

A review of 15 years of Annie E. Casey Foundation investments  
that yielded measurable results for vulnerable children

# Responsible Fatherhood Investments, 1994-2009

*Influence, Impact, & Leverage*

Summer, 2010

Prepared for The Annie E. Casey Foundation by JustPartners, Inc.

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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. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. 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. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

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## Foreword

**Wade F. Horn, Ph.D.**

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Forty years ago, noted developmental psychologist Michael Lamb described fathers as "the forgotten contributors to child development." He was right. Far from being understood as important for the rearing of children, by the latter half of the 20th century fathers were seen mostly as economic providers for their children. The fatherhood idea had essentially shrunk to the size of a wallet.

Lacking a more compelling idea as to their worth as fathers, more fathers simply disappeared from their children's lives. In 1960, the total number of children in the United States living in father absent families was less than 10 million. By the mid 1990's, that number had grown to nearly 24 million. By some estimates, the percentage of children born in the 1990's who could expect to live a significant portion of their childhoods without their father in their home increased to sixty percent.

Of course, just because a father does not live with his children does not mean he cannot stay actively involved in their lives. But it is harder. Statistics at the time found that forty percent of American children in father absent homes had not seen their father -- not once, not even for a moment -- during the previous year. More than half of all American children who didn't live with their fathers had never been in their father's home. And whereas 57 percent of unwed fathers consistently saw their children during the first two years of life, by the time their child reached 7 1/2 years of age that percentage dropped to less than 25 percent.

Even when fathers lived with their children, too many were nonetheless psychologically absent from their lives. Indeed, a Gallup poll taken in 1995 found that 50 percent of all adults in the U.S. agreed that "fathers today spend less time with their children than their fathers did with them."

The consequences of this retreat from fatherhood were disastrous for children. Not only were children who were living in fatherless households significantly more likely to live in poverty, but even after controlling for economic factors, they were also more likely to be suspended from school or to drop out, be treated for an emotional or behavioral problem, commit suicide as adolescents, and be victims of child abuse or neglect.

Some viewed these trends with resignation, believing that while unfortunate, nothing much could be done about them. Others saw these trends as not only inevitable, but as positive, trumpeting the notion that fathers had become "superfluous" to the modern family. In short, the fatherhood idea was dying.

But something happened on the way to the graveyard. As documented in this report, beginning in the mid-1980's, an awareness began to build that this trend toward fatherlessness was not only lamentable -- but that something ought to be done about it. By the mid-1990s, a number of fledgling fatherhood organizations had emerged, some offering direct services, others building awareness, still others engaged in public advocacy, but all dedicated to recapturing the fatherhood idea and improving the well-being of millions of children in the process. Most, however, suffered from a lack of resources; many were sustained by shoestring budgets. Worse, there was a sense of competition developing among the various fatherhood groups that threatened to destroy the fragile unity of purpose that held this new "fatherhood field" together.

Fortunately for the field -- and for the millions of children it hoped to help -- there was the Annie E. Casey Foundation. As documented in this report, beginning in the mid 1990's, the Annie E. Casey Foundation provided two important ingredients to these nascent fatherhood organizations: critical funding and the opportunity to coalesce into a cohesive community. Operating from a "big tent" approach, the Annie E. Casey Foundation brought together a diverse set of thought leaders, policy experts, service providers and advocates to learn from and support each other. More and more, there was talk of a "fatherhood movement" -- and the Annie E. Casey Foundation was central to its birth and rearing.

***...the Annie E. Casey Foundation was the rock that kept this movement together, providing valuable time for the diverse viewpoints and purposes to gain an appreciation and understanding of each other."***

But there is more. While support from other philanthropic organizations came and went, the Annie E. Casey Foundation was the rock that kept this movement together, providing valuable time for the diverse viewpoints and purposes to gain an appreciation and understanding of each other. It was here, in the Casey "big tent," that the "dead broke dad" groups made common cause with those that promoted married fatherhood. It was here, too, that those providing direct services and those engaged in public awareness building activities came to appreciate the synergies that each created for the other. And it was here that critical bipartisan support for the movement was nurtured and sustained, resulting in a significant focus on fatherhood by the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations alike as well as by both Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Congress.

The results of this work have been impressive. Public opinion polls show that more and more Americans agree that fathers play a critical and indispensable role in the rearing of their children, and that fatherlessness is a significant social problem about which something ought to be done. Surveys reflect fathers spending more time with their children. Increasing numbers of organizations are sponsoring fatherhood programs and services, supported in part by historic and bipartisan legislation passed by the U.S. Congress in 2007. And there are few, if any, voices today heralding the "superfluous" father.

Of course, challenges remain. While awareness of the importance of involved, committed and responsible fatherhood has increased, and more services are available to help men fulfill their role as fathers, too many children continue to grow up disconnected from their fathers. Indeed, the percentage of children fathered by men out of wedlock continues to rise. The divorce rate remains too high. And child support is still too often just a piece of paper.

But there is hope. The fatherhood idea has been recaptured. Programs and services for fathers are no longer an oddity. Public policy is no longer ambivalent about the importance of father involvement. Healthy marriage is part of the public debate. And the Annie E. Casey Foundation is still here.

# Responsible Fatherhood Investments, 1994-2009

## *Influence, Impact, & Leverage*

In June, 2009, the President of the United States convened a high-profile Town Hall Meeting two days before Father's Day. Sharing the stage with him were representatives from both political parties, leaders of key fatherhood advocacy groups, and fathers who have overcome hardships to parent successfully. Some might have viewed this as a routine media event or a photo opportunity because a focus on fathers is firmly entrenched throughout the nation today. But the back story was not lost on the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In fact, that day was testimony to the hard work that many have done since 1994 to build a national commitment to improve child outcomes through the promotion of Responsible Fatherhood. Casey has played a central role in a series of policy and practice initiatives aimed at changing the policy environment so that this day could happen.

