

SOWING THE SEEDS OF HOPE

# Keeping children safe with families



“

The destiny  
of all of us  
is, to a large  
extent, in  
the keeping  
of each of us.

-JIM CASEY  
FOUNDER

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**DR. WALTER HOWARD SMITH, JR.**

CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

## Working together for safe children, strong families and supportive communities

In the nearly 60 years since Jim Casey founded Casey Family Programs, we have been driven by his simple, often-asked question: **How are the children?**

Here at Casey Family Programs, we work directly with children and families to provide foster care and related services. We also work in support of public child welfare agencies, sovereign tribal nations and a range of partners in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to influence positive and sustainable change.

As a foundation, we remain as committed as ever to our founder's vision that all children grow up and thrive in a safe, supportive and permanent family. This vision guides our efforts to provide, improve — and ultimately prevent the need for — foster care.

Through it all, we believe the answer to Jim Casey's question can be: "The children and their families are safe and feel safe. Safety is the foundation of well-being for each and every one of us."

**As a foundation, we remain as committed as ever to our founder's vision that all children grow up and thrive in a safe, supportive and permanent family. This vision guides our efforts to provide, improve — and ultimately prevent the need for — foster care.**

This country has made great progress in keeping children safe and strengthening families, but opportunities remain. This is where foundations like Casey Family Programs can play a critical role, and why Jim Casey intended for this foundation to work over the long term, so we can continue the crucial work of Building Communities of Hope, where children and families have what they need to thrive.

Joining us in this work are partners from across the country who are equally committed to sowing the seeds of hope as we help families to thrive. We know that when all sectors in our communities — government, business, philanthropy, nonprofit and community members themselves — work together, our power is unbounded.

With your help, we can uplift all families in striving for bright futures.

Sincerely,



Walter Howard Smith, Jr., Ph.D.



**DR. WILLIAM C. BELL**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO

# Making safety a reality for every child in America

For more than five decades, leaders and communities across America have sought to make improvements in our efforts to keep our children safe and free from the trauma of abuse and neglect.

Child and family well-being systems are using research, data and lessons learned to create transformative policies, practices and interventions to improve life outcomes for families today who are still facing challenges that are being exacerbated by food insecurity, insufficient income, housing instability or substance use disorder.

Since our founding in 1966, Casey Family Programs has been guided by the understanding that children who have the support of a strong, loving family do better in life. That knowledge prompted our founder, Jim Casey, to create this foundation. One of the fundamental beliefs supporting our theory of change is that we cannot effectively solve the issues impacting the well-being of children without understanding and addressing the issues that are also impacting the well-being of their families and their communities.

Twenty years ago, Casey Family Programs began a conversation with communities across America by asking ourselves a very challenging, but very necessary, question: What would happen to America's children if nothing changed in the way that America was treating children impacted by child abuse and the foster care system in 2005?

The answer — that the lives of millions of children would be irreparably damaged, or worse, cut short — was just simply unacceptable for us.

This question and its answer compelled us to embrace the wisdom contained in an old saying, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time to plant a tree is today.”

The wisdom of this saying and the challenges that too many children in America were facing in 2005 compelled us to launch a vision that today we call Building Communities of Hope. Casey Family Programs, along with the leaders we engaged, understood that we could not change the future for children by complaining about what had not been done by 2005. We had to begin planting the seeds of hope in that moment that would bear the fruit that our children needed to survive.

Trees, just like visions for change, take time to reach their full potential. For them to flourish requires strategic patience, intense persistence and purpose-driven actions.

Today, because of the work that has been done by federal, state and tribal leaders across this country over the past 20 years, we can see the fruits of this approach.

Fewer children are entering and remaining in foster care, separated from their families. Fewer children are confirmed as victims of child abuse and neglect. Children who are removed from their families are more likely to be placed with relatives, improving their outcomes. The approach to federal funding is recognizing that families need support to help them thrive and keep children safe, as evidenced by the Family First Prevention Services Act and the Supporting America’s Children and Families Act, which reauthorized Title IV-B.

Today, we as a nation are called upon to ask ourselves another question, to plant another tree: How can we build on what we have learned over the past two decades of progress to further transform our approach to not just keeping children safe after they have been harmed but to build a child and family well-being system where children are safe from harm because their families are strong and their communities provide the support that they need?

In this report, we approach this question of safety with a sense of deep humility. We recognize that, despite tremendous progress that has taken place, we still face complex challenges and no simple solution exists.

We lack consistent, coordinated responses across multiple systems and agencies that could help us better respond to children and families in crisis. We lack an understanding of the causes and underlying factors that contribute to some of the critical incidents that still occur in families across America.



At the same time, we see hopeful and promising progress in the work of organizations like the National Partnership for Child Safety. We see states such as Texas and California taking important steps forward to address some of the underlying issues when children must be removed from their homes. We see promise from other national partnerships like Thriving Families, Safer Children.

Progress will require the same commitment to thinking, planning and acting in new ways. It will require strong partnerships built on deep and mutual relationships across fields and communities. It will require leadership at all levels, especially by those who have experienced the child welfare system, to create policy and practice changes that produce the outcomes we seek.

The safety and well-being of children has always been at the heart of our nation's response to child abuse and neglect. We know that children must feel safe and be safe to grow up with hope and achieve their full potential.

