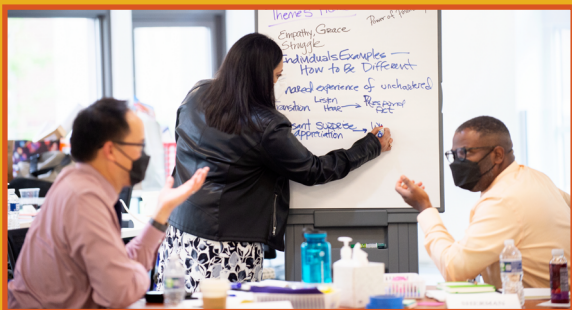




2022 CLASS OF CASEY CHILDREN AND FAMILY FELLOWS

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



A LIFE-CHANGING PROGRAM. AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE.

Strong results-driven leaders with the vision, skills and ability to champion and drive change are essential to making a lasting difference for large numbers of children, youth, families and communities.

The Children and Family Fellowship® is the Casey Foundation's signature program to develop this potential in leaders of public, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2023, the program has hosted 12 Fellowship classes and maintains a national network of 140 highly accomplished alumni Fellows. The Fellowship brings together midcareer leaders from varied professional backgrounds, geographic regions and racial and ethnic groups who are ready for significant professional growth and expanded leadership roles. It increases the pool of diverse, visionary leaders with the confidence and competence to lead and sustain major system reforms and community change initiatives. The 21-month executive leadership program attracts individuals who lead with passion, inspire others to action and persevere, often against great odds. Fellows think strategically, get things done and measure the difference they are making for the well-being of the nation's children and families.

FIFTEEN

ACCOMPLISHED, ASPIRING LEADERS

We are delighted to introduce the 2022–24 class of the Casey Foundation’s Children and Family Fellowship. Like the Fellows who have preceded them, the 15 members of the current class are dynamic leaders from a wide variety of backgrounds. Their work spans the fields of education, juvenile justice, philanthropy, child welfare, economic development, housing, mental health and research and evaluation, and often involves cross-sector collaboration. While they work in different disciplines, they share a common set of beliefs:

- All children, youth and families deserve to thrive not just survive.
- The people closest to the problem should drive the solutions.
- Data can both mask and illuminate entrenched disparities.
- Small solutions are not enough.

Compelled by the trials and triumphs of their families and communities — and by mentors who inspired them — the new Fellows are committed to a brighter future for the nation’s children, youth and families, their communities and the systems that serve them. The Fellows work to ensure that more children and youth have nurturing and supportive families and more families live in thriving communities.

Beyond setting and advancing individual objectives, the Fellows' work contributes to a shared result: Ensuring that all youth ages 14 to 24 have the necessary connections to school, work and family to achieve equitable outcomes of success. This work will involve learning about and applying the competencies of Results Count® — Casey's signature approach to leadership development — to leverage data and drive decision making around concrete goals.

The Fellowship will be enriched by the exemplary leaders profiled in these pages.

Leslie Boissiere

Vice President, External Affairs

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Barbara Squires

Director, Leadership Development

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

CLASS 12 CHILDREN AND FAMILY FELLOWSHIP PROFILES



MALIK BENJAMIN

“I became an architect because I thought things needed to be pretty,” said Malik Benjamin, chief of staff at Elevate. “It took a path through economic development to realize that stabilizing communities has to happen from the inside out, not the outside in.”

Elevate is a multistate nonprofit that provides affordable and clean heat, energy and water solutions to communities in need. Elevate seeks to address the history of resource extraction and pollution by the utilities sector in communities of color through services such as replacing heating systems that use fossil fuels with electric alternatives and helping execute solar energy projects on neighborhood, city, county, regional and statewide scales.

“We focus on the facilities and infrastructure that make it possible for nonprofits, families and communities to thrive,” he said.

Benjamin is focused on a triple bottom line: **1.** training young people of color who have traditionally been underserved or left out of the clean energy economy, including people with juvenile or criminal records and people who have aged out of foster care; **2.** providing new technology and affordable power to young families; and **3.** financing construction businesses led by young builders.

“Children and families are both an opportunity and a lever,” he said. “In particular, workforce development programs [in energy efficiency and solar energy jobs] improve the lives of participants while lifting up others with them. By improving the lives of young people, we can improve entire communities.”



