

# CONNECTS

CASEY

SPRING 2002  
A REPORT FROM THE  
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: Conference Highlights Benefits of Team Approach to Foster Care; Resource Corner; Foster Youth and Families Share Experience; INSITES

## HELPING ADVOCATES WEIGH IN ON THE WELFARE REFORM DEBATE

For advocates working on behalf of low-income families, the bad news is that the average American doesn't know much about the 1996 welfare reform law, or that millions of parents left welfare, many for work. The good news is that they approve of using tax dollars to help low-income working families get and keep good jobs.

"People are saying that they actively want to help and provide supports for families who make an effort or try to improve themselves and their situation," says Guy Molyneux, senior vice president with Hart Research Associates. In particular, they favor job training, education, and child care assistance.

This data—gathered in a series of four Casey Foundation-funded focus groups of 40 Democratic and Republican swing voters and an accompanying public opinion survey—are part of the Foundation's multipronged advocacy approach to the forthcoming Congressional reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding.

Molyneux presented the focus group findings at a meeting hosted by the Coalition on Human Needs in January; survey results were released in March. Together, these formed the basis of strategic communications research for advocacy groups talking to Congress, the media, and the public.

"The idea was to help groups use more persuasive language and arguments that are responsive to

## COMING TOGETHER AROUND RESULTS



Making sure results matter was a key theme of three recent gatherings focused on how to make a measurable difference in the lives of children and families: the all-staff retreat; *Making Connections* Joint Convening; and Family Economic Success Institute. Photos from the meetings include: top, Jane Fogg of Des Moines and Cec Ortiz of Denver; center left, Terri Bailey of Denver and Fred Blackwell of Oakland; center right, Tim Healy of Seattle and Bob Giloth of the Casey Foundation; and left, Martha Dore and Ben Kerman of Casey Family Services.

## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF TEAM APPROACH TO FOSTER CARE

The abuse began when Sheena Evans was 5 years old. It was a year after her mother died, and Evans was placed under her grandmother's care. The abuse persisted even when, at 12, she appealed for help from school counselors and family members. No one, it seemed, heeded her pleas.

### CASEY CONNECTS

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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. 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.*

Between the ages of 16 and 18, Evans attempted to take her own life some dozen times. It wasn't until she entered the Alabama child welfare system that she began—in fits and spurts—her journey to recovery.

Nearly a year since her last suicide attempt, Evans is again pleading her case and the case of some 570,000 children and youth swelling the ranks of the U.S. child welfare system. What she wants for herself and for other children is a say in how the system cares for them. So Evans and a handful of her peers from her home in Birmingham and from New York made their voices heard during the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family conference held in Brooklyn, March 13–15.

"We want to have a say so in something," said Evans, who now lives with a foster mother. "How do you find out how to better [care for] youth without the youth there?"

That was, in part, the point of the conference and the Family to Family initiative: To bring together each player in the foster care system—public agencies, community organizations, private contract agencies, foster parents, birth parents, and the children themselves. Using such a partnership approach, they are changing how child welfare agencies support families and care for children.

Now in its tenth year, Family to Family has grown from sites in Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland to a movement that's spreading across the nation, from eight counties in California to major cities like New York, Detroit, and Chicago. At its heart is the philosophy that strong networks of support within communities are better sources of care for children than are institutions and foster care placements outside the communities in which families live. Support those communities and families, and the system can produce the kinds of results that are best for a child.

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Foster youth from New York City and Birmingham, Alabama, participate in a panel presentation at the recent Family to Family meeting.



ROBERT MAAS

# RESOURCE CORNER

## In Print

All publications listed can be ordered from the Foundation's website ([www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)) or by calling our publications voice line at 410.223.2890.

- **MONEY GUIDE SERIES FOR FOSTER YOUTH**

Working with foster care parents and professionals, youth counselors, and social workers, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National Endowment for Financial Education jointly published these guidebooks to help educate foster children and teens about personal finance. Workbook exercises cover topics such as defining



needs versus wants; saving; banking and credit; attitudes about money; and creating budgets and goals. The series includes:

- a two-part guide for youth ages 8 to 11: *Money Pals: Being Cool with Cash*;
- a two-part guide for youth ages 12 to 15: *I Know Where I'm Going (But Will My Cash Keep Up?)*; and
- a *Caregiver's Handbook* that provides tips on how to use the guidebooks and help build their foster children's money skills.