We know that families are best positioned to ensure that children are safe and loved. And we know that families rely on the support of a strong and caring community to help them raise their children so they can achieve their dreams.

This understanding is at the heart of Building Communities of Hope. A Community of Hope requires action from each one of us in all five sectors of society: in government, business, nonprofit and faith-based, philanthropy and community members themselves.

When communities can support families, those families are strengthened. When families are strengthened, they can keep their children safe. This is the path toward the day when a child's ZIP code will no longer be one of the most determinant predictors of their success or failure in life.

**When communities can support families, those families are strengthened. When families are strengthened, they can keep their children safe. This is the path toward the day when a child's ZIP code will no longer be one of the most determinant predictors of their success or failure in life.**

Together, we must build the conditions that families need to thrive.

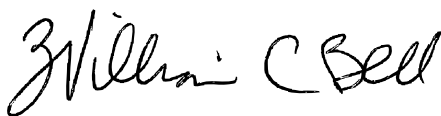
When planting trees, it can be helpful to envision the purpose for the trees we are planting: to create a forest; to provide fruit from an orchard; or to create a place for restoration when we need to rest, reflect, heal and regain our sense of hope.

Without hope, our nation's children, their families and their communities will never be able to achieve their full potential. Each time we take the intentional actions to make safety a reality for all of America's children, we are sowing the seeds of hope.

Over the past 20 years, we as a nation have learned invaluable lessons about children's need for a safe, supportive and permanent family. We must continue to use what we have learned to improve federal, state and tribal practices and policies so that together, we can keep all of our children safe and their families strong. There is still much work ahead of us if we are going to succeed in making hope a reality for every child, in every family, in every community across this nation.

Please join us in this urgent work. Every single one of us has a role, and a responsibility, in Building Communities of Hope.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William C. Bell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" being the most prominent part.

William C. Bell, Ph.D.



SOWING THE SEEDS OF HOPE

# Keeping children safe with families

Safe children. Strong families. Supportive communities.

Casey Family Programs uses these words to describe the desired outcomes of our mission to provide, improve — and ultimately prevent the need for — foster care.

Read them in reverse — supportive communities, strong families, safe children — and a framework emerges. If the first condition — supportive communities — is true, the next can follow. If the next is true — if families are strengthened by those supportive communities — then we can have safe children.

Understanding that all three are connected is key to improving safety for our nation's children, guiding us to think, plan and act differently.

Over the past quarter century, this country has made great progress in keeping children safe, with significantly fewer experiencing abuse or neglect. Much of that has taken place in recent decades, a time when communities across the nation have begun to think, plan and act based on data, research and experience of what works best to keep children safe in their own families and cultures. Local, state, tribal and federal leaders have worked to develop and implement policies and practices that ensure more children can grow up safely in strong families and supportive communities.

From Texas to Washington state, Kansas to Connecticut, a shared vision is growing of a child and family well-being system that supports improved safety. In this report, we look at how communities are adapting their approach to ensuring child safety and what leaders from all sectors can do to support continued progress.

## The beginnings of child protection systems

To understand just how far we have come in our approach to child safety, it is helpful to look back at the foundation of our current system.

Our national child protection system emerged from the 1960s, the same decade that Casey Family Programs was founded, based largely in response to the work of Dr. C. Henry Kempe, a physician who coined the term “battered child syndrome” in 1962 to describe injuries caused by child abuse and neglect.<sup>1</sup> His work influenced policymakers and led to all states creating mandatory reporting laws and child protection systems.<sup>2</sup>

But these systems were all built to respond after a child was harmed, and they frequently relied on removing children from their families and placing them in foster care. Over time, the number of children under 18 in foster care ballooned, reaching a peak in 1999 of 543,000 — roughly the population of Fresno, California, or more than the number of students in the entire Los Angeles Unified School District today.

Removing children from their families has remained the primary response to suspected abuse and neglect across this country, in part due to the belief that children couldn’t be safe in an environment where they had been maltreated before. And historically, removal was tied to federal funding — the federal government generally provided the most significant level of funding support to states after children were removed from their homes.

Has this approach improved safety for children? This is a critically important question to answer as we continue efforts to ensure all children grow up safe and strong.

In general, safety can be defined as freedom from abuse or neglect. But across the country, individual states have varying definitions of what constitutes neglect.<sup>3</sup> Safety also can be described as feeling safe, having a permanent family and a connection to one’s community and culture.

Over the past two decades, the number of children involved in a substantiated report of maltreatment has dropped by about one-third.<sup>4</sup> Rates of physical and sexual abuse have dropped by nearly two-thirds since the 1990s, while rates of neglect have decreased by more than a quarter.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the number of children under age 18 in foster care has dropped — 354,000 were in out-of-home care in 2022, down more than one-third from the peak in 1999.<sup>4</sup>

One major measure of safety for children involved with the child protection system is whether they were harmed after the agency intervened. Did the abuse happen again? Over the past decade, the percentage of children who experienced maltreatment again in the next 12 months has consistently been at or just under 10%.<sup>4</sup>



# What does the data tell us?

AS OF SEPTEMBER 2022

**7.5 million children**

INVOLVED IN REFERRALS ALLEGING MALTREATMENT

**3.1 million children**

INVOLVED IN REFERRALS SCREENED IN FOR AN INVESTIGATION OR ASSESSMENT

18% of child protective services investigations are substantiated

**0.9 million children**

RECEIVED POST-RESPONSE SERVICES

**184,000 children**

ENTERED FOSTER CARE

Millions of calls are made each year to child protection hotlines with concerns that children are being abused or neglected.

