

CONNECTS

CASEY

SUMMER 2002
A REPORT FROM THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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MAKING WORK COUNT FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

On May 23, the Annie E. Casey Foundation held a policy briefing in Washington, D.C., to release new information on the well-being of our nation's families and children. Just blocks away, the U.S. House of Representatives was debating proposals for reauthorizing the 1996 welfare reform bill, with the power to affect millions of American families and children.

The link between the two events was deeper than mere geographic proximity. The thirteenth annual Casey Foundation *KIDS COUNT Data Book* paints a picture by numbers of how American families are faring in the wake of devolution and welfare reform—data that can inform sound policy.

In an essay accompanying the *Data Book*, Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson noted that while welfare reform has helped significant numbers of people leave public assistance and join the workforce, “having a job does not ensure an escape from poverty, greater family stability, or entry into the middle class.”

Nelson and a panel of experts at the briefing highlighted the importance of state and local programs that help low-income working families achieve greater economic security by providing the kinds of supports they need to make work pay, such as child care, health care, transportation, cash assistance, and improved access to the Earned Income Tax Credit and savings mechanisms such as Individual Development Accounts.

KIDS COUNT tracks ten educational, social, economic, and health indicators state-by-state, charting increases and declines over time. This year's data show that overall, most children are better off now than they were a decade ago. Death rates for infants, children, and teens have dropped, and the number of teenage parents has declined. More children live in families where at least one parent is employed.

But Nelson sounded a note of caution. “These heartening numbers cannot and should not mask the fact that millions of

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ISAC JONES

Gale R. Walker, president and chief executive officer of the Children of the Rainbow child care centers in San Diego, speaks at the KIDS COUNT policy briefing.

Having a job does
not ensure an **ESCAPE**
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A NOTE OF RECOGNITION



Still from the longer version of the documentary, *My Family, My Neighborhood, My Story*, in which four women filmed their neighborhoods and told their own stories.

MILWAUKEE VIDEO WINS FILM FESTIVAL AWARD

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, a Casey grantee, has won a \$1,000 award in the second annual Media That Matters Film Festival for an eight-minute documentary about a young mother's struggle to improve her life in a low-income neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

A longer version of *My Family, My Neighborhood, My Story*, featuring the stories of four women, aired on Wisconsin Public Television in March and in June on Howard University's public television station in Washington, D.C. What makes the film unusual is that the women telling the story also helped film it, using video cameras provided by the Casey Foundation as part of the *Making Connections* initiative.

The Media That Matters Film Festival honors films that inspire people to speak out and take action for social change. *My Family, My Neighborhood, My Story* won the first-ever Fight Family Poverty Award from Connect for Kids, one of the sponsors of the film festival. Connect for Kids is a multimedia project of the Benton Foundation.

The four women featured in the documentary overcame significant obstacles to achieve their goals. For example, Anne Hazelwood, formerly an IV drug user and homeless, now manages a church-based transition house for women trying to recover from addiction, prostitution, and crime.

"I had to give something back because it was given to me," Hazelwood said. "The joy of knowing you helped someone is priceless."

RAMANATHAN AWARD GOES TO YOUTH TRANSITION WORKER

Scott Ackerson, Community Transition Services Center Coordinator for Casey Family Programs in San Antonio, is the first recipient of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative's (JCYOI) Rama Ramanathan Commitment to Service Award. The JCYOI is a nonprofit organization launched last year by the Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs to address the pressing needs of young people making the transition out of foster care. The award was established to honor Rama Ramanathan, who retired last year as chief financial

COUNTY BLAZES PROMISING TRAIL

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which built consensus about the purpose of the reform effort, examined every aspect of the system's operations, and oversaw change.

The Department of Community Justice, which runs the probation system and the detention center, developed a set of effective and culturally appropriate community-based alternatives, another JDAI core strategy. These included shelter care, home detention, and a day reporting center, which gives kids who have been sent home pending adjudication a place to go during the day to ensure that they are not out on the street.