- **BARRIERS AND PROMISING APPROACHES TO WORKFORCE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT**

There has always been tension in the juvenile justice system between the

dual goals of punishment and rehabilitation. This series of reports was developed to identify barriers to success in juvenile justice, survey innovative state and local policy initiatives, and showcase exemplary employment and youth development programs for young people involved



with the courts.

The toolkit, designed for various audiences interested in

helping court-involved youth find jobs and become successful, contains an overview outlining problems facing the juvenile justice system and identifying solutions; profiles of promising programs; descriptions of innovative public policies; and appropriate contact information.

- **END GAMES: THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY**

"There is a great deal more advice available to foundations and grantees about how to start a comprehensive community-based initiative than there



is about how to successfully end one," writes author Ira Cutler in this report on how funders and grantees approach sus-

tainability. The report draws on interviews with people who share experience and insights from dozens of community-based initiatives and projects, and offers guidance and suggestions from the field on how to achieve sustainability.

- **2002 KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK (RELEASE DATE: MAY 23, 2002)**

The Casey Foundation will release its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* May 23 with state-by-state rankings on 10 indicators of child well-being, along with supplemental data on the economic conditions of families, child health, and education. In the *Data Book* message this year, the Casey Foundation explores the plight of low-income working families struggling to not only stay in the workforce but also move toward real, yet elusive, economic security. A pocket guide and wall chart will also be available with the *Data Book*. After May 23, you can access an updated version of our KIDS COUNT online interactive database to obtain customizable profiles, rankings, graphs, or maps at: [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org).



## On the Web

- **ECONDATA.NET** Sponsored by the Economic Development Association, *EconData.Net* is a starting point for users who need state and regional economic data on such topics as income, economic security, employment, and demographics. It points users to major economic data collections, access tools to multiple data series, indices and rankings, economic analyses and forecasts, and mapping resources: <http://www.econdata.net>



## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF TEAM APPROACH TO FOSTER CARE

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- **FATHER & FAMILY LINK**

The National Center on Fathers and Families offers current information on research, policy, and practice issues related to the field of responsible fatherhood on this website. Searchable databases include a father and family program locator and *FatherLit*—citations and abstracts for over 8,500 research publications on fathers, families, and child welfare:

<http://fatherfamilylink.gse.upenn.edu>

- **COMMUNITY TOOL BOX**

A collection of how-to tools and pragmatic tips for those engaged in promoting community health and development, *Community Tool Box* offers highly structured and detailed information on community assessment, program evaluation, strategic planning, advocacy, social marketing, grant writing, and other related topics:

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu>



- **STATE WELFARE WEBSITES**

National Governors' Association's Center for Best Practices provides a list of links to TANF, welfare-to-work, and welfare-related workforce websites. Web links are arranged alphabetically by state for easy access:

[http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,C\\_ISSUE\\_BRIEF^D\\_1920,00.html](http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,C_ISSUE_BRIEF^D_1920,00.html)

And the movement is showing results. "For the first time in anyone's memory, we open more new preventive care cases than we are putting kids in foster care or out-of-home care," said William Bell, commissioner of New York City's Administration for Children's Services. "That's what Family to Family is all about."

The Foundation is now moving Family to Family into a phase in which participants rely more heavily on peer-to-peer teaching and support, said Lisa Paine-Wells, a program associate with the Foundation's System and Service Reform program. "As sites learn from one another to deepen the work they've each begun, they will be better positioned to sustain the changes they have begun."

The New York conference was evidence of that goal of collaboration as the more than 450 participants from the 20 sites exchanged ideas and testified to successes, failures, and lessons learned during workshops that covered the key tools and strategies of the movement. Cities that have followed the Family to Family philosophy for a longer period of time served as advisers to newcomers from states like Illinois and California.

"The best thing that happened to us was when we met the foster parents," said Kitina Martin, whose three children were taken from her and her husband, Steven, in 1996. "We found out that they didn't want to take the kids from us." That unofficial meeting helped her and her husband recover from drug addiction and get their children back a year later.