It is the responsibility of child protection agencies to evaluate all maltreatment referrals and determine if there is a safety risk that requires further investigation or a differential response, where lower-risk cases are not investigated by child protection but often served by a community-based resource agency.

Child protection agencies currently intervene and investigate some families for which there is no evidence the child is likely to be abused or neglected. In 2022, only 18% of the children whose cases were screened in for further investigation were actually substantiated as victims of abuse or neglect following the investigation.

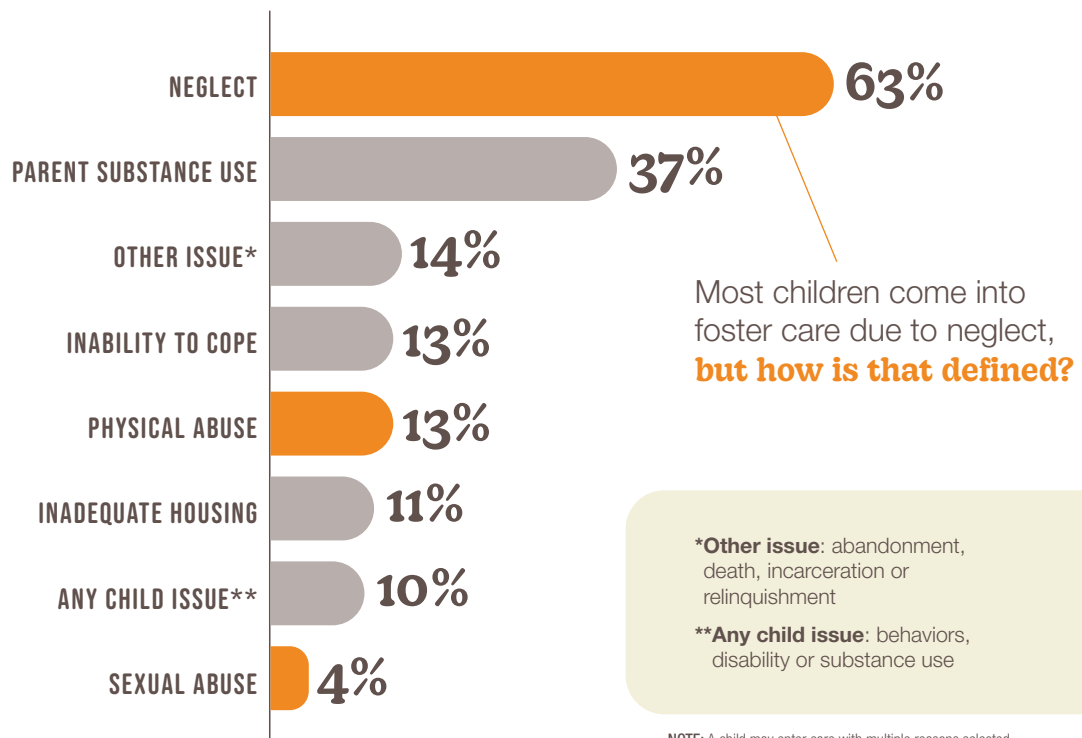
In some cases, family challenges could be more appropriately addressed through supports that help build resilience and strength. Supporting these families in this way could allow the resources of the child protection agency to be more effectively targeted toward situations that pose safety risks to children, and it would help to avoid unnecessary trauma to the child and their family.

Most children enter foster care due to neglect — not because of physical or sexual abuse. Providing targeted and effective interventions as soon as possible, including by accessing resources provided under the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, the Family First Transition Act and the Protecting America's Children by Strengthening Families Act, can safely allow children to remain with their families and thrive.

## REASONS CHILDREN ARE PLACED INTO FOSTER CARE

(<18 years old)

FOR CHILDREN WHO ENTERED CARE IN FY2022



NOTE: A child may enter care with multiple reasons selected.



At the state level, there are examples of policies that try to reduce unnecessary removals when “immediate danger” or “imminent risk” are not present.

In **Texas**, legislation passed during the 2021 session clarifying standards in the Texas Family Code that the Department of Family and Protective Services and Texas courts use when making decisions about the removal of children. HB 567 helps reduce the harm to children by unnecessarily separating them from their families, prioritizes support for families over removal, and ensures that minimum due-process standards are met before families can be forced into court-ordered services.

The legislation, which went into effect September 1, 2021, amended the Texas Family Code’s definition of “neglect” to mean “an act or failure to act by a person responsible for a child’s care, custody, or welfare evidencing the person’s blatant disregard for the consequences of the act or failure to act that results in harm to the child or that creates an immediate danger to the child’s physical health or safety.” HB 567 also limits non-emergency removals of children from their families.

Child protective services removals in Texas had been declining, and that continued after the policy took effect, dropping 55% from 2018 to 2024.<sup>6</sup> The total number of children in Texas foster care dropped 43% from 2019 to 2024.<sup>7</sup>

In **Washington state**, HB 1227, the Keeping Families Together Act, was passed in 2021 and took effect July 1, 2023.