This narrative documents the Casey Foundation's investments and the significant results to which it has contributed through its 15 year focus on Responsible Fatherhood. A notable area of strength for the Foundation, the Responsible Fatherhood work is a classic case example of what a Foundation can achieve by focusing on what it does best. The Foundation's contribution to the field's achievements over those 15 years has relied on tried and true Casey strategies:

- Convening a "big tent" and seeking common ground
- Leading with data
- Investing in ideologically diverse grantees
- Promoting the inclusion of diverse populations
- Providing technical assistance based on a growing understanding of what works
- Staying the course

Here is a closer look at how these strategies unfolded within a tough policy climate -- and worked, very well.

## The Responsible Fatherhood work is mission-driven.

In 1991, the final report of the nonpartisan National Commission on Children highlighted the worrisome level of father absence and its contribution to child poverty. Research documented the striking relationship of children living without fathers to multiple poor child outcomes -- emotional and behavioral problems, lowered school performance, drug use, failure to complete high school, and criminal behavior. It became clear to the Casey Foundation that it could not achieve its mission to meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families if it ignored fathers.

Extensive research, some of which Casey helped to fund and disseminate, shows that children who live absent their biological fathers are more likely than their peers living with married biological or adoptive parents to:

- use drugs (3 times more likely)
- experience educational, emotional, and behavioral problems (3 times more likely)
- drop out of school (twice as likely)
- engage in criminal behavior (3 times more likely) and
- live in poverty (5 times more likely).<sup>1</sup>

Conversely, when fathers are involved with their children, the children:

- perform better in school, both academically and socially
- have higher self esteem and lower rates of depression
- are less likely to display aggressive or hyperactive behaviors
- are less likely to engage in high risk behaviors (e.g., drugs, truancy), and
- (for boys) are more likely to become responsible fathers themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This research undergirds the following assumptions on which the Foundation's fatherhood investments were made:

Children are better off when their fathers:

- Receive encouragement and support to acknowledge paternity and build skills in support of good parenting practice
- Develop the necessary skills for a respectful relationship with the children's mother
- Have access to the opportunities and resources needed to provide ongoing financial support for their children
- Become actively involved in caring for and raising their children.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fathers and Their Children*, Fact Sheet 5, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood*, A TARC Resource Guide, 2005.



AND

Families and communities are better off when:

- Men play an active and constructive role
- Public policies support responsible fatherhood
- Quality programs and adequate supports are available to both parents, custodial and non-custodial
- Children have the supports they need to engage in healthy activities and develop into responsible young adults

When Casey began its investments in responsible fatherhood in the early 1990s, births outside of marriage, father absence, and child support collection by never married mothers were glaring problems, as the following data document:

- **Births outside of marriage.** Between 1960 and 1989, the chances of a White child being born to an unmarried mother rose from one in fifty to *one in five*; the chances of a Black child being born to an unmarried mother rose from one in five to *three in five*.<sup>3</sup>
- **Children in father-absent homes.** Between 1960 and 1995, the percent of children in father-absent homes almost *tripled*.<sup>4</sup>
- **Child support enforcement.** From 1976-1997, *fewer than one-third* of all single mothers received child support.<sup>5</sup>
- **Teen births.** The rate in 1995 was 54 per 1,000 teenage women.<sup>6</sup> The rate of repeat teen births in 1990 was 25%.<sup>7</sup>
- **Paternity establishment.** In 1996 the rate was only 52%.<sup>8</sup>

Father absence takes its toll on government, too. One conservative estimate is that father absence costs taxpayers \$100 billion per year.<sup>9</sup>

Given these stark data, Casey's **Vision** was this:

**All children should have the support of both parents, regardless of whether the parents live together or not.** Responsible fathers – who play key roles in child development and family economic success -- help to create strong families, and strong families lead to good outcomes for children.

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<sup>3</sup> R. I. Lerman & T. J. Ooms, *Young Unwed Fathers*. Temple University Press, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> W.F. Horn & T. Sylvester, *Father Facts*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> E. Sorenson & A. Halpern, *Child Support Enforcement: How Well is it Doing?* Urban Institute, December, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> P. Donovan, "Falling Teen Pregnancy, Birthrates: What's Behind the Declines?" *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, October 1998. <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/01/5/gr010506.html>

<sup>7</sup> E. Schelar et.al., "Repeat Teen Childbearing: Differences Across States and by Race and Ethnicity." *Child Trends Research Brief*, October, 2007. [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2007\\_10\\_25\\_RB\\_Repeat.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_10_25_RB_Repeat.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> S.S. MacLanahan and M.J. Carlson, "Welfare Reform, Fertility, and Father Involvement," *The Future of Children* 12,1: 147-165. [http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/12\\_01\\_06.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/12_01_06.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man: The Annual Costs of Father Absence*, National Fatherhood Initiative, 2008

**Fathers should take personal responsibility for their children and have the necessary resources to fulfill their parenting roles and responsibilities.** For this to happen, at a minimum fathers must declare paternity, have access to decent jobs, develop effective parenting and relationship skills, and find support for their familial roles in public policies.

**Policymakers and government officials should support public policies that affirm and promote responsible fatherhood.** Such policies promote strong family values and long-term cost-savings by enhancing family self-sufficiency.

Put differently, Casey's belief is that good policy builds and reinforces fathers' work attachment, family attachment, and the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors necessary for these to be attained and sustained. Given these, children will be better off.

