

**CHILDREN *and* FAMILY FELLOWSHIP**



**2007**

**CLASS OF CASEY FOUNDATION**

**Children and Family Fellows**

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

## THE 2007–08 CLASS OF CASEY FOUNDATION

### Children and Family Fellows

#### **A Life-Changing Program, An Investment in the Future**

Through the Children and Family Fellowship, the Casey Foundation explicitly strives to increase the pool of diverse, visionary leaders with the confidence and competence to create supports and systems that help families make positive choices and to lead and sustain major system reforms and community change initiatives that benefit large numbers of children and families. During their 18 months of Fellowship activities, participants broaden their vision, increase their networks and base of knowledge, expand and refine their skills, and accumulate the experience they need to lead major change efforts. A unique opportunity for reflection, action, exploration, and learning, the Fellowship fosters career-enhancing growth.

The Fellowship serves as a complement to the Foundation's existing programs and funding strategies. As such, it represents an important investment in the human services field, in the future of communities, and in the futures of our most vulnerable children. The Fellowship represents the Foundation's ongoing commitment to encouraging the strongest possible leadership on behalf of America's children and families.

## A Unique Group of Talented, Aspiring Leaders

*It is my pleasure to introduce the 2007–08 Annie E. Casey Foundation Children and Family Fellows. These 16 women and men, like the 59 Fellows who have preceded them since 1993, are talented and accomplished professionals from the children and family services field and related disciplines throughout the country. They are people deeply concerned about the distressing conditions facing too many children, families, and communities. They are a diverse group of individuals who want to accelerate their professional and personal development to enhance their ability to ensure that children, families, and communities are strong—that all children and youth have a permanent connection to a family and that all families are economically self-sufficient.*

*As you will read in the following pages, many of these Fellows work across traditional cultural, disciplinary, and systemic boundaries. They may speak more than one language, mediate differences between policymakers and community leaders, or negotiate between federal and*

*state governments. Although these characteristics are not formally elicited through the Fellowship application process, we think they reflect some of the changing and complex requirements of public leadership today.*

*Leading significant change, whether in systems or communities, increasingly requires professional agility or fluency in diverse, multi-stakeholder environments. The Casey Foundation, therefore, has much to learn from this talented group of Fellows. We look forward to facilitating their learning and development during the Fellowship.*

Donna Stark, Director of Leadership Development  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation



Douglas Ammar



Karen Baynes

Georgia Justice Project, a criminal defense agency that serves indigent people in Atlanta, took the unusual step of starting a landscaping company to employ clients, including ex-offenders, who typically struggle to find jobs.

Executive Director **Douglas Ammar**, an attorney, helped design this community-based effort that partners with other nonprofits to offer legal representation plus holistic rehabilitation programs. These include drug counseling, anger management, life skills, housing, education, supportive family services, job training, and employment. The recidivism rate for Georgia Justice Project clients is 17.8 percent compared to a national average of over 60 percent.

Because Georgia Justice Project's work is funded by individual community supporters and accepts no government monies, the organization works on the edge of the criminal justice system, enabling lawyers to help clients rebuild their lives. "It's not just about being a good lawyer. It's about a relationship," says Ammar.

Coming on the heels of being named a 2006 honoree in Casey's FAMILIES COUNT program, Ammar believes the Fellowship offers the Georgia Justice Project an opportunity to "help spread the word of our work."

When **Karen B. Baynes** entered academia in 2002, she brought many years of experience in juvenile court—as a volunteer child advocate attorney, an executive director of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, and an associate judge.

Her leadership and experience "in the trenches" is informing her work as associate director for Governmental Services at the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, where Baynes is coordinating a multi-disciplinary child and family policy initiative that bridges research, policy, and practice. The institute's goal is to improve governance in Georgia and beyond by providing research, training, and technical assistance to government agencies and elected officials.

As a faculty member of a land grant university designed to improve citizens' lives, Baynes is working to create a "two-way" street between the university and community that leads to a more inclusive policymaking process. "Unless we hear all the voices at the table we won't get it right," says Baynes. "Creating a sustainable dialogue among researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers is more of a challenge than I imagined."



