



Strengthening Families & Communities

LIFE SKILLS: TOOLS FOR SURVIVAL AND PROSPERITY

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Life Skills: Tools for Survival and Prosperity

The transition of older youths served by Casey Family Services “out of care” and “into adulthood” remains a central focus of the agency, as articulated in its Five-Year Plan. Ultimately, the bottom line across all programs is helping young people of all ages to develop the life skills to become – “to transition to” – healthy, happy, productive young adults. If transition represents a process and perhaps a phase in the lives of challenged young adults, then life skills represent the “meat,” the substance of transitions – the tools they need to survive and to prosper.

Recognizing the continuing importance of this relationship between process and product, Casey Family Services recently re-engaged its Life Skills Work Group (LSWG) to bring renewed focus to its life skills efforts. With the able assistance of Senior Program Associate for Program Development, Patrick Lyttle, newly hired Senior Program Associate for Life Skills David Johnston recently assumed the coordination of this inter-divisional group. In addition to the piloting of a life skills assessment tool, the LSWG will ultimately produce both an inventory of the many existing life skills activities already in place, and a Life Skills Framework – a concise document that summarizes the agency’s life skills philosophy, activities, relationship to other agency work, and challenges and priorities for the future.

Prior to joining Casey, David Johnston managed a federally funded grant in Connecticut to study conflicts at the town of Windsor’s middle school and the work of a partnership of the police department, school system and town government to prevent violence among youth. As the executive director of The Bridge Family Center in West Hartford, Johnston managed this multi-service agency that provided youth and family counseling, “street outreach,” regional youth shelter and school-based family resource centers. He also led negotiations to fund and create the region’s first residential Transitional Living Program in Hartford.

On September 10, representatives of each division and Administration met in Lowell, Massachusetts, to kick off this latest phase of the Work Group, and to learn about a tangible aid to life skills work – the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA), developed by Casey Family Programs (CFP) in Seattle. With the help of Dorothy Ansell, CFP developed this instrument, and accompanying guides and reference material, three years ago, and has already accumulated a significant body of experience and data on its use with thousands of youths and caregivers.

Casey Family Programs research experts, Dr. Chris Downs and web master Richard Brassini, introduced Casey Family Services staff to this user-friendly measurement tool, coached Lisa Cornish from our Baltimore Division to demonstrate it online for the group, led us in a discussion of how to interpret the ACLSA profile of a foster youth and his caregiver, and outlined how the ACLSA can enhance outcomes for Casey youth. The ACLSA is available to anyone, free of charge, online. Casey Family Programs will also core the results and send them back to any user.

Over the next few months, members of the LSWG will familiarize themselves with the ACLSA, participate in a teleconference to discuss their impressions, apply the methodology to some of their cases, and introduce their colleagues to the existence and use of the ACLSA. At the same time, David Johnston will visit with members of the Work Group at each Division, and talk with other staff about life skills, asking questions such as:

- What are the life skills we think our client youth should possess?
- Where does life skills work occur within Casey Family Services?
- How does it relate to the day-to-day work of staff in various programs?
- (Much of the work done by Casey Family Services staff includes “life skills work” whether or not so described.)
- Who does it?
- What else could be done?
- What are the barriers to doing more and better life skills work?
- How can the Life Skills Work Group help?
- What is the potential of the ACLSA?

In addition to his work with the LSWG, Johnston is looking at other areas that fall generally under the headings of “transitions” and “life skills” to see how they are defined, where they fit into an evolving life-skills model for Casey Family Services, and how they can be enhanced. These areas include the School-to-Career Partnerships, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the Bridgeport Computer Project, the November Teen Conference, and housing for youths in transition – starting with the young mothers served by the Baltimore Division.

Survival and Prosperity

During visits to divisions over the next few months we will focus on six key areas:

- • Daily Living
- • Housing and Community Resources
- • Money Management
- • Self-Care
- • Social Development
- • Work and Study Skills

For more information about the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment go to www.caseylifeskills.org