

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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

Casey in Atlanta

CREATING SUCCESSFUL FUTURES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



PAVING A ROUTE TO ECONOMIC SUCCESS

As a single mother who had raised two adult children and had a 16-year-old still at home, Deborah Henry drew on the support of her family, church, and pastor for many years as she struggled through “many uphill and downhill battles.” After 18 years of living in the McDaniel Glen public housing complex in Mechanicsville, and being unemployed

for several months, Henry was ready for a change. On one of her frequent trips to the library at the Dunbar Center where her children used to go to school, she saw a flyer for a class that promised to offer employment skills and connections to jobs. The class was being offered by Ropheka Rock of the World Inc., an organization Henry was familiar with because her daughter had attended a class there.

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

Atlanta is one of three cities defined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a “civic site,” meaning a place where we have a unique long-term commitment, presence, and set of connections.

Those connections are easy to track in Atlanta, which is the headquarters of UPS. UPS is the multibillion-dollar company that grew out of a small messenger service started by a 19-year-old named Jim Casey in 1907. Its success enabled Casey and his siblings to launch a charitable foundation in 1948 named for their mother, Annie E. Casey.

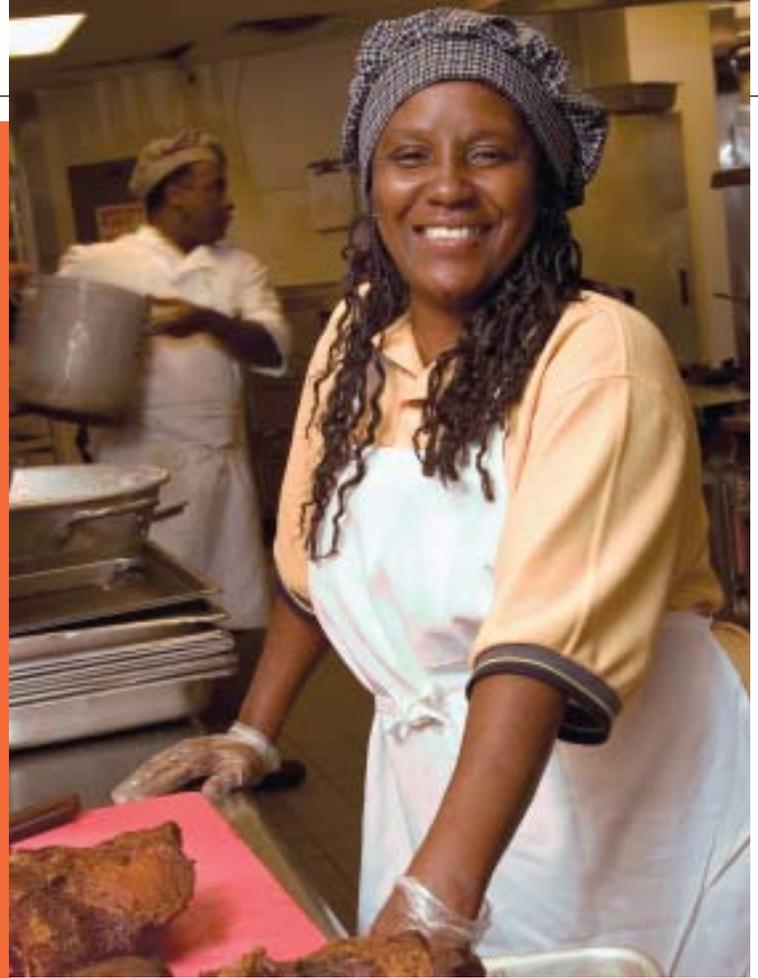
UPS directors remain active in the governance of the Casey Foundation, and many UPS employees are personally engaged in a variety of community improvement activities across Atlanta. Furthermore, UPS is a significant employer and investor in the greater Atlanta economy.

The mission of the Foundation is to improve the lives of the children whose odds of success are severely compromised because of poverty and other difficult circumstances. The Foundation seeks out approaches, forges partnerships, and invests in initiatives that can help these children beat the odds and result in fewer children being at risk, failing, or being denied the core promises of American life.

