

CONNECTS

CASEY

FALL 2000
A REPORT FROM THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: Team Specializes in Tailor-Made Technical Assistance; FAMILIES COUNT Honorees Share Experiences; Putting KIDS COUNT Network to Work for Families; A Note of Recognition; INSITES

FOUNDATION TEAM SPECIALIZES IN TAILOR-MADE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

When Diane Arnold was asked to help greet students on their first day of school at the new Washington Middle School in Indianapolis, she knew just what she would wear.

Her T-shirt read “1927-1995 Washington Continentals: The Legacy Ends, the Legacy Lives On,” and the last time Arnold wore it, what was then Washington High School was closing its doors, another casualty in a whole cluster of neighborhood schools forced to shut down due to declining enrollments and court-ordered busing.

“It was nice to be able to wear this T-shirt today and say indeed the legacy does live on because this school is reopening,” says Arnold, executive director of the 75-year-old Hawthorne Community Center and a proud member of the Washington High School Alumni Club. Arnold and others fought long and hard to make this dream a reality. But the way their dream took shape directly reflects what they learned through a new brand of



JOHN GENTRY

help being offered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Foundation’s Technical Assistance/Resource Center, known as TARC, is a growing team of Casey staff members and consultants who provide customized strategies for the 22 *Making Connections* sites. It specializes in pairing people who have a vision for change with others who have experience making change happen.

“Our goal is to help people, especially neighborhood leaders, learn about things they want to know in order to accomplish their goals,” said Frank Farrow, who directs TARC and is also director of the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

In Indianapolis, when a federal judge lifted the desegregation order that had

Two alumni, the school principal, a community leader, and a board member join in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Washington Middle School.

shut down the schools, a group of citizens pushing for neighborhood schools sprang into action. Donna Stark, site team leader for the Indianapolis *Making Connections* initiative, heard about the Westside Education Task Force while meeting with Olgen Williams, a community activist who heads Christamore House, another multiservice community center that has been in the neighborhood since 1905.

Williams shared the task force’s vision of a school designed and planned in partnership with residents to serve as a learning center and support system for the community. Stark knew other schools in the country had charted a similar path, and she knew just where

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

These discussions demonstrated HOW SIMILAR OUR WORK IS, even though we use very different approaches.

FAMILIES COUNT HONOREES SHARE FAMILY-STRENGTHENING EXPERIENCES

FAMILIES COUNT: The National Honors Program, an awards program launched last year by the Casey Foundation, celebrated the accomplishments of local organizations working to strengthen families and build supportive neighborhoods. In August, the Foundation brought the first group of honorees together for two days of celebration, reflection, and sharing of community-building ideas.

Reflecting on their work in a series of sessions in the relaxed surroundings of Aspen, Colorado, the honorees displayed a rare blend of inspired and charismatic leadership, dedication, persistence, and idealism.

Jim Joseph, former ambassador to South Africa and former head of the Council on Foundations, quoted social reformer John Dewey by noting: "I'm a pessimist in the short run and an optimist in the long run." In unison, heads nodded around the table, silent acknowledgment that the work of each honoree was fraught with difficulties—but ultimately paid off in results.

Leaders and key staff members from six of the seven honorees took part in the gathering, including Abriendo Puertas of East Little Havana, Miami; Kaleidoscope, Inc., of Chicago; Community Action Project of Tulsa; Parent Services Project of Fairfax,

California; Center for Family Life in Sunset Park of Brooklyn, New York; and Alliance Schools Initiative of Austin, Texas. Project Match of Chicago was unable to attend.

The agenda featured the debut of a film highlighting the work of these organizations, a presentation on social marketing, and a discussion on immigrant and refugee issues around the forthcoming documentary "The New Americans."

Robert Goodwin, president of the Points of Light Foundation, surprised the honorees by bestowing them with special Presidential Awards. Ambassador Joseph spoke on the role of nonprofit and faith-based organizations in community building and on the need for periodic self-renewal by individuals engaged in family and neighborhood strengthening.

The gathering was designed to help the honorees form their own network and contribute to a national movement supporting the Foundation's family- and neighborhood-strengthening agenda.

"These discussions were remarkable to me because they demonstrated how similar our work is, even though we use very different approaches," said Karl Dennis, director of Kaleidoscope.

Each honoree will receive a total of \$500,000 over three years from the Casey Foundation. The class of 2001 FAMILIES COUNT honorees, to be selected through an internal Foundation process, will be announced during National Family Week next month.



Center for Family Life in Sunset Park's Sister Mary Paul accepts Points of Light award from Ambassador Jim Joseph at Aspen FAMILIES COUNT conference.