Fred Blackwell



Robin Brule

Fred Blackwell is the personification of what the Casey Foundation likes to call impact, influence, and leverage—spreading Casey values by producing concrete results, developing sound policies, and attracting funding to help children and families succeed.

After serving for several years as local manager for the Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative in Oakland, California, Blackwell landed a job as deputy director and then director of San Francisco's Office of Community Development. He oversees a budget of more than \$30 million a year in programs to help low- and moderate-income people and neighborhoods.

Heady stuff for someone who spent his formative years in community meetings. "I am a product of a family of activists and teachers and nonprofit professionals. I was always the boy in the back of the room with the coloring book wondering why everyone was so angry and when we could go home."

Today, Blackwell is dedicated to "figuring out ways to make our local governmental systems more responsive to the kids and families who need them." Through the Fellowship he looks forward to "having a cohort of colleagues struggling with similar questions."

As executive director of the Central New Mexico College Foundation, Robin Brule has found that for the "average" student, who is 29, has children, and works in a low-wage job without insurance, "school becomes a luxury" even when it's free or very low cost. One loose link in the tenuous chain of survival, and education is the first victim.

Service systems designed to fill the gaps are labyrinthine, with multiple application processes and long waits.

"Unless we look at our students as entire people, we're never going to get them in the classroom and keep them there," says Brule, who raises funds to cover everything from bus passes and GED fees to a down payment on rent for someone in crisis or money for eyeglasses.

Viewing education as "the great equalizer" to steer people toward self-sufficiency, Brule has been instrumental in New Mexico's Earned Income Tax Credit campaign, Center for Working Families, scholarship programs, and educational assistance to prison parolees. Brule looks forward to "learning about different structures people have set up to bring multiple constituent groups together to make support services more effective."



Daniel Cardinali



Dana Jackson

Daniel J. Cardinali, president of Communities In Schools, the nation's largest dropout prevention organization, understands how education paves the way to a productive future.

As a community organizer in Latin America, Cardinali vividly remembers teaching a woman to read who had only been able to get around by knowing the color of the right bus. "I felt like an animal," the woman told him. "Now I feel like a human. I am free to travel wherever I want."

Doing community development work in the United States and abroad has made Cardinali "passionate about social justice"—a fitting mission for a network of 200 local nonprofits and state organizations working to close the achievement gap and eliminate the causes for kids dropping out of school.

Over the past two years, Cardinali has transitioned into his role as national president, succeeding the organization's founder. He's excited about learning from Casey's leadership transition expertise. He also relishes the chance to reflect with peers. "We don't have to be on all the time with each other, we just have to be able to share and learn."

As local coordinator of Casey's *Making Connections* initiative in Louisville, Kentucky, Dana Jackson has helped spark a powerful movement to strengthen family and community supports to improve the odds for vulnerable children.

Having served as deputy commissioner of the Department for Community-Based Services in the state's Cabinet for Families and Children and as a director in state offices of child protection and child care, she's been responsible for billion dollar budgets and overseen the work of thousands of employees in carrying out innovative programs.

She's also worked with schools, shelters, and community health and faith-based agencies—in short, all the players needed to provide a supportive "village" for children to grow up in. "I've had an opportunity to work in different environments, from grassroots organizations to leadership positions in the state. I bring an understanding of different areas, environments, and perspectives."

But Jackson knows there is much more to learn—and contribute—with the help of the Fellowship. "I want to stretch and learn new leadership skills and bring back information to my team and local partners that will help push the work forward."



Vinodh Kutty



Rafael López

As coordinator of the Hennepin County Office of Multi-Cultural Services in Minneapolis, **Vinodh Kutty** makes sure immigrants and refugees are heard even when they don't speak English. "I bring a voice to a large minority who are silent, who might be undocumented and fearful."

Born in Malaysia and educated in Singapore, Kutty was a high school teacher before coming to the United States, where he has worked with service providers and educators conducting cultural competency training and assisting new Americans, refugees, asylum-seekers, and other minority groups. Kutty helped create the county office he now coordinates, translating it from concept to reality and winning the trust of a once skeptical community. "Now the community looks at us as an ally. That's my proudest accomplishment."

