon capital of Salem is a good place to do business.

But the easy-in, easy-out convenience that benefits commerce once ushered in the wrong kind of trade – illegal drugs. In a city known for the wheeling and dealing of government, the peddling and manufacturing of methamphetamine had taken over certain neighborhoods.

Neighbors in some parts of the city felt like prisoners in their own homes. Mothers shuddered at the thought of pushing strollers down the sidewalk. Sketchy vehicles pulled up to decrepit houses and drove away just as fast. One neighbor watched in horror as a stranger left a baby on the porch of a notorious meth house before entering, presumably to make a deal, get high or both. That same neighbor also once saw the occupants of that house answer the door with guns.

The community puts the responsibility for the welfare of its children squarely upon itself

Enough was enough. The community mobilized.

Neighbors, business leaders and faith leaders partnered with police, prosecutors, the court system and elected officials to mount an aggressive community-wide effort to shut down the meth trade. The “No Meth – Not in MY Neighborhood” campaign was a huge success – but an unintended consequence resulted from the wave of prosecutions. As Salem’s meth houses were shuttered and parents who were dealers and users were taken into custody, the number of children placed into foster care in Marion County went up a dramatic 50 percent, from about 800 to 1,200 children.

Residents could have left it to government – specifically, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) – to deal with that influx of children in foster care. The department, after all, is charged with overseeing child welfare. But instead, the community put the responsibility for the welfare of its children squarely upon itself, working in full partnership with DHS.

On the heels of the community effort to beat back the scourge of meth, Salem mobilized yet again – this time to recruit foster families for the hundreds of displaced children who had been unable to stay safely with their parents and families.

Successful in that recruitment effort, the community could have congratulated itself and stopped there. Instead, it expanded its vision as it extended its hand. Salem came to understand that in order to address the long-term safety and success of vulnerable children, it couldn’t simply focus on foster care.

It had to foster hope.

In an inspiring example of an entire community coming together to improve the lives of its children, Salem has committed to a multi-faceted partnership that strengthens families and makes neighborhoods supportive places for those families. In doing so, Salem is embracing values that lead to a reduction in child abuse and neglect, which in turn safely reduces the need for foster care.

Salem has built a community of hope.

For several years, Casey Family Programs has supported innovative programs in Marion County – and all across the state of Oregon – that recognize the important role that engaged communities play in building strong families and keeping children safe.

One way for a community of hope to get built is for child welfare systems to encourage relationships with local partners – and then nurture those partnerships with mutual respect and abiding trust.

“You have to put your ego aside and let everyone play in the sandbox,” said Rene DuBoise, DHS district manager over Marion County. “By working with community partners, we are reinforcing the idea that these kids are not DHS kids, they are the community’s kids.”

Are you on board?

Hope emerges when community partners come together under a shared vision to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families. Those partners can have diverse backgrounds, hailing from different systems of government (child welfare, law-enforcement, juvenile justice, family courts, education, health care) and various sectors of the community (business, faith, philanthropy, nonprofit, political).

Hope flourishes where leaders within those areas emerge.

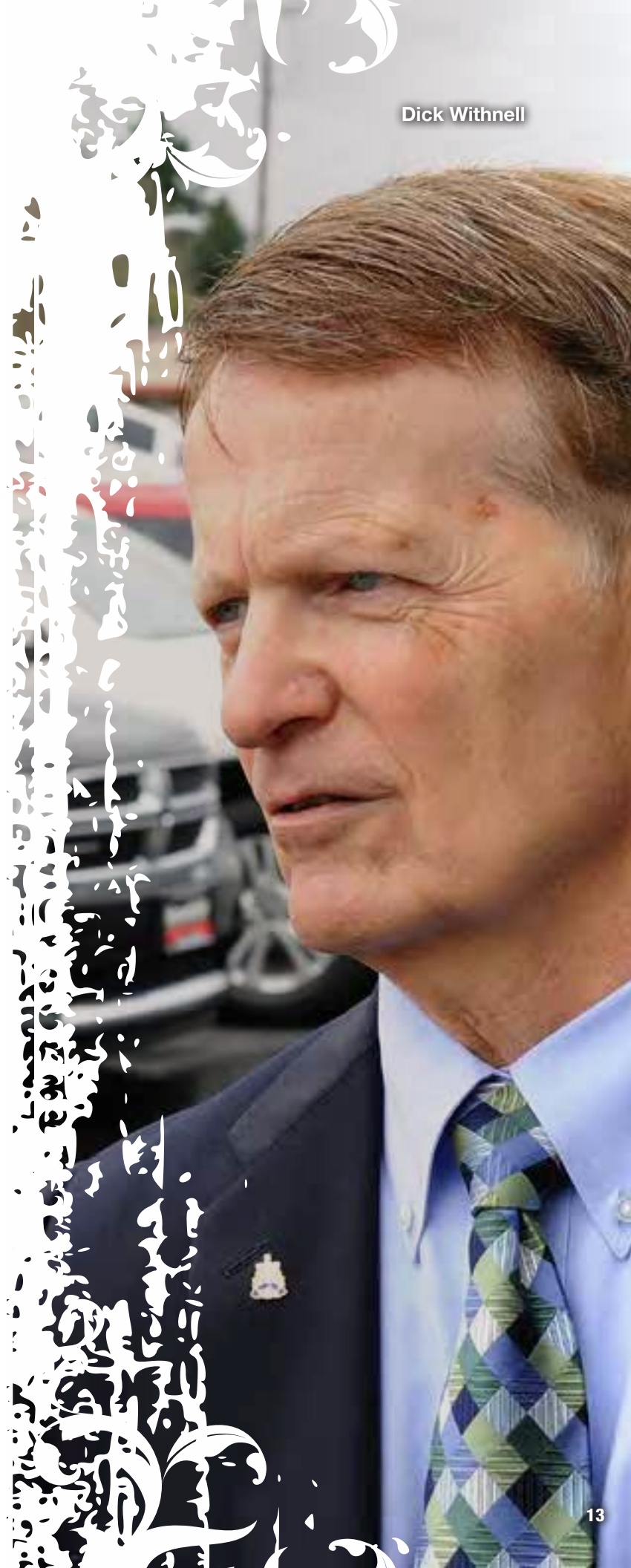
Dick Withnell, 70, is a visible leader in Salem's community of hope. A slight-of-build but larger-than-life local figure, Withnell has run a Dodge dealership in town for decades. After seeing the economic impacts of Salem's meth epidemic, Withnell helped drive the initial "No Meth" campaign.

