

# Casey in Seattle

CREATING SUCCESSFUL FUTURES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION has been working to promote the well-being of vulnerable children for more than 50 years. *Casey in Seattle* is one in a series of publications designed to illustrate the ways we are working with specific places to help fashion creative, cost-effective strategies to strengthen families and communities and build better futures for children whose circumstances place them at risk.



## JOBS INITIATIVE BRIGHTENS OUTLOOK FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

Esther Spare has a job she loves and a new promotion. Spare worked in fast-food restaurants and as a manual laborer, but the wages were low and her chances for advancement nil. That is, until she became one of more than 5,300 men and women who found a job—and not just any job but a job with a future—with the help of Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI). Now celebrating its tenth year, SJI is recognized as a leader for innovative practices that are changing the way business is done in the field of workforce development. For Spare, those practices mean the difference between a dead-end job and a promising future. “I don’t think they know what all they’ve done for me,” she says. “A job, yes. But they’ve also helped me move forward. I’ve come from a hard life. This is the best experience I’ve ever had. I’m miles ahead of where I’d be otherwise.”

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Seattle Jobs Initiative focuses on training to help meet the needs of employers in the region and jobs that offer the chance to move up the ladder. Carlos Amesquita, center, instructs Michael Clarke-Hubbard, left, and Tewodros Bekele Tasfaberhan, right, in automotive services and repair at South Seattle Community College.

LETTER FROM DOUGLAS W. NELSON  
PRESIDENT, THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

Seattle is where it all began: A boy on a bicycle; a widowed mother raising four children; a rough-hewn town where people's dreams were as grand as the trees and rivers and mountains that surrounded them. Jim Casey grew up in Seattle and knew what poverty felt like. He dropped out of school and, with his mother's encouragement, delivered packages by bicycle to add pennies to his family's larder. Even as he built his messenger service into UPS, a global multibillion dollar corporation, he became passionate about using his wealth to help kids who were living in tough circumstances and to promote the kind of family stability and care that would allow these children to reach their potential.

In 1948, Jim Casey and his siblings founded the Annie E. Casey Foundation, named for their mother, and committed it to strengthening families and serving disadvantaged kids. When I look around Seattle today, I see ample evidence of the impact of his deep philanthropic commitment.

You'll read here about some of the Casey projects and partnerships that reflect that commitment. Seattle Jobs Initiative is a decade-long effort that has demonstrated innovative methods for linking low-income men and women with living-wage jobs in the regional economy, because we know good jobs are one of the keys to strong families. Making Connections White Center is showing us new ways communities and neighborhood residents can lead efforts to improve conditions for families and children living in tough neighborhoods. And Thrive by Five, a public-private partnership, promises to greatly improve, expand, and promote early childhood education in the state. These and other efforts are profiled in these pages.

Seattle is also home to Casey Family Programs and the Marguerite Casey Foundation. They are part of the Casey legacy along with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct services agency, Casey Family Services, which is based in Connecticut and serves families throughout New England and in Maryland. Together, these organizations all reflect the guiding principle that children need supportive families and communities in order to thrive. Our joint work on the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the Youth Transitions Funders Group, and the Casey Alliance for Racial Equity also stems from one man's caring spirit and determination to make a difference. ✚



Seattle Jobs Initiative graduate Esther Spare goes over paperwork with her co-worker Douglas Hamilton. Spare participated in SJI's office skills program. Hired as an administrative assistant, she recently received a promotion.

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High-paying jobs in aerospace and technology fuel the Puget Sound economy, but low-wage workers without the skills or connections to share in the prosperity are perpetually running on empty. A minimum wage job covers only 37 percent of what it takes for a single parent with two kids to keep food on the table, pay the rent, and keep up with medical, transportation, and child care costs. Ninety percent of SJI participants earn less than \$15,000 a year before entering the training program. Seattle Jobs Initiative targets low-wage workers like Spare and offers training, skills, and the supports needed to find and keep a good job.

The initiative's "dual customer" approach pays attention to the needs of workers and business, and that's one key to its success. SJI trains workers for jobs in specific sectors of the regional economy and in industries in need of trained workers. "It seems like a no-brainer to actually prepare people for jobs that exist and provide a set of skills based on a deep knowledge of industry needs," says Mary Jean Ryan, an SJI board member. "But that wasn't the way workforce development was done ten or 15 years ago."