Kutty hopes to learn more about the U.S. civil service system and glean as much knowledge as he can from the Foundation and other Fellows. A father of two, he's glad most of the work can be done from Minnesota. "You can't work on behalf of children and not be around to be a role model for your children."

Working for children and families in the nation's second largest city of four million people, **Rafael López** is intrigued by "how to bring innovative solutions to scale."

"How do you conceive of programs, deliver them, evaluate them, and implement them in a way that you can say you have changed the life of a child or a family? You can't have one cookie-cutter-fits-all solution" reflects López, executive director of the Commission for Children, Youth, and Families for the City of Los Angeles.

Appointed by the mayor for his impressive record in serving disadvantaged children throughout California, López has helped institute programs, policies, and reforms spanning health, safety, education, and economic well-being. He derives special satisfaction from "encouraging a young person or parent or community member to stand up for what they rightly deserve."

López is thrilled to become part of a national network and conversation through the Fellowship and is particularly interested in learning "how to create a new knowledge base for dramatically changing communities across the country."

The Fellowship "is like a living lab," says López.



Steven McCullough



Chris McInnish

Steven McCullough takes his work at a faith-based community development corporation very personally because he works on Chicago's West Side—his home turf.

"I was born and raised in the community," says McCullough, president and chief executive officer of Bethel New Life, Inc., a 2002 Casey FAMILIES COUNT program honoree that specializes in affordable housing development, child development, employment, elder care, and advocacy. "I've seen my community at its worst and I've seen it do amazing things. Having that perspective makes me more effective and passionate."

Driven by his personal and religious faith, McCullough works to get younger professionals more engaged in community change. "Before it was about getting your education and leaving," he says. "It's our time to take ownership of our community."

McCullough spent many years in the for-profit sector, including ten years at Quaker Oats. "I bring that pragmatic approach, which helps my organization focus on the outcomes we hope to achieve," says McCullough, who hopes to use the Fellowship to sharpen his organization's work in education, affordable housing, and helping families and communities build and maintain wealth.

As deputy commissioner of the Alabama Department of Children's Affairs, Chris McInnish has earned praise for developing a statewide network of grassroots "children's policy councils" to coordinate and assess services for disadvantaged children and families.

Now based in every county in the state, these coalitions of community members, judges, agency directors, and local decision-makers have raised over \$6 million for local services. In many communities, the children's policy council is the focal point for efforts to improve children's lives.

McInnish has also led the charge to design a sophisticated web-based mapping system that helps communities gather data from different sources to analyze and evaluate program effectiveness. The system will give state and local leaders and community programs access to statistical, resource, and financial information and is built on the collaborative efforts of more than 30 state agencies and nonprofits.

McInnish looks forward to bringing the resources of the Fellowship Network back to his state. "If we can leverage some of that passion, it will help me and others do our jobs better."



Tyronda Minter



Alice Shobe

Tyronda Minter is most proud of her ability to “establish connections with people across different social and economic strata and create strategic alliances.”

These skills serve her well in her current capacity as program director for the Metropolitan Youth Opportunities Initiative in Atlanta, Georgia, which brings together a wide range of resources and opportunities to help young people make a more successful transition from foster care to adulthood. The Atlanta program is a local pilot of the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and is supported by the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta.

Minter’s ease in forming diverse alliances has helped her identify and implement unique and creative system reform efforts throughout her career working in the public and nonprofit sectors to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged children, their families, and communities.

“I am grateful for this opportunity and to the people who have supported me,” Minter says. “I am excited about learning new skills and being exposed to proven tools that will help me to become a more effective change agent.”

It may seem surprising that the Massachusetts Department of Welfare launched the career of Alice Shobe, a Michigan native who has now lived most of her life in the Northwest. “As a college intern assigned to monitor homeless shelters, I saw how my passion for urban issues and desire to help people directly could come together.”

With 17 years of housing, philanthropy, and community development experience under her belt, Shobe today directs the Sound Families Initiative, a partnership between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, seven public jurisdictions, and six housing authorities to provide coordinated resources to curb homelessness in the Seattle, Washington area.