But it wasn't until he read a story in the local newspaper that he understood the unintended consequences of that effort. The story examined the plight of DHS, which was bringing children from meth houses into protective custody in the middle of the night with no place to put them. Innocent babies had nowhere to go.

Withnell organized a meeting with other Salem business leaders, passed around a hat and helped raise more than \$200,000 to open a receiving home where children could be placed hours after being removed. He also stood before faith leaders inside the Salem Conference Center and urged them to help DHS address a debilitating shortage of foster families. Using the hard-sell approach of a car dealer, he made the faith leaders sign pledge cards that had three options to check: Yes, Yes and Yes.

"I want to know today if you are on board. I want to know today if you see the need," he said to the faith leaders, his voice cracking. "And if you don't, God help us."

In the upstairs office of his car lot, Withnell explained how a politically conservative businessman having virtually no previous familiarity with the nuances of the child welfare system has become such a vocal partner in Salem's community of hope. Business leaders



need to lead in child advocacy as much as those in the human services field, he said.

“You can be a bleeding-heart, warm-fuzzy goody-good-shoe who works on foster care issues, and that’s great,” Withnell said. “But you also need a hard-core, no-nonsense business guy who understands the ROI (return on investment) of getting involved. When children do not have the same opportunities that the rest of us have, that’s not right – that’s not American.”

Like a true businessman, Withnell illustrates his thoughts through a flow chart he draws on an easel in his office. Memorabilia displayed inside his office reflect many of the opportunities he has had – from his company’s sponsorship of NASCAR to his face on a Wheaties box to the framed photo on the wall given to him personally by former Chrysler executive Lee Iacocca.

“I used to be a hard-core, throw-‘em-in-jail kind of guy,” Withnell said. “Now I think we underestimate what a human being can do when taught how to become a good parent. A lot of people get excited about ‘extreme makeovers’ of houses. To me, nothing is better than the ‘extreme makeover’ of a life.”

A welcoming door

A hard-working single mom raising seven kids ranging in age from 2 to 15, Raquel Chavarria could use a little help.

That help arrived through the Fostering Hope Initiative, which has brought together more than 30 community partners to improve the lives of children and families in two high-poverty Salem neighborhoods. With Catholic Community Services as the anchor, the collaborative includes nonprofits, churches, DHS, the Marion County Children and Families Department, the Marion County Health Department, two area elementary schools and several other partners. The initiative gives parents like Chavarria a welcoming door to services and hope for their children.

Chavarria’s introduction to the Fostering Hope Initiative began with an invitation from her sister to attend a community dinner at her church.



Communities
of hope
expand their
vision as they
extend their
hand



Raquel Chavarria's
son, Gavino

The weekly dinners, which feed about 200 people, are organized through the Fostering Hope Initiative and Christian Center of Salem as a way to bring families together to build relationships and support for one another.

Sitting at one of the round tables with other moms, Chavarria learned about a free 13-week class for parents with young children offered through a Fostering Hope Initiative partner. The last time she had taken a parenting skills class was in high school, as a teenage mom with one child. "I figured it couldn't hurt to go through one again," she said.

She also signed up for a "home visiting" program. Nancy Contreras, a Fostering Hope Initiative home visitor with Catholic Community Services, visits Chavarria and her children once a week, often carrying donated diapers for 2-year-old Omarion, plus books and other necessities for the family. Contreras also provides information on early childhood development so Chavarria can track milestones for Omarion. The visits not only help the children, but also help Chavarria.

"I'm noticing a change in the way we do things here at home as a family," Chavarria said. "I'm certainly not being as negative or as hard on myself as I was before. I felt I was alone with no one to help. I felt it was my fault that my kids are in this situation. Right now, someone is helping us and you never know, maybe one day we'll be in a position to help someone else."

Actually, she already has. Chavarria, who lives in an apartment complex for low-income families, told Contreras about a neighbor, a new single mom who also could benefit from Fostering Hope Initiative services. Contreras approached the neighbor, but the mother wouldn't answer her door.

So in this case, the messenger of hope needed to be Chavarria, whose own life had been lifted by a community of caring individuals. When Chavarria joined Contreras for a second attempt on the porch, the neighbor opened the door to let them in.

And hope walked right on through.

Families and communities, not systems, are best equipped to raise children

Little house, big heart

The little house called “La Casita” is owned by the adjacent Holy Cross Lutheran Church but is operated by the community. It opened a year ago as a resource center to families within one of the Fostering Hope Initiative’s target neighborhoods.

Holy Cross, located in a neighborhood with many young Latino families, is a mostly white and mostly gray-haired congregation. The church once ran a daycare center in the little house. “We had an empty house that we wanted to do something with to impact the youth in the community,” said Loran Sell, a church elder and retired schoolteacher.

Sell already was involved in the Fostering Hope Initiative as a tutor and mentor at the local elementary school, so he approached Carrie Maheu, who works for the Salem Leadership Foundation, a faith-based community nonprofit and a Fostering Hope Initiative partner. Maheu serves as a liaison between the neighborhood and area churches.

“I explore opportunities,” she said. “I explore the heartbeat of a church and the needs of the neighborhood, and we go on that journey together.”

That journey led to a handshake between Holy Cross and the Fostering Hope Initiative to operate La Casita. “We have a written agreement, but I can’t say it’s binding,” Sell said. “It’s just kind of a leap of faith, I guess. I presented the idea to our church council, and they trusted Carrie and me enough to make it happen.”

La Casita has embraced an issue residents identified as a top need: early literacy services. “When we headed down the road of early literacy, man, I’ll tell you, we got a response from the community to help,” Maheu said.

