

# CONNECTS

CASEY

WINTER 2004  
A REPORT FROM THE  
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: Setting the Stage for Successful Reintegration After Prison; Notes of Recognition; Leadership Critical in Sustaining “Family to Family” Reforms; INSITES

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION AFTER PRISON

More than 650,000 people will leave state and federal prisons this year, most returning to the low-income, urban communities they left. Estimates indicate that two-thirds of people leaving prison go to a relatively small number of urban neighborhoods. Data in Providence, Rhode Island, for example, show that the highest concentrations of formerly incarcerated people return to just three low-income neighborhoods.

Many of those returning home will face legal barriers to securing jobs, getting public benefits, and regaining custody of their children. While in prison, only one-quarter of these men and women participated in vocational programs. Yet, because finding and keeping employment are conditions of probation and parole, their very freedom may depend upon reliable employment. Before incarceration, 64 percent of mothers and 49 percent of fathers lived with their children. Upon release, they must try to repair relationships and reestablish family ties.

“The challenge is to make the case to a variety of audiences that despite their past conduct, it is important and even



A counselor and children participating in Camp AIM High, a program of the Atlanta-based Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers.

urgent to invest in helping formerly incarcerated people reattach to the economic mainstream, their communities, and their families,” says Casey Foundation Senior Vice President Ralph Smith.

In questions of who goes to prison, who stays in prison, and where former prisoners go, both race and place are critical factors. Because of racial and class inequities in society generally and in the criminal justice system in particular, formerly incarcerated individuals are disproportionately low-income people of color. One in four African-American men in Rhode Island is currently in prison, on probation, or on parole. And as many as one in five cannot vote, having lost that right due to a felony conviction.

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# NOTES OF RECOGNITION

## CASEY CONNECTS

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*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.*



**TERRELL COLLINS** was a straight-A student expected to surmount the barriers of the Chicago projects until he was gunned down at the age of 14. The pain of his death changed his family. *Legacy* is the Casey Foundation-supported, Oscar-nominated film that documents that change, narrated by Terrell's cousin Nickole and directed by filmmaker Tod Lending. Inspired by the family's compelling story, Congress passed the LEGACY Act of 2003 as part of the American Dream Down-payment Act. President Bush signed it on December 16, and a national coalition called Generations United hosted a Capitol Hill briefing and reception February 26.

Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United, turned the name of the film into an acronym—Living Equitably: Grandparents Aiding Children and Youth—and initiated the National Center on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children ([www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)). Under the LEGACY Act provisions, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will develop housing specifically for grandparents and other relatives raising children. HUD personnel

Nickole Collins narrated her family's story in *Legacy*.

will be trained to work with these families and a national study will be conducted to understand the unique housing needs of families headed by grandparents and other relatives. For more information, visit [www.legacymovie.com](http://www.legacymovie.com).

**THE MONEY TRAP** follows several low-income individuals whose attempts to get ahead are repeatedly thwarted by fringe financial services such as payday loans, rapid refund loans, and high-fee check cashing and tax preparation services. The documentary has now received four top honors at the 2003 Communicator Awards event: the Crystal Award of Excellence for Best Educational Documentary, two personal achievement Awards of Distinction for best direction, and an Honorable Mention for editing. The Spanish version, *La Trampa del Dinero*, won the Crystal Award of Excellence for Best Foreign Language Documentary. *The Money Trap* was produced with Casey funding by N.A.K. Productions along with the Hatcher Group and the Aspen Institute.

**MARY NELSON**, president and founder of Bethel New Life, a 2002 FAMILIES COUNT honoree, was named one of seven Chicagoans of the Year by *Chicago* magazine. She was credited as a “force for change on Chicago’s West Side for nearly four decades.” The Foundation’s FAMILIES COUNT: National Honors Program recognizes organizations doing exemplary work to strengthen families. Bethel New Life was itself named Non-Profit Neighborhood Development Group of the Year by the Chicago Neighborhood Development Awards program, sponsored by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Cited for “daring to risk,” Bethel New Life has been a “visionary catalyst for change,” according to Andrew Mooney, coordinator of the awards event. Having started out with an abandoned hospital, a foreclosed apartment building, and \$9,600 in contributions from local church members, Bethel New Life now has a \$12 million annual budget devoted to housing, job training, and a host of connected services on the West Side of Chicago.

## THE NEW AMERICANS

### IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

from Nigeria, India, the Dominican Republic, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and Mexico are featured in *The New Americans*, a seven-part series scheduled for PBS broadcast on March 29, 30, and 31. The series already has been screened by large audiences in Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, and Seattle. Public television stations in each of these cities organized financial literacy workshops, televised profiles of local immigrants, sponsored local town halls, and distributed school lesson plans including the new workshop curriculum, “America, My New Home.” More than five million people have already been touched by these activities.