## Partnerships Address Workforce Challenges

*W*hen Casey launched the Jobs Initiative in 1997, one of its goals was to find out if lessons learned from the initiative could eventually inform and influence a larger, national effort. Today, national foundations including Hitachi and the Ford Foundation have joined with Casey to improve employment training and job success for low-income people by forming a partnership called the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. The partnership, which is supporting the effort with at least \$30 million in grants, aims to improve the quality of jobs and the capacity of workers by promoting change at the personal, institutional, and system levels. Influenced in part by the success of Seattle Jobs Initiative, a regional partnership also has been launched in the Pacific Northwest that includes the City of Seattle, the Seattle Foundation, and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation. The regional collaborative will work to improve training and access to good employment opportunities for job seekers in health care, information technology, logistics, and construction, all growing sectors of the Northwest economy. ✦

Ryan was working for the City of Seattle's Office of Economic Development in 1995 when Bob Giloth, director of family economic success at the Casey Foundation, first approached the city about co-investing in a jobs program. Casey chose Seattle as a one of the sites in its five-city Jobs Initiative, designed to link low-income adults to good-paying jobs. Casey's initial investment of \$750,000 drew a \$5 million commitment from the City of Seattle, then led by Mayor Norm Rice, and in 1997 SJI was launched under the city's auspices.

Three mayors and a decade later, SJI is an independent nonprofit organization supported by public and private funders. Ryan credits "Casey's rigor and structure around outcomes" with shaping SJI. "They were zealots about having robust data systems and measurable results that would guide the work." In bad budget years, she says, SJI data were crucial to the initiative's survival. "It's hard to cut a program when you have the numbers."

SJI Director Anne Keeney, who has been involved with the program since its inception, says it offers employers qualified job candidates with skills and on-the-job experience. "Our classes have employer expectations built into them," she says. "We get job

seekers to practice as if they were on the job." Assessments, internships, and a year's worth of follow-up also help to ensure success.

SJI is designed to help people like Spare land a job that offers a chance to move up the ladder. Participants choose classes in automotive, construction, welding, and office support. The program also helps them get an internship in their field and offers English language and GED programs as well as help with housing, child care, and transportation challenges that might otherwise derail them.

Spare attended classes to learn office skills and approached her internship "with the mind-set that I was going to come in and land the job. I came to do my best." Tanya Jimale, owner of JTS Manage Services, hired Spare and recently promoted her to operations manager. "She's a team player," Jimale says.

A new partnership with community colleges and \$15 million in new state funding for training low-income adults promise to expand SJI participants' opportunities and connections to mid-wage jobs. "There are lots of news stories about new jobs in our region, but what do they pay?" Keeney asks. "Our goal is to connect to jobs that pay a living wage." ✦



# Putting Food Stamp Dollars to Work for Job Training

*Making Connections* White Center is working to influence how federal job training monies are spent, and the strategy has the potential to dramatically increase the number of dollars for job training in Washington State.

The little-known Food Stamp Employment and Training program (FSET) is designed to provide job training opportunities for people who receive food stamps, matching federal and local dollars. *Making Connections* is working with partners in the county, the state, community colleges, and jobs programs, including Seattle Jobs Initiative, to bring more of those dollars into White Center and other cash-strapped communities. A pilot was launched in 2005 with five community nonprofits eager to generate additional revenue—more than \$730,000 in 2006—to improve and expand training programs. The pilot broke new ground by channeling funding directly to the nonprofits running the programs, rather than to the state. The pilot encourages collaboration between the providers. FSET comes with a tangle of bureaucratic regulations, and the partners are considering now how to remedy the glitches. But the strategy holds great promise, and *Making Connections* continues to push ahead with its partners to find the best way to put FSET dollars to work for low-income people in White Center and the region. ✚