One of La Casita’s rooms has been turned into a lending library for pre-schoolers. Residents donated about 1,750 books. The Union Gospel Mission

donated shelves. A local church donated small tables and chairs from its former pre-school. Retired librarians categorized, labeled and organized the books.

Building hope requires the commitment of all in a community.

Neighbors helping neighbors

While the impetus behind Salem’s community of hope was an emergent meth epidemic, any set of circumstances can inspire one.

“In Marion County, we had a community that mobilized from the private sector forward in response to a crisis,” said Lois Day, director of the DHS child welfare program. “In the process, the community learned a lot about meth and police intervention, but also about family stress factors. Once the community got to know these families and these kids, it couldn’t let go. And that’s what happens. Once we all become aware of the needs of our children and families, we can’t close our eyes to them. It’s part of the human condition that we care about people.”

Marion County District Attorney Walt Beglau recalled that back in the day when law-enforcement was shutting down meth houses, investigators would enter the homes and literally step over the children to arrest the adult occupants, failing to see beyond the criminal case that lay before them. Today, the law-enforcement approach is more holistic. All in the community have come to recognize the important role they play in helping heal suffering families. Instead of being stepped over, children are scooped up in an embrace.

“As district attorney, I can file charges until the cows come home, but it won’t do any good until we have neighbors walking alongside neighbors,” Beglau said. “There truly has been a change in our mindset – and I’d never go back.”



Lois Ehlert
**Red
Leaf,
Yellow
Leaf**

**WHEN
WAS LITTLE**

**PIPPIN AND THE
SECRET OF KINGDOMS**

The Very Hungry Caterpillar



The goal is
for all children
to grow up
with the
expectation
that they can
succeed
in life

children



Desire and Determination: Mississippi Delta Moves Toward the Promise of Hope

Children are getting
opportunities their parents
and grandparents never had

The sights, sounds and stories of the Mississippi Delta region are easy to romanticize.

Cotton fields and catfish farms spreading across an alluvial plain. Neighbors socializing on wide wooden porches, cooling off with glasses of sweet tea. A society that fought hard to overcome the stains of slavery and segregation. A fondness for the blues. Fried pickles and comeback sauce.

Indeed, the flavors of the Delta are bold and enticing. But the Delta is one of the most impoverished regions in the country.

The Mississippi Delta stretches hundreds of miles across the northwest part of the state between two rivers. On average, residents there are less healthy and have less formal education. The kinds of forces that tear vulnerable families apart and send children into the foster care system are all too common: substance abuse, mental illness and domestic violence.

Images of despair dominate the landscape. Children raised in houses so run down they appear to be falling into themselves. Long-abandoned storefronts with broken windows, suggesting shattered dreams.

Yet the pieces are in place to build communities of hope in the Delta. Change will come because a variety of community partners – the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), the state Supreme Court, philanthropy, local government, school districts, universities and churches – are working together to ensure that the current generation of children have opportunities to achieve success that many of their parents and grandparents never had.

Hope for children and families is taking root in various places – in a school that itself has made the honor roll, in new homes built with the dignity of the family in mind, and in a little library that opens a large window on the world.

And hope has become the guiding light of MDHS, which recognizes that everyone in the community has a role to play in uplifting vulnerable children and families.

Casey Family Programs is proud to stand beside MDHS as a partner in its efforts to make Mississippi a better place to raise children – and to be a child.



“Hope, more than anything, is the concept that drew me to the social work profession in the first place,” said Lori Woodruff, deputy administrator of MDHS’ Division of Family and Children’s Services. “To help somebody believe that things can change and change for the better is what this work is all about.”

Ingredients for change

Cut off from the rest of the Delta city of Greenwood by two rail lines, a creek and a derelict cotton compress, the historic Baptist Town neighborhood is an island unto itself.

Shotgun-style houses, some on the verge of collapse, line dusty roads. Young parents clutch the hands of their children as they cross to the opposite side of the tracks to buy goods. Some families have lived in Baptist Town for generations and have grown protective of their neighborhood. But that doesn’t mean they are resigned to having their children grow up with little or no hope for better futures.

“The residents are satisfied to some degree because it has been this way so long and this is the only life they know,” said the Rev. Calvin Collins, pastor of

Everyone in the
community has
a role to play in
uplifting vulnerable
children and families

New Zion Missionary Baptist Church, which has congregants from Baptist Town. “But I sense there’s a stirring now, especially among the young people.”

For vulnerable children, the most direct pathway to hope is a quality education. In Baptist Town, that path leads to Bankston Elementary School. Bankston was named a 2011 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, a prestigious designation recognizing schools with high student achievement or where the achievement gap is narrowing. Bankston teachers have benefited from professional





Building
coalitions
improves
the lives
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development funded through the Foundation for the Mid South, a regional philanthropic organization that uplifts the Delta in various ways.

With its inherent contradictions, Baptist Town has been the subject of many sociological and anthropological studies. Over time, residents have grown resentful of outsiders who arrive with big plans and false promises. Collins said the result is a functional inertia caused by too much talking and not enough doing.

Plenty is happening close by, though. A gradual redevelopment of downtown Greenwood has occurred over the past decade due to investment from Viking, the high-end kitchen appliance company headquartered in town. But much of the development – an upscale hotel and spa, a prestigious cooking school, top-chef restaurants, an independent bookstore, clothing boutiques and antique stores – is lost on the families of Baptist Town.

“When you are on the lower end of the educational and social strata, you’re worried about paying your light bill and your water bill, and having a place for you and your children to stay,” Collins said. “If your house is still falling down, then nothing has changed for you.”

Bridging the gap between downtown Greenwood and Baptist Town is an ongoing challenge. The city is set to embark on a public works project called Linear Park, a two-mile greenway and bikeway along an unused rail line that will connect Baptist Town and downtown. The city also has plans to develop a Baptist Town community center and to beautify the entrance of the neighborhood.

Whether those projects will build hope for the children and families of Baptist Town is anybody’s guess. Collins said he thinks a project to rehabilitate owner-occupied houses in Baptist Town, one property at a time, could turn the tide.