RYAN ESTES

A licensed clinical social worker with a master's in business administration, Ryan Estes brings a unique business lens to his work as chief of clinical innovation and technology for Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth (SAFY). SAFY offers behavioral health and therapeutic foster care services.

“Growing up with family members with mental health and substance use issues, I always knew I wanted to be in the counseling field,” he said. “I realized that doing family therapy isn’t enough; the systems are weak and marginalizing. You have to change the systems. That’s what drew me to social work.”

Estes tracks trends nationally and in the seven states where SAFY works to ensure the organization’s services are meeting needs. SAFY emphasizes family preservation. In particular, Estes is taking on the disproportionate involvement of young people of color in family services and foster care.

“How do we disrupt using child welfare as a surveillance system, and instead use it to build parent capacity and share resources?” he asked.



ANGELO GONZALES

As interim deputy secretary for the New Mexico Public Education Department, Angelo Gonzales oversees the implementation of the agency's strategic plan for K–12 education, as well as the agency's school transformation efforts. The big vision: Every student graduates ready for college, career and life. To get there, Gonzales is focused on breaking down silos to transform public education.

“At the end of the day, my work is about helping adults get organized and work together,” he said. “What’s really cool is that our staff are eager to connect the dots across the programs they lead.”

Gonzales is working to align departments around shared priorities and metrics. One strategy he’s particularly passionate about is community schools.

“Community schools help to engage historically marginalized voices,” he said. “How can we put partnerships and systems in place that ensure schools are responsive when we identify a need for extra support?”

New Mexico is already a leader in the community schools movement nationally. Now, the focus is on sustainability.

“I help people work better together by putting results at the center,” he said. “That’s what I’m good at. That’s what fills me up.”



SHARONICA HARDIN-BARTLEY

“I have the best students on the planet,” said Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, superintendent of schools at the School District of University City, a suburb of St. Louis, Mo. Hardin-Bartley’s 2,600-student district has a rich tradition of excellence, despite facing the challenges of many urban districts. Her leadership of the district is rooted in three pillars: humanize, personalize and problematize (focus on critical thinking).

“I want students to understand that education is a path to something else,” she said. “That means we are constantly in a state of problem solving and making connections to what’s next. We also embrace social justice and racial equity to make sure students understand it’s their role to make things better.”

Hardin-Bartley credits a school administrator from her own childhood as sparking her love for teaching. As she enters her seventh year as superintendent — a long tenure for the leader of an urban district — she sees the Fellowship as an opportunity to strengthen how districts partner with families and track progress.

“Education is the civil rights issue of our time,” she said. “I want to sharpen my tools to impact educational systems across the country.”



JODI HILL-LILLY

As the deputy commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, Jodi Hill-Lilly oversees the fiscal services, hiring, contracting, training and racial equity work of the state agency.

“I really do believe that this work is a calling,” she said. “It found me.”

With a long career in child welfare, Hill-Lilly sees movement in this moment.

“I can’t remember a more exciting time to be in this field,” she said. “With changes in legislation and funding and a focus on prevention, the stars are aligned to make a real difference in the lives of kids and families.”

Hill-Lilly sees those changes coming through the aligned contributions of leaders across multiple systems to shift funding further upstream for early intervention and invest in grassroots organizations.

“In my 33 years in this field, we’ve primarily provided funding for large nonprofit agencies,” she said. “I worry that some of the recommended practices out there are not as culturally responsive for communities of color. Our children and families need to be served by competent providers who look like them and understand what they are dealing with day to day.”



ANDREW JOHNSON

Andrew Johnson's work to integrate housing and wraparound services for groups navigating complex challenges stems from his early experiences in direct service for people with housing instability.

"I walked alongside them as they tried to navigate siloed services and systems," he said. "They couldn't get what they needed when they needed it. Their voices weren't even in the mix."

Today, Johnson serves as the associate director for family and youth systems transformation at the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a national nonprofit.

His vision for change: a holistic, equitable investment in families that begins with housing.

"Housing is often used as a carrot at the end of a long, hard road instead of the foundation for progress," he said. "Safe and affordable housing is a necessary prerequisite for preventing foster care."

Johnson sees an opportunity in the way the pandemic and racial justice reckoning have upended many systems.

"My goal is to not put the pieces back together the way they were," he said. "We have a chance to reimagine and radically transform the experiences that children and families have so they reach their full potential."