The Foundation’s research and experience over the past two decades have convinced us that children cannot prosper unless their parents do, and that families need strong and supportive communities in order to thrive. In Atlanta, the Foundation is grateful to partner with a diverse array of state and local officials, community organizations, residents, and civic groups working to strengthen families living in tough neighborhoods in order to bolster children’s odds of success.

Here, as in other cities in which we work, we are contributing resources, technical assistance, and learning opportunities to help people and organizations committed to achieving concrete, measurable, and lasting results for children and families.

This fact sheet profiles our efforts to help working families build their wealth and financial skills, revitalize communities, strengthen and mobilize families and communities to improve outcomes for kids, and ensure that children making the transition out of foster care have a chance at happy and productive lives. The goal of these investments is to support innovative local efforts to improve conditions for children in families and, in the process, gain new knowledge about practices and strategies that make a difference for families with multiple challenges in tough urban neighborhoods.



continued from page 1 Henry signed up for the class, which gave her the skills that she needed to successfully apply for and get a job as a grill cook on the campus of the Georgia Institute of Technology. “I was lacking on what to do in a job interview,” Henry explains. “Now I’m more aware and more confident. I needed more insight on how to write a resume, how to dress for an interview, how to talk to employers.”

The class Henry attended was a part of a prototype for the Atlanta Center for Working Families, the Casey Foundation’s primary strategy to help families in the five neighborhoods that make up the Atlanta “civic site” get good jobs, manage their money, and resolve problems so that they can plan for the future. Nearly 60 percent of families in these communities have incomes below \$20,000, and federal welfare caseloads in this cluster of neighborhoods are three to four times the city’s average.

Cover: Families enjoy refreshments at a reunion of the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association.
Above: Deborah Henry gained job skills and confidence through the Center for Working Families.
Opposite: Andrew Tabb got a scholarship to DeVry University through Project GRAD.

The center is not a physical building but a collaboration between organizations with a strong track record for providing services that can help families gain a secure economic footing. Besides Ropheka, these organizations include the Atlanta Technical College, the Center for Black Women’s Wellness, Quality Care for Children, Georgia Justice Project, Goodwill Industries, and the Sullivan Center.

In its first six months, the prototype for the Center for Working Families served 57 people and helped nine residents move into jobs, seven receive construction certification, five start GED classes, 21 complete financial literacy classes, and two open savings accounts. Four residents also received legal services, and 54 were screened for public benefits.

Another Foundation-supported effort to help families become more economically stable is the Atlanta Metro Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign, which encourages eligible families to file for and claim the federal credit. The campaign returned more than \$1,000,000 to low-income working families in Atlanta in 2003. The Foundation is also supporting a credit counseling campaign run by Consumer Credit Counseling Service, which will help residents improve their credit ratings and reduce their debt. ❧

The Center for Working Families is a collaboration between organizations with a strong track record for providing services that can help families gain a secure economic footing.

PROVIDING RESOURCES AND INCENTIVES TO FOSTER LEARNING

andrew Tabb attended five different elementary schools and three middle schools as a result of frequent family moves, and his school performance—and motivation—flagged. By the time he reached Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta, chronic school truancy was putting him on a path to failing or dropping out—until he got involved in Project GRAD. He was able to maintain stellar attendance after that and graduated from high school in May 2004 with a scholarship to attend DeVry University.

Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), a cornerstone of Atlanta’s school reform efforts, integrates several proven school improvement strategies at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, including the Success for All reading *continued on page 4*



continued from page 3 program, Move it Math, Consistency Management and Discipline, summer institutes on college campuses, and a scholarship program for high school graduates who meet specific requirements.

The Casey Foundation helps fund a component of Project GRAD called Communities in Schools of Atlanta, which provides counseling, community outreach, parental involvement, and family case management for students having difficulties in school. This component was critical for Andrew Tabb, who says his weekly meetings with a family support counselor got him back on track toward near-perfect school attendance. Casey support helps maintain a budget for

special projects, incentives, and field trips to help reward improved attendance and behavior.