“We’ve got to make sure when we renovate or change, it’s still Baptist Town,” he said. “We want to connect to Baptist Town’s past

but don't want it to remain stuck in the past. We can keep the shotgun houses, but they've got to have decent roofs on them."

No lack of spirit

The Mississippi Delta region lags behind the nation in many quality-of-life indicators related to economics, education and health, according to statistics compiled by the Foundation for the Mid South.

About 28 percent of all people in the Delta were living below the poverty line between 2006 and 2010, compared to about 14 percent nationally. Delta families earn about \$20,000 below the national median household income, and the unemployment rate of 10.9 percent is 3 points higher than the combined average for Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana – the three states that the foundation serves.

Quality education for children is paramount to end the cycle of family poverty, yet only about two of every three ninth graders in the Delta graduate from high school, compared to 92 percent nationally.

Health outcomes also are discouraging. The life expectancy of a Delta resident is four years shorter than the national average, which may relate to the fact that one of every three adults is considered obese (compared to one in four nationally). Only about half of the Delta's population has access to healthy foods via grocery stores, produce stands or farmers markets (compared to 92 percent nationally). To compound matters, one in four Delta adults are without health insurance, compared to about one in eight nationally.

The economic, education and health conditions in the Delta contribute to a high number of teen pregnancies (ages 15 to 19). In the Delta, 76 of every 1,000 teenaged girls give birth, compared to the national benchmark of 22 per 1,000.

Despite the dispiriting statistics, there is no lack of spirit in the Mississippi Delta.

"There is a tremendous desire that Mississippians have to help people who need help," state Supreme Court Justice Randy Pierce said. "So we need to channel that desire and take advantage of that tremendous heart. Believe me, the people will respond."

Pierce co-chairs the state Commission on Children's Justice, a 25-member panel that brings together stakeholders from all three branches of government to develop recommendations for improving services to children and families – primarily those who come into contact with the court and child welfare systems.

"The commission looks at issues from 30,000 feet, but real change occurs on the ground at the community level," Pierce said. "Each community needs to take responsibility for the children it is blessed to watch over. The role of government is that of facilitator – to make sure children are protected and their best interests are served."

In the Delta, philanthropy also is a key partner in building hope. The Foundation for the Mid South directs its investment in four areas: K-12 education, health and wellness, community development, and wealth building. Ivey Allen, foundation president, said the role of philanthropy is "to be a catalyst in helping communities move forward and become the determiners of their own destinies."

A hint of what could be

The Common Cents Warehouse Outlet once sold housewares, electronics, tools, apparel and shoes. Today, the forsaken storefront is a time capsule along the near-vacant business district in the tiny Delta town of Itta Bena.

Behind shards of broken window glass are toppled chairs, buckled ductwork, overturned plastic buckets, and grime. Downtown Itta Bena gives visitors "a sense of what it used to be, a hint of what it could be, but a reality of what it is," said Aisha Nyandoro, a Foundation for the Mid South program officer who works in the Delta.

Real change occurs on the ground at the community level

But flying in the face of Common Cents are signs that Itta Bena is a community on the cusp of hope.

One risk factor for child neglect or endangerment is the condition of the home in which the family lives. The foundation set out to improve family living conditions by investing \$213,500 in the dream of an inexperienced local developer to build the first quality rental housing in Itta Bena in several decades. By forming a nonprofit community development corporation, the developer was able to leverage the foundation's investment with \$2 million in federal and state housing funds. The result is the 22-unit Valley Apartment Homes, which opened in 2009.

Surrounded by fields and protected by a security gate, the solid three-bedroom apartments rent for an average of \$518 a month, about \$200 less than the lower quality rentals in town. Word of mouth created a waiting list of families with children in no time flat.

"We took a leap of faith on this project," Nyandoro said. "With most of our community partners, we are taking a chance. As a result, we do a lot of handholding. We will invest to help our partners acquire the skills they need to become leaders in the community."

Not far from the apartments, the Itta Bena Public Library operates as a triumph of community collaboration. For families on the brink, libraries are more than warehouses of books. They are community meeting places that can tear down the walls of isolation and introduce opportunities.

When the Greenwood library system shut down the branch in 2001 for lack of funding, meaning the closest branch was 22 miles away, the mayor at the time rallied the community to reopen it. The Foundation for the Mid South contributed \$50,000 toward a renovation, and the library – complete with four Internet-ready computers loaded with resumé-building software – is now funded as a line item in the town's budget.

"We have citizens who cannot afford computers at home," current Mayor Walter Parker said. "This place is a godsend. It's a safe place for our children. The things they have to worry about outside they don't have to worry about in here."

The library is small, but the number of books available to Itta Bena residents is not, thanks to a partnership with the local college. Mississippi Valley

State University has made its more extensive book collection available through an exchange. All local residents have to do is go online to check out a book from the college library and it will be delivered to the Itta Bena library.

Making families whole again

In every Delta community, children are suffering because their families are suffering. In Mississippi and all over the country, child welfare systems have come to understand that to truly address the needs of a vulnerable child, they must also address the needs of the struggling family.

That is why the Mississippi Department of Human Services is reaching out to help build healthy communities that can support strong families.

"It's better to work on keeping families whole versus putting pieces back together," Woodruff of MDHS said.

Yet no single government agency can be held responsible for the welfare of a community's children. That task rests with every person and institution within that community. Only with that kind of widespread support will communities of hope be built.

Healthy communities – communities brimming with hope – can nurture families like Dequita Johnson and her 3-year-old daughter Aaliyah Brooks, who live in the Delta town of Greenville.

Johnson suffered a brain injury at 7 years old when a car hit her as she crossed a street. Pregnant as a teenager, Johnson backed off her medications and experienced psychotic episodes as a result. After Johnson gave birth, the episodes continued and the state took Aaliyah into custody at 3 months old, placing her in foster care.

Today, mother and daughter are being reunited as a family. Johnson is managing her health with the support of the county mental health system and other caring people, including members of her church, MDHS caseworkers, a grandmotherly neighbor and Aaliyah's loving foster mother. Johnson believes that without the community surrounding her with hope, reunification would not be possible.