Rick Jennings, executive director of the Center for Fathers and Families in Sacramento, California, at a recent meeting at the Casey Foundation to discuss lessons and challenges from community-change initiatives with other foundations and grantees. The April meeting, "Learning for Community Change: How Foundations and Grantees Learn and Apply Knowledge," was sponsored by the Casey Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds.



## FOSTER YOUTH AND FAMILIES SHARE EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE



Lisa Wiley Rivera and John Rivera, foster parents from Bridgeport, Conn., at a March Casey Family Services conference, "Helping Families Grow Strong Together," in Boston.

In powerful, emotion-filled stories, youth in foster care and foster parents shared common issues and innovative solutions during discussions at two Casey Family Services conferences held over the past several months.

More than 500 parents, youth, guests, and staff took part in the Seventh Biennial Casey Family Services Foster Parent Conference, "Helping Families Grow Strong Together," March 9–10, in Boston.

Highlights included a seminar by motivational speaker Wayne Dyer and workshops such as "Mums Not the Only Word," a look at foster parenting from a Dad's point of view; the Vermont "Casey Parent Leadership Team: A Voice for Parents by Parents"; "Strengthening Partnerships While Parenting"; and "Teens in Transition: The Next Generation."

The event proved a welcome opportunity for families to share experiences, concerns, and encouragement and for Casey

Family Services Executive Director Raymond Torres to formally recognize more than 50 foster parents who had achieved 5, 10, and 15 years of service with the agency.

The conference helped parents pick up practical skills to help overcome obstacles that can cause problems for foster families. "I learned how to make the children realize that they are amazing people who can achieve a positive future," one parent said.

A comprehensive University of North Carolina study of young people served by Casey Family Services who made the transition out of foster care showed that more than 70 percent had graduated from high school or earned a GED, about half had received education beyond high school, and nearly 70 percent were currently employed.

"We can point to the findings of our alumni study to underscore that safety, security, and stability make a measurable difference for foster kids," said Annie E. Casey Foundation President Douglas W. Nelson.

Casey foster youth had their own opportunity to speak out at the first agency-

wide Youth Conference late last year. The conference, "Teens Are the Future," drew nearly 100 teens ages 15 to 19 from across New England and Baltimore, Maryland, to Waterville Valley, New Hampshire.

Designed by a youth steering committee, the conference featured workshops on such topics as time management, planning for college, sexual responsibility, managing finances, and finding a job. Also offered were sessions in beadwork, painting, improvisational acting, drumming, and the martial arts.

Hearing from foster youth who had successfully made the transition into independent living was a highlight for participants. Gary Zerola, an attorney from Massachusetts and foster care advocate, attributed his accomplishments after leaving foster care to the encouragement and support of his foster parents. He offered three guideposts for transitioning from foster care: prepare, ask for help, and do the right thing.

David Gillan, now 24, came to Casey Family Services at age 15 after both parents, who suffered from drug and alcohol problems, had died. He became an accomplished athlete and went on to college, earning an associate's degree from Dean College in Massachusetts and a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Connecticut. Gillan now works at Boy's Village in Connecticut, a facility for troubled youth where he once lived. "I want to give them hope, and let them know there is light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

The next Foster Parent Conference will be held in March 2004, and a second Youth Conference will take place sometime next year.





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## HELPING ADVOCATES WEIGH IN ON THE WELFARE REFORM DEBATE

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public perceptions,” says John Monahan, a Casey Foundation senior consultant.

In September 2001, the Foundation supported the Brookings Institution in publishing *The New World of Welfare*, edited by Ron Haskins and Rebecca Blank. The book—written primarily for Congressional staff, social scientists, reporters, and child advocates—kicked off the policy debate by highlighting the information and concerns of a diverse array of welfare experts.

The Casey Foundation’s strategy for TANF reauthorization, according to Michael Laracy, a senior associate spearheading this work, centers on “disseminating the lessons and data learned over the last six years to help inform and guide the national debate, helping stakeholders—most notably grassroots organizations—effectively contribute to the discussion, strengthening TANF to support working families, and, where possible, forging a realistic common-sense consensus between people with diverging views.”

In addition to supporting research, the Foundation took the lead in conceptualizing a project sponsored by members of the Grantmakers Income Security Taskforce (GIST) to convene a bank of strategic communications experts and link them with policy analysts, researchers, and state and local advocates working on TANF reauthorization.