The department also changed its detention intake procedures. Previously, detention decisions often had been driven by instinct rather than data. To make sure that the right youth were being detained—those likely to commit a new offense before their hearings or disappear—the county developed an objective, culturally sensitive risk assessment instrument. Also, a seven-person intake team now reviews every detention decision.

Other core JDAI strategies implemented in Multnomah County were expedited procedures to process cases, which reduced lengths of stay in detention, and the use of alternative, nondetention sanctions for probation violators.

The strategies Multnomah used to address the higher detention rate for minorities included diversifying the probation staff and training employees on the causes and effects of disparities and the effectiveness of alternatives.

"The overall goal is keeping the community safe, but you don't have to make the automatic assumption that detaining kids is the only way to do it," said Joanne Fuller, director of the Department of Community Justice.

Other players in the juvenile justice system also changed their practices to help reduce the detention rate for minorities. A



Scott Ackerson of Casey Family Programs receives the first Rama Ramanathan Commitment to Service Award for outstanding work helping young people transition out of foster care.

officer of the Casey Foundation and played a critical role in launching JCYOI.

Ackerson started as a case assistant with Casey Family Programs in 1996 and advanced quickly as a result of his skills in collaboration and networking on behalf of troubled young people and families. He is being honored for his “extraordinary leadership and service while improving the lives of young people in foster care.”

SCHOLARSHIP HONORS MEMORY OF SLAIN CHILD WELFARE WORKER

Last fall, Nancy E. Fitzgivens, 53, became the first caseworker with Franklin County, Ohio Children’s Services to be killed in the line of duty. She was fatally stabbed while making a home visit to a couple that had lost custody of their seven children.

A few months later, the Ohio State University (OSU) Foundation established a scholarship in the name of Nancy E. Fitzgivens with a \$25,000 gift from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “Most people know that fighting for abused and neglected children is difficult, but few recognize that it can also be dangerous,” said Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson. “Despite the difficulties and the dangers, children’s services professionals are out there today doing their job of protecting children and supporting families. We want them to know that we appreciate it.”

Fitzgivens went to school part-time for ten years to earn her degree while raising three children on her own. She was working toward a Master’s Degree in Social Work at Ohio State before her death. Fittingly, the first winner of the \$1,500 scholarship is Laura Cipolaro, a caseworker with Franklin County Children’s Services who is also pursuing her M.S.W. at Ohio State. Cipolaro has been described as having exceptional clinical insight and skill in her work with children, adolescents, and families.

“Nancy would have been extremely pleased in knowing that what she held so dearly would carry on in spite of her death,” Clovis Dawson, Fitzgivens’ husband, was quoted as saying in a newsletter for alumni and friends of the Ohio State University College of Social Work. “Nancy was a true social worker—she gave from her heart with genuine altruism. She didn’t want to be in the limelight; she wanted to be a quiet soldier of goodness.”

We made some fairly **SIMPLE CHANGES** in the way we process cases, yet made a **CONCRETE DIFFERENCE** in the lives of individuals.

switch to community policing and training in the effectiveness of community alternatives improved interactions between police and minority youth and reduced the number of arrested youth sent to the detention center. The county also increased the resources available to public defenders, the most likely defenders of youth of color.

“Multnomah County has shown the country that you can reduce racial disparities in juvenile justice, make more modest use of detention, and still uphold public safety,” said Vincent Schiraldi, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Justice Policy Institute and coauthor of

Reducing Racial Disparities in Juvenile Justice, a monograph published by the Foundation.

“Portland is trailblazing a route that the rest of the nation should consider following,” said Bart Lubow, senior program associate for JDAI. For more information, see *Reducing Racial Disparities in Juvenile Detention*, the eighth monograph in the series, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, available at www.aecf.org. Additional information on Multnomah County’s detention reforms is available at www.co.multnomah.or.us/dcj/jcjdetrform.html.