In a nation where 24 million children live in homes without their biological fathers<sup>10</sup>, and 20 million live in single-parent homes – most of them lacking fathers – embracing and aspiring toward this vision was seen by the Foundation to have the potential to improve the lives of millions of children and strengthen the fabric of the families and communities in which they live. These goals reflect the reality that, while married couples in healthy relationships provide the best environment for children, millions of the nation's children will continue to live with their single mothers. Because too many single moms are poor, live in disinvested neighborhoods, and don't benefit from having a father actively involved in family life, Casey's *simultaneous focus* on responsible fatherhood and the economic self-sufficiency of single mothers would be vital to making a difference in the lives and life chances of children.

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, CPS, 2008, Table C9.

## The Foundation faced a challenging policy climate.

While the foregoing indicators presented challenges to be addressed for children and families in the early 1990s, an equally significant challenge was the negative policy climate for fatherhood work. The following simple claim that is taken for granted today was off the national radar screen in public policy only two decades ago: *Fathers matter for families because they play an essential role in child development and family economic success.*

Here's the context within which the Foundation's investments began:

- **Existing policy for families was largely focused on mothers and children.** Traditional public policies often ignored or discouraged disconnected men's direct participation with their families.<sup>11</sup> In the case of welfare and child support, the State often became the provider of financial support for unwed mothers by providing them with temporary cash assistance. This system presumed a non-custodial father's absence and then functioned in ways that discouraged or penalized fathers' visibility and engagement. A focus on fathers was limited to paternity establishment and efforts to collect child support payments for the state rather than going directly to the family.<sup>12</sup>
- **The nascent fatherhood "field" was fragmented along ideological lines.** Fatherhood advocates had no consistent core of issues, perspectives, or messages around which they coalesced. The growing energy was not organized or strategic. Since the 1970s local communities had seen selected social service organizations add responsible fatherhood components to their core objectives to address middle and lower-income fathers. The Reagan administration had given fatherhood a *national* platform when Gary Bauer, then a staffer, hosted a White House meeting on the topic in 1984. In the following year the Secretary of Health and Human Services launched a Young Unwed Fathers research and demonstration project, and the National Urban League launched its Male Responsibility Project. Responsible Fatherhood as a *policy* issue received national attention in the 1988 Family Support Act, which linked employment and training services to child support obligations. The Act also launched national demonstrations to test policy and practice and emphasized paternity establishment. Under President George H.W. Bush, the USDHHS created the Minority Male Initiative. The organization called the National Fatherhood Initiative was founded in 1994 by a group of men with Republican connections. In that same year Democratic Vice President Al Gore highlighted fatherhood issues at his annual Family Reunion conference. In short, the ground was fertile for confusion rather than clarity and collaboration around crucial fatherhood issues.

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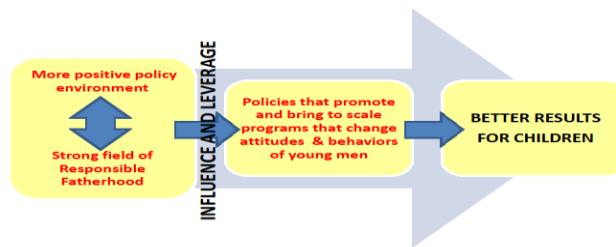
<sup>11</sup> W. Marsiglio and R. Day.1998. *Social fatherhood and paternal involvement: Conceptual, Data and Policymaking Issues*, <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/CFSForum/c4.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk E. Harris, "Public Housing and the Legacy of Segregation," in M.A. Turner et.al., *Fathers from the Family to the Fringe*, .Urban Institute Press, 2008.

- **Capacity was lacking** to produce and communicate good research, which is a prerequisite for achieving effective fatherhood policy and practice. The emerging interest and energy around issues of fatherhood lacked the basic infrastructure for advancing change – fundamental research and useful data; model programs and evidence-based practice; user-friendly tools for scaling good practice; coherent policy ideas; consistent, persuasive, and widely shared messages to stimulate demand and attract resources; visible, credible, and reliable messengers; and effective communications and advocacy strategies.
- **Media portrayal of fathers focused on irresponsible and uncaring fathers** and “fractured families.”<sup>13</sup> Public views about welfare *programs* were increasingly being formed by widely held stereotypes about *recipients*, and the language used to refer to recipients was race-coded. Phrases like “urban poverty” and “the underclass” and images like “welfare queen” and “deadbeat dad” served simultaneously to demonize African Americans – who were disproportionately eligible for benefits by virtue of their disproportionate poverty -- and undermine public support for welfare programs for *all* low-income families.<sup>14</sup>

In the face of the foregoing, the Casey Foundation set out to provide leadership in an effort to change the policy environment -- a prerequisite to improving child outcomes through better fathering. Its theory of change (see Figure 1) was that if it could mobilize the significant players in the fatherhood arena, a more positive policy environment would result. The Foundation expected that, simultaneous with building a strong field of Responsible Fatherhood, it could help to produce policies that promote and bring to scale the kinds of programs that could change the attitudes and behaviors of young men. Those changed attitudes and behaviors would in turn positively affect children through their fathers’ improved abilities to provide financial support, improved relationships with the children’s mothers, and better parenting and co-parenting skills. As a result, children would be better off.

**Figure 1. Theory of Change for the Foundation’s Responsible Fatherhood Investments**



<sup>13</sup> C. Trost, “News media images of fathers” and “Broadcast news media images of fathers,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Anti-Poverty Policy*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.

## Casey applied what it does best to this challenge.

**(1) It convened a big tent.** A “big tent” approach seeks to minimize the potential for fragmentation across groups by looking for common ground and by keeping conversations going when differences arise. In 1994 Casey used the Foundation’s influence to bring together previously contentious advocates and practitioners at Vice President Gore’s annual Family Re-Union gathering. This convening produced a common ground agreement that “men be required, encouraged, and enabled to accept the responsibility to contribute to the social, emotional, and economic well being of their children, regardless of whether those fathers lived in the same home as the children.”<sup>15</sup> This was a watershed moment that has sealed bipartisan support for fathers to this day. At the 1994 convening and a subsequent National Summit on Fatherhood held shortly thereafter, affinity was crystallized around the notion of *responsibility*. The growing Responsible Fatherhood movement came to understand that it would take mutual and interlocking responsibility to succeed. That is, government would need to address the deep-seated structural inequities experienced by vulnerable and marginalized fathers, and these fathers would need to accept the irreplaceable responsibility for involvement that their children needed from them.