"I've worked hard to reach this point," Johnson said. "I am doing my best to be a good mother. I'm happy and Aaliyah is happy."

Families
are best
served
in the
context of
communities

Dequita Johnson and her
daughter, Aaliyah Brooks

A group of men, likely foster parents or social workers, are seated in a room, looking towards the right. They are wearing yellow shirts. The background shows a room with shelves and a television.

Working with families
prevents the need for
children to enter foster
care in the first place

families



Breaking the Cycle: Initiative in Virginia Aims to Strengthen Families

Faith-based community helps
build bonds between fathers
and children



Travis Johnson

Locked behind steel bars painted baby blue, men dressed in government-issued jumpsuits and sandals sit together and explore their deep feelings on fatherhood – the relationships they have had with their own fathers and those they have with their own children.

The Richmond City Jail may seem like an unusual setting for men to voluntarily divulge their vulnerabilities, but the group sessions seem to be working. Travis Johnson, 29, incarcerated for breaking and entering, has come to realize that he headed down the same destructive path as his father and as a result became less of a dad to his 4-year-old and 4-month-old girls.

“My girls see me as a superhero, and look at me – here I am in jail,” Johnson said. “Not being able to be a good father to my daughters has been very stressful on me – and on them. I want to be there for them. I want to spend time with them, encourage them and motivate them. My biggest fear right now is them walking in my footsteps like I did in my father’s. Our children, you know, they imitate us.”

The jail program is one of many offered through the Richmond Family & Fatherhood Initiative, a community collaboration designed to encourage greater responsibility among fathers and reduce

unmarried births. By addressing the bonds between father and child, the initiative aims to strengthen Richmond families so that they can raise their children safely and successfully, thereby reducing the need for foster care. In addition to working with fathers, the initiative focuses on teenage boys – including many who grew up without the loving guidance of strong fathers – in hopes of breaking the cycle of father absence.

Evidence is overwhelming that children have a better chance of growing up safe, healthy and successful if their fathers are present and actively involved in their lives. In Virginia, seven of every 10 children brought into foster care in 2010 came from homes where the biological father was not present.

The fatherhood initiative grew out of a partnership between Virginia’s child welfare agency and Richmond’s public health district. Its spirit, however, rises through a partnership with the city’s faith-based community. Pastors throughout Richmond have answered government’s call to lead a community dialogue on the delicate issue of father responsibility and the social ramifications of father absence. Faith-based organizations are facilitating the group sessions at the jail, and a local pastor is leading a mentorship program for freshman boys at a public high school.



Empowered communities create the change that is needed

The partnership between government and faith leaders is helping build a community of hope in Richmond. Casey Family Programs supports efforts in Virginia and Richmond to strengthen families by focusing on the all-important relationship between father and child – and we applaud them in recognizing that community partnerships are needed to make it happen.

As a result of Richmond's success, Virginia is replicating the fatherhood initiative model statewide.

"People need hope, faith and a support system – and the faith community provides all three," said Martin Brown, commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services. "Hope gives us courage to endure. Faith is trust in a source beyond yourself. A support system is a community of healthy and reliable relationships. When hope, faith and a support system are present, we are empowered to make the tough decisions regardless of the hardships, moving beyond the present obstacles into a better future."

A faithful partnership

Richmond, the capital of Virginia with a population of about 200,000, is beset with deep pockets of poverty. Much of its middle class has migrated to

surrounding communities over the years. The city's main employers – state government and three major universities – bring an intellectual vibrancy but are exempt from contributing to the property-tax base, creating revenue scarcities. Richmond's economy also has suffered as the popularity of tobacco – a staple of the industrial base – has faded.

One in every four Richmond families lives in poverty, breeding a sense of hopelessness that manifests at the city jail, where the daily population is nearly 1,500, almost twice the aging facility's capacity.

When Dr. Donald Stern took over as director of the Richmond City Health District in December 2006, he assumed responsibility for a city that was worse than the state average in every key public health indicator, including the rates for teen pregnancies, infant mortality and unmarried births. In Richmond, 64 percent of all births are babies born to single women, compared to about 36 percent statewide. The non-marital birth rate in Richmond is even higher among African Americans, at 84 percent.

Observing that each of those public health indicators track back to a breakdown in relationships between men and women, Stern helped craft the Richmond Family & Fatherhood Initiative in partnership with the Department of Social Services. The initiative

commissioned an economic impact study that determined Richmond taxpayers spend an additional \$205 million a year on human service, criminal justice and education programs due to family fragmentation and absent fathers.

Strengthening families safely reduces the need for foster care

Citing the study as evidence of a city emergency, government leaders sought to elevate the issue by turning to those who arguably are the community's most influential individuals – church pastors. For all of Richmond's social challenges, the city always has found comfort within its deep-rooted tradition of Christian faith. Richmond's stereotype of having a church on every corner is not far from reality.

"The health district provides training and materials to churches, but we are not the program," Stern said. "The churches are the program. We are just facilitating the process."

Brian Gullins, a local pastor hired by the health district and the Department of Social Services to coordinate the fatherhood initiative, organized a lunch among pastors to gauge their interest in becoming involved. They hoped 120 would attend. Instead, more than 200 showed up and 160 signed up to help on the spot.

"The intersection between government and faith is critical," Gullins said. "If it is navigated carefully, respectfully, thoughtfully and with humility, it can be a beautiful thing."

The importance of a mentor

Just a few weeks after starting a new phase in their young lives, 37 freshmen boys at Richmond's Armstrong High School boarded a bus to visit the

new Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial in Washington, D.C. The idea was to expose the boys to the work of a hero.

The freshmen are part of a Richmond Family & Fatherhood Initiative mentorship program, funded through a Department of Social Services grant. The program is led by the Rev. Owen Cardwell, Jr., a local pastor who is an inspiring male role model all his own, having been one of the first two African American students to integrate a high school in Lynchburg, Va. Cardwell's fondest memory is as a 14-year-old boy, sitting on the floor of a home singing freedom songs with King, who was in town to support the desegregation efforts.