Lateefah Simon

**LATEEFAH SIMON** suddenly has more resources than she ever imagined possible to fight poverty among young women in California. The 26-year-old director of Oakland’s Center for Young Women’s Development has been named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow (formerly called the “Genius” awards), which comes with an award of \$500,000. For young women who have been in prison, addicted, or otherwise beaten down, the center opens a door toward economic independence and self-esteem. It is run entirely by the young women it serves. The Casey Foundation helped the center publish *Know Justice*, a street law handbook in Spanish and English, and is also helping fund a documentary about the center’s work entitled, *Girl Trouble*. Simon told the *San Francisco Chronicle* she hopes to use the money to attend Stanford University, become a lawyer, and return to her community. Simon is living what she tells the girls at the center every day: “You have it in you to succeed, and there is nothing that you can tell me that says you don’t. Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.”

This year’s **PABLO EISENBERG AWARD** for Neighborhood Leadership goes to Sandy Hoa Dang, executive director of Asian American LEAD. LEAD, a 2004 FAMILIES COUNT honoree, helps Asian immigrants in Washington, D.C., make bridges between their Asian culture

and their American home. Dang came to the United States as a teenager in 1981. The Pablo Eisenberg Award is bestowed by the National Neighborhood Coalition on local leaders who meet community needs and “engage neighborhood residents in critical decision-making about their communities.”

### DANIEL (DANNY) ROSADO CHRISTOPHER

has been selected Grand Prize Winner for the fifth annual Child Welfare League of America Kids to Kids National Service Award (ages 13 to 17 category). Christopher entered the foster care system as an infant and lived in a residential home until he was nine years old, and was assigned to Casey Family Services’ Hartford Division. He has participated in teen life skills classes, the youth advisory board, and youth conferences. In January 2003, on his 16th birthday, he was adopted by his foster parents, Dee and Jim Christopher. Steven Hoffler, Christopher’s social worker, nominated him for the CWLA award given to young people who have had an impact on their community through outstanding service projects. Christopher has been a mentor for elementary school students, a member of the Helping Other People Everywhere and Students Against Destructive Decisions clubs at his high school, and a regular volunteer at the local homeless shelter with his church.

Danny Rosado Christopher



STEVEN HOFFLER

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION AFTER PRISON

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At the same time, the low-income communities of color that many prisoners return to bear the scars of long-standing patterns and practices of discrimination, neglect, and missed opportunities that result in a loss of power and vitality. “On top of that, the disenfranchisement of significant numbers of their residents erodes their potential electoral power to challenge these forces,” notes Paula Dressel, senior fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “The former prisoners who are returning and need substantial support come back to the communities that are the least supported.”

In 2003, Dressel’s team coordinated the gathering and synthesizing of research through an interdisciplinary work group, representing many different units of the Foundation, which produced a point of view document on former prisoners and the challenges they face. The paper concluded that successful reentry and reintegration will require both policy and practice changes and that sentencing alternatives and nondiscriminatory practices are needed to change the odds of incarceration up front.

The document also states that families and children of prisoners should not be punished or suffer damage; that people should not continue to be punished once they have served their terms; that successful reintegration begins in prisons and in the homes of the families; and that neighborhoods to which prisoners return have assets on which to build and need both support and a voice in decisions affecting them.

The issue is pivotal for cities involved in *Making Connections*, the Foundation’s signature initiative aimed at improving outcomes for poor children by mobilizing their communities around efforts to strengthen families and neighborhoods. Ten cities involved in the project across the country are working toward a set of core results that will be doubly difficult to achieve if large numbers of families and neighborhoods affected by reentry don’t get adequate support.

The Urban Strategies Council in Oakland and the National Trust for the Development of African-American Men have created a leadership training program in San Quentin prison for men who are nearing release. Participants will learn about values and leadership, educate fellow inmates about health risks, and design a public health education program for their communities.

“These guys are going back to Oakland. And they’re going to affect the health in Oakland,” explains Garry Mendez, Jr., executive director of the National Trust. “The key is to convert them from a liability into an asset.”

To help supply the high-quality data needed to achieve policy reforms related to incarceration and reintegration, the

Foundation supports the Reentry Mapping Network at the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center. Six sites around the country will collect and map corrections and census data to show how specific communities are affected, and the project will help teach residents to use the data to advocate for change. In 2004, six more sites—many from *Making Connections* communities—will be involved.

To raise awareness and foster community discussion, the Foundation also has developed the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. Through public television documentaries, free videos, and an interactive website, the campaign showcases hundreds of programs that promote successful reintegration. A companion report by the Urban Institute, *Outside the Walls: A National*

*Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Reentry Programs,*

describes more than 200 programs offering an array of services.

For more information, visit [www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org).

Larry Davis got help finding a home through the Public Action in Correctional Effort/Offender Aid and Restoration program in Indianapolis.



DARIA HINGLE

At one profiled program, the Osborne Association’s Family Resource Center in New York, families of incarcerated people give others advice, information, comfort, and support. These families are firmly in the driver’s seat. Liz Gaynes, Osborne’s executive director, says that practitioners often make a critical mistake about the formerly incarcerated. “We always start from the fact that they’re not working, and they’re not this, and they’re not that. But no one’s asking what they *are*.” The most exciting programs give formerly incarcerated people and their families a voice and work to build strengths in the person, the family, and their overstretched community.