Further, to ensure that the emerging fatherhood field learned from and speaks to the range of fathers and their advocates, active outreach has occurred over the years of Foundation investments to include fathers across economic and racial-ethnic groups, formerly incarcerated fathers, men and women working to reduce domestic violence, and advocates for healthy marriage. To this day, Casey is both an active and a go-to convener at moments when the field is threatened by division – whether between men and women, across racial-ethnic differences, or between political pushes and pulls. The Foundation’s creation in 2005 of the National Fatherhood Leadership Group, a collection of leading organizations with diverse perspectives, and its support for the Women in Fatherhood group exemplify its ongoing role in sustaining the big tent required for continued progress.

The fruits of this “big tent” commitment are seen in the broad embrace of Responsible Fatherhood documented below at the national, state, and local levels, across both “mainstream” and father-focused service systems, and by advocates of all political persuasions.

**(2) It led with data.** The Foundation’s 1995 *Kids Count* essay focused on “the increasing fraction of our children who are growing up without their fathers actively involved in their lives.”<sup>16</sup> The essay acknowledged the difficulty of finding a non-politicized way to frame this issue. It presented a data-based case that strongly linked changes in family structure to diminished labor force preparation and opportunities for young males. Consequently, it called for:

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<sup>15</sup> R. Smith, Introduction to R. Lerner, *Liberty*. Sage Publications, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> 1995 *Kids Count* Overview.

- improving educational outcomes for poor and minority male students
- making fathers' family roles explicit concerns in child welfare and social work practice
- committing to welfare reform that requires and rewards work by non-custodial parents
- finding and sustaining employment for father-age males.

The beginning of a sustained Casey commitment to responsible fatherhood was launched in the year before the essay appeared when it co-invested – along with the US Department of Health and Human Services, US Department of Labor, US Department of Agriculture, and the Ford and Mott Foundations – in one of the two national demonstration projects authorized by the Family Support Act of 1988 called Parents Fair Share (PFS). Targeted at underemployed or unemployed non-custodial fathers who owed child support and had children receiving welfare, PFS aimed to increase child support payments, employment and earnings, and parental involvement.<sup>17</sup>

For more than 15 years, the Casey Foundation has invested to ensure that the Responsible Fatherhood field has had available to it the best data, research and analyses needed to advance evidence-based policy and practice. Its grantee, the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF), produced the seminal research documents giving shape to a field that previously had no common conceptual ground. NCOFF's publication *Cutting Across the Issues* identified core research findings about the critical roles of fathers in families. *The Fathering Indicators Framework* and *Fathering Indicators in Practice* tools allowed for the systematic tracking and analysis of changes in specific dimensions of fathering. NCOFF also provided analyses of emerging issues within the fatherhood field (e.g., incarceration, father's role in school readiness). This work paid off in noticeable ways. The broad fatherhood field is credited with shifting "how federal agencies view fathers, collect data, and design policy,"<sup>18</sup> and NCOFF played a key early role in that achievement.

**(3) It invested in ideologically diverse grantees** to build an infrastructure of advocacy and practice for the field. Over 15 years, these investments have produced the grounded experiences needed to understand why and how some strategies work better than others, and the ideologically diverse voices needed to keep fatherhood on the table as administrations come and go. In addition to grantees with differing political persuasions, Casey spread its investments among those focused not only on responsible fatherhood, but also on healthy relationships and healthy marriage.

**(4) It promoted the inclusion of and invested in diverse populations** to ensure that the fatherhood field learned from and spoke to the range of fathers (and their advocates) that needed to be reached. As a result, the base of fatherhood advocates, researchers, and practitioners was broadened. The Foundation's expectation was that all children and families would benefit from its investments and that fatherhood work would be appropriately nuanced

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<sup>17</sup> See Parents Fair Share on the MDRC website, [www.mdrc.org/project\\_12\\_39.html](http://www.mdrc.org/project_12_39.html), accessed 6/30/05.

<sup>18</sup> C.S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera, "Perspectives on Father Involvement: Research and Policy," *Social Policy Report*, Society for Research in Child Development, 1999.

to a father's culture and circumstance in order to be effective. The foci included men across various racial-ethnic groups, formerly incarcerated fathers, and rural fathers.

The publications and products developed with Casey funding that illustrate its role in the mobilization of diverse populations to Responsible Fatherhood work include:

- *Fatherhood Lessons*, a Toolkit with guidelines, interventions, and practical tools to assist organizations wishing to build culturally relevant fatherhood programs for Latino fathers and families
- Spanish-language version of "Boot Camp for New Dads" training curriculum
- Fatherhood Training Curriculum developed by Johns Hopkins University in conjunction with Native American communities
- The "Long Distance Dads" curriculum designed to re-connect incarcerated fathers with their children
- With the Polk County Iowa Fatherhood Coalition, a video and workbook for inmate fathers just entering prison and those nearing release
- Training curriculum developed by Southwest Key Program for adolescent fathers in the juvenile justice system
- Training curricula for young non-custodial fathers in Latino communities developed by the Latino Fathers and Families Institute

Additional culturally relevant materials have been produced by Centro de Salud La Fe of El Paso, Texas, and American Indians in Texas, which is based in San Antonio.