"Kids drop out of school when they don't have hope for the future," Cardwell said. "From my perspective, dropout rates aren't an educational issue. I think of them as a spiritual issue. The educational system can prepare kids to take tests. But if anyone can address the issue of loss of hope and give people a sense of direction, it's the faith community."

Just getting off the ground now, the mentorship program is working on building trust between the freshmen boys and their male mentors. While the mentors have lectured about the importance of being responsible young men, they haven't yet pushed the boys to explore their own feelings about their fathers.

"These kids want to see a consistent male face," said Shawn Peebles, a social worker at Armstrong who is one of the mentors. "If they have something going on at home, they may want to divulge that to us. Or they may just be looking for us to smile back at them when they see us in the hallway. That may be enough to help them get through the day or through the weekend."

Esha Ore, 17, a senior taking part in the program as a peer leader, says that when his father died three



years ago, he lost a lot of focus in school. So he can appreciate the importance of having a father present in a young man's life.

"I don't talk about my father's death because I don't like to," he said. "But I know I can go to Mr. Peebles to talk about anything and he'll always ask how I'm doing. There aren't a lot of people who really care about you enough to ask that. To know that he cares makes me feel good. When I was failing, I had no one to talk to."

Sean Powell, 22, a recent graduate in business at Virginia Commonwealth University, is organizing a group of college buddies to mentor at Armstrong. Raised in a two-parent family, Powell fathered a baby as a freshman in college. Powell's three-year-old son recently moved to Georgia with his mom, and the separation is tearing Powell up inside. He said helping with the mentorship program is easing some of his pain because he knows the importance of a father being present in a child's life.

"I could easily have dropped out of school when my son was born," Powell said. "But his mother and I discussed it rationally, and we decided that I should stay in school and take care of the present so I could better dedicate myself to our child's future."

Healing the wounds

The fatherhood initiative has hosted community trainings featuring Bishop Steven Banks, senior pastor and chief executive officer of the Living Waters Christian Fellowship in Newport News, Va. Banks has

authored a book, "Healing the Father-Wound," which describes "the injury inflicted on a child who does not sense or receive the affirmation of a father."

In his trainings, Banks details the negative societal effects of children growing up with an absent father, and lays out a path toward healing so that men don't inflict the same wounds on their own children. He emphasizes that fatherhood absence also can have profound impacts on daughters.

Back at the Richmond jail, a small group of female inmates are discussing their own absent fathers as part of a group session offered through the fatherhood initiative.

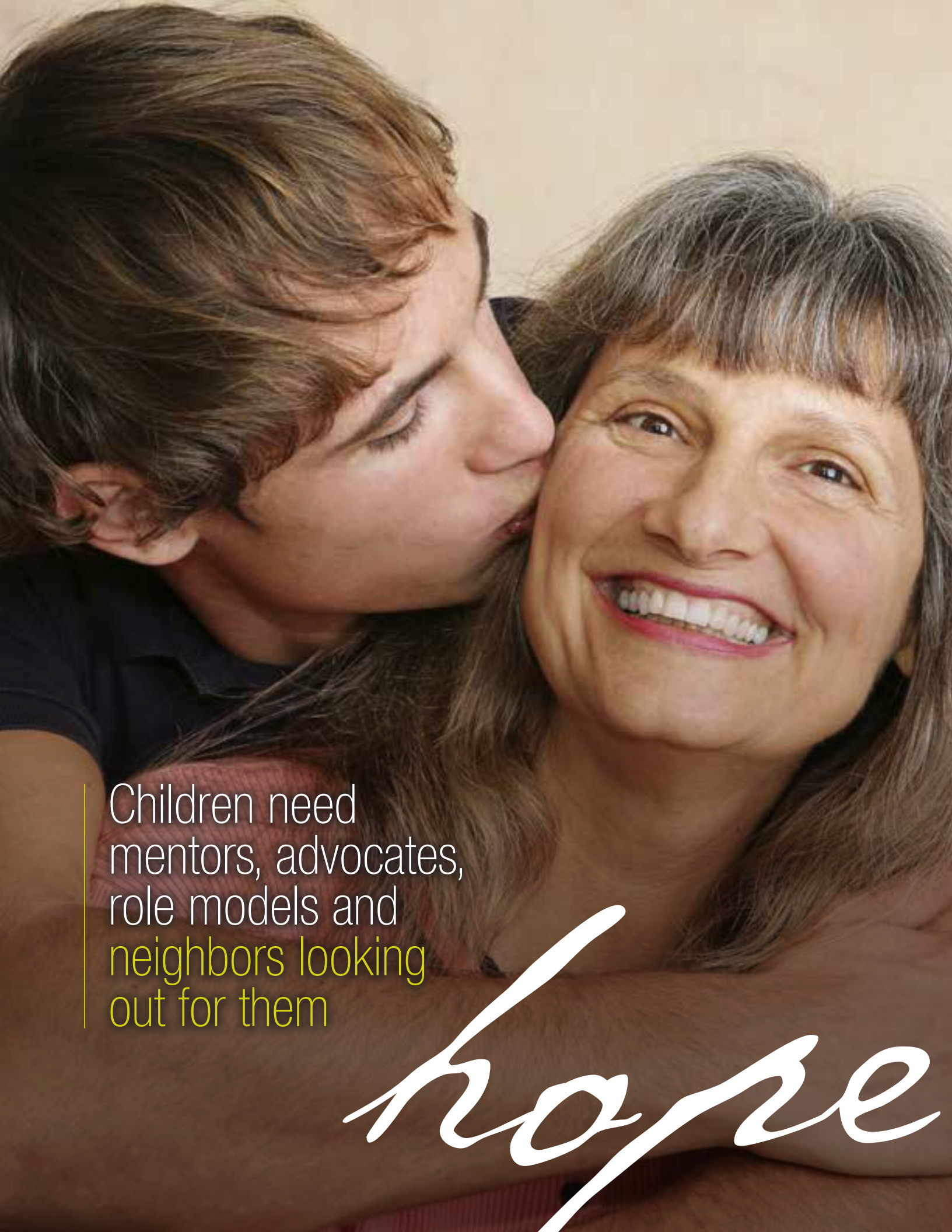
Andrea Collins described how her father was put in prison when she was only 7 months old. "I've always been looking for a man – an older man – for all the wrong reasons ever since. It's led me to prostitution because I crave a man's attention so much."