Like many of her cohorts, Shobe says the way the new 18-month Fellowship program has been revamped—allowing most of the work to be carried out on Fellows’ home turf rather than in Baltimore—has made all the difference. It also meshes perfectly with her goals in serving families. “The theme for me through this whole Fellowship is working to balance family and career demands,” says Shobe. “I believe that people with a healthy balance make better decisions.”



Tony Thurmond



Marian Urquilla

Tony Thurmond has worked on the East and West Coasts to address the challenges children face when they lack stability and consistency in their families. He started in child protective services working with families of abused and neglected children in Philadelphia and now heads Beyond Emancipation, an Alameda County, California program that helps youth aging out of foster care find housing, jobs, health services, and other resources.

Also a member of the City Council in Richmond, California, Thurmond has a passion for problem solving. “I know how to find the right people to put on the team and keep the team together and make sure we find a way to keep the conversation going until we find a solution, and I just won’t quit,” he says.

Thurmond’s drive to make sure young people grow up with caring adults stems from personal experience. He lost his mother as a youth and grew up without a father. “I only made it because I have had so many mentors,” he says. “This tradition of people helping me has been passed down to me to help others.”

Marian Urquilla calls herself a “boundary crosser”—one who moves easily between institutions and communities helping people and systems achieve their vision. “I’m really good at helping people think about what could be and how to get there.”

Urquilla blends her experiences as a community organizer, nonprofit leader, feminist activist, writer, and policy analyst in her role as executive director of the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative in Washington, D.C. The collaborative is a network of community organizations and leaders that provide responsive neighborhood-based services to families at risk of or already in crisis.

Urquilla has earned awards and honors from groups ranging from the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia to the Rockefeller Foundation’s Next Generation Leadership Program to the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, which named her a Mellon Fellow in the Humanities.

At the collaborative, Urquilla has played a key role in helping to institute family group conferences and in championing solutions to youth violence. “I’d like to find a way to really expand the impact of my work, while still being grounded in serving this community,” she says.



Juanita Valdez-Cox



Anne Williams-Isom

As a girl, **Juanita Valdez-Cox** joined her family in the fields as a migrant worker. Today, she advocates for migrant workers as Texas state director of La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE), the primary vehicle for community organizing in the state's farm worker movement.

“What drives me is my absolute faith in peoples’ ability to achieve real and lasting social change when they accept for themselves the responsibility for making the changes in their families and communities,” says Valdez-Cox, who has worked with low-income people along the Texas-Mexico border for over 20 years as an early childhood development specialist, social service volunteer, organizer, and union coordinator.

Her efforts have helped bring working poor families, farm workers, and supporters into public policy talks. Through the Fellowship, Valdez-Cox hopes to find new ideas and initiatives for LUPE, which—along with its sister organization Proyecto Azteca—is a 2003 honoree in Casey’s FAMILIES COUNT program.

“While we have made great progress, we still need to improve our efficiency, advance the quality of our work, and improve the value of our membership to the broader community,” says Valdez-Cox.

As a deputy commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children’s Services, **Anne Williams-Isom** helps ensure that children are safe and that families have the resources and supports they need to help them thrive.

Nearly 90,000 children are touched by the Administration for Children’s Services, which runs foster care, prevention, child care, and Head Start programs throughout New York City.

Williams-Isom draws inspiration from her own family. “We’re raising three children in an urban, socioeconomically mixed African-American community. While there is a lot of cultural richness and community strength, there are also a lot of challenges. What drives me is to help create a world where all children, but particularly African-American children, have opportunities for a good education, recreational activities, and caring adults who are consistent and stable.”

As a lawyer, Williams-Isom knows the value of informed advocacy and evidence. But in the social service world, “we don’t focus enough on results.” She’d like to learn “what strategies really work and how to prove it. Once we know that we can purposefully move forward to implement those strategies throughout the country.”

FELLOWSHIP STAFF

pictured from left to right:

Kathy Jo Harris  
*Administrative Assistant*

Donna Stark  
*Director of Leadership Development*

Barbara Squires  
*Coordinator, Children and Family Fellowship*

Elisabeth Hyleck  
*Program Assistant*



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