**The number of children removed from their families nationally has also dropped considerably.**

**And still, we do not have data to support that this primary response to abuse and neglect — removing children from their homes — is the most effective approach to improve children's safety.**

Enabling a focus on prevention and greater support for families and staff, Washington is working to safely reduce the number of children placed into foster care and to support relatives in taking care of children when they must be removed from home to protect their safety.

Washington has seen a steady decline in the number of children in foster care since a peak in 2018 of 11,399. By 2022, that number had fallen 29% to 8,049.<sup>4</sup>

The number of children removed from their families nationally has also dropped considerably, yet there are still more than a quarter-million children living in foster care. And still, we do not have data to support that this primary response to abuse and neglect — removing children from their homes — is the most effective approach to improve children's safety.

In some cases, removal is clearly necessary. Anecdotally, we know that some youth credit foster care with saving their lives. At the same time, research tells us that removing a child from their family is one of the most traumatizing actions that governments can take. Twenty years ago, Casey's own landmark Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study showed that the majority of youth in foster care faced significant challenges in the areas of mental health, education and employment. Those aren't the only negative impacts of foster care.<sup>8</sup> For example, youth who have experienced foster care are more at risk for sex trafficking<sup>9</sup> and becoming a teen parent.<sup>10</sup>

# HOW ARE THE CHILDREN? Snapshot

## CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

488,000

2006

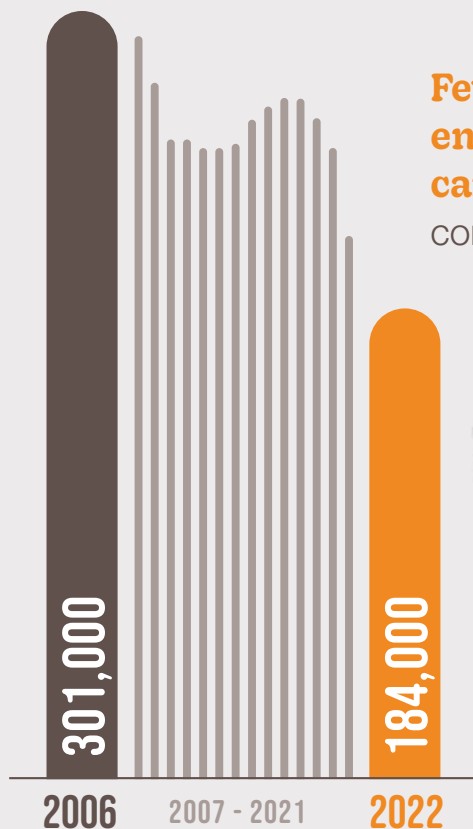
354,000

2022

The number of children in foster care **decreased** in 2022 when compared to 2006.



## CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE



**Fewer children entered foster care** in 2022 when compared to 2006.



## RE-ENTRY INTO FOSTER CARE

93%

of children **did not re-enter** foster care in 2021\*

Most children who exited foster care to permanency **did not** re-enter foster care within the next 12 months.

\*2022 data is not available

## ABUSE / NEGLECT

2006 — 809,000

559,000

2022

**Fewer children were involved in substantiated reports** of abuse and neglect in 2022 when compared to 2006.

**More children are placed with relatives and kin** in 2022 when compared to 2006.

2006

25%

PLACED IN KINSHIP CARE

2022

35%

KINSHIP CARE

90%

of children **did not experience** a repeat occurrence of maltreatment in 2021\*

\*measured over 12 months from 2021 through 2022

MALTREATMENT

SOURCE: Data are for children under age 18. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Child Maltreatment reports. AFCARS and NCANDS 2005-2022 [Dataset]. Available from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. <https://www.ndacan.acf.hhs.gov/>. The receiver of the original data (the Archive, Cornell University) bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.



A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair kissing a young girl on the cheek. The woman's eyes are closed, and the girl is looking upwards with a gentle expression. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple grid pattern.

# What can we learn?

SOWING THE SEEDS OF HOPE | KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE WITH FAMILIES



To improve safety, it helps to have a better understanding of what works and what doesn't. While information gaps exist, we can learn from data reviews, safety practices in other fields and evidence-based programs and practices. Since 2018, a national partnership has been working hard to expand what we know about child safety.

The National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS) is an organization of public child welfare systems around the country that looks at “critical incidents” to identify the systemic problems or contributing factors. The NPCS partnership, launched with the help of Casey Family Programs, allows for data about critical incidents to be pooled from the participating child protection systems so they can look for patterns and root causes that could be used to prevent future critical incidents.

This approach is similar to other safety-critical industries. For decades, leaders in aviation, nuclear power and, more recently, health care have worked to implement safety science principles to create a safety culture — one in which the organization itself focuses on and prioritizes safety, and in which any employee, regardless of rank, is empowered to point out a risk without fear of retribution. When mistakes do happen, they are analyzed to improve reliability and accountability — not to find someone to blame after a critical incident, but to prevent the problem at the individual and system levels. Other safety-critical industries have learned that avoiding blame creates opportunities for learning and contributes to improved safety.