## EFFORTS TO HELP RESIDENTS LAND AIRPORT JOBS TAKE OFF

**S**ea-Tac Airport is a short bus ride from White Center, but it might as well be a thousand miles away. While new construction and security procedures have opened up plenty of new jobs at the airport, residents of White Center's refugee and immigrant communities have had trouble tapping into those opportunities. Enter Airport Jobs. With support from *Making Connections*, the Airport Jobs program is working with community organizations in White Center to recruit,

screen, and refer job seekers to a three-day training program to prepare for the airport's application process. The recruiters are familiar with White Center residents—their strengths, the barriers they face, their needs and hopes—and offer them a neighborhood pipeline into the robust regional economy. The training concludes with a job fair for

White Center residents. "Almost everyone gets a job, because they are so well prepared," says Ruth Westerbeck, program manager for Airport Jobs. Applicants with limited English skills find support from an airport-based case manager, who also works with new hires to resolve on-the-job issues. Follow-up during the first year helps ensure good job retention. ✚

Graduates of the Airport Jobs program celebrate the completion of their training and new jobs. Celebrants (front row, l-r): Nega Gebrmariam, Mulunesh Nora, Mam Danh, Daniel Le, Krishna, Hing Nguyen. (Back row, l-r): Ermias Mehanzel, Omar Abadir, Abdulmuniem Aman, Insarmu Dibaba, Mizan Abraha, Siliva Tapu.



## RESIDENT DESCRIBES HER JOURNEY FROM ADVOCACY TO LEADERSHIP

Sili Mana`o-Savusa lives in White Center, a *Making Connections* neighborhood, and is a longtime community leader and activist. She has been a “Trusted Advocate” since the early days of the initiative. Mana`o-Savusa worked for the City of Seattle for eight years and now serves as program director for the Southwest Youth and Family Services, a community organization near White Center that helps people address challenges by building on their strengths. Active for many years in efforts to improve public schools, Mana`o-Savusa recently announced her bid for a seat on the Highline School Board.

**Q:** You’re a mother, you have a full-time job, and you’re active in your church. And you’re deeply involved in *Making Connections*. What drives you?

**A:** I was raised by parents who were always active in the community. So to do community work, it seems like the natural thing to do. And the values that we were raised on, my brothers and sisters and I, were that you do whatever you can to help your people. I work in a place that really supports and nurtures the work of community.

**Q:** Who are the Trusted Advocates?

**A:** The Trusted Advocates are a group of community leaders and residents who work together to help guide *Making Connections*. A lot of us have had experience doing advocacy work with families for years. We’re probably a group of about 15 or 20. There are about 15 different languages among us; we come from largely immigrant and refugee cultures.

**Q:** How is the way you work together different from community work you had done before, or is it?

**A:** Having institutional partners as part of the normal way of doing community work is probably the newest thing to me. Part of the process early in the initiative was to identify institutional partners that would eventually come together on a regular basis. Somebody from the governor’s office, the secretary of social and



*Making Connections* Trusted Advocate Sili Mana`o-Savusa, right, and her mother, Lupe Mana`o, are all smiles on the day Mana`o-Savusa announced her candidacy for a seat on the Highline School Board. Behind Lupe Mana`o is Dwight Mizoguchi.

health services, Boeing, the sheriff’s department, the mayor’s office, the school superintendent, foundation representatives—all these major players sitting around the table with residents.

**Q:** What was that like for you?

**A:** It was really intimidating at first, and I spent the first few meetings just sitting there quietly trying to figure out how to get my voice in this mix and also trying to understand how everybody relates to each other in terms of the institutions. More importantly, I wanted to be supportive of the other Trusted Advocates. There have always been points of struggle between the community and

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some of these institutional partners. The partners really wanted to help, to problem solve, but what is really important is for institutions to understand what happens when you work with communities. As institutions, you need to listen and be ready to shift what you do so that together you reach successful and sustainable outcomes. The more that there have been opportunities for the community to partner and build relationships with institutional partners, the stronger the work has been. The last community forum that we held around the White Center Early Learning Initiative, we had over 500 people participate. It was amazing. We can deliver that, it's one of our strengths. But to build those kinds of trusting relationships takes time, and sometimes you have to go through some struggle. But it's the struggle that makes our relationships real.

**Q:** How has the partnership with Airport Jobs worked out, the neighborhood pipeline that links White Center residents to jobs out at Sea-Tac?

