

CONNECTS

CASEY

SUMMER 2001
A REPORT FROM THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: *Chronicling the Legacy of One Family's Transformation; Alert for Community Organizations; Strategic Consulting Group Offers Hands-On Help; A Note of Recognition; INSITES*

INITIATIVE AIMS TO EASE THE PAIN OF TRANSITION FROM FOSTER CARE

Alfred G. Perez, 24, believes it's a myth that foster kids can't make it. But he also knows they can't do it alone. Perez lived in 11 different foster homes in as many years before he left the California foster care system.

"When I turned 18, I had to do everything on my own," he said. With the assistance of an independent living program and the support of a mentor, Perez went on to earn a bachelor's degree in social work from San Jose State and a master's degree from the University of Michigan. He now works as a research analyst at Westat, Inc., a prestigious research and evaluation firm in Rockville, Maryland.



Alfred G. Perez made the transition from foster care with a mentor's help.

Transition for foster youth **HAS NEVER BEEN APPROACHED** as **COMPREHENSIVELY** and ambitiously as in this new joint undertaking.

Myeshia Grice, a 24-year-old senior at California State at Hayward and the first in her family to attend college, is another success story. Grice met her mentor, Arlene, when she was 15 and in foster care, and she said Arlene's steadfast belief in her is what persuaded her to go to college.

Perez and Grice made the transition from foster care to adulthood with the help of caring individuals. But studies show many young people like them face overwhelming obstacles completing their education, getting good jobs, and finding safe, affordable places to live. Too often, foster care "graduates" end up unemployed, homeless, or in jail. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 gave states some new funds to support transition programs, but too often these teenagers are not a state or local priority.

To reverse that trend, in May the Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs launched the Jim Casey Youth

Opportunities Initiative, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of the more than 100,000 young people in the United States between the ages of 16 and 21 who are about to leave or have already left the foster care system. The Foundation has committed \$18 million over the next three years to address the educational, employment, health, and housing needs of this group of young adults. The initiative grew out of studies and collaboration between the two founding partners dating back to 1997. "Transition for foster youth has never been approached as comprehensively and ambitiously as this new joint undertaking," said Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Casey Foundation. "We expect to be a change agent, a facilitator, and promoter of successful programs that can be duplicated throughout the country."

Gary Stangler, former head of the Missouri Department of Social Services, will direct the initiative from headquarter offices in St. Louis. Part of his job will be to act as a convener,

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BLACK PEOPLE LOOK BAD. It shows the truth about
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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.

SHARING THE LEGACY OF ONE FAMILY'S TRANSFORMATION

When a promising young man was shot down two blocks from his home at the Henry Horner Housing Project in Chicago, he left a powerful legacy for his family and his community.

Terrell Collins, 14, was a straight-A student with a scholarship to a private high school. Everyone believed he would make it out of the projects and become successful. His death transformed the lives of family members, fueling their struggle to circumvent the cycle of poverty, welfare, violence, and substance abuse that robbed so many in their community of their hopes, dreams, and dignity.

Tod Lending, an award-winning producer who was filming a documentary in Terrell's neighborhood, interviewed his

grandmother, Dorothy Jackson, just a few hours before Terrell's death. He decided, with their permission, to continue filming the family for an extended time to see how Terrell's death would affect their lives. The result of their five-year collaboration is *Legacy*, a powerful chronicle of the family's transformation and the social factors that both impeded and aided them in their ultimately triumphant path. So compelling is this depiction that the film earned an Oscar nomination this year. *Legacy* aired on HBO July 25, and is scheduled to debut on PBS stations in 2002.

The story is told through the voice of Nickole, Terrell's cousin and best friend, who went on to become the first member of the family to graduate from high school and attend college. But it also



TERKOWITZ PHOTOGRAPHY

details the trials and triumphs of Terrell's grandmother, who eventually realizes her dream to leave the projects and buy a home; of his mother, a long-time substance abuser who finally enters rehab and enjoys the fruits of recovery; and of his aunt, Nickole's mother, a single mother of five who eventually gets off welfare and finds steady employment and educational opportunities. Jack, Terrell's surviving brother, is shown still struggling to move his life in a positive direction.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, along with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and other grant makers, supported the filming as well as a wide range of outreach activities to help share the legacy of this family with a broader audience. The Foundation has supported a number of events and educational materials designed to help people in the education, faith, civic, and nonprofit sectors translate the film into a tool to help families and communities connect to sources of help, hope, and opportunity. *Legacy* has been screened in nearly 1,000 community settings to more than a half million people since it was completed in 1999.