The 38 participating jurisdictions in the NPCCS reflect a footprint of public child welfare agencies that represent more than 50% of families involved with the child welfare system nationally. The group recently released its first findings, based on 711 reviews.<sup>11</sup> The findings identified more than 1,800 areas for improvement that may have impacted child safety outcomes. The most often cited theme was the need for better teamwork and coordination, usually related to outside agencies. Another key theme was the importance of economic support for families.

“What we are learning from this early data is that child protective services cannot do this work alone,” said Jodi Hill-Lilly, commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families and executive committee co-chair of NPCCS. “As child welfare continues to shift to a more front end, preventive system, we must find better ways to apply a multidisciplinary approach that engages families with resources before harm occurs. That means working across a range of child- and family-serving agencies, such as law enforcement, education and the judiciary.”

**The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF)** has been actively working to do just that through the Connecticut Safety Practice Model.

Four years ago, the agency evaluated its safety assessment and safety planning practices, looking at the consistency of safety language, consistency of decisions and outcomes, clarity of expectations for staff and providers, and understanding of applied safety concepts. The resulting Connecticut Safety Practice Model assures that good safety practices are implemented all across the state.

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“

**-JODI HILL-LILLY**

COMMISSIONER, CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR, NPCA

The ultimate goal is that all of Connecticut's children are safe, regardless of who is providing care to them, and ideally, these definitions and the safety practice model are applied well beyond the child protection agency. This is applicable to educators, health care professionals, workers in the many nonprofit organizations that support the community, leaders from faith communities and law enforcement.

Applying an easy to remember mnemonic, A-B-C-D, Connecticut is working to align definitions of safety and maltreatment throughout DCF, across agencies and with its network of external partners and stakeholders. With the ABCD paradigm, Connecticut is clarifying how reasonable suspicions of abuse or neglect are defined.<sup>12</sup>

- **Adult protective capacities:** evaluating the ability of the parent to understand their protective role and take action to keep their child safe
- **Behaviors:** evaluating the parent's efforts to reduce, control or manage behaviors that are harmful to their children, such as impacts of substance use, untreated mental health, intimate partner violence, unsafe interactions or actions that cause physical or emotional suffering
- **Child vulnerability:** evaluating that child vulnerability is understood, and the parent takes action to keep them safe
- **Dangerous conditions:** determining that imminent dangerous conditions in the home or community are addressed to reduce dangers to the child, such as a home environment that is reasonably child-proofed to restrict hazards from guns or other weapons, poisons, medications or substances, and drug paraphernalia

**When families have direct help, their children are less likely to be harmed, involved with the child protection system or placed in foster care.**

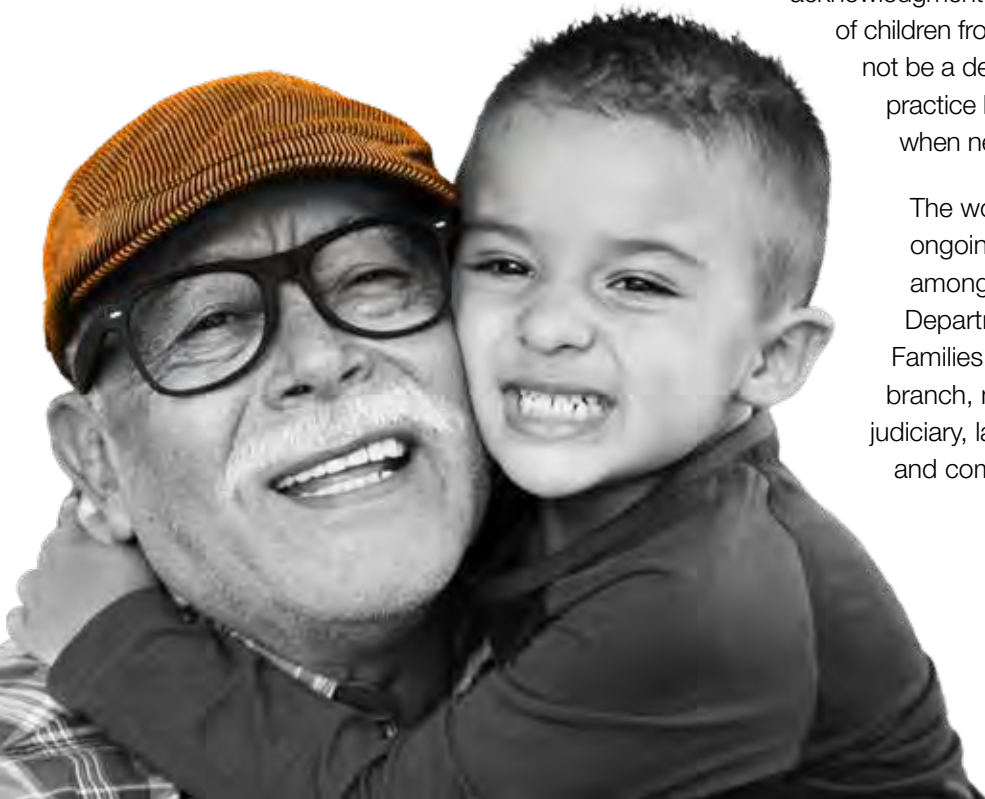
Connecticut's safety practice paradigm is recalled simply, yet it is grounded in practice profiles and discussion guides. The consistency of language is mirrored externally to its partners through the department's Provider Academy.