**A:** We've had a huge success rate working with Airport Jobs. The Trusted Advocates pushed for White Center residents to get jobs at the airport. There were so many job openings with the new construction at the airport. There is a huge population of families that live close by and can get there. So it was *Making Connections* really sitting down with Ruth Westerbeck [Program Manager, Airport Jobs] and saying look, there are families you could be providing a service to if you target them, if you make them your priority families. We talked about what they needed to do to identify applicants. We

suggested simplifying the forms and offering ESL and literacy support on the job site. The goal was to make sure potential employees get past the screenings and can last longer with their jobs.

We all understand we can't be successful unless real relationships exist—people from the community helping to identify and bring people through the pipeline. An Eritrean woman, Mergitu Argo, works for Neighborhood House [an Airport Jobs community partner] and is a longtime community leader. All the Advocates know her. When the training classes start, she's able to fill them up. And then she follows up with everybody. My nephew, who came recently from Samoa, signed up for the training, and within that next week he was working at the airport.

**Q:** And how has that worked out for him?

**A:** He's learned skills and moved onto a higher-paying position, and that's the way it should work. Mergitu has been helpful in training folks at the airport on how to work with people from these various cultures and utilizing Trusted Advocates to come in and provide training to the staff. So this is an example of where we feel like there is a real partnership and that the institution really does want to learn and really wants to know. And some barriers are removed and people have jobs. We're having people from the community actually influence the system and that is incredibly helpful in terms of getting results. And I think this is largely because our partners at Airport Jobs really listened to what we said and accepted the

guidance they were being given. Trusted Advocates made a difference by providing deep roots in these communities and by articulating what the realities are for the largely immigrant families coming into this neighborhood, this community, and even into this country. ✚



Sili Mana'o-Savusa (center) talks to two supporters, Michele Collins, left, and Ruth Dickey, right, at her campaign kick-off.



## CENTER MAKES LEARNING A FAMILY AFFAIR

Atlantic Street Center has reached out to low-income families from around the world for nearly a century. The nonprofit organization provides educational, social, and recreational programs for children and families at its family centers, including the

NewHolly Youth & Family Center in south Seattle. NewHolly is located on a campus of inviting new buildings at the edge of a mixed-income neighborhood of public housing, affordable rentals, and market-rate homes. With its front porches, curving

Nuguse Weldemichael and his wife, Nigisti, say NewHolly has made a big difference to their family. "The kids came [to the center] first and we followed them," says Weldemichael. The Weldemichaels have six children, and their oldest, Luwam, needed help with her homework and access to a good library. She found both at NewHolly, a short distance from their home.

Luwam, 15, comes to the center five days a week and gets help from a tutor. "I feel good, like I learned something new," she says. "I use the computer, finish my homework, read books." Her father often accompanies her and her siblings for Family Study Time and to "keep an eye on my kids and make sure they do their homework," he says.

NewHolly's programs, partners, and support groups reach family members of all ages and offer them the skills and connections to find their own pathways to success in America. Weldemichael was born in Eritrea and settled in Seattle 15 years ago. Negotiating the school system has been daunting at times, and the staff at NewHolly has helped him understand how it works. His wife studies English at NewHolly and has joined a women's group. Weldemichael says he has found a community there, as well as what he came for: opportunities for his children.

Nuguse Weldemichael and three of his six children, from left to right, Luwam, Rahel, and Dawit, sit outside the NewHolly Youth & Family Center in south Seattle. Next page: Rahel and Dawit Weldemichael burn off some energy outside the NewHolly Center. Their father, Nuguse, and their mother, Nigisti, say NewHolly provides opportunities for the whole family.

streets, and pocket parks, the neighborhood is a multicultural haven where middle-class homeowners and families in public housing meet on common ground. The NewHolly Youth & Family Center offers children and young people from the surrounding neighborhoods a fun, safe place to hang out, study, and connect with others.