Young people from five community-based organizations in New York that work with youth facing challenges recently attended a one-man performance of *Manchild in the Promised Land*, a play based on Claude Brown's acclaimed book. Brown appeared at the performance as part of his work to mark the 100th anniversary of the Juvenile

Court and to press for maintaining and improving a separate system of justice for young people. Brown is a former juvenile delinquent who benefited from the Juvenile Court's early focus on protection and rehabilitation. Zakia Carter, who attended the performance, asked Brown to sign her mother's 35-year-old copy of *Manchild*.

PUTTING OUR KIDS COUNT NETWORK TO WORK FOR FAMILIES

Families need connections in order to thrive. And we need our network of KIDS COUNT grantees in order to connect families to the support, help, and opportunities they need to raise healthy, happy, and productive children.

That was the thrust of Tony Cipollone's opening message at the KIDS COUNT Annual Meeting in Denver last month. An essay from Casey Foundation President Doug Nelson in this year's KIDS COUNT report made the case that poor families simply don't benefit from the same connections that more affluent families take for granted.

These include connections to jobs and economic opportunity; supportive

networks of friends and institutions; and high-quality education, health care, child care, and other public services.

Cipollone, Casey's director of evaluation, data analysis, and policy advocacy, expounded on these themes in his remarks at the conference. He enlisted the help of KIDS COUNT grantees in helping to promote policies that foster these connections.

"This is where we see the increasing value and contribution of the KIDS COUNT network—as a real partner for helping us advance a meaningful and realistic family-strengthening policy agenda," Cipollone said.

Cipollone stressed that the work KIDS COUNT was designed to do is more important than ever, given the Foundation's increased emphasis on helping communities learn to use data on the condition of children and families as a tool for policy advocacy. To help the grantees carry out KIDS COUNT's basic mission, the Foundation plans to increase its KIDS COUNT grants and provide technical support to help grantees more effectively communicate, analyze data, and build up their organizations.

In addition, Cipollone said, the Foundation is looking at ways to provide additional support to KIDS COUNT

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

to go to connect the folks in Indianapolis with examples they could learn from.

TARC entertains these kinds of requests from site team leaders through a “help desk” approach, which draws on Casey’s technical assistance network, internal expertise, and research capability to find models for folks who are working to address a particular community issue.

Caroline Gaston, a member of the TARC team with expertise in education, arranged for a contingent of Indianapolis citizens, parents, and a school board member to visit two schools in New York City operated in a partnership with the Children’s Aid Society and one that is part of the Beacon Schools program. She also invited a Baltimore school with an exemplary approach to join the group. The visit helped the Indianapolis folks see firsthand how communities can work with school systems to turn schools into centers of family and community life.

“It was very edifying for us to share some of our concerns and hear about their successes,” said Arnold.

TARC continued to support citizens and the school system in a number of ways, from funding a retreat that gave all parties a chance to air their concerns to staging conference calls between task force members, school officials, TARC staff, and New York program officials. TARC has also arranged for the school’s new principal and members of her staff to travel to New York to learn more about school-community partnerships.

Such pairings, called “peer matches” in TARC lingo, are an integral part of the Foundation’s technical assistance strategy. Since its inception last year, TARC has arranged matches addressing a wide range of neighborhood issues—from tackling crime to addressing health needs to helping make city services more responsive—all with an eye to strengthening families.

TARC also publishes resource guides, is designing a resource bank that will be on the Foundation’s website, and helps connect *Making Connections* sites with national consultants. TARC looks for opportunities to bring people from the sites together so they can compare notes. Another aspect of its work involves helping technical assistance providers in education, health, and child welfare tailor their work to promote family and neighborhood strengthening.

“Attempting to get all of our site partners to view their work through a family-strengthening lens is a huge job,” says Susan Batten, a TARC member who also heads the Providence *Making Connections* team.

TARC’s approach to technical assistance is very much demand-driven. “We’re really talking to people about their needs and trying to design strategies to fit them,” says Bill Shepardson, who runs TARC’s help desk and is based at the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

The team—which has expanded from three people to a far-flung group of 13—meets regularly to mull over requests flowing into the help desk. “Everyone brainstorms about how to fill that request, so that even if it isn’t one you brought to the table, you learn from it,” notes Beth Leeson, a TARC team member who works with the Des Moines and San Antonio *Making Connections* sites.

TARC is working to make sure everyone who works on the Foundation’s technical assistance strategy is skilled at helping people work on “core” principles of *Making Connections*, such as resident engagement; family strengthening; and addressing issues of race, class, culture, and power. But the ultimate goal is to help equip sites to provide their own technical assistance. “We’re determined to find, develop, and invest in local skills and gifts,” notes Leeson.