**(5) It provided technical assistance** to national organizations, state governmental units, and the staff and partners in Casey's *Making Connections* locales and Civic Sites (both place-based initiatives) based on the growing knowledge about what works to improve conditions for disconnected fathers, their children, and the families in which the children are raised. Publications supported to advance this work include the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families' *A City-by-City Inventory of Services to Promote Responsible Fatherhood* and the Social Policy Action Network's *Making Connections with Fathers: A 14-City Study*. At the peak of the Foundation's *Making Connections* and Civic Site work, 9 of the 14 participating sites invested in activities to improve fathers' family involvement.

Casey's growing awareness of what works to increase the amount of fathers' financial support and involvement in their children's lives and the development of knowledge, tools and strategies that contribute to effective work has helped to build up a diverse, reliable cadre of seasoned advocates and practitioners to support the scaling up of good practice and policy. In addition to its stand-alone value, fatherhood investments have informed other Casey portfolios, including efforts to promote men's successful re-entry from incarceration and the constructive engagement of men in their neighborhoods and communities. It also applied what

it learned through Responsible Fatherhood investments to inform its healthy marriage work, and to continue efforts for the inclusion of under-attended populations.

**(6) It stayed the course.** While it was not the sole mover of the changes described below, the Casey Foundation is viewed as the one major philanthropic institution that has consistently supported Responsible Fatherhood over the 15 year period. Advocates give the Foundation credit for its commitment and longevity, as other foundations turned their attention and investments elsewhere. Casey is valued for the “big tent” approach it has taken and urged others to adopt. The strongest evidence for the value of such an approach is steady bipartisan support in Congress and state legislatures for responsible fatherhood, which in turn allows for diversified sources of funding and advocacy. As the leading and longest-standing philanthropic funder of Responsible Fatherhood work, the Foundation remains a valued thought and practice leader in the field.



## The Foundation accomplished what it set out to do.

Casey's theory of change was on target, and the Foundation realized its investment aspirations:

- The policy environment has changed dramatically.
- A strong Responsible Fatherhood field now exists to sustain progress.
- Responsible Fatherhood programs show evidence they can change men's attitudes and behaviors.
- As a result of more responsible fathering, children are better off.

Here are some of the details.

### The policy environment has changed dramatically, at all levels.

- **Significant Federal commitments have been enacted and proposed.** They span Republican and Democratic administrations and include:
  - ✓ 1995 Executive Memorandum issued to all federal agencies to include fathers in their work
  - ✓ 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which strengthened child support
  - ✓ Bipartisan Task Forces on Responsible Fatherhood, organized in the mid-1990s by the National Fatherhood Initiative, that work in the United States Senate and House to ensure that fatherhood issues remain on the legislative agenda
  - ✓ \$50M per year from 2006 to 2010 in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 that supports fathering/parenting programs
  - ✓ Creation in 2009 of the White House Task Force for Fatherhood and Healthy Families
  - ✓ Bill entitled Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 introduced in both the Senate and the House, which would add further appropriations for fatherhood initiatives.
- **Ideological conservatives, moderates, and liberals in both political parties now actively embrace responsible fatherhood as an important policy objective.** This is evidenced by the aforementioned Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 with regard to TANF reauthorization and child support enforcement. Provisions under the 2005 Responsible Fatherhood legislation included funding for relationship skill-building, financial counseling, responsible parenting training, programs to improve the economic status of fathers, a national media campaign, and a national clearinghouse for policy and practice

assistance to states and communities.<sup>19</sup> The Child Support Provisions of the Act reflect a bipartisan understanding of research showing that child support collection is less effective if payments are kept by the government rather than passed on to families. Fathers pay more support when the money goes to their children. The new rules authorize states to pay more collected child support to children in families who currently receive TANF or have received it in the past.<sup>20</sup>

- **Significant commitments now exist within states to implement fathering programs.**
  - ✓ By 1999, 98% of states had policy or programs to strengthen fathers as economic providers and 37 states had initiatives to help prevent unwanted or too-early fatherhood.<sup>21</sup> Publications supported by the Casey Foundation that enhanced this mobilization include Social Policy Action Network’s *Restoring Fathers to Families and Communities: Six Steps for Policymakers*, the National Fatherhood Initiative’s *Seven Things States Can Do to Promote Responsible Fatherhood*, the National Center for Fathering’s *Child Support Best Practices Review*, and the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families’ *A Comparative Review of State Commissions, Initiatives, and Programs Addressing Fatherhood Initiatives*.<sup>22</sup>
  - ✓ Thirty-six states have revised TANF eligibility rules to treat one- and two-parent households the same, so a father’s presence does not preclude a family’s critical financial support. Nineteen states have set up separate state-funded welfare programs for two-parent families, and Tennessee and Vermont forgive child arrearages owed to the state if parents marry or reunite.<sup>23</sup>
  - ✓ According to an August 2005 report from the General Accounting Office, 31 states reported using federal welfare funds for marriage for responsible fatherhood programs in the 2002-2004 period. States that reported funding responsible fatherhood programs most frequently supported programs that deliver services to non-custodial fathers to help them meet parental obligations.<sup>24</sup>
  - ✓ By 2003 nineteen states had chosen “pass-through” and “disregard” child support policies so that payments are forwarded directly to families without

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<sup>19</sup> P. Roberts, “The Marriage and Fatherhood Provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005,” Center for Law and Social Policy, January 9, 2005, [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

<sup>20</sup> P. Roberts, “The Child Support Provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006,” January 9, 2005, and “Backing Away from Parental Responsibility: Child Support Budget Cuts Will Unravel a Decade of Progress,” Center for Law and Social Policy, [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

<sup>21</sup> *Map and Track*, 1999 Edition, National Center for Children in Poverty.

<sup>22</sup> Available through [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org), except for the Child Support document, [www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com).

