

# CSAW

June 2008

*Children's Stability & Well-Being Study Newsletter*

*By promoting safe, well-resourced, stable families, we seek to improve the health and well-being of children who enter out-of-home care.*



## Message From the Principal Investigator

It's been an exciting and eventful year for the Children's Stability and Well-Being (CSAW) Study. In November 2006, we partnered with Philadelphia's child welfare and behavioral health systems on the first study to measure the well-being of young children in out-of-home care every time they were moved to a different living situation. The goal of the CSAW Study is to identify the barriers that keep children from achieving stable and permanent placements early on and, ultimately, to guide the city in developing strategies to improve both stability and outcomes for these children at the earliest possible opportunity. The long-term success of this study will be measured by the interventions that develop on its heels, and by the improvements in integrated service delivery and child well-being that we hope will follow down the road.

Since our study began, we have enrolled nearly 400 children who were 3 to 8 years of age at the time of their entry into out-of-home care. Providers on the performance-based contract with the Department of Human Services have been updating our team weekly with information on the placement moves of these children, and caseworkers have been clarifying the

decision-making process regarding these moves. Our research team, composed of emerging leaders in social work and public health from our community, has gone far and wide to gather information on child well-being, from the homes of families to psychiatric hospitals, and from our residential neighborhoods in Philadelphia to as far away as Virginia. And our stakeholders — including foster, kinship and birth families; our advisory board; and the management council for children, youth and family services — have been responsive to our study and have expressed a great deal of interest in its results.

We are humbled by the enthusiasm our study has generated — and we look forward to the insights and interventions it will inspire.

Sincerely,

David Rubin, M.D., M.S.C.E.

Stoneleigh Center Fellow

Director of Research and Policy,  
Safe Place: The Center for Child Protection and Health  
at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia



## Message From Our City Partners

On behalf of the Department of Human Services and the Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services, I would like to reaffirm our continuing support of the Children's Stability and Well-Being Study. I want to thank all of the agencies and caregivers for supporting the advancement of the project and urge you to continue your support. We hope that this longitudinal study of children entering foster care in Philadelphia will provide useful information on the well-being of children as they move between placements and that this information will translate into novel approaches to

reduce placement instability, thereby improving the health and well-being of the children we serve.

Sincerely,

Arthur C. Evans Jr., Ph.D.

Director, Department of Behavioral Health  
and Mental Retardation Services

Former Acting Commissioner, Department of  
Human Services

# We Need You to Care

by Misty Stenslie, M.S.W.

*Deputy Director,  
Foster Care Alumni  
of America*

As a little girl in foster care, I dreamed about finding a family that would be mine forever. I dreamed about having a mom who would rub my back and sing me a song, and a dad who would someday walk me down the aisle at my wedding. I had elaborate fantasies about what a “real family” would be like, and I just waited and watched to see if that would ever happen for me.

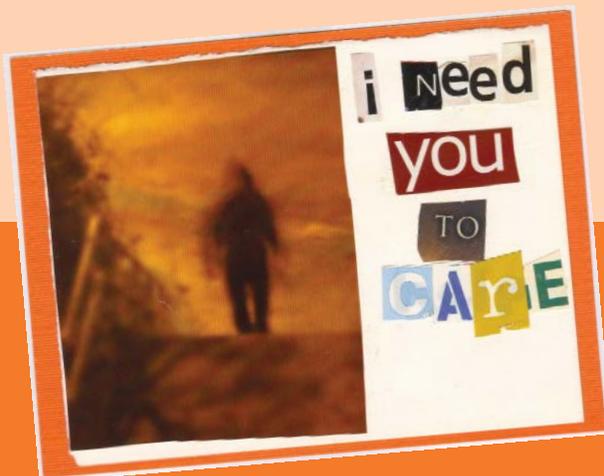
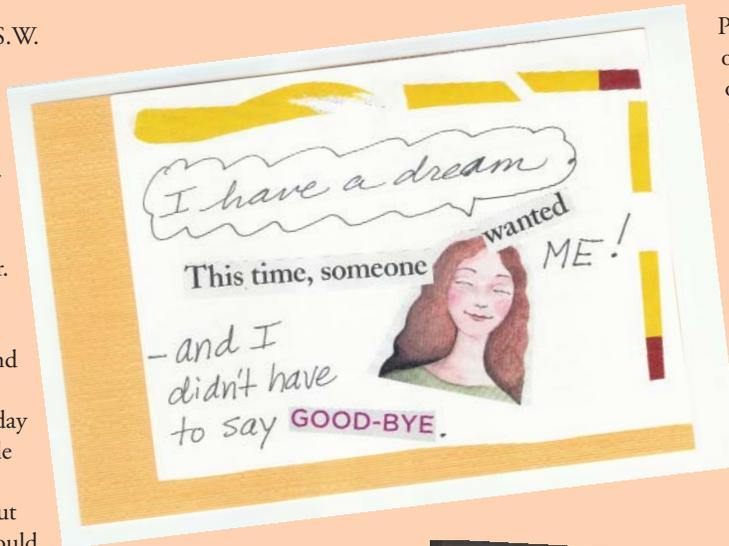
After about 30 different placements — foster homes, group homes, kinship care, detention centers, institutions — I aged out of foster care without having found the family I dreamed of. Every day in America, there are more than half a million children in care waiting and watching. Every year in America, there are 25,000 young adults who leave foster care who never found a family. For the estimated 12 million of us who are alumni of the foster care system, research tells us that adult outcomes

