

CONNECTS

CASEY

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A REPORT FROM THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: Sharing Strategies for Using Data; MC³ Meeting Puts the Pieces Together; Conference Assesses Welfare Reform; Resource Corner; INSITES



ISAAC JONES

ANNA DEAVERE SMITH, an acclaimed playwright, actor, author, and teacher, spoke at the Foundation March 26 and performed at Center Stage. Smith, who uses interviews, story telling, and acting to dramatize controversial events, is particularly interested in using the arts to engage communities in addressing social issues. Her most recent book is *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines*.

SHARING STRATEGIES FOR USING DATA IN MAKING CONNECTIONS

The ultimate goal of the Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative is to improve the odds of success for children and families living in challenging neighborhoods. To do that, we need multiple sources of data to track the conditions that contribute to child, family, and neighborhood well-being.

But our data agenda in *Making Connections* goes well beyond evaluating the success of this work. It is driven by a fundamental belief that neighborhoods need to be able to produce, interpret, and use data effectively in order to both understand and influence the forces that shape their destinies.

Key to helping people develop this capacity in *Making Connections* is a special entity known as the Local Learning Partnership. Local Learning Partnerships are diverse groups of organizations, institutions, community leaders, and residents being assembled in the 22 sites to help shape the local agenda for using data.

On March 28–30, the Casey Foundation sponsored the first gathering specifically designed to bring members of these partnerships from the different cities together. The meeting drew about 180 people, including

researchers and policymakers, practitioners and scholars, ethnographers and demographers, statisticians and civic leaders, preachers and teachers. Although they hailed from varied backgrounds and locales, participants had a unifying force: their firm belief in the power of data to help people learn and bring about positive changes in their communities.

“The most successful Local Learning Partnerships will be those whose agendas are driven by data users, rather than providers,” noted Tony Cipollone, director of the Foundation's Evaluation, Data Analysis, and Policy Advocacy unit, which convened the meeting.

The meeting was designed to help the Local Learning Partners come away

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Participants in the Local Learning Partnership meeting en route to a reception at the American Visionary Art Museum.



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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.



From bottom left to top right: Sarah Morgan, Debbie Chase and her daughter Rachel, Edgar Cahn, and Manuel Gutierrez participate in a small group discussion at the MC³ meeting.

These players have taken on a wide range of responsibilities, from serving as key local contacts and coordinators to documenting the role of the site team leaders to helping steer the sites' agendas for acquiring and using data.

The February 5–9 *Making Connections* Consultants Conference, informally called MC³, was designed to help all these players understand the rationale, values, goals, strategy, and components of the initiative so they can help carry a consistent message. More than 250 people attended.

“We wanted to use this opportunity to create a strong network of practitioners to provide ongoing support and capacity, we wanted to create time and space for reflection, and we wanted to create an energy and synergy about the work,” said Casey Foundation Vice President Ralph Smith.

Besides helping local consultants charged with various tasks understand their roles, an important goal was to help form a cadre of people who are better equipped to contribute to a national movement on behalf of strong families and neighborhoods.

Making Connections focuses on generating local momentum, energy, expertise, and will in the

MC³ MEETING PUTS THE PIECES TOGETHER FOR LOCAL PLAYERS

A variety of local actors in *Making Connections* cities had the chance to meet and begin forming their own network at a recent five-day retreat.

In keeping with the initiative's goal of drawing on local talent and leadership to assume ownership and sustain this work on a long-term basis, Foundation-based site teams assigned to the 22 cities have increasingly relied on local people to keep important aspects of the work moving.



The MC³ Resource Café featured a colorful collection of displays showcasing work going on in each of the 22 sites, sprinkled with artifacts of local history, culture, and commerce. The Café also offered on-line information and tools from the Foundation's Technical Assistance Resource Center, a sampling of Foundation publications, and on-line library reference services.

22 sites, but it is part of a much larger body of work designed to spur a national commitment to improve children's lives by strengthening their families and neighborhoods.

The conference featured presentations and conversations on the history, theory, premises, and goals of *Making Connections* as well as its strategies for connecting families to the opportunities, networks, and support they need.

"In our view, the vulnerability of America's most at-risk families can be most usefully and constructively grasped if it's understood in terms of the social, economic, and political isolation that these families in tough neighborhoods live with every day," said Casey Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson.

The meeting offered reflections from people involved in specific *Making Connections* sites and opportunities for participants with different and similar roles to discuss what they were learning. Electronic polling was used to gauge how well people understood *Making Connections* themes, and by the end, many more reported feeling comfortable and ready to be effective message bearers.