<sup>23</sup> T. Ooms et.al., “Beyond Marriage Licenses,” Center for Law and Social Policy, April, 2004, [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

<sup>24</sup> K. Sylvester, “Fathers and Families: Foundation Investment Summary,” November, 2005. Unpublished, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

reducing TANF benefits.<sup>25</sup> By 2007, half of all states passed through at least some support to families.<sup>26</sup>

- ✓ Over 300 correctional agencies and 40% of all Head Start programs have developed core fatherhood programs as central components of their work.
  
- **Emerging local involvement has expanded capacity.** Beyond stand-alone Responsible Fatherhood programs, local activity continues to grow. Almost 100 local foundations have invested in Responsible Fatherhood. Publications supported by Casey that enhanced this mobilization include CCFY's *Fathers Matter 2001: What Community Foundations Can Do* and *Policy Matters to Fathers and Families: A Tool for Community Foundations*.<sup>27</sup> A Municipality and County Task Force on Responsible Fatherhood was launched, starting with a 25-locality capacity-building effort.<sup>28</sup> YMCA-USA has made Responsible Fatherhood a national priority, for which it will develop practical guides and tools to enable its affiliates around the country to undertake informed Responsible Fatherhood programming.
  
- **Consistent bipartisan support has existed** for federal legislation and state initiatives. Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations advanced Responsible Fatherhood, the former most notably through the 1995 Executive Memorandum and the latter through the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act. The Obama Administration's White House Task Force for Fatherhood and Healthy Families signals the ongoing Presidential commitment to the promotion of Responsible Fatherhood.
  
- **Improved media imagery has produced a better policy climate.** Analyses of print media and broadcast news show a noted shift from the mid-90s image of "deadbeat dads" and fractured families to "dead broke dads" and then "engaged dads" today.<sup>29</sup> More accurate print and broadcast media coverage about responsible fatherhood increased with the emergence of pro-fatherhood initiatives, identifiable leaders of the responsible fatherhood movement who could be contacted as sources, and the infusion of fatherhood issues into political debates and campaigns.

By the late 1990s print media and broadcast news had shifted their focus from fathers as problems to a focus on what it takes to be a responsible father<sup>30</sup>. Two studies funded by the Casey Foundation examined whether and how media portrayal of fathers has

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<sup>25</sup> [www.nccp.org/pub\\_csi04.html](http://www.nccp.org/pub_csi04.html)

<sup>26</sup> V. Turetsky, "Restored Federal Funding Needed to Implement New Child Support Pass-Through Options," CLASP, January 28, 2008. <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0393.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> [www.ccfy.org](http://www.ccfy.org)

<sup>28</sup> <http://municipal.fatherhood.org/about.asp>

<sup>29</sup> Trost, op.cit.; Jamin Warren, "Media and the State of Fatherhood," *Father Facts 5*, Fifth Edition, National Fatherhood Institute, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> C. Trost, "News media images of fathers" and "Broadcast news media images of fathers," Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.

changed over time.<sup>31</sup> The first examined six national news publications (*Newsweek*, *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *USA Today*, *Ebony*, and *Emerge*) from 1985-2002, and the second studied five national television networks and one public radio network (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, public TV's "The News Hour," and NPR; Fox News Channel did not have enough news coverage archived to produce a meaningful sample) from 1992 to 2003. Among the key findings are these:

- ✓ For the print media, 1995 seemed to be a turning point in the coverage of fathers when the quantity of coverage reached its peak and the quality of the stories began shifting to greater complexity.
- ✓ Print media coverage shifted from a predominant focus prior to 1995 on deadbeat dads, fatherlessness, and fractured families to a "redemptive theme" firmly in place by the late 1990s wherein a majority of stories focused on promoting fatherhood and the challenges and barriers to being a good father. Findings from demonstrations like Partners for Fragile Families were pivotal in changing perceptions about fathers away from the stereotype of "deadbeat dads" to the more accurate portrayal of "dead broke dads."<sup>32</sup>
- ✓ Broadcast news took longer than print media to produce more complex reportage about fathers that went beyond the issue of fatherlessness and battles over child support. Since 1998, however, stories in this medium that focus on responsible fathering have been roughly equal to those focused on fathers as problems.
- ✓ Both print and broadcast media coverage about responsible fatherhood increased as foundations began to fund pro-fatherhood initiatives, new fatherhood groups held summits and created a media buzz around new issues, identifiable leaders of the responsible fatherhood movement emerged who could be contacted as sources, and fatherhood issues infused political debates and campaigns.
- ✓ The challenge remains for media coverage to give sufficient attention and complex analysis to low-income fathers in the manner that they now do with regard to middle-class fathers. Nevertheless, they have gotten much better in the last decade.
- ✓ A 2000 study of father portrayal on prime time television by the National Fatherhood Initiative showed the majority of TV fathers married to the mothers of their children but less involved in family than mothers.<sup>33</sup> Five years later another source (the third and most recent study of prime time television by the Parents Television Council) concluded that "television shows are increasingly showing more fathers who are involved in their children's lives." Their study focused on evening programming on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, UPN, PAX, and WB.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> C. Miller & V. Knox, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children*, MDRC, November, 2001, [www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org).

<sup>33</sup> Communication from Roland Warren, July, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> "Father's Day Special Report," [www.parentstv.org/ptc/publications/reports/fathersday/main.asp](http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/publications/reports/fathersday/main.asp), 7/1/05.