Atlantic Street Center's work with families and children was recognized by the Casey Foundation in 2006 as part of FAMILIES COUNT: The National Honors Program, which recognizes organizations that improve the odds for vulnerable children by helping to build strong families and communities. ✦













## MAJOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENTS HELP CHILDREN

Three thousand kids under the age of five live in White Center. Thanks to Thrive by Five, their chances of starting off well and going the distance in school have just gotten a whole lot better. White Center has been selected as a demonstration site for Thrive by Five Washington, a public-private partnership co-chaired by Governor Christine Gregoire and Bill Gates Sr., co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Over the next decade, as much as \$30 million could flow into White Center from Thrive by Five and the Gates Foundation to support improvements in early education, parent outreach and education, and policy advocacy. The Casey Foundation was an early supporter of Thrive by Five.

“The vision is to make sure every child in the state gets to school ready to learn so he or she can succeed in school and contribute to society,” says Graciela Italiano-Thomas, president and CEO of Thrive by Five. Recent surveys show that as many as half of all children in Washington State enter kindergarten without the tools and support they need to do well in school. “The demonstration communities are sparks. They’ll show us how to reach families and give us knowledge of what we need to do to get this right.”

It was no accident that White Center was chosen as a demonstration site when Thrive by Five went looking. Theresa Fujiwara,

*Making Connections* local site liaison, made it a priority from the early days of the initiative to build strong relationships between White Center residents and community leaders and influential partners in business, the schools, law enforcement, and city, county, and state government.

“*Making Connections* was an important asset that had established connections deep into the community,” says Greg Shaw, program director for education at the Gates Foundation. “People had already identified early childhood education and improving the schools as priorities long before we arrived. There were processes in place for the community to get involved and be active. The Trusted Advocates were there from the very beginning. They led the summit [on early childhood education]. We didn’t select White Center as much as White Center selected us. They decided to do this.”

Elisa Aréchiga knows the value of early childhood education, and she wanted to make sure her two

Top: Children attend classes and a summer language and culture program as part of Para los Niños, one of several opportunities for parents in White Center to help their preschool children succeed when they start school. Right: Elisa Aréchiga takes an ESL class along with other mothers while her children are busy across the hall in their own summer school class.



“Why does early childhood education matter to a company like Boeing? We want to find and employ the kind of human being who can imagine things that never were. You get there by helping children early. All of the research shows that it makes a huge difference when kids get off to a head start with early education and when there is great support for parents.”

—Bob Watt, Vice President for State and Local Government Relations and Global Corporate Citizenship, The Boeing Company

## “THRIVE BY FIVE”

daughters got a good start. She and her husband Roberto de Santiago live in White Center and are among more than 100 Latino families and 250 children who have joined Para los Niños Family Literacy Program, designed to help prepare kids to succeed in school, provide ESL classes for parents, and build pride in Mexican culture.

*Making Connections* White Center’s early childhood education initiative has supported several community efforts to improve kids’ chances of doing well once they start school. Para los Niños, PASIFEKA, and a multicultural pre-K program organized by the Refugee Federation Service Center have all offered families and children educational opportunities. Now, with support from Gates and Thrive by Five, existing programs like Para los Niños are expected to be able to serve more families with expanded programming. Thrive by Five includes plans to support other providers as well, such as home-based child care centers, to extend their reach, train staff, and improve educational services—all part of a strategy to reach White Center’s 3,000 preschoolers and give them the best chance possible to succeed in school and provide a road map for other communities in the state.

Strategies to expand job opportunities and improve family financial well-being are entwined in the effort. “Early learning opportunities are just part of the continuum of life for our families,” says Kimberlee Archie, project manager for *Making Connections*.

“If other parts of your life aren’t stable, it’s hard to think about reading to your child or going to the library.”

Elisa Aréchiga and her young daughters, Karla and Ximena, go to school together. While the girls learn math and writing, their mother is down the hall studying English. “I have learned how the school district works and what the process is for helping my daughters,” says Aréchiga, a parent leader and volunteer in Para los Niños. “I feel I have gained the confidence to speak out if something’s not right for the children. I’m learning too. It was important for me to do something for myself and important to help my daughters do something good.” ✦



Right: Elisa Aréchiga and her young daughters, Karla and Ximena, go to school together. Bottom left: Seattle Jobs Initiative trains young men and women for good jobs that have the potential to pay a real living wage. Here, Michael Clarke-Hubbard, left, and Melvin Escajeda in an automotive service and repair class. Bottom right: Thrive by Five Washington will help ensure that more young children like the boys below are healthy and ready to succeed once they get to school.



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