One component of TARC’s work is a set of Resource Guides offering the Foundation’s perspective on particular issues; summarizing key trends in the field; highlighting examples; and pointing to people, organizations, and materials to turn to for additional help.

The following guides have been published so far:
Improving Health Care for Children and Families
Connecting Families to Jobs
Child Care for Communities
Building Family Assets
Community Safety and Justice
Building More Effective Community Schools

Other guides in progress will cover such issues as resident engagement, housing, data use, family support, communications, neighborhood service delivery, neighborhood economic development, faith communities, domestic violence, outcomes accountability, intergroup relations, policy advocacy, and community organizing. For more information, contact Cheryl Clark, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul St., Baltimore, MD 21202; 410.223.2952.

A NOTE OF RECOGNITION

- The Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative in Camden has earned a local "best practices" award from the New Jersey Office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The awards recognize initiatives that bring local organizations, service providers, and housing officials together to find "innovative ways to solve old problems."
- St. Joseph's Carpenters Society, a non-profit organization in Camden, has received the President's Service Award. The group, which buys and refurbishes old homes to sell at affordable prices, has remodeled and sold 220 homes since 1985. It also offers programs to teach new home buyers budgeting skills. The award, sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation and the Corporation for National Service, is one of the nation's top honors for volunteer service. St. Joseph's Carpenters Society is part of the Camden Development Collaborative, which received a \$100,000 *Making Connections* grant last year.
- Lynette Lee, executive director of the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation in Oakland, California, was recently awarded a Fannie Mae Fellowship in recognition of her work in community building. Lee will devote part of her fellowship time contributing her skills in land acquisition and building development to an initiative to establish "small schools" in the San Antonio neighborhood, the target neighborhood for *Making Connections* in Oakland.
- The International Congress of Distinguished Awards is including the Casey Foundation's FAMILIES COUNT: The National Honors Program in its 2000 Official Roster of Distinguished Awards. FAMILIES COUNT recognizes community organizations doing exemplary work to improve the odds for vulnerable families.
- Too many children aren't being heard in the political process because their parents don't vote, suggests a recent article by William O'Hare, the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT coordinator. In an article published in the October issue of *Population Today*, the monthly newsletter of the Population Reference Bureau, O'Hare analyzes parental voting patterns and concludes that parents disconnected from the mainstream by virtue of poverty, lack of education, and other socioeconomic factors are less likely to participate in politics, decreasing the odds that their children's interests will be represented.
- Children's economic circumstances improve more substantially when parents remarry after a divorce than they do when parents simply live with someone, suggests an article co-authored by Amy Ritualo, a research associate at the Casey Foundation. The article, published in the August issue of *American Sociological Review*, cites longitudinal data showing that cohabitation restores families to pre-divorce income levels as effectively as remarriage, but that these families don't do as well in the long term because they're generally poorer to start with and the support a nonmarried partner provides isn't enough to lift the family out of poverty.



The Déjà Vu Dancers, a group of teenage dancers organized by Creative Visions in Des Moines, performed at a recent "Connections Count" forum to discuss the Foundation's efforts to promote family and community strengthening. The Foundation is holding a series of these forums in *Making Connections* cities.

FENDRAS PHOTOGRAPHY



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KIDS COUNT NETWORK
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

grantees that “broaden their reach in ways that better enable them to focus on families as well as kids, and on counties and neighborhoods as well as states.”

A small group of KIDS COUNT grantees has already been working with the Foundation to draft recommendations for a policy platform that promotes family strengthening. Cipollone urged grantees to keep working individually and collectively to foster policies that:

- Help poor and working families garner good jobs, affordable housing, and savings and assets;
- Promote neighborhood safety, better health care coverage, and more child care and after-school programs;
- Improve transportation, education, access to technology, and recreational opportunities.

In a panel discussion on family strengthening moderated by Jim Gibson of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, Carl Dunst of the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute offered innovative ideas for using data differently to frame the debate around creating opportunities for families rather than preventing poor outcomes.

Irv Garfinkel of Columbia University cited data from a national survey on families that debunked stereotypical myths about lack of father involvement in poor communities. And Laura Lein of the University of Texas at Austin offered concrete examples of how sub-par neighborhood conditions affect families’ ability to nurture their children.

It was clear from the discussions and from materials displayed by KIDS COUNT grantees that many of them have been using their work to spotlight the importance of supporting families in order to improve child outcomes.

Delaware’s KIDS COUNT materials offer a list of actions families and communities can take to improve conditions for children and urges people to “use this book to identify problems and mobilize citizens.” And a Hawaii KIDS COUNT publication includes a whole chapter on “social conditions and community engagement,” charting such data as the percent of adults who feel they can rely on another person in their community for help, the percent of families eating together every day or most of the time, and the number of times per week children are in contact with an extended family member.