- **Responsible fatherhood work has gone “mainstream.”** Findings from a study of fatherhood programs in the Oakland, California, area<sup>35</sup> emphasize that agendas that are integrated into “mainstream” organizations have a better chance of surviving budgetary and public opinion downturns than do stand-alone enterprises. In other words, it is critical for fatherhood issues to be taken up by longstanding advocacy and practitioner groups who have predictable funding streams and a deeply-rooted policy presence. Casey has paid attention to this particular dimension of *influence* by investing in efforts to support and educate such allies to give priority to fatherhood. Over 300 correctional agencies, 40% of all Head Start programs, and family practice organizations in at least 11 states have developed core fatherhood programs as central components of their work. Head Start created a Male and Father Involvement Initiative and has developed a Father Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning tool. The highly respected National Fatherhood Initiative has developed specialized curricula for both incarcerated fathers and men who have children in Head Start programs to increase their involvement with their children and enhance their parenting skills. As already mentioned, the national YMCA has made Responsible Fatherhood a strategic priority, with the potential for its affiliates around the country to take up the work. These efforts complement the hundreds of stand-alone fatherhood programs that developed early in the history of the fatherhood movement. By virtue of being housed within organizations whose funding is reliable and predictable, the mainstreaming of fatherhood work strengthens its prospects for sustainability.
- **The healthy marriages and marriage promotion agenda receives strength from the complementary responsible fatherhood field.** Some of the research in which Casey has invested shows that the norm of marriage is highly embraced within low-income communities. It has also revealed that the “magic moment” when a child is born and the “daddy moment” of a typical father’s engagement in the child’s first two or three years are the most opportune times to provide supports for unwed fathers so that they can envision the possibility of a healthy marriage. The fatherhood field’s ability to re-center dislocated fathers within the family constellation and communicate the enormous value of fathers for their families opened up the political and conversational space for men, and especially low-income men, to be taken seriously in family policy. That accomplished, the desirability of marriage is the next logical policy issue. Responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage issues are complementary emphases focused on the greater family good.<sup>36</sup> The fatherhood movement and the now crystallized fatherhood field created the conditions whereby marriage advocates could advance their cause with low-income families.

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<sup>35</sup> NCOFF, *Bay Area Fatherhood Initiatives: Policy and Practitioner Perspectives on Integrating Fathering Efforts*, 2003, [www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu](http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu).

<sup>36</sup> Mathematica’s conceptual framework on healthy marriage reinforces this point: R. Dion et.al., *Helping Unwed Parents Build Strong and Healthy Marriages: A Conceptual Framework For Interventions*, Mathematica Policy Research, January 2003, [www.mathematica-mpr.com](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com).

## A strong Responsible Fatherhood field now exists to sustain progress.

**A robust and respected Responsible Fatherhood infrastructure provides a platform for the work.** The Annie E. Casey Foundation has been *the* reliable funder in the development of important, well-regarded, impartial institutions for the responsible fatherhood field. These investments have produced a core set of institutional leaders who are respected and viewed as impartial advocates and reliable sources of information by elected officials and government agencies at all levels of operation. The CEOs of three of the groups to which Casey has provided support now sit on the White House Task Force for Fatherhood and Healthy Families.

In 2005 the Foundation convened these leaders and a few other strong allies into a National Fatherhood Leaders Group -- a network of strategic field-shaping organizations -- for the purpose of information-sharing, collaborative agenda-setting, and greater coordination of efforts. A group called Women in Fatherhood, begun in 2006 through the efforts of the Casey Foundation, is an important nationally-focused ally in the work.

Earlier research, analyses, practical products, and core lessons funded in part by the Casey Foundation have provided a strong base on which the National Clearinghouse funded under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 is able to build. Other critical achievements in knowledge development include the sheer growth in the number of studies on fathers, the inclusion of men in parenting studies, and a greater emphasis on practice issues by researchers.

## Evidence from rigorous evaluations of Responsible Fatherhood programs shows that men's attitudes and behaviors are changing.

When the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse applied its most stringent criteria for program evaluation -- which required random assignments and control groups, with sufficient sample size to generalize -- it found that Responsible Fatherhood programs have the following impact:

- Young men are more likely to **use contraception** regularly.<sup>37</sup>
- Fathers and mothers report fathers' **improved co-parenting**.<sup>38</sup>
- Fathers have more engagement and stronger **relationships with their children**.<sup>39</sup>
- Young men are more likely to develop **vocational plans** and obtain **employment**.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> E.g., Young Dads, New York City,

<http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/fatherhd/Blob/62423.pdf?w=NATIVE%28%27BASIC+ph+is+%27%27Promising+Practice+Reports%27%27+AND+AUTHORS+ph+like+%27%27National+Responsible+Fatherhood+Clearin+ghouse%27%27%27%29&upp=0&rpp=-10&order=native%28%27year%27Descend%27%29&r=1&m=3>

<sup>38</sup> Minnesota Early Learning,

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ798228&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ798228](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ798228&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ798228)

<sup>39</sup> E.g., A Prenatal Education Intervention,

<http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/fatherhd/Blob/62423.pdf?w=NATIVE%28%27BASIC+ph+is+%27%27Promising+Practice+Reports%27%27+AND+AUTHORS+ph+like+%27%27National+Responsible+Fatherhood+Clearin+ghouse%27%27%27%29&upp=0&rpp=-10&order=native%28%27year%27Descend%27%29&r=1&m=3>

Considerable evidence apart from these rigorously implemented and evaluated programs shows that Responsible Fatherhood programs matter for improving workforce opportunities, parenting skills and responsibility, and relational skills. Their effectiveness is optimized when they offer an initial needs assessment and case management, provide an array of services delivered in interactive ways, involve mentoring, are staffed by culturally respectful and empathetic individuals, and offer incentives for participation.<sup>41</sup>

The past fifteen years have taught the fatherhood field a number of important lessons,<sup>42</sup> including the confirmation that being a father is very important to non-resident fathers. Relational and fathering skills, as well as financial sufficiency, are important ingredients for demonstrating Responsible Fatherhood. Still, low-income fathers in particular, and especially fathers of color, face considerable employment barriers as they seek to do well by their children. The local community's economic vitality is crucial for positive employment prospects for young men. Beyond this knowledge, a large number of soon-to-be completed programmatic evaluations<sup>43</sup> of fathering programs promise to teach the field a lot more.