Collins said she sees signs of her own daughter, who is only 14, seeking affirmation from older men. "My daughter is going through the same thing I did because her father hasn't been there. I still haven't healed myself, so I don't know what to do. It's creating a hole in my heart."

Fortunately, the heart of Richmond is beating with a benevolent spirit and rousing strength, offering hope to suffering families so that all of the community's children can grow up healthy, safe and successful.



Sean Powell



Children need
mentors, advocates,
role models and
neighbors looking
out for them

hope



Two Stories of Success:

Doors Open
When Individuals
Step Up to
Change Lives

Strong Leaders Help Build Communities of Hope

Frank L.
Alexander

The message to struggling families in Boulder County, Colo., is really more of an invitation: “Any door is the right door.”

Whether they need help obtaining stable housing, receiving medical attention, putting food on the table or getting protection from domestic violence, the invitation is the same. If parents walk through any agency’s door in Boulder County, they will receive the services needed to strengthen their families and keep their children safe.

Over the years, Casey Family Programs has been honored to work with many outstanding child welfare leaders across America who are dedicated to improving the lives of children and families in the communities they serve. Frank L. Alexander, director of the Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services, is among a growing number of those leaders who have come to recognize the importance of infusing communities with hope.

In 2009, Boulder County appointed Alexander to head a new agency created when the departments of housing and human services merged.

“We wanted to break down the silos across our human services delivery system,” Boulder County Commissioner Cindy Domenico said. “It made sense to have housing and human services under one agency with the same mission of getting families on their feet and children off to a good start. We wanted to see what kind of boost we could get from that synergy.”

Since the agency was created, the number of Boulder County children in foster care has decreased from 191 in January 2009 to 80 at the end of 2011, a 58 percent reduction in just three years.

By integrating service systems, Boulder County has ensured that government bureaucracy never will detour or deter struggling families from seeking and receiving the help they need for themselves and their children.

“Systems are too complicated,” Alexander said. “Historically, it’s been difficult for families to access the right combination of services in the right dosage in the ways they want and need.”

Alexander has been a strong advocate for programs, policies and practices that help prevent the need for foster care by strengthening families and their communities. For example, he worked with the federal government to obtain special housing vouchers that are designated exclusively for families at risk of having children removed from their homes because of unsafe housing conditions. The vouchers make stable housing readily available, thereby averting the trauma of separating families.

“No homeless or housing situation ever should be the cause of a foster care placement,” Alexander said.

Alexander also has made sure that the county’s “Any door is the right door” philosophy of integrated services extends to community nonprofits by building strong partnerships with those providers. Anne Tapp, executive director of the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence, which provides support for victims of domestic violence, said Alexander “has set a new standard for what collaboration and community investment looks like from a county department. He has built bridges that allow us to improve policies and find better ways to serve families.”

Alexander is quick to note his appreciation for Boulder County’s ongoing partnership with Casey Family Programs. He cited the focus on early intervention to strengthen families rather than the more traditional approach of separating them as just one example of success the collaboration has brought.

Alexander also is president of the Colorado Human Services Directors Association, which represents the 64 county human services departments across the state. The association works collaboratively with the Colorado Department of Human Services to improve outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system.

“Frank is true to his word, does great follow-up, is genuinely compassionate and uses data to help people be accountable, do the right things and move things forward,” said Roxane White, chief of staff for Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper.

Alexander’s calm and gracious leadership style helps nurture the agency integration and community partnerships that are opening doors and building hope for families that need services.

“When you are building communities of hope,” White said, “any way to access services is the right way.”



Leadership



How Hope Changed My Life

By Linda Lee Zambito

The severity of my situation really didn't hit me until I was lying in bed one night, thinking about everything I had experienced in my life up to that point. Suddenly, I felt stuck. Stuck in foster care. Stuck without any real parents. Stuck in the sense that I had nowhere to go.

I was just about to turn 13, and I had been in foster care since I was 9. On the last day of third grade, two official-looking people came to my school to tell me I would not be going home that day. The events of that day seemed to happen in a fog and in a flurry. By that evening, I was at a new home – a foster home – wearing someone else's pajamas.

My biological parents were both Chinese. My dad was an American citizen, but my mom was not. Whenever my parents fought (which was often) and my mom brought up the subject of divorce, my dad told her she would get deported and never be able to see me again. So she stayed married to a man who was physically, sexually and emotionally abusive. Often, I was home alone with my dad because my mom went back and forth from where we lived in Florida to New York, where it was easier for her to find work because of the limited English she spoke.

I think my mom knew what was happening when she left, and I think she felt like she was doing the best she could. Our neighbors and my teachers in grade school were noticing signs of physical abuse becoming more frequent. The more the police came to my house, the more erratic and violent my dad would act. On several occasions, he threatened to kill me and anyone else who upset him.

From the day I entered foster care, I never went back home again. My foster parents stated their desire to adopt me soon after I arrived at their home, but they changed their mind. I found out after they casually announced they weren't

A community
of hope
creates the
confidence
to succeed

adopting any more children. I remember being confused and asking my foster parents whether they really meant they weren't adopting anyone else after me. They said, no, they weren't adopting me either, but that I could live in the home until I was 18.

So that's where my head was at that night when I was lying in bed, feeling stuck. It seemed like an invisible force had erased the first nine years of my life. I remember questioning if my situation was something I deserved because I threw too many tantrums when I was little. I even asked God why this was happening to me. I felt like I had been abandoned.

My life in foster care had been difficult up to that point. My foster mother had a strict routine for the seven girls who lived in the two-bedroom house. Every day after school, I had to change into my pajamas and be in bed by 8 p.m. I remember in the summer, it would still be daylight out, but I had to be in bed. While I never rebelled against this routine, many girls did – and soon after, they were moved to another home. Some 30 to 40 girls must have come and gone while I remained. So while everyone else my age was experiencing the natural teenage angst, I lived in perpetual fear of being moved and not knowing where I would go. I was scared that the new foster home could be worse. I was scared that I would be moved not once, but multiple times. This is a common fear for youth in foster care.