The Casey Foundation provided \$100,000 in seed money, helping to spur

more than \$500,000 in additional investments from other foundations. Connect for Kids, an online publication and project of the Benton Foundation, is connecting the nonprofit groups to communications strategists.

“Nonprofits know sophisticated communications strategies are important, but they don’t always have the skills or means to make it happen,” says Jan Richter, Connect for Kids’ senior policy and outreach analyst and coordinator of the project. “The nonprofits—from major national organizations to small grassroots groups—say their work with the GIST communications team has helped them craft on-target messages, write op-eds, train spokespeople, and plan press events.”

Informally dubbed the “Inside the Beltway” group, some 35 national organizations focusing on federal and state policy decisions affecting low-income families have been meeting biweekly with government affairs consultant Tom Downey and others to share legislative information, analyses, and the most persuasive messages on TANF reauthorization.

Since 1995, the Casey Foundation has made major investments in core research related to welfare reform, including the Urban Institute’s Assessing the New Federalism project, which generated data on welfare reform’s implementation across the country and its impact on families. The Urban Institute has compiled findings from six years of studies in its new book, *Welfare Reform: The Next Act*.

The Foundation also has supported the Brookings Institution’s Welfare Reform and Beyond project and efforts by the Center on Budget Policy and Priorities and the Center for Law and Social Policy to help translate the data on welfare reform for policymakers. In a 2001 survey, bipartisan Congressional staff named these as the most effective groups working on welfare policy. In addition, the Foundation has invested in the Center for Community Change’s work to mobilize grassroots organizations and advocates from low-income communities around the TANF reauthorization policy debate and supported research by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation to measure the impact of public policies on U.S. families and children.

The Foundation is also cementing partnerships with the National Governors’ Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National League of Cities, the American Public Human Services Association, and other groups interested in welfare reform and family economic success.

“We’re reaching out based on our shared interest to improve programs, hold conferences, and produce materials in newsletters and newspapers, to focus on ways members can make a difference for low-income kids and families,” says Monahan.

Programs that promote responsible fatherhood, a significant issue in the welfare reform debate, are highlighted in this issue of INSITES.

# INSITES

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## A LABOR OF LOVE: PROGRAMS WORKING TO MAKE FATHERS COUNT

Until recently, Thomas Read thought of himself as nothing more than a small-time Baltimore hustler with a young son that he saw for occasional trips to an arcade.

"My back was against the wall, you know, I was behind the eight-ball and I did whatever to stay alive," the 22-year-old Read said.

Without a high school diploma, Read felt hopeless about finding a job to better support his child and feared that he might end up a stranger to his own son—much as his own father, a stranger he never knew.

"I don't even know the man's hair color," Read said. He was embarrassed that he couldn't show his son Dezmond, now 4, that a real man works for a living.

Through a friend, Read hooked up with a local fatherhood program called the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development. He started GED classes and joined the group's job training program, called STRIVE.

"They convinced me to keep my spirits up and keep trying," said Read, who now works for Sky Chef, an airline food supplier, and volunteers at the center 25 hours a week. His self-esteem is high and he has worthwhile goals he believes he can achieve. Instead of the arcade, he now takes his son to the library.

"Before I came into the program, I always felt as though a father was needed," Read said. "Being I missed out on that, I now get to relive my childhood all over again through my son. I'm an active father in his life."



Thomas Read became an active father in his son's life and gained the self-confidence and training he needed to work toward a better future as a result of his involvement in a fatherhood program run by the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development in Baltimore.

Evidence from more than three decades of research proves that children are more likely to grow into healthy, mature adults if their fathers are involved in their lives. Across America, fatherhood initiatives are blooming, a trend that has accelerated since the mid-1990s as organizations and foundations have focused more attention on getting fathers involved in their children's lives.