ROLE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE HIGHLIGHTED IN CONNECTING WORKERS TO JOBS

When the Casey Foundation launched the Jobs Initiative in 1995, the aim was to connect low-income, inner-city neighborhoods with labor markets hungry for entry-level workers. But as the \$30 million, multicity project progressed, each site began to encounter a similar problem: the gulf between employers and employees could not be bridged with job skills alone.

Most participants were people of color who had long been isolated socially and economically. While they needed exposure to the culture of work, employers also needed better tools to navigate these relationships. For many, this meant talking openly and honestly about race for the first time.

“When we started the Jobs Initiative, we knew that issues of race and ethnicity were important,” said Bob Giloth, director of Family Economic Success at the Foundation who manages the Jobs Initiative. “But as we got started, our sites started to feed us the message that these issues had to be front and center.”

In June, the Jobs Initiative convened a three-day conference to help widen the network of people working in the field of cultural competence—a set of tools and behaviors that allow people to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Some 180 trainers, employers, consultants, scholars, funding organizations, and human relations managers gathered in Chicago for the meeting, which was sponsored by the Casey Foundation and cohosted by the Chicago Jobs Council and the North Lawndale Employment Network.

During the often-lively discussions, conference presenters covered a range of “important and sticky and sensitive issues,” as Brenda Palms-Barber, executive

Walter Boyd, left, of the North Lawndale Employment Network in Chicago, and Albert Moore of the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council in St. Louis, both participants in the Jobs Initiative conference, tour the Jane Addams Resource Corporation, a successful manufacturing training program in Chicago.



ERIC LINGER

director of the North Lawndale Employment Network, put it.

After sending hundreds of racial “testers”—equally qualified pairs of applicants from different races—into job interviews, Marc Bendick, Jr., an economic consultant who has served as an expert witness in many discrimination lawsuits, found that at least one in five employers continue to consistently discriminate against people of color in job interviews. Bendick urged workforce developers to steer clear of such firms. “Walk away from them. Declare them a no-fly zone,” he said.

An “aha moment” for one employer, said Rhonda Simmons of the Seattle Jobs Initiative, came when she discovered that many of her employees were single parents, and that they were often

tardy or absent not because they lacked “soft skills,” but because most were recent immigrants with no extended family nearby to help baby-sit.

Capitalizing on the hidden strengths of culture was another key theme. Several speakers pointed out ways to capitalize on peer networks, family ties, and word of mouth. “Use families, however defined, and peers, however defined, to get people to do the right thing,” advised James Mason, a social work professor at Portland State University.

Many workforce developers argued that you have to dangle financial incentives for companies to adopt a cultural competence perspective. But several policymakers disagreed. “You’re misleading yourself if you think that if you have financial incentives, you’re going to have a better time getting



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American kids and their families are living on economic thin ice,” he said. “When an injury, rent increase, or child’s illness can trigger an eviction from a home, job loss, or a slide back toward dependence on welfare, that is the very definition of economic insecurity.”

In two areas measured by KIDS COUNT—the percentage of low birth-weight babies and the percentage of families headed by a single parent—most states fared worse than a decade ago. And there was no progress nationally in the high school dropout rate. More than 10 million children still live in low-income families, with parents working in jobs that offer no mobility, flexibility, or benefits and often don’t pay a living wage. Evidence suggests that children fare best when parents’ income increases, particularly above the poverty line—an outcome that remains elusive in most states.

One panelist, Gale R. Walker, struggled to keep her family together on welfare for six years before she started Children of the Rainbow in 1991, an innovative child care center in San Diego. Children

of the Rainbow, which is receiving support through the *Making Connections* initiative and is an honoree in the Casey Foundation’s FAMILIES COUNT: National Honors Program, helps parents improve their skills and get other assistance they need to maintain stable jobs.