Plenty of other systems and agencies are starting to examine their models, working in multidisciplinary ways to create better conditions of safety.

**Kansas** is one state working to bring together stakeholders to better understand the challenges faced by their child protection system. Two statewide efforts — the Kansas Supreme Court's Child Welfare Summit in April 2024 and the Kansas Child Welfare, Reimagined effort in October 2024 — brought together all three branches of government and community stakeholders as part of a multiyear strategy to educate about and implement strategies that support child safety, improve permanency and engage the voices of lived experience. The questions examined by these stakeholders have revealed areas for improvement, opportunities for collaboration and, foundationally, a shared

acknowledgment that the separation of children from their families should not be a default standard of practice but used only when necessary.

The work continues, with ongoing conversations among the Kansas Department of Children and Families, the Kansas legislative branch, members of the judiciary, law enforcement and community partners.





## Tools to help children and families

The progress taking place in states has come as leaders at the national level have developed research, created new tools and passed landmark policies that create conditions for continued success.

- **Plenty of evidence shows the positive effects of “economic and concrete supports” as “protective factors” for families.** What does that mean? When families have direct help, their children are less likely to be harmed, involved with the child protection system or placed in foster care.<sup>13,14</sup> Direct help includes broad policies such as tax credits, paid family leave and minimum wage; tangible support such as care coordination to access services, vouchers to remain in substance use treatment and direct cash transfers; and public assistance programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.<sup>15</sup>
- **The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act** enhanced support services for families to help children remain at home safely, reduce the unnecessary use of group placements and build the capacity of communities to support children and families. Included are resources for mental health and substance use treatment, as well as parenting classes and kinship navigator programs. Progress is being made, but not as quickly as some would like.<sup>16</sup>
- **The 2025 Supporting America's Children and Families Act** reauthorized Title IV-B of the Social Security Act for the first time in more than 15 years, providing critical support for efforts to improve the safety, support and well-being of children and their families.
  - o It allows more support for early interventions to help families stay together safely.
  - o It expands support for evidence-based programs that are shown to prevent abuse and neglect.



- o The reauthorization improves funding access for Native American tribes and supports effective implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- o The act strengthens support for the more than 2.5 million grandparents and other relatives who provide kinship care to children who would otherwise be separated from their extended families when placed in traditional foster care arrangements.
- o Importantly, the support is not tied to being involved in the child protection system — it is available to families before their children are removed.
- **Families themselves keep children safe.** Casey's work with tribal nations underscores this notion: connection to one's culture and a sense of community enhance safety for children. Research also tells us that children have better outcomes and are more likely to remain connected to their families and culture if they are placed safely in kinship care, with relatives or close family friends, while safety issues at home are resolved.<sup>17</sup>

A review of more than 100 studies<sup>18</sup> found that when compared with children in non-relative foster care, children in kinship care have:

- o More stability in placement and greater likelihood of remaining with siblings
- o Lower rates of both re-abuse and institutional abuse
- o Better behavioral and mental health
- o Higher likelihood of achieving permanency through guardianship with their relative caregivers if they are unable to safely return home

Already, a dozen state and tribal child protection systems have updated their foster care licensing standards to make it easier for kinship caregivers to take care of their relative children. Many more are working to do the same.<sup>19</sup>

- o Learn more about how a kin-first culture is helping keep more children safe while staying connected to their families and communities in Casey Family Programs' 2024 signature report at [casey.org/hope2024](https://casey.org/hope2024).

## Emergency room vs. preventive care

Policy changes such as those implemented in Texas and Washington reflect an effort to address one of the major challenges facing child protection agencies. Over decades, they have come to play the role of an emergency room. Everything comes through their doors. They treat the most serious situations. They try to stabilize people in crisis and prevent the worst outcomes. At the same time, they are seeing families who might only need help accessing basic support, but who have been pushed through the agency's front doors. This ongoing pressure strains their workforce. It overwhelms the emergency room so it can't do what it was designed to do.

Instead, child welfare, or child and family well-being, requires a broader continuum that includes the child protection agency but stretches far beyond. Before the emergency room, we need urgent care, we need primary care, and we need preventive practices.

Health care systems alone aren't what keep us healthy. Educators teach us about nutrition and how to keep our bodies healthy. Farmers and grocers supply our food. Community centers provide spaces to exercise and build social connections. Houses of worship nurture our spiritual needs. It takes many systems to keep ourselves healthy.

The same is true for safety. Similar to an emergency department, a child protection agency is an essential component with specific responsibilities in a larger, more robust family well-being system that prevents child harm.<sup>20</sup> As we have explored in previous signature reports, upstream supports such as warm lines or help lines, family resource centers and other assistance can keep families from becoming overloaded with life's challenges and unnecessarily coming to child welfare's emergency room, allowing workers to triage and truly focus on the most critical cases.<sup>21</sup>





# What if we reimagined safety?


SOWING THE SEEDS OF HOPE | KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE WITH FAMILIES



As a nation, we are coming to realize that it is possible to serve children in their own homes and with their own families to keep them safe. **We haven't found a better substitute for families than families.**

And those families — our families — need the support of communities to thrive. It is our communities that keep children safe. This underlies what we at Casey Family Programs call Building Communities of Hope, an approach that requires all five sectors of society — public, business, nonprofit, philanthropic and community members themselves — to work together to improve the safety and success of children, families and the communities where they live.