"I got lots of ideas and suggestions for how to move forward," said Patrick McGuigan, a member of the Local Learning Partnership in Providence (see story, page 1). "It was an impressive group of people with a lot of experience who were able to share their lessons."

Several participants said the meeting helped them understand how their work contributes to *Making Connections* and to the larger mission to refocus the national debate on child poverty.

Sherece West, a program associate at the Foundation who is on the Baltimore, Boston, Denver, and Philadelphia teams, said what meant most to her was "getting a sense of what's going on in the other communities—meeting them, understanding their challenges and how they are not so different from ours."

"It's good to know we're all in it together," she said.

CONFERENCE TAKES STOCK OF WELFARE REFORM'S IMPACT

Despite the RANGE
OF PERSPECTIVES,
there was consider-
able COMMON
GROUND about
what has changed
under welfare reform.

For two days in February, standing-room-only crowds debated how to fine-tune the revolution that began nearly five years ago when Congress passed reforms to end welfare as we knew it.

The sometimes academic, sometimes heated debate took place at a policy summit organized by the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The conference, *The New World of Welfare Reform: An Agenda for Reauthorization and Beyond*, drew some 875 people to Washington, D.C., including state budget directors, academics, social workers, county officials, Navajo Nation leaders, legal services attorneys, government research and policy staff, think tank scholars, and welfare recipients and their advocates.

The summit provided a forum for some of the leading researchers in the welfare policy field to analyze the data and discuss their implications for public policy as Congress prepares to reauthorize the legislation that unleashed a sea change in the way this country responds to its poorest citizens.

The interest reflects the importance of the social experiment being conducted with the country's social safety net. It is elevated by a new administration, by headlines predicting an economic downturn, and by the potential consequences welfare reform will have for lives in the balance.

In addition to researchers and policy specialists, the conference drew about 60 grassroots activists, including current and former welfare recipients, who disrupted targeted speakers, adding volume and some tension to the already lively scholarly exchange that predominated.

Despite the range of perspectives, there was considerable common ground about what has changed during the past five years. There was widespread agreement that "the culture of welfare has been transformed," as Susan Golonka of the National Governors' Association put it. Decision making has been transferred from the federal government to the states and counties. Recipients have heard the message that they must work and prepare for the day when welfare will no longer be an option.

The number of families receiving welfare has dropped every year since 1995, and there have been dramatic increases in female labor force participation, particularly among single mothers and less-skilled women such as high school dropouts.

Has the shift from welfare to work reduced poverty? Ron Haskins, a long-time congressional staffer who now works with the Brookings Institution and the Casey Foundation and helped organize the conference with Rebecca Blank of the Ford School, said increased government spending on child care, Medicaid, children's health insurance, and the Earned Income Tax Credit helped the second-lowest-fifth of earners make up for the loss of welfare and food stamps and come out ahead overall.

But, in some years, welfare benefits fell more than earnings rose for the bottom fifth of earners, some of whom were worse off after leaving welfare. Wendell Primus of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated there are 700,000 families—as many as 2.5 million people—in this category. Researchers also called attention to other problems associated with the loss of welfare, such as increases in homelessness and hunger, unsupervised children, untreated illnesses, and mental health issues. They also noted that a weaker economy could undermine the gains in employment made since 1996 under welfare reform.

Are children better off? Data on the effects of welfare reform on children are not definitive, suggested Greg Duncan, a professor at Northwestern University. But available research suggests that the age of the child and the kind of care available to children while their parents work are factors. “An obvious recommendation here is to provide after-school programs for adolescents as well as child care for young kids,” he said.

Duncan also cited data showing child outcomes were better in states that supplemented the earnings of former welfare recipients with additional financial incentives that increased total income.

The activists who staged the protests objected in particular to the views of Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute, known for his controversial writings on issues such as illegitimacy and race. Murray and other speakers discussed the effects of out-of-wedlock births on welfare issues and what can be done to help young people succeed and improve job prospects for African-American males.

Lawrence Mead, a professor at New York University, said welfare reauthorization should stay focused primarily on work. The public “would like two-parent families to be the norm, but there is not a desire to enforce the norm,” he said.

Although they disagreed on solutions to many of the challenges raised at the conference, researchers agreed the following items should be addressed in the reauthorization legislation:

- Continue block grant funding for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.
- Plan for recession.
- Address problems in the food stamp and Medicaid programs that lead to underenrollment by eligible families.
- Support flexible strategies to reach the most disadvantaged families.
- Emphasize activities, including education and training, that will help people retain jobs.
- Improve the child support system.

The papers presented at the conference are available on-line at www.fordschool.umich.edu/conferences/final.htm. For a complete report on the conference, go to the What's New link at www.aecf.org.