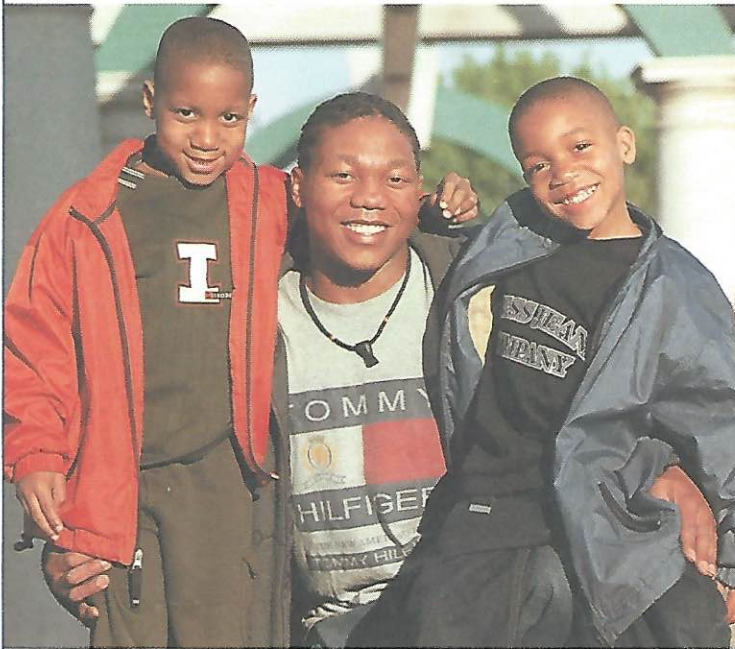


An estimated 23 million American children live in homes without their biological fathers, 20 million of those in single-parent homes. The poverty rate for children whose parents never married is 64 percent, compared to a poverty rate of just 8.4 percent for children in two-parent families.

But clearly, a father's importance goes beyond financial support. Studies show children who grow up without fathers are far more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and

men's best efforts to do right by their children. Men who become fathers as teenagers often don't get the support and make the positive connections they need to become committed parents, to the detriment of both father and child. And efforts to hold so-called "deadbeat dads" accountable for child support too often sidestep the ability of fathers to make a living so they can support their kids.

"I hate to say it, but being black and poor—and many of us here come from poverty—we want to change, but



We have learned from the research that kids who have **FATHERS ENGAGED** in their lives do better socially, are more healthy emotionally and physically, and do better in school.

Darnell Griffin, a participant in the Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center in Indianapolis, and his six-year-old twin sons, Dravon and Davon. The program has helped Griffin get the skills and resources he needs to be an effective and productive parent.

illegal drugs, get into trouble with the law, and have sex at a younger age than children whose fathers are involved in their lives.

"What we talk about is that fathers matter," said Maurice Moore of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Fathers and Families Initiative. "We have learned from the research that kids who have fathers engaged in their lives do better socially, are more healthy emotionally and physically, and do better in school."

Unemployment, underemployment, and disincentives in the welfare and child support systems complicate some

there are no opportunities," said 29-year-old Ulysses Snell, a Minneapolis father getting help from a program called Minnesota Early Learning and Development. The program helps fathers overcome troubled pasts—including criminal convictions and owing thousands of dollars in back child support—daunting obstacles that often interfere with a man's ability to be a dad.

For seven years, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has been supporting programs that address these issues and underscore and highlight the critical contributions fathers make to their children's lives. The Foundation is part of a burgeoning movement to help "build the field," Moore noted, by encouraging federal, state, and local policymakers to support systems changes that help fathers embrace and fulfill their parenting roles.



Programs that are well connected to a wide-range of social service agencies and have good follow-up work with dads after the formal sessions end generally have the best likelihood of success. "You have to have visionary leadership and staff who are committed," Moore said. "You have to have a mission."



The Johns Hopkins Fatherhood Program works in four sites—Fort Defiance, Puba City, and White River, Arizona, and Gallup, New Mexico—using trained counselors to work one-on-one with young Native American fathers and mothers, whether or not they live together, said Johnathan Begay, the coordinator of the program.

The program works primarily with two tribes, the Navajo Nation and White Mountain Apache Nation. On tribal lands, most young parents live with each other, but each parent gets individual attention from the program.

"Family health educators get the names of couples that have gone to the Indian Health Service for pregnancy counseling and assistance," Begay said. "Moms must be between 14 and 19 and dads must be between 14 and 26. Male counselors meet with the dads each week from the start of the pregnancy until the end of the child's first year."

Some 28 fathers have been involved in the pilot program for the past year, and the organization is gearing up to expand to 120 dads. Although drug abuse still is a major challenge, evaluations conducted every four months show the parents involved have made significant gains in parenting skills and education, Begay said.