“We’ve got to attack poverty head-on,” Walker said, by helping families get the kinds of support they need to reach self-sufficiency.

For some low-income working parents, education and training can make the difference between a dead-end job and a handhold on the career ladder. Julie Strawn, a senior policy analyst for the Center for Law and Social Policy, offered evidence that helping parents increase credentials over time can work. “The most effective programs use education and training with an employment focus, to help parents upgrade skills and find meaningful employment,” she said.

But employment alone is not enough; investments in cities and communities are critical. “We need a comprehensive

approach to poverty alleviation,” said Jim Carr, senior vice president for innovation, research, and technology at the Fannie Mae Foundation.

Families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population—and often, homeless families have at least one working parent. Carr noted that African-American and Latino households “continue to face challenges that often defy the most creative approaches” as a result of discriminatory practices such as redlining.

Carr and Steven Dow, executive director of the Community Action Project of Tulsa County, called for institutional changes to combat predatory lenders and boost the number of banks and favorable-rate lending institutions operating in underserved communities.

Despite the recent recession and the dot-com collapse, says Gene Steuerle, an Urban Institute senior fellow, “we are not a poor economy. It’s not that we can’t afford programs for kids. It is whether they are a priority.”

CONNECTING WORKERS TO JOBS

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employers,” said Lee Crean of the New Orleans Jobs Initiative. “They’re going to be a lot more receptive to you because of the quality of the person you’re bringing.”

Jim Norman, the chief executive officer of Kraft Foods’ North America Division, encouraged workforce developers to find companies that have “multiple access points”—in

particular, those that need qualified entry-level workers—and work with them to find out what they want.

After holding several conferences on issues of race, ethnicity, and workforce development, the Casey Foundation wants to expand this dialogue beyond the Jobs Initiative.

“The issue of strategic alliances, and organizing, and advocacy—it’s really a new concept as far as this work is concerned,” said Sharon Walter, one of the conference planners.

INSITES

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RCI REINFORCED THE VALUE, CHALLENGES OF PLACE-BASED CHANGE

For years, government agencies, community organizations, and foundations tried to chip away at the cycle of poverty by fixing the formal systems designed to deal with issues like child welfare, crime, housing, schools, and jobs one at a time. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI) took a bold step in a different direction by addressing these challenges comprehensively—and with residents taking the lead.

RCI recognized that efforts to help children and families could not ignore the reality of where they live, and that residents of

low-income communities needed to be heard and their skills developed and used to bring about lasting change.

The initiative, launched in 1994, invested more than \$20 million in neighborhoods in Boston, Denver, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., to demonstrate how a resident-led effort combining system reform and community building could help transform troubled urban neighborhoods into safe, supportive, and productive environments. A lead organization in each site worked with residents to set an agenda for their neighborhood and pursue the wide-ranging strategies needed to advance it.

To help residents get the kinds of support that best fit their needs and shift more decision-making power to the neighborhood level, RCI worked to develop collaborative local governance bodies in each of the target neighborhoods and invested heavily in community organizing and leadership development.

The RCI communities have taught us a great deal about both the obstacles and avenues to neighborhood transformation and about how a foundation can play a catalytic role. These neighborhoods have also demonstrated that it takes a long time and a lot of time every day to build the kind of broad-based movement needed to produce and sustain change. The following stories illustrate some other important lessons RCI leaves us—and hopefully the field at large—as the initiative winds to a close.

Denver's Santa Fe Drive, a major thoroughfare leading into downtown, is a shining example of urban revitalization. Although it houses some of the city's most historic buildings and is surrounded by some of its oldest Hispanic communities,

A wide-ranging parent-organizing effort in the Eastside of Detroit helped parents to become more active, organized, and connected to their schools.



the street was lined with abandoned and dilapidated buildings up until a few years ago. A local community development corporation's tenacity over many years dramatically changed the landscape, bringing many new businesses to the area and transforming it into a vibrant cultural center.