Child protection systems alone can't keep children safe. Instead, we must commit to creating a broader Community of Hope, where families can ask for help without fear, and where neighbors and business owners know and look out for one another before family challenges turn into something bigger. We must connect the people and places that touch families' lives every day: their schools, their doctors, their houses of worship and their workplaces.



**California is the first state in the nation to examine and restructure rates in such a child-centered way. It is one of several recent investments that the state has made to support the full continuum of care and meet the complex care needs of children in the child welfare system.**





### **Start sowing the seeds of hope**

Around the country, child welfare systems and partner organizations already are innovating to support families and keep children safe.

**California** is working on a different approach that impacts safety by allocating resources to children in out-of-home care based on their need, not their placement. With this tiered rate structure, a child who has higher, more complex needs would receive more resources regardless of whether they are placed in an institutional setting or a family home setting.<sup>22</sup>

California is the first state in the nation to examine and restructure rates in such a child-centered way. It is one of several recent investments that the state has made to support the full continuum of care and meet the complex care needs of children in the child welfare system.

In 2024, the California Department of Social Services, in partnership with the University of California, Davis, launched the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement and Support. The Center works to support county efforts to keep children connected to their family members while in the care of child protective services. They also provide statewide, culturally appropriate training and technical assistance to county child welfare and probation departments, behavioral health, and other child-serving stakeholders, including tribal partners and service providers. This enhances their practices, policies and efforts for family finding, engagement and support.



# What else can we do?

Improving child safety is possible with the commitment of strong leaders and stakeholders. Here are some places to start.

### System leaders

- If you are not already a member of the National Partnership for Child Safety, consider joining: <https://nationalpartnershipchilfsafety.org/>
- Build a plan to implement available policies such as:
  - Family First Prevention Services Act
  - Supporting America's Children and Families Act, which reauthorized Title IV-B, allowing more support for early interventions to help families stay together safely and expanded supports for evidence-based programs that are shown to prevent abuse and neglect
  - New kin-specific licensing standards
- Lean in on gold-standard practices and promising practices such as:
  - Active efforts, as outlined in the Indian Child Welfare Act, that attempt to prevent removal and avoid breakup of a family
  - Kinship care, especially as the first placement for a child
- Understand and implement the responsibilities of a well-functioning child protection agency<sup>20</sup>

### Policymakers

- Assess state definitions of neglect and explore whether they are contributing to unnecessary child protective services intervention.<sup>3</sup>
- Examine implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act and consider “active efforts” and other provisions as the gold standard for all children engaged with child protective services.
- Bring together and join with others committed to improving child and family well-being.
- Consider a multisystem approach — the child protection agency cannot do this work alone. Explore models such as child advocacy centers that bring together professionals from health care, law enforcement, legal, child protection, advocacy and other systems.<sup>23</sup>
- Listen to and learn from families who have experienced the child protection system.

### Judicial leaders

- Examine and explore court practices and how they impact families.<sup>24</sup>

### Tribal leaders, community leaders and others interested in supporting child and family well-being

- Use Casey Family Programs' Community Opportunity Map, which allows anyone to find child and family well-being data for any neighborhood in the United States. Building Communities of Hope requires that we look beyond what the child protection system can do alone and consider how we can work together across systems and across sectors to improve the broader conditions that affect the health, safety and opportunities of children and their families. See <https://www.casey.org/community-opportunity-map/>
- Convene with others across all sectors — government, business, nonprofit and faith-based, philanthropy and communities themselves — to better support children and families.

We can achieve the vision of safe children, strong families and supportive communities by bringing together society's five sectors. All families need support. And every one of us has a role to play in sowing the seeds of hope.



## About Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs works in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and with tribal nations to influence long-lasting improvements to the safety and success of children, families and the communities where they live. We learn from and collaborate with communities at local, state, tribal and national levels to nurture the safety and success of every child.

## Consulting

We offer ongoing strategic consultation, technical assistance, data analysis, and independent research and evaluation at no cost to child welfare systems, policymakers, courts and tribes across America to support long-lasting improvements that safely reduce the need for foster care. We partner with communities across our nation to enhance partnerships, improve practice and policy, and ensure that these improvements will endure over time.

## Child and family services

Casey Family Programs' Child and Family Services team provides direct services — including prevention, foster care, family reunification, young adult transition, kinship and permanency work — to more than 1,000 children and families each year. We operate nine field offices in five states — Arizona, California, Idaho, Texas and Washington — and work in urban, suburban and rural communities. We draw on evidence gained from research-informed and promising practices, as well as our nearly six decades of front-line child welfare experience, to provide a range of multidisciplinary services to children, youth, young adults and families. Through Casey's demonstration and spread and community engagement programs, we share what we have learned with state, tribal and county child welfare systems, private providers and community partners, working with them to achieve better outcomes for families, youth and children.

Casey's Indian Child and Family Well-being Program partners with tribes and American Indian/Alaska Native communities to support

their development of effective and culturally responsive child welfare services. Strong sovereign tribal nations keep children healthy, safe and connected with their families, relatives, tribal communities and cultures. Casey Family Programs partners with tribes and national partners through efforts that honor tribal sovereignty and support nation-building, help build capacity, and support tribal-state efforts to effectively implement the Indian Child Welfare Act and its principles as the gold standard of child welfare practice.