Last fall, the Laurence G. Paquin Secondary School in Baltimore, an alternative school for expectant and parenting teenagers, aired the film for its 300-member student body. "I told them we're going to see a family just like them, and that they need to learn that no matter how bad your circumstances, you can survive," said the school's director, Dr. Rosetta Stith.

What she didn't tell her students was that members of the Collins family were behind the curtain, waiting to greet students after the screening. "When I pulled that screen up, it was almost like they stopped breathing—it was like they had seen a miracle," Stith said.



TERKOWITZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Bottom left photo, from left to right, Terrell Collins' aunt, Alaisa; mother, Wanda; cousin, Nickole; brother, Jack; and filmmaker Tod Lending. The family spoke with students at the Paquin school, above, after a *Legacy* screening.

"They stood up and gave a standing ovation."

Students asked questions, spoke one-on-one with the family, and wrote notes to the various family members.

"It's nice to finally see a movie that doesn't make black people look bad," one student wrote. "It shows the truth

about what we really do and go through. It's also nice to see a black family stick together through thick and thin."

Stacy Copes, a 15-year-old with an 8-month-old daughter, said the movie inspired her to try harder to achieve her goals. What is the most forceful lesson she took from *Legacy*? "Don't let anything hold you down—just keep trying."

HELP SOUGHT FROM COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community organizations can be a lifeline for families living in challenging neighborhoods. Besides providing services people depend on, they are part of the social fabric of neighborhoods and lend stability to isolated communities. Their own stability, however, is too often threatened by high turnover rates in leadership.

The Casey Foundation has committed funding to explore the impact and opportunities presented by leadership transitions in community-based organizations. The ultimate goals of this work are to help organizations prepare for and manage changes in leadership and to improve the preparation, recruitment, support, and retention of effective leaders.

The Foundation has commissioned a survey of community-based organization grantees to learn more about their experiences and needs in the area of leadership transitions. Selected grantees will receive letters and postcards explaining the survey, which can be completed by visiting a special website, www.managance.com/casey-survey, between July 30 and August 20. Organizations that do not have Internet access should contact Melody Thomas-Scott of Tom Adams and Associates at 410.439.6635 to schedule a telephone interview. The Foundation will publish its findings in mid-September.

STRATEGIC CONSULTING GROUP PROVIDES HANDS-ON HELP TO PUBLIC AGENCIES

Fixing broken human-service agencies is one of the most vexing challenges facing cities and states, but that has never stopped the Casey Foundation from venturing into the fray. The principles on which the Foundation bases much of its work on behalf of children mandate that public systems be responsive, efficient, and customer driven.

For better or worse, one of the most promising opportunities for change presents itself in the wake of a crisis. Building on a long legacy of work to help change the way public systems operate in order to improve outcomes for children, the Casey Foundation has launched a new enterprise to provide immediate intensive, strategic help when these moments of opportunity arise.

The Casey Strategic Consulting Group will respond to public agencies seeking outside intervention that is experienced, neutral, analytically oriented, and hands-on.

“Real change in public agencies requires them to value families and encourage family ties, to identify and use community resources, and to involve parents and children in planning for the future,” said Kathleen Feely, managing director of the group. “These agencies must build community partnerships that encourage local participation, decentralized decision-making, and flexible funding to address communities’ unique needs. That is what Casey Strategic Consulting hopes to bring to agencies in distress.”

Entry points for this process may include systems in crisis in the aftermath of a highly visible tragedy, such as the death of a child. Public sector agencies facing the threat of class-action litigation or having recently come under new political leadership may offer another window of opportunity for reform efforts.

The Casey Strategic Consulting Group will build on the Foundation’s recent involvement with the Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel in New York City, which stemmed from efforts to mediate a class-action lawsuit against the Administration for Children’s Services, known as *Marisol v. Scoppetta*. The group has modeled itself after such private-sector consultants as McKinsey & Company and seeks out opportunities within states or localities that show great

promise for reform and willingness to commit to intensive intervention to meet their goals.

Feely, a former deputy commissioner of New York City’s Department of Juvenile Justice, has assembled a multi-faceted team. Gary Weeks, former director of Oregon’s Department of Human Services, has been named manager of human services reform. The staff also includes Jim Dimas, Kathleen Noonan, Joy Behrens, and John Musewicz, who offer a distinct mix of public