are very poor. It turns out that being raised by the government is a strong indicator of extreme vulnerability across the lifespan.

That’s why we need you to care. Foster children belong to ALL of us. WE are the government, and we have a role to play.

Please find a way to make a difference — by foster parenting, becoming a mentor, using your voice to advocate for change or volunteering.

Please join Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA) to support our community and join our efforts to improve foster care practice and policy. Whether you are an alumnus of care or one of our allies (a person who shares our mission), please join FCAA today. For more information, visit our Web site at [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org) or call our office at 703-299-6767.



These postcards come from Foster Care Alumni of America’s national community art project, *Exploring the Culture of Foster Care*. Created by people in and from foster care, these postcards describe our experiences: what we’ve learned, what we’ve lost — and what we’ve gained.

## Youth Voice



### A young woman who has aged out of foster care talks about her experiences

“I arrived in placement about seven years ago. Over the course of that time, I’ve been

in three foster homes. Having those experiences, living in three different homes at a young age, was a negative experience because I had to change who I was to fit in. I felt like I could never be myself because everywhere I went the rules were different, the people were different and I constantly had to change myself.

I went to three different schools. My friends changed all the time. All those changes made me feel evil inside because I never got to keep friends and I was constantly losing my best friend.”

Sykia, 19

*Supervised Independent Living Program  
Delta Community Supports, Inc.*

## Call to Action

### Join the Campaign for the 2010 White House Conference on Children and Youth

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has launched a campaign to bring another national Conference on Children and Youth to the White House in 2010. Previous conferences helped establish priorities for protecting and supporting children in need. The 2010 conference would focus on child welfare and cover issues from prevention and intervention to permanency, including reunification, kinship care and adoption. To show your support for the 2010 White House Conference on Children and Youth, contact your senators and representatives in Congress at (202) 224-3121 and ask them to support the conference. For campaign updates, visit [www.cwla.org/advocacy/whitehouseconfsignon.htm](http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/whitehouseconfsignon.htm).

## What We’ve Learned So Far

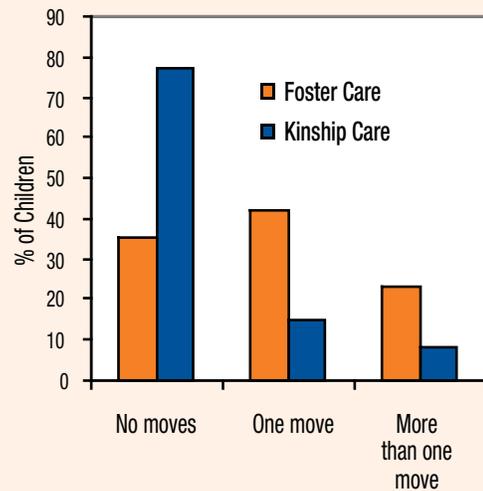
### The CSAW Study: Year One

Although we have not yet had the opportunity to examine behavioral or school-age outcomes, our study has already yielded important information about children who are entering out-of-home care, and about their earliest experiences.

- 80 percent of our children are African American; 53 percent are male.
- 34 percent of our children have significant histories of neglect.
- 33 percent of our children come from families with substance abuse or mental health problems.
- 50 percent of our children have entered kinship care settings; 50 percent have entered foster care.
- 21 percent of our children are reported to have chronic medical problems.
- 35 percent of our children were reported to have significant behavioral problems when entering care.