First introduced at Booker T. Washington and its feeder elementary and middle schools in 2000, Project GRAD is reaping impressive results. Tabb was one of 287 students to graduate from Booker T. Washington in May 2004, marking the school's largest graduating class in 15 years. One hundred and fifty-three GRAD scholars have been awarded more than \$6.7 million in scholarship monies, and graduating seniors have been accepted at more than 50 prestigious colleges, universities, and technical schools. ❧



MAKING HOUSING SAFE AND AFFORDABLE

*i*n the summer of 2002, a group of neighbors in Atlanta’s Pittsburgh community, one of the neighborhoods the Foundation works in, asked a question that would change their community and their lives: Who was responsible for the dilapidated buildings and littered properties that made them fear for their children’s safety? They created a list of two dozen negligent absentee landlords—“The Terrible 24”—that they took to city hall.

Today, thanks to the work of these residents, many of these absentee owners have been forced to comply with housing codes. This effort was spearheaded by the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (PCIA), which has begun to restore leadership, collective vision, and civic pride in the community.

Over the past year, with the help of a new executive director and support from the Casey Foundation, PCIA has grown even stronger. When the association learned of plans to demolish the affordable Civic League apartments and replace them with high-end units that would displace 120 low-income families, association staff and volunteers publicized the plan, helped residents find safe places to relocate to, and—largely based on the legitimacy lent by the Foundation—convinced the real estate developer to preserve 120 units of affordable housing.

Now, residents are planning for the future. Their ten-year Pittsburgh Redevelopment Plan aims to make measurable progress on increasing safety, enhancing the beauty of the neighborhood, and expanding affordable housing by the end of this year. The Foundation and the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association are developing a plan to help tenants become homeowners by building affordable housing on vacant and tax-delinquent properties in partnership with other organizations. Foundation-supported efforts also will make homeownership feasible for more families by increasing their savings, improving their credit, and helping them find stable employment. ☘

A ten-year redevelopment plan in the Pittsburgh community aims to make measurable progress on increasing safety, enhancing the beauty of the neighborhood, and expanding affordable housing.

The Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association, which sponsored the summer reunion pictured on page 4, has helped restore leadership, collective vision, and civic pride in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Atlanta.





HELPING COMMUNITIES KEEP CHILDREN SAFE

in March 2001, the state-run Dulaney House Children's Shelter in Atlanta was a "sub-standard shelter" that, if it were a private institution, "would never be licensed," according to the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate. With 150 children living in a facility designed for 85, allegations of verbal and physical abuse by staff, and children staying for extended periods of time, it was clear the shelter should be closed. But it was the only place police officers could bring kids in crisis at night and on weekends, when the "regular" Georgia Division of Family and Children Services offices were closed.

Little more than a year later, the shelter as it used to exist closed down. At the same site, children began receiving quality care and attention in a spacious setting, and 95 percent of the time, no one stayed more than 23 hours.

What happened? The Fulton Family Resource Center happened.

The center came about as a result of increased state funding; collaboration between state and county child welfare administrators, advocates, and private foster care and group home providers; and technical help from the Casey Foundation's Family to Family program. The players all joined forces with a mandate to create a county system

where fewer children are in unstable situations that require intervention. And for kids who need safe temporary settings, they've provided more foster homes as an alternative to shelters, and made those homes even safer by giving foster parents more support. Foster parents, as well as police, now have access to caseworkers 24 hours a day, and caseworkers now partner with families and their support networks—including clergy, friends, relatives, public mental health providers, etc.—to decide where a child can live safely.

In addition to eliminating the need for the emergency shelter, Fulton County has been partnering with communities to help prevent children from entering the system in the first place. For example, in 2001, three residents formed the East Point Community Action Team. With technical assistance and training from the Foundation, they partnered with the county to turn an abandoned school into the East Point Community Partnership for Protecting Children. The partnership promotes community involvement, economic development, adequate housing, economic self-sufficiency, family supportive incomes, quality education, and services for children, youth, and families. "If any of these are missing," says Mary Wilson, one of the team's cofounders, "that's a threat to a child's well-being and safety" —a threat her community isn't willing to

tolerate. In 2003, the East Point Community Partnership for Protecting Children served 215 children, helping to stabilize them in their homes and communities.