But while Santa Fe Drive underwent its renaissance, poverty in the surrounding neighborhood increased and rates of homeownership went down. When RCI came to Denver, the NEWSSED (Near Westside Economic Development) Community Development Corporation had faced the fact that economic development alone was not enough to improve the quality of life for city residents.

A comprehensive survey of residents showed that while the economic picture had improved, people weren't getting other help they desperately needed to cope with family issues, substance abuse, and welfare problems. The "engine of change" for RCI became the development of a holistic approach to deliver needed services to families in the La Alma/Lincoln Park neighborhood. This system, called PATCH, brought social service providers and residents together to jointly develop and govern a coordinated process to walk people through the myriad kinds of help they needed, rather than having to deal with many different bureaucracies.

PATCH is designed to help individuals and families, but the resident empowerment it fostered had a much broader impact. "What we came up with was the ability to impact policy and allocation of resources," said Carlos Guerra,



MARY ANN DOCEWASCOLO

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston has shown what can happen when residents of a diverse community come together to dream, plan, and implement their vision for a better future.

who cochairs an advisory council that governs the RCI work. "That will be the legacy of RCI here."

The resources, technical help, and coaching that RCI brought not only enabled the community to approach its challenges more systematically, but also helped people learn to work together and use organizing and leadership skills effectively.

For example, when NEWSSED learned that a new Texaco gas station convenience store was applying for a liquor license in an area already overrun with liquor establishments, its leaders met with Texaco administrators and got the company to withdraw its liquor license application, while agreeing to help publicize the store's presence in the neighborhood.

"We've learned that we can participate in mainstream, citywide issues and decisions, and impact them as a

community," says Guerra. "Just a few years ago, that was unheard of here."

More than the Anacostia River separates Ward 7 from the rest of Washington, D.C. A part of the city that tourists and even many D.C. residents never see, Ward 7's median income and employment rates are well below the city average, and years of neglect have left residents lacking basic services, banks, employers, and even sidewalks and paved streets in some places.

But Ward 7 has many assets, including the Marshall Heights Community Development Organization, a 22-year-old nonprofit that has helped usher in several important economic development and housing projects. With support from RCI, Marshall Heights began taking a look at the disproportionate number of Ward 7 children in the child welfare system.

When the city's child welfare and housing agencies were placed in receivership as a result of poor performance, Marshall Heights had an opportunity to redesign services for local children and families. A key goal was to reflect the voices and perspectives of people who use these services, most of whom lived in four public housing developments.

After years of relating to residents primarily as a service provider, it took a major capacity-building effort to adopt a different approach. But working with RCI, Marshall Heights was able to develop a community-organizing strategy and an effective structure—the East River Family Strengthening Collaborative—made up of residents, service providers, and others who wanted to improve treatment of children in Ward 7.

Guided by the community's vision, the group is working toward a system that locates services where they are needed, addresses a wide range of needs—from child abuse prevention to job training to health to decent housing and schools—and helps expand the informal networks that help people learn from and rely on each other.

“This is an example of a nonprofit having to develop a new competency” to shift from business as usual, one RCI leader noted.

The Eastside of Detroit has a rich history of activism, including dozens of block clubs and neighborhood associations. But the area's loss of jobs, population, and businesses over the years proved too great a match for these groups. When RCI came along, restoring the Eastside's voice and influence in decisions affecting the community was the first order of business.

But first, roles had to be clarified between the Warren/Conner Development Coalition, the lead agency in Detroit's RCI effort, and the Eastside RCI Steering Committee, a group of resident, neighborhood, city, business, and social service leaders overseeing the community-building plan.

When Warren/Conner—consumed with workforce issues and other competing interests—failed to meet initial goals laid out in the plan, the steering committee “dug in to help them,” noted Garland Yates, a senior associate at the Casey Foundation who manages RCI. The group worked out a strategy that would help Warren/Conner use RCI resources to build its skills and pick up its performance, with monitoring and accountability to make sure the group focused on community priorities.