### **Children are better off as a result.**

While no single organization can take credit for the significant changes that have occurred with regard to father involvement since the Casey Foundation began its investments in the mid-1990s, these changes nevertheless demonstrate the collective accomplishments of the Responsible Fatherhood field – for which the Foundation has been a reliable supporter and investor.

- **The share of low-income children living without a father present dropped from 50% in 1995 to 42% in 2006.**<sup>44</sup>
- **The proportion of teenage women giving birth dropped from 58/1,000 to 42/1,000,<sup>45</sup> and repeat teen births declined by 20% between 1990 and halfway into the first decade of 2000.**<sup>46</sup>
- **Significantly more children now have paternity established -- from 64% in 1998 to 90% in 2007.**<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> E.g., Young Dads, op.cit.

<sup>41</sup> J. Bronte-Tinkew et.al., Elements of Promising Practice in Teen Fatherhood Programs, August, 2008, available at [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov).

<sup>42</sup> Urban Institute, *Ten Key Findings from Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives*, February, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Knox et.al., *Policies that Strengthen Fatherhood and Family Relationships: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?* August 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Data from 1995 and 2006, respectively. Source: [http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/tables/4\\_Table\\_2.htm](http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/tables/4_Table_2.htm)

<sup>45</sup> Data from 1995 and 2006, respectively. Source: [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr57/nvsr57\\_07.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr57/nvsr57_07.pdf), Table 4, ages 10-19.

<sup>46</sup> Compares rates for 1990 and 2004, Child Trends, [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2007\\_10\\_25\\_RB\\_Repeat.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_10_25_RB_Repeat.pdf).

- **Resources are available for more children because of significant movement toward a “culture of compliance” in child support collection rates -- from 20% in 1996 to 54% in 2006.<sup>48</sup>**

The latter statistic is all the more impressive when understood within the context that the employment rate for men ages 18-24 with only a high school diploma was stagnant in the 1990s for whites and Hispanics and actually declined for African Americans. Average wages for members of these same groups who could find work, however, were up slightly in the decade (but still below 1979 wages).<sup>49</sup> These data reflect a basic point: if given a chance, a lot of fathers will do the right thing for their children.

Another important point to emphasize is that funding spent on federal child support collection is cost-effective. The child support program collects \$4.73 in support payments for families for every public dollar spent.<sup>50</sup>

The Foundation feels confident that its work will be sustained well beyond the Foundation’s financial support for the field, thanks to the climate about fathers it has helped turn around, the bipartisan political support it has helped forge, the organizational infrastructure it has helped build, and the growing evidenced-based practice it has helped nurture. It has learned from the work on Responsible Fatherhood, as it has in other investment areas, the power that comes from advocating for a big tent, leading with data, and staying the course on issues that are crucial to successful outcomes for struggling children and families. The return on investments in Responsible Fatherhood is nothing short of a stronger nation — for generations to come.

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<sup>47</sup> Data from 1998 and 2007, respectively. Source: Center for Law & Social Policy.

<sup>48</sup> Data from 1996 and 2006, respectively. Source: Center for Law & Social Policy.

<sup>49</sup> E. Richer et.al., *Boom Times a Bust: Declining Employment Among Less-Educated Young Men*, Center for Law and Social Policy, July, 2003, [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

<sup>50</sup> [www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0450.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0450.pdf).



## Epilogue

Since the 15-year review was written, the Foundation's Responsible Fatherhood portfolio continues to see a committed policy environment for this work, regardless of the extended recession. In the first two years of the Obama Administration, the Task Force on Fatherhood and Healthy Families of the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships has issued recommendations for advancing fatherhood in America<sup>51</sup> and the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 has been introduced into both the House and the Senate. The proposed legislation seeks to advance much of the groundwork that has been laid by the Responsible Fatherhood field, such as:

- ✓ ensuring that support payments go to children and families and do not result in loss of food assistance for eligible families,
- ✓ expanding fatherhood services to the formerly incarcerated,
- ✓ funding adult literacy initiatives and job training programs for fathers.

It is written to provide states with an infrastructure to:

- ✓ offer court-supervised employment for fathers at risk of incarceration due to failure to make child support payments
- ✓ provide transitional job programs for ex-offenders and other disproportionately unemployed populations
- ✓ restore cuts in federal child support and require states to pass through 100% of collected child support payments
- ✓ ensure equal funding for programs such as mediation and conflict resolution, financial literacy and employment services.

Further, it proposes to:

- ✓ expand the Earned Income Tax Credit by reducing marriage penalties and increasing EITC for "no-child" and noncustodial parents
- ✓ adjust the Food Stamp program to assure that child support payments do not result in loss of food assistance for families who depend on payments by non-custodial parents
- ✓ provide funding for partnerships between domestic violence prevention organizations and fatherhood or marriage programs to train staff in domestic violence services and provide services to families affected by domestic violence, while developing best practices in domestic violence prevention.

In June, 2010 Casey's Executive Vice President, Ralph Smith, was invited to testify before the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support of the House Ways and Means

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/partnerships-fatherhood-healthy-families.pdf>

Committee about the effectiveness of Responsible Fatherhood Programs for improving the well-being of children and families. In that testimony he recounted the bipartisan support that has fueled the history and the progress of the Responsible Fatherhood movement. The same bipartisan support was evident from the panel that testified, with all participants enjoining Congress to take steps to ensure that fathers have the jobs and the supports they need in order to fulfill their responsibilities to their children. This moment crystallized the influence the Responsible Fatherhood field has achieved in just two decades, as well as the next steps the work must take to strengthen the nation's families. The Annie E. Casey Foundation for 15 years has done its part to help set that course.