The partnership is also a full-service family support center where parents and foster parents get on-site support and training. Residents take courses in computer use, GED preparation, and English/Spanish as a Second Language. Kids have after-school programs. The site also houses a charter school called the Knowledge is Power Academy, offices for the Division of Family and Children Services, the East Point Community Action Team, and the East Point Community Partnership for Protecting Children coordinator, as well as a Prevention Resource Center. In short, the partnership forms a hub of support for families during times of both strength and need. It draws in families themselves, and their informal support networks, along with child welfare workers, school personnel, the police, domestic violence staff, and mental health counselors. In 2003, the partnership's family support center provided services for more than 400 families. ❧

UPS employees work with Atlanta children as part of a volunteer challenge event that drew 2,000 metro Atlanta employees and helped launch a multiyear volunteer campaign.

BUILDING STABLE FUTURES FOR FOSTER KIDS

It's a wonder Tacia Bazile survived. As a child and a young adult in Atlanta, she endured sexual and verbal abuse and an unstable home life with various relatives. At one point things got so bad that she ran away and was homeless. Then she entered foster care, where she experienced abuse as well.

"I was moving so much, and the more I moved, the worse it was getting," recalls Bazile, who says all she wanted was to finish high school and get out.

Bazile's story up to that point is all too common among kids who "age out," or come of age and leave the child welfare system having never been adopted. But what happened next has helped stop the cycle of poverty and violence that for many kids continues after they turn 18. Bazile got involved in the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative, the local site of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, a national effort launched in 2001 that is helping young people who are exiting foster care make successful transitions to adulthood.

Now, Bazile is working for the Georgia Independent Living Program, returning calls and planning activities for foster kids. She's on the Youth Board of the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative, which she calls her family. "We can call each other any time," Bazile explains. And she plans to go to college. "What I love about the Jim Casey program is that everything they said they'd do, they did it," says Bazile. "They helped me a lot in my personal life."

"When young people leave foster care, they leave with no support," notes Carla Owens, Atlanta's representative from the national initiative. "They don't have anybody to mentor them or give them that extra push they need when they turn 18." The initiative, managed by the Greater Atlanta Community Foundation and the Georgia Independent Living Program, helps these young adults get food, health insurance, a mailing address, and education and employment opportunities. A board of community members—who consider themselves "door openers" for the young people—has tapped partners such as the United States Department of *continued on page 8*



“My family
never called me Tacia;

they called me ‘hey, girl.’ So when somebody says my name, it makes me feel good. They see who I am.”

continued from page 7 Labor, UPS, Publix Supermarket, and Kaiser Permanente to provide these resources.

To more than 127 young adults aging out of foster care, the initiative offers financial literacy training, a debit card, and an Individual Development Account—a special savings account for education, housing, and professional opportunities matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$1,000 by the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta. To Bazile, being stable is “not about having a

lot of money,” but about “being happy, going to church, talking to God, and having a good relationship with yourself.” She recognizes, though, how much the concrete skills she’s learned in the program have made a difference. “They taught me about financial planning and how to save money. I used to have nine credit cards, and now I have two.”

In addition to conducting youth outreach, youth board members like Bazile plan the programs sponsored by community partners.

“When I speak, people listen to what I say and bring it up later when deciding what we’re doing,” says Bazile. That’s important, because “when you’re in foster care, you don’t have any say.”

“My family never called me Tacica; they called me ‘hey, girl.’ So when somebody says my name, it makes me feel good. They see who I am.” The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is helping Bazile and others not only see who they are, but be who they can be. ❧



DRAWING ON DATA TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

According to KIDS COUNT, the Casey Foundation’s signature initiative to collect national and state-by-state data on the status of children, Georgia has made progress on eight of ten benchmarks of child well-being between 1996 and 2001 and has improved its national ranking from 44th to 40th. To sustain this progress, the Family Connection Partnership in Atlanta, which leads Georgia’s KIDS COUNT campaign, is taking a close look at how those improvements occurred. The group is working to identify and replicate programs and policies that contributed and establish benchmarks for the future. The Foundation has published these benchmarks and other pertinent data for our target area in Atlanta in a 2004 book called *Neighborhoods Count*. Residents and community leaders are working with the Foundation on ways to use this information to encourage the city and the state to invest in their neighborhoods to improve the lives of children and families.

Whether the issue is economic success, education, housing, safety, young people in transition, or using data strategically, the Casey Foundation is committed to playing an ongoing role in civic improvement in Atlanta—and to refining, building on, and weaving together all these strategies so that the whole is truly worth more than the sum of its parts. ❧

A father and son capture the moment at a Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association reunion.



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