HILARY SCHWAB

Addressing the welfare reform conference in March, Casey Foundation Senior Consultant Ron Haskins described the movement of families from the welfare rolls since the implementation of reform legislation in 1996. The two-day meeting, which attracted nearly 900 policy advocates and public officials, examined the consequences of the welfare reform law in advance of congressional consideration of reauthorization of the law in 2002.

RESOURCE CORNER

In Print:

All publications listed below can be ordered from the Foundation website (www.aecf.org) or by calling our publications voice line at 410.223.2890, unless otherwise noted.

- **THE RIGHT START CITY TRENDS: CONDITIONS OF BABIES AND THEIR FAMILIES IN AMERICA'S LARGEST CITIES (1990–1998):** This new special report, published jointly by KIDS COUNT and Child Trends as a two-volume set, presents a decade's worth of data tracking the successes and failures of the nation's largest cities in providing every child a healthy and promising start to life. The report includes trends for several key measures of a healthy birth, such as the percentage of babies born to teen and unmarried mothers, the percentage born to mothers who smoked during pregnancy, the percentage born to mothers who did not complete high school, and the percentage born at low birth weight.
- **THE RIGHT START STATE TRENDS: CONDITIONS OF BABIES AND THEIR FAMILIES ACROSS THE NATION (1990–1998):** The second part of the series described above, this volume presents a decade's worth of data tracking the successes and failures of all 50 states in providing children with a healthy and promising start to life.
- **EMPLOYING WELFARE RECIPIENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO WORK: LESSONS FROM THE DISABILITY FIELD:** This report examines efforts in the disability community to help individuals with significant barriers to work get and maintain

employment. It also identifies how welfare agencies can learn from and build on lessons from the disability community.

- **HOLDING SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE TOOLKIT: A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN NEIGHBORHOODS:** This guide was prepared by Public Interest, a North Carolina education research and consulting organization, with support from the Casey Foundation. It offers useful instruments, materials, stories, tips, and references based on the experiences of more than 20 pioneering community-based efforts to hold schools accountable. It can be found online at www.publicimpact.com/hsat, or copies can be ordered by e-mailing hsat@publicimpact.com or calling 704.370.0357
- **CULTIVATING COMMUNITY: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY GARDENING AS A COMMUNITY-BUILDING TOOL:** This report was produced for the Casey Foundation by the American Community Gardening Association. It explores some basic values that underlie successful community empowerment programs of any kind, and it illustrates how these have been applied to community gardens across the country. It was designed as a resource for organizations and coalitions whose specific aim is to use gardens to empower people by building their skill and confidence to transform their lives and their communities. Copies are available from the Community Gardening Association, 100 N. 20th Street, 5th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103-1495, 215.988.8785, www.communitygarden.org

On the Web:

The following websites offer information specific to community development efforts.

- **CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS:** This is a compilation of hundreds of links to sites dealing with issues critical to community development. The links are organized into categories such as economic development, housing, sustainable development, organizing, case studies, and best practices: www.change.org
- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ONLINE:** This database, drawn from the NeighborWorks network website, contains information related to neighborhood revitalization efforts throughout the country: www.nw.org
- **GRASS ROOTS:** This site contains more than 200 stories about some of the most innovative grassroots programs in the United States and the local heroes involved in these efforts. Stories are organized by state, region, and type of program and cover issues ranging from feeding hungry people and housing the homeless to job training, political organizing, and community economic development: www.grass-roots.org



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HILARY SCHWAB

SU'AD ABDUL KHABEER and other Foundation staff members greet AL GORE, who visited April 6 to meet with community-building specialists. The former vice president has been teaching and is working with a consortium of universities, based at the University of California at Los Angeles, that is developing a family-centered community-building curriculum.

LOCAL LEARNING PARTNERS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

with a deeper understanding of the Casey Foundation, *Making Connections*, and their own role in this work; some stimulating ideas to help them do their work; and new connections and relationships with colleagues from other sites.

In plenary sessions and small workshops, people from the different cities had the opportunity to share the myriad ways they are generating and storing data, finding ways to preserve local stories and histories, and mobilizing communities to use data as a policy tool.

“It was great in terms of presenting a wide range of ways that sites are engaging with communities to collect and use data and technology in ways that help those communities do their work,” said Gloria Cross Mwase, site liaison for the Boston *Making Connections* team.

“For this enterprise to be worth the undertaking, all our collaborators have to know where we began, what obstacles and assets each community faced, what happened, what resources were mobilized, what changed in each community,

and how these changes succeeded or failed in forging new economic, social, and service connections for families and children,” Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson said at the conference. “No actor will be more critical in answering these questions than our Local Learning Partners.”

A proceedings document summarizing highlights and lessons of the conference will be available later this summer.