In south El Paso, Texas, one of the poorest areas of the country, the Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe is in its third year of an initiative to reconnect fathers to the cultural traditions of the Mexican and indigenous people.

"In our culture and many cultures, many of our males were comfortable just earning the money and letting the wife take care of the family," said La Fe Associate Director

Jorge Salazar. "Now, with our knowledge of the importance of both parents participating in a child's early development, we wanted to make sure we were combining that information with cultural traditions."

La Fe—which translates as "the faith"—is not a religious organization, but a multipurpose social service and health organization that helps 20,000 people with an annual budget of about \$10 million. The agency's fatherhood initiative, called Hombres 2000, began in 1999 and organized a summit for men in the year 2000. Some 300 fathers are involved in the initiative.

Men are encouraged to come with their pregnant wives and girlfriends to La Fe's health clinic and to come alone with their children for immunizations and well-baby checkups. The program emphasizes that the man carries equal responsibility for the welfare of the baby. "We use terminology with them such as both of them being pregnant and it's not just the woman carrying a baby," Salazar said.

The group also has a new cultural and technology center where dads bring their children to learn new skills—such as the use of computers—just as fathers in ancient times would teach their children to hunt and to defend the village. "The father would be the one to show the child how to hunt, and in today's marketplace, the spear is the computer technology that is needed to get a job," Salazar said.

La Fe also has a program for young men called the Mexican-American Youth Alliance, or MAYA, which helps connect youth to their forebears. "The male movement is not going to be one with very high numbers at the beginning," Salazar said. "We're going against the grain of traditional societal expectations."

The group also holds focus group sessions, called Platicas, in which men talk to each other about mistakes they made in life and how they can get on the right path. The Mexican-American community in El Paso is also battling a breakdown in communication across the generations—grandparents don't speak English and their grandchildren don't speak Spanish. Oral histories and storytelling help bring the generations together, Salazar noted.



The Indianapolis-based Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center was launched in 1993 by the head of the Social Work Department at Wishard Memorial Hospital as a way to combat infant mortality, primarily in the African-American community. At the time, Indianapolis had one of the nation's worst infant mortality rates, said Wallace McLaughlin, the president and chief executive officer of the program.

"This was a way to address teen pregnancy, infant mortality, and many of the other social ills in the community by trying to engage fathers in the lives of their children," McLaughlin said. "The purpose was to help fathers become providers and nurturers and see them as a resource to their families and to their communities."

As an ordained minister and pastor of Imani Community Church in Indianapolis, McLaughlin often deals with the same families that get involved in the fatherhood program. Many of them are struggling to survive day to day, and one more crisis can push them to the brink. "People have to understand the complexities of the challenges of young, fragile families who can barely pull the pieces together," McLaughlin said.

The program, which is primarily voluntary, provides a range of education, job training, job placement, and parenting classes. About 5 percent of its clients are referred by courts and another 5 percent are sent through child support enforcement agencies. McLaughlin estimates that the group has helped about 1,000 men since 1993.

"Too often, foundations, funders, and policymakers want a changed picture in six months or a year," McLaughlin said. "But because of the incipient issues like racism, drug usage, and unemployment, it takes a while for a change to take place."

Some 300 men and their families are now involved in the program. The centerpiece is the Fatherhood Development Workshop, which meets eight times a year for three and a half weeks each time. It helps men who have established paternity to get their GED if needed and to be prepared for job interviews and the workforce.



Mai-Ka Bui and her father, Phuong Bui, playing a toy xylophone together at their home in Seattle. The family is involved in several programs in White Center, the target neighborhood in the Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative.

For many men who have not been involved in their children's lives until child support enforcement authorities step in, it is too late, noted Greg Bishop, the founder of "Boot Camp for New Dads."

First launched in Irvine, California in 1990, this peer-to-peer mentoring program for fathers has expanded to 127 sites in 37 states and has trained more than 50,000 new dads. "Our premise all along is you want to get guys connected with kids right out of the chute," said Bishop. "Once that baby comes home, opportunity closes, patterns of involvement or non-involvement set in, and men tend to follow the pattern of their own fathers."

But if you connect with fathers when the thrill of parenthood is fresh, it can make all the difference. "Birth is a magical moment for fathers, and men are very receptive at that point," Bishop said.