When I turned 15, my foster parents announced they were closing their home and everyone had to move. I didn't get to stay until I was 18 like they promised. The idea of moving to a new placement turned my world upside down because that meant also moving to a new school, and school was the only stability I had in my life. I was deeply involved in many school activities. I had friends, teachers and mentors who believed in me. They didn't see the unhappy life I was living in foster care. They just saw a young person with potential.

So even though I had been placed in a new foster home on a farm far from my school, moving schools was not an option for me. With help from my guardian ad litem and caseworker, we found a school bus that could pick me up at my new foster home at 5 a.m. (school didn't start until 7:30) and then return me at 4 p.m.

After about a year of enduring this grueling routine, someone very special took a personal interest in my

life. Her name is Diane Zambito, and at the time she was the director of an independent living program for youth in foster care in the county where I lived. Having known me for a few years, she began to notice that the long bus rides and even longer days were starting to take a toll on my emotional and physical health. So she requested I go live closer to my school with her family, even though she wasn't running a licensed foster home. The child welfare agency initially turned down that request over liability concerns, but she was *not to be deterred* because, well, Diane Zambito is not deterred by *anyone or anything*.

Through Diane's persistence, I was able to move in with her family at age 15. At that time of my life, though, I already had decided that I never wanted to be adopted or be a part of an actual family. I just wanted to grow up, live on my own and not have to worry about anyone except myself. I had decided those things because I was scared of getting hurt by people who were supposed to be there for me.

But then, while not fully realizing it or understanding it at the time, hope found me. And I found hope. I found hope in my teachers and peers at school who gave me confidence. And I found hope in Diane Zambito, who made her family my family.

I'm happy to report that last year, the Zambitos formally adopted me and I officially adopted the family name – even though I don't look one bit Italian!

In a community of hope, the only thing that matters is the potential we all have to achieve our dreams. All it took for me to reach my potential was a community of caring people – and one special person – who made the effort to change my life.

To them, I am grateful.

Linda Lee Zambito, 22, graduated from Florida International University in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in public administration and a certificate in public policy studies. An alumna of foster care, she interned with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute in Washington, D.C., and helped persuade Florida legislators to pass a law that gives current and former youth in foster care the services they need to attain safe and stable families and become successful adults.



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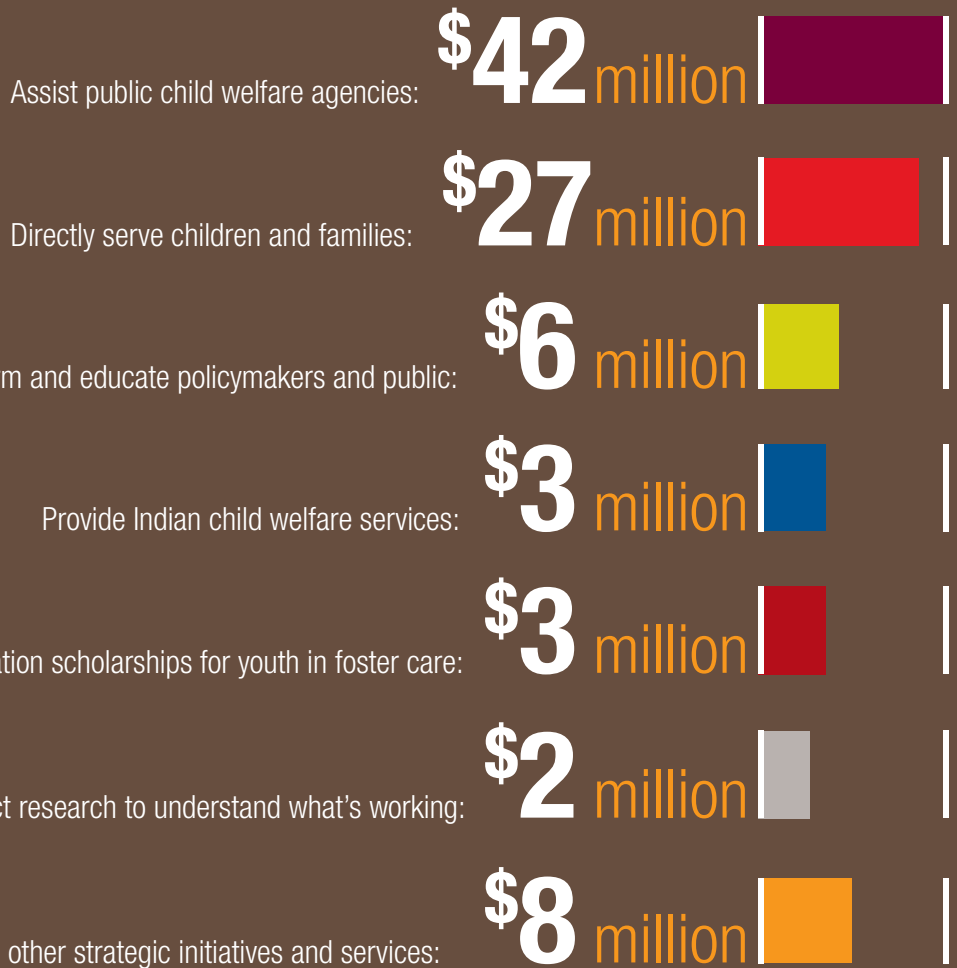
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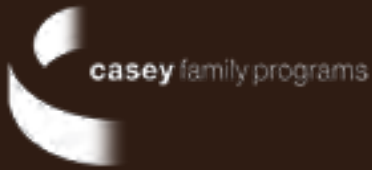
In 2011, Casey Family Programs spent \$118 million in pursuit of our vision of safely reducing the need for foster care and building communities of hope for all of America's children and families.

Out of each dollar spent in 2011, about 85 cents paid for strategic initiatives, services and research to help ensure that all children can have a safe, loving and permanent family.





In a
community
of hope, all
children are
safe and
have support
from adults
to grow up
healthy and
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make it *happen* across america

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BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF HOPE
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