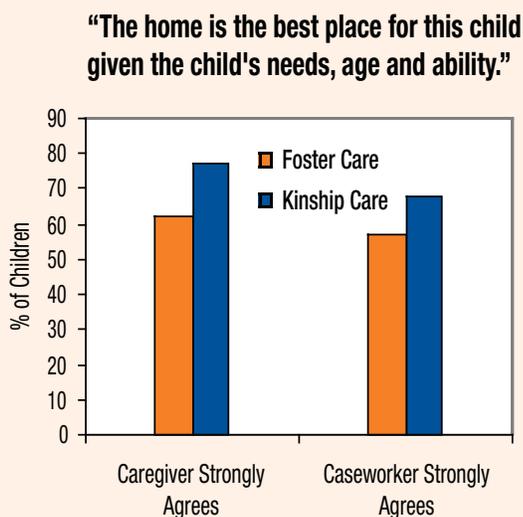
While it is early to examine the stability of children in placement, we have already detected significant differences between children in kinship care and those in foster care. Whether we count the number of moves a child has experienced, or the number of children who established a secure placement within 45 days of entering out-of-home care, we have found that children in kinship care are much more likely to secure a stable placement than children in foster care. (See graph below.)

Graph 1: Foster Care vs. Kinship Care Moves



We have also found that caseworkers and foster and kinship care families share similar concerns about whether the children placed in their homes are in the best setting. (See graph below.)

Graph 2: Response to Statement



## Next Steps

### Educational Outcomes

To date we have enrolled more than 400 children in the study and hope to enroll the final 100 by year’s end. For final assessments, the Philadelphia School District recently approved the survey of each child’s respective teacher to measure the child’s behavioral and educational outcomes 18 months after placement. The information collected will provide a basic understanding of the relationship between out-of-home placements and educational well-being. It will also be used to provide a better picture of how stability patterns affect the overall health and well-being of children in foster/kinship care.

For additional information, please contact the CSAW project director at 267-426-2887 or visit us online at [stokes.chop.edu/programs/csaw](http://stokes.chop.edu/programs/csaw).

## Field Notes

Below you will read about a situation we encountered in the field. We don’t claim to have solutions to the challenges presented here, but we do think that the story offers a starting point for a discussion about how to address the flaws in our foster care system — and promote better outcomes for the children it serves.

### What We’ve Observed

As we visit with families in the study, we have come face to face with the challenges of reaching stability. One kinship caregiver lost two grandchildren because she reportedly could not obtain a physical examination for an adult grandchild who was away at college and visited during school breaks. It was her understanding that the other grandchildren were taken away because she could not get the college student’s physical form completed within 60 days of the young grandchildren’s arrival in her care.

### Things to Think About

Can the regulations put in place to ensure the safety and well-being of children who enter out-of-home care actually hurt them? Kinship care usually occurs in response to an emergency situation, and kinship homes are often identified only when a placement is imminent. The decision to become a foster parent, on the other hand, is usually made long before a child is actually placed in the foster home. In the latter case, there is more time for the family to prepare, and to meet the requirements, before the child arrives.

This brings us to ask what we can do to support stable placements. Information and data collected from this study will be used to make recommendations for how we can improve on this process in order to promote the stability and well-being of children who enter out-of-home care.

*“I think that it would be a benefit to just be in one home, because you feel more like a family. It is really important to find homes that children can feel loved.”*

Anonymous, 20

*Supervised Independent Living Program  
Delta Community Supports, Inc.*

## Impact Corner

As we move forward with the CSAW Study, we feel it is necessary to keep all of our stakeholders — both professionals and families — abreast of the ongoing impact of our research on stability and well-being. Through presentations and other activities, we are continuously engaging audiences in an effort to improve outcomes for children.

Here are a few examples:

- In July 2007, Dr. Rubin presented on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support for the U.S. Congress. A transcript of his presentation, which focused on the challenges of meeting the healthcare needs of children in foster care, is available at <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/washing/07-19-07-Foster-Care-Testimony-Rubin.pdf>.
- In December 2007, the CSAW team presented preliminary data from the CSAW Study at our annual advisory board meeting. Members of the advisory board were supportive of our efforts to develop recommendations to improve children's access to kin when appropriate and possible and to begin to identify strategies to improve stability among youth who are placed with nonrelatives in foster care.
- On May 1, 2008, using data from the CSAW Study, CSAW project director Robin Mekonnen presented on the healthcare needs of children in foster care at the National Forum on Children, Families and the Courts, which was attended by family court judges from across the nation. Calvin Johnson, M.D., M.P.H., the Secretary of Health for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, joined her on her panel.
- On June 2, 2008, Dr. Rubin provided Congressional briefings to the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate on the outcomes of children in foster care versus children in kinship care. His briefings coincided with the release of findings from his team's analysis of the National Survey of Child & Adolescent Well-Being.\* The relevance of that study to pending federal legislation to address the needs of kinship families was a focus of the sessions.