ALI KNIGHT

Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) partners with young people in the Bay Area who are affected by the justice system to transform not only their own lives but also the system itself.

“A community of young people have succeeded in our program,” said FLY CEO Ali Knight. “Their lived experience is valuable in policy. How do we incorporate their voices into systems change?”

Knight’s own experiences inspired his passion for youth justice.

“I grew up a poor, Black boy in the ‘90s in New York City,” he said. “The narrative around boys like me essentially meant that young people I knew who were talented, smart and capable were locked up for long periods of time.”

Now, under Knight’s leadership, young people who have been on juvenile probation have the opportunity to act as justice consultants, formally advising district attorneys and participating in onboarding new probation officers to change harmful policies and practices. His goal for the Fellowship is to shift the thinking of those youth about their own role as instruments of change in their communities.

“I want young people to see that their stories can be a catalyst for change,” he said.



JAMES LIU

James Liou's interdisciplinary work as senior director at Equal Measure sits at a unique intersection of his personal and professional lives. The research and evaluation projects he leads are shaped by his background as a teacher, a family foundation program officer and an Asian-American man in a time of racial reckoning and distress.

"It really shapes my disposition, how I facilitate conversations and how I think about learning and what's required for change," he said.

Liou provides professional services to foundations, nonprofits and public agencies in multiple sectors, including areas that range from education to criminal justice reform to place-based cross-sector initiatives. Across projects, Liou's goal is to create and communicate the evidence that spurs progress toward racial equity and justice.

"I'm very interested to see how a results framework might be integrated and applied to Equal Measure's role in the broader ecosystem," he said. "How might it amplify our methodological point of view for evaluation, learning and action?"

Liou also appreciates the opportunity the Fellowship provides for personal reflection.

"It's such a gift to integrate my own growth and well-being into my professional work," he said.



KASSI LONGORIA

“I think our sector often focuses solely on children,” said Kassi Longoria, vice president of MAYA Consulting. “Kids don’t exist in a silo, separate from their families.”

Longoria is a former early childhood educator who now supports school districts, public agencies, philanthropies and nonprofits to improve outcomes for families with young children. Her upbringing and experience in direct service drive her work.

“My first job was in a high-quality early childhood center,” she said. “They had a social worker on staff and comprehensive, holistic supports for the whole family. The biggest lesson was that when parents feel good and supported, their children do, too.”

Longoria is encouraged by some of her recent projects that honor families as experts by engaging them as paid consultants. Still, as a Texan, she sees a connection between the recent mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, and policies that continue to disadvantage and directly affect communities of color.

“I’ve come to a point in my career where I’ve realized passion isn’t enough,” she said.



SHAHEER MUSTAFA

“We accept a lower standard for kids experiencing foster care, and that needs to stop,” said Shaheer Mustafa, president and CEO of HopeWell, a nonprofit providing comprehensive foster care statewide in Massachusetts. Mustafa says part of that lower standard is accepting academic setbacks as a necessary byproduct of involvement in the child welfare system.

“Youth experiencing foster care typically experience four to eight placements,” he said. “With every new placement, they lose about six months of academic progress.”

Those losses accumulate. Only **3%** of youth who age out of foster care get a postsecondary degree, affecting their long-term earning potential. That figure has remained static for 20 years.

“Child welfare is starving for innovation,” he said. “Pushing the envelope starts with raising the standards for our systems and our providers around what we accept for youth experiencing foster care.”

Mustafa sees [housing-first models](#), which prioritize rapid (re-)housing in instances of homelessness, and [high-impact tutoring](#), which provides continuous academic support in addition to classroom time, as important tools to get (and keep) young people reading on grade level. He sees the Fellowship as a chance to move from pilots to scale.

“The next step is building a road map toward population-level change,” he said.



SARAH NEVILLE-MORGAN

As deputy superintendent of public instruction for the California Department of Education, Sarah Neville-Morgan oversees early education, expanded learning, special education, multilingual support and nutrition for 6 million students.

A longtime advocate, Neville-Morgan is thrilled that the state is now offering universal pre-K and afterschool and summer programs at every elementary school, but she knows there is work to do to ensure those powerful opportunities are experienced equitably.

“Right now, only 13% of eligible 3-year-olds and 37% of 4-year-olds are served in state preschool,” she said. “We should serve all of them.”