## Public policy

We also support federal, state, tribal and local governments by providing comprehensive, nonpartisan child welfare information and education driven by data and based on evidence of what works best to improve the lives of children and families. We draw on our direct services and consulting work to help align and improve state and federal child welfare policies, allowing communities to focus on preventing abuse and neglect and improving outcomes for children in foster care. We share what we have learned with public child welfare and tribal child welfare systems, private providers and other community partners to inform policy. We are committed to supporting federal child welfare policy changes that will provide every state with the ability to invest existing resources in the most effective strategies to safely reduce the need for foster care, strengthen families and improve the safety and success of all children.

# Leadership and offices

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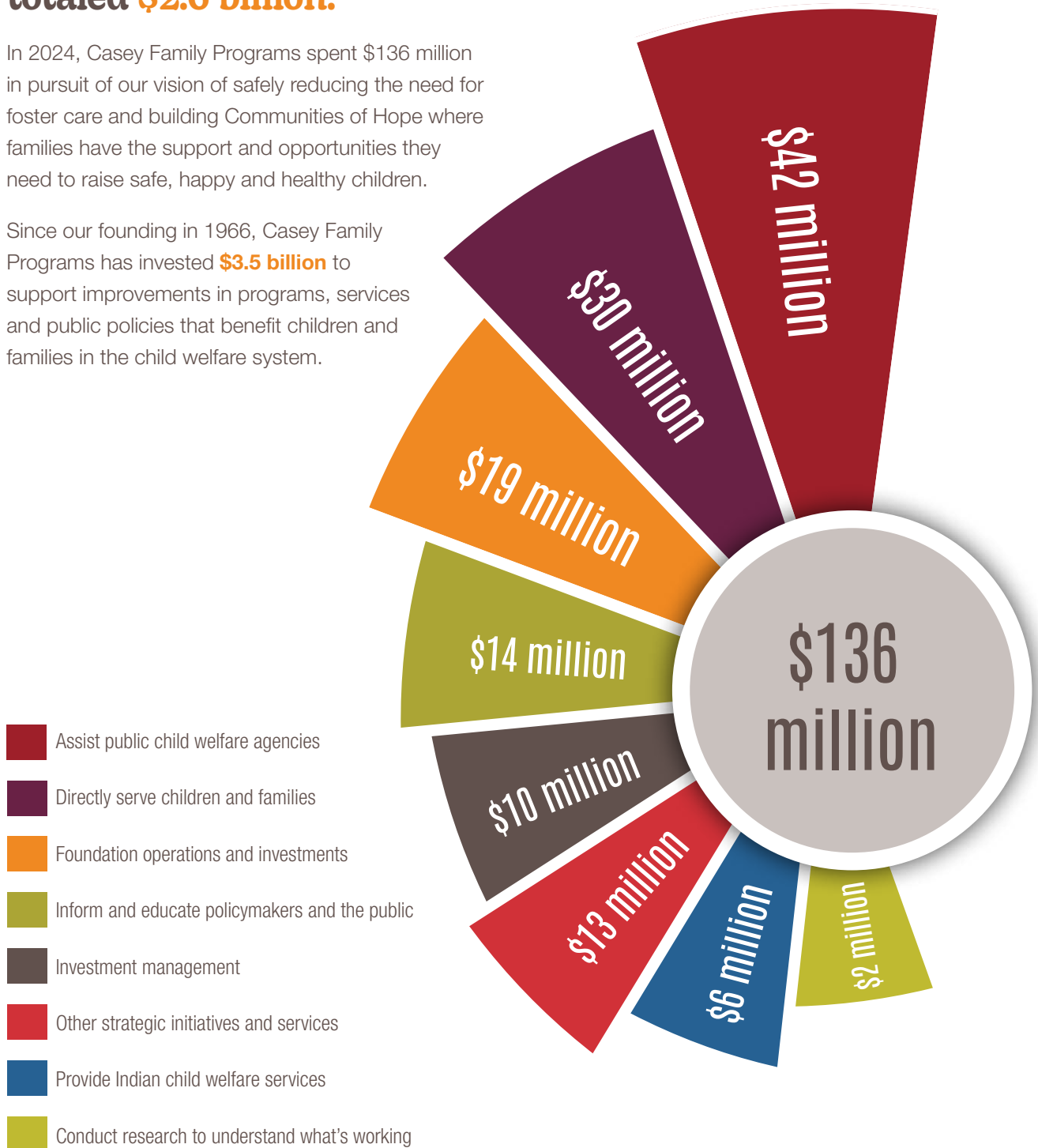
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# 2024 financial summary

## At the end of 2024, Casey Family Programs' assets totaled **\$2.6 billion**.

In 2024, Casey Family Programs spent \$136 million in pursuit of our vision of safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope where families have the support and opportunities they need to raise safe, happy and healthy children.

Since our founding in 1966, Casey Family Programs has invested **\$3.5 billion** to support improvements in programs, services and public policies that benefit children and families in the child welfare system.



“

**Inspiration and  
enthusiasm  
are of little  
value unless  
they move us  
to action and  
accomplishment.**

**-JIM CASEY  
FOUNDER**

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