\*Rubin D, Downes K, O'Reilly A, Mekonnen R, Localio AR, Luan X. The impact of kinship care on behavioral well-being for children in out-of-home care. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2008;162(3).

### Attention PBC Foster and Kinship Care Agencies

The success of this study greatly relies upon the cooperation of participating foster/kinship care agencies. We'd like to keep up enthusiasm and update you on the progress of the study as well as obtain your feedback by presenting some preliminary data to agencies. The presentation, which is ideal for either a staff training or meeting, is a great opportunity to refresh those who have been participating, as well as to provide background for those who may be new to CSAW. We have already visited a number of agencies and aim to visit all of them. If we have not visited your agency to present, please contact Robin Mekonnen at [mekonnen@email.chop.edu](mailto:mekonnen@email.chop.edu) or 267-426-2887.

#### *Sponsored by:*

Stoneleigh Center  
William Penn Foundation  
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

#### *Special Thanks to:*

Department of Human Services  
Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services



## Meet the CSAW Study Team

### David Rubin, M.D., M.S.C.E. – Principal Investigator

Dr. Rubin is currently a Stoneleigh Center Fellow, the director of research and policy for Safe Place: The Center for Child Protection and Health at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Dr. Rubin was named to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Task Force on Foster Care in 2006 and received a career-development award from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to continue studying the outcomes of children in foster care. He has been focusing on the stability of a child's placement history in out-of-home care and has been working with the city of Philadelphia on the development and implementation of the CSAW Study.

### Amanda O'Reilly, M.P.H. – Scientific Director

Amanda O'Reilly is the assistant director of research and policy for Safe Place. She is also the scientific director of the CSAW Study. O'Reilly received her master of public health degree in maternal and child health from the University of California, Berkeley. Her primary research interests include public health interventions for vulnerable populations.

### Robin Mekonnen, M.S.W. – Project Director

Robin Mekonnen is the project director for the CSAW Study. She is currently in dissertation status at the School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her master's degree in social work and expects to receive her Ph.D. in social welfare. Her dissertation is on the termination of parental rights in child welfare cases.

### Kudirat Jamiu, M.P.H. – Senior Research Assistant

Kudirat Jamiu is the senior research assistant for the CSAW Study. Prior to joining the CSAW team, she served as a program coordinator for a youth violence reduction program. Jamiu joined the CSAW team because she wants to help improve the lives of children.



The CSAW Study Team (from left to right): Robin Mekonnen, Kudirat Jamiu, Heather Rouse, Denise Actie, Yolanda Hurt, Dawn DeVan-Bertrand, David Rubin and Amanda O'Reilly

### Denise Actie, M.S.W. – Research Assistant

Denise Actie works as a foster care supervisor. She joined the CSAW team because she has become increasingly aware of how changes in living environments can negatively affect the mental, relational and emotional health of children living in out-of-home care.

### Yolanda Hurt, M.S.W. – Research Assistant

Yolanda Hurt works as a program supervisor for Services to Children in Their Own Homes (SCOH). She joined the CSAW team because she was intrigued by the study and says that this work has brought her out of her element of providing services and into the realm of data collection.

### Dawn DeVan-Bertrand, M.S.W. – Research Assistant

Dawn DeVan-Bertrand works as a school social worker/counselor. She joined the CSAW team because she wants to help give a voice to the systemic challenges endured by families and agencies providing foster and kinship care as they work to provide a stable, nurturing and caring environment to children in and around Philadelphia.

### Heather Rouse, Ph.D., M.S.Ed. – Education Consultant

Dr. Rouse is a research associate of the Graduate School of Education and research director of the KIDS Research Service Center at the University of Pennsylvania. As a graduate student, she was awarded a Head Start Research Scholars grant to investigate the influence of approaches to learning for Head Start children. She has published a number of research articles, including the 2005 Article of the Year in *School Psychology Review*. Rouse received her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.