## LEADERSHIP CRITICAL IN SUSTAINING “FAMILY TO FAMILY” REFORMS

In a number of cities and counties, the Casey Foundation’s Family to Family initiative is helping to change the face of foster care. Strong leadership in child welfare agencies is critical not only to instituting these reforms and keeping them on track, but to changing the way business is done over time. Without support from the top and insistence on accountability among staff, resistance may prevail and systemic problems continue.

The role of leadership in promoting and sustaining foster care reforms underlay the Family to Family Leadership Summit held February 11–13 in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico, which drew some 200 child welfare leaders. Among the many points made there: Agency leaders should venture out with their Family to Family coordinator to meet community members to reinforce the message that the agency is doing foster care in a new way. Supervisors and caseworkers can’t do their jobs more effectively without more support. Retraining foster care staff won’t matter unless leadership instills a new attitude in the agency.

Since 1992, the Casey Foundation has been working with grantees to refashion foster care to produce the best possible outcomes for children and families. Family to Family was adopted early by child welfare agencies in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and so far has spread to 16 states, including California, which together serve 65 percent of the children in foster care nationwide. “Our long-term commitment is something you don’t find in foundation work, especially

to these big public systems,” says John Mattingly, the Foundation senior associate responsible for Family to Family.

In Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio, one of the first sites, the number of children in foster care has dropped from



TOM NAPPI

6,240 in 2001 to 4,122. The proportion of teenagers placed in an institutional setting declined from 39 percent of those who entered care in 1992 to 23 percent who entered in 2000. The percentage of teenagers initially placed in family-like settings has increased from 45 to 73 percent in 10 years. Agencies in sites as diverse as San Jose and Louisville are experiencing similar improvements.

Family to Family sites recruit and train foster and kinship families who can support children and families in their own neighborhoods; build community partnerships with organizations in neighborhoods with high referral rates to child protection; use team decision-making to

Sandra Slappy, a former Family to Family coordinator in the Prince George’s County, Maryland Department of Social Services, and her child.

involve birth families, community members, foster parents, and caseworkers in placement and reunification decisions; and collect and analyze

data to drive decision-making and highlight progress and challenges.

One big change under the program has been a new openness to prospective foster parents in the tough neighborhoods from which many children entering the system come. Agencies are now helping these candidates with paperwork and housing code compliance, “rather than finding ways to keep them out,” says Foundation consultant Denise Goodman. Foster parent training is being offered in the neighborhoods, not downtown, and at night and on weekends.

These efforts are paying off by keeping more children in their home communities and allowing birth parents to be more involved in their lives

Foster parents are called resource parents because their role has widened. Instead of simply caring for a child, they also work with the birth family. When the resource parent goes to a PTA meeting, the doctor’s office, or a court hearing, the birth mother goes too. “It’s much more of a team working toward reunifying the

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**CHILD WELFARE LEADERSHIP**

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family or at least making the best decisions on behalf of a child,” notes Marcia Kennai, the new deputy commissioner of the Office of Children’s Services in Alaska.

Knowing that their children are doing well and that the resource parents respect and value them has helped keep many parents with substance abuse problems on a path to recovery, Goodman notes. When reunification does occur, children are no longer forced to cut ties with their foster family.

Community partnerships offer many benefits. People and groups in even the poorest areas can pitch in to help. A retired teacher

can tutor, a neighbor can help a family find food and clothing or drive a child to Girl Scout meetings, and a store owner can give a teenager an after-school job. Schools, churches, and family centers can band together in collaboratives to provide day care, computer learning, English classes, recreation, or just someone to talk to.

Residents often have no idea how many neighborhood children are being placed in foster care, how far away they are sent, or how many teenagers end up in group homes. Collecting and sharing this kind of data have made a big difference. In Cleveland, the agency posted figures periodically to show the progress being made with the neighborhood’s help. For example, between 1993

and 1998, a time nationally when agencies were losing foster families, the agency doubled its supply from 500-plus to over 1,000.

Having leadership set the right tone is essential to the success of reforms, notes Judith Goodhand, a former director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services. Goodhand once prohibited workers at all levels from going home until placements were found for all children sleeping in the building’s lobby for want of a place to go. In Cleveland, she says, the fact that child welfare leaders made clear their desire to keep kids at home or at least in the neighborhood, admitted past mistakes, and asked residents for help made them “much more willing to work with us.”



**TAX CREDITS HELP WORKING POOR FAMILIES IN ALL REGIONS**

A new Brookings Institution study shows rural and suburban families benefit as much as those in urban areas from tax credits aimed at working poor families. The Casey-funded study was released at a briefing in Springfield, Illinois, which has adopted an earned income credit that is both permanent and refundable. The event, cosponsored by the Chicago-based Center for Economic Progress, featured Department of Human Services Secretary Carol Adams (left); Louanner Peters, deputy chief of staff to Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich; and Jodie Winnett, associate director of the Department of Revenue. The Casey Foundation launched a national campaign in 2003 to help working families gain access to tax credits.

BRANDY SQUIRES