Neville-Morgan sees the Fellowship as an opportunity to focus more intentionally on diversity, equity and inclusion. That includes understanding who has access to services.

“We need to take the time to understand which communities aren’t applying for funding and investigate why,” she said.

Neville-Morgan also is focused on increasing the rate of inclusion for students with disabilities, starting in pre-K, and expanding sources of support for multilingual learners. She appreciates the dedicated time afforded by the Fellowship.

“Having this rare opportunity to integrate the Fellowship with my work and teams pushes me,” she said.



KIMBERLY STUBBLEFIELD

More than 20 years ago, Kimberly Stubblefield heard a radio ad calling on listeners to work with young people involved in the justice system. It changed her life.

“I heard that ad on an urban radio station, and I thought, wow, they are talking to me,” she said. “That’s what I want to be doing.”

Today, Stubblefield is the assistant deputy director for corrections in Ramsey County, Minnesota. She oversees nearly 50 staff in juvenile probation, working together to improve outcomes for youth.

“I want our interactions to be meaningful,” she said. “I want people to leave their time better than they began.”

The approach starts with developing a plan for each young person that is tailored to the individual’s goals and family values. Ultimately, Stubblefield hopes to better understand the precursors to delinquent acts to intervene sooner.

She sees the Fellowship as an opportunity to connect with leaders of other large systems.

“Young people and families involved with probation are often involved with other systems, like mental health, substance use and child protection,” she said. “How do large systems work together better to improve outcomes?”



PUNITA DANI THURMAN

For Punita Dani Thurman, vice president of program and strategy at the Skillman Foundation in Detroit, transforming education systems is all about ensuring they are designed to make sure every child can succeed.

“I believe philanthropy has an important role to not just resource and support nonprofit partners but to serve as connectors, collaborators and conversation shapers,” she said.

Thurman noted that young people spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school. For those in communities of entrenched poverty, there are widespread gaps in opportunities to make the most of those hours.

“There are brilliant and powerful young people in every neighborhood in every community,” she said. “The systems that serve them were never designed for all of them to succeed to their full potential. The [systems] need to be transformed and reimaged, not just reformed or patched up.”

Thurman oversees a team that deploys nearly \$20 million annually in support of Detroit children. Her goal is to create flexible solutions with young people and the adults who serve them.

“We encourage them to think big and ensure their voices and ideas are at the center,” she said.



SHERMAN WHITES

As a manager at Target Corporation, Sherman Whites worked with a large team of people, many of whom were not formally educated beyond 12th grade.

“So many of my colleagues were talented but had dropped out of school because of teen pregnancy or postponed college due to financial struggles,” he said. “I witnessed many lost opportunities for people to reach their full career potential.”

That experience led him to pursue a career in educational opportunity. After spending over a decade in philanthropy, Whites is passionate about providing multiple pathways to improve the life outcomes of the next generation as a director at Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

“I am excited about the organizations that serve as support systems to K–12 districts, from community-led parent advocacy groups to talent pipeline programs,” he said.

Whites is also interested in helping to rewrite the rules of philanthropy, shifting it away from making the minimal investments required by law toward catalytic, sustainable change.

“Influencing how investment strategy is formed, how dollars are deployed and how beneficiaries are engaged is critical to overlaying a lens of equity onto our work,” he said. “I’m excited to leverage my eclectic set of experiences to lead system-level change.”



KEVIN WILLIAMS

As the probation manager at the Pierce County Juvenile Court in Tacoma, Wash., Kevin Williams is empowering his team of supervisors and frontline staff to create a culture of change and connection.

“We own the deep history of oppression and racism in our system, and we’re working to unburden the families we serve,” he said.

Through restorative practices like peace circles, the adults working in probation experience firsthand the strategies that can help to transform their traditionally punitive system into one that prepares young people for positive transitions to adulthood.

Despite meaningful changes in Pierce County, Williams remembers his time as a probation officer 22 years ago in a system that too often placed kids in confinement.

“I’m passionate about leaving things better off than when I arrived,” he said.

For Williams, that means improving the well-being of Black children in the community through diversion and alternatives to confinement.

“Black children are the most overrepresented at every decision point in the system,” he said. “We’re trying to shrink the footprint of the system and bring the community in to do the work we’ve traditionally done.”

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ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children and youth by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.
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