



Take This Heart / The Foster Care Project Fact Sheet

A long-term campaign to build public will, the Foster Care Project was developed in association with the one hour documentary, *Take This Heart*, produced by KCTS / Seattle. Public television stations in communities across America were invited to participate in the outreach campaign to build awareness about foster care and mobilize communities to take action to improve the lives of children in foster care. Major funding for *Take This Heart* was provided by The Casey Family Program and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The national community and educational outreach campaign was made possible by generous grants from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The Casey Family Program and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) was the national community outreach partner. Strategically designed and implemented by Outreach Extensions, the project extended from November 1996 through May 1998. A significant outcome was that, in large measure, the campaign and film led to federal legislation that extended benefits to foster families so they could continue to assist youth aging out of foster care.

Primary activities for *The Foster Care Project* included the following:

- ***Five Community Service Action Grants*** – Five public television stations received Community Service Action Grants. Their local campaigns were distinguished by intensive collaboration with a community partner and a coalition of other local groups serving youth in foster care and their families, a community assessment process resulting in an action plan, implementation efforts to achieve specific outcomes, and an outcome evaluation. Participating stations and their primary partners included: KCET / Los Angeles and the Child Welfare League of America, Western Division; KLRU / Austin, Texas and the Casey Family Program, Austin Division; KCTS / Seattle and The Casey Family Program, Seattle Division; Maryland Public Television and the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth; and WTVS / Detroit and Evergreen Children's Services.
- ***Thirty National Incentive Grants*** – Thirty public television stations received Incentive Grants to conduct outreach activities within their local communities in coordination with agencies and organizations involved in foster care, and utilizing campaign materials.
- ***National Partner*** – The Child Welfare League of America assisted the project through preparing content materials on foster care; providing technical assistance to community organizations, local stations and the Steering Committee; and participating in related activities, such as conferences. At the end of the project, CWLA acquired the rights to campaign materials and then sold them through its resource catalogue.
- ***Development of Tools and Resources*** – Important project resources included the Web site, housed on the KidsCampaigns Web site published by the Benton Foundation; *The Foster Care Project Toolbox*; and the *Take This Heart Community Foster Care Packet*, including a

20-minute videotape and discussion guide. A “how you can help” brochure was developed, which all stations could customize for local distribution.

The external evaluation for The Foster Care Project was conducted by Michelle Jackson. Primary tools for data collection included project records maintained by the stations and survey instruments. As noted by the evaluator, it was difficult to quantify impact in a project of this nature. “The difficulty is due to the fact that results often manifest as individualized decision making processes (e.g., the decision to become a foster parent) and/or increases in awareness that are hard to measure and do not necessarily translate into immediate action.”

Overall, the greatest areas of impact across the stations were:

- Increased recognition of public television as a viable and available tool to educate and effectively address the social needs of communities;
- An increase in public awareness of needs related to foster care;
- An increase in public awareness of reasonable, creative and available opportunities to involve individuals, families, communities and organizations in positively affecting the lives of children, youth and families in foster care;
- Sustained relationships formed between community agencies and public television stations that will insure continuation of many activities beyond the life of the project;
- An increase in public television’s sensitivity to, and understanding of, foster care (resulting in local programming about the issue);
- Development of effective models for coalition building;
- Broad reach and the ongoing effects of using local community agencies to disseminate materials and information to their colleagues, local officials and the general public.

Examples of sustainable outcomes at each of the five stations:

KCET / Los Angeles and the Child Welfare League of America, Western Division: CWLA has become a member of KCET’s Outreach Coalition for its signature *Life & Times* public affairs program. Its involvement provides assurance that foster care issues will continue to be represented in public affairs programming.

KCTS / Seattle and The Casey Family Program, Seattle Division: The KCTS evaluation, conducted by Tarah and Associates, documented the far-reaching impact of the Seattle campaign through the building of an effective community coalition to deal with the State of Washington’s foster care system. The State Department of Children and Family Services will maintain the statewide toll-free number for recruitment of foster and adoptive parents recommended by the coalition. DCFS offered to expand the existing system to encompass the service areas designated by The Foster Care Project, and to fund it as a permanent part of the State of Washington’s foster care system. In addition, The Foster Care Project provided the state’s foster care system with a streamlined system of responsibility and accountability for all agencies – helping to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of DCFS.

KLRU / Austin, Texas and the Casey Family Program, Austin Division: The strong involvement of foster parents empowered them to become leaders and advocates on their own behalf. The campaign incorporated an educational component, including radio interviews and editorials that were conducted and written by parents. Thirteen of the 24 child placement agencies in the region signed Memoranda of Understanding, agreeing to work together to assist youth nearing the age of emancipation, and to advocate for effective public policy changes to support their transition.

Maryland Public Television and the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth: The Maryland campaign was unique in that many components targeted a very vertical market, the Department of Human Resources. The purpose was to encourage and reinforce positive interactions and dialogue among government agencies, private companies and families in need of services. The public television station demonstrated its effectiveness in serving as an outreach tool to bring community members to the Department of Social Services as well as to establish a model for government agencies to work with other partners to increase community awareness and action.

WTVS / Detroit and Evergreen Children's Services: While WTVS served as the catalyst for the campaign, all outreach strategies empowered community agencies and organizations to participate in and lead efforts to increase public awareness of the needs of children in foster care and their families. Results included capacity building for local agencies and an increase in available resources. Partnering with corporations resulted in employment and mentoring opportunities for teens. Placement of the project's Web site, and related training, within the Michigan Community Network supported knowledge sharing among nonprofit organizations.



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