This process resulted in “one of the most high-performing RCI sites,” noted Yates. Among other accomplishments, the effort produced:

- The Neighborhood Tool Box, a set of projects and services designed to help strengthen and energize the Eastside's many block clubs and community groups.
- A wide-ranging parent-organizing effort that helped parents learn more about school policies and become more active, organized, and connected to their schools and to school-reform efforts.
- A \$1.2 million partnership with the Daimler Chrysler Corporation to support a joint neighborhood beautification effort.
- A successful initiative to help welfare recipients move into secure jobs.

As in other sites, helping young people assume leadership roles is critical. “The neighborhoods are in the shape they're in because we haven't been able to transition leadership from generation to generation,” noted Tonya Allen, who served as director of Detroit's RCI effort while still in her 20s. “You have to continuously encourage them, ask them questions about what they want to see happen, and then tie that back to things they can do.”

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), the lead RCI organization in Boston, has shown what can happen when residents of a multi-racial, multicultural, and multilingual community join forces not just to resist the destruction wrought by years of institutional abuse and neglect, but to dream, plan, and implement their vision for a better future.

People have a sense
of OWNERSHIP
and feel like they
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community to make
it HAPPEN.

Now that I have a chance to DO SOMETHING, I'm going to do it. I'M IN IT FOR LIFE.

When RCI entered the scene, DSNI already had made tremendous strides in transforming a key quarter of Roxbury ravaged by illegal trash dumping and arson fires into new homes, community spaces, and flourishing gardens, with the help of a hard-fought struggle to gain eminent-domain authority over a broad stretch of vacant lots.

“Our neighborhood has blossomed into a beautiful garden,” said Keila Barros, a young woman who got her start in activism by picking up trash on the street in front of her house and is now the clerk of the board of directors of DSNI.

“People have a sense of ownership and feel like they have a say in what happens. You can have a dream and work with the community to make it happen.”

DSNI has devoted its RCI resources to strengthening residents’ power in decision-making, and its resident leadership training, organizing campaigns, and youth development work have paid off.

A resident-led planning process used in developing the new Vine Street Community Center, for example, successfully staved off a conflict between Cape Verdeans who used to run a settlement house in the property, which had since been abandoned, and other members of the community who wanted to broaden its use.

That’s just one example of how the community has learned to resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise from partnerships, not only with outside players but also from within.

The lead RCI organization in Philadelphia, Germantown Settlement, is one of the largest and most powerful, with a history dating back to the settlement movement at the end of the 19th century. It works with affiliated groups on issues including housing, economic development, and resident organizing and has contracts with the state and the city to train and place large numbers of residents in jobs.

What was needed in Germantown’s case was a mechanism to partner more effectively with all of these projects and entities, while strengthening resident voices in the process. The engine of change for doing that under RCI became the Germantown Community Collaborative Board, a governance structure representing residents and diverse groups community-wide. More than 50 percent of the voting power went to residents, and the rest was divided among the various local organizations, institutions, and businesses.

It took nearly two years to develop a strong and diverse board, weave a comprehensive rebuilding plan, and nurture a sense of togetherness through a series of retreats. Although the power dynamics could have been dicey, the collaborative board has helped Germantown Settlement partner with various state, city, and



Lower Germantown, Philadelphia residents have made their voices heard in projects ranging from a new charter school to workforce development to human services reform.

foundation initiatives; administer its own programs; and use resident leadership more effectively.

The neighborhood’s collective involvement in projects ranging from a new charter school to workforce development to human services reform have translated into a sense of individual power and possibility.

“I’ve been living here for 29 years, and during all that time, nothing much happened,” said Rufus Holmes, a collaborative board member. “Now that I have a chance to do something, I’m going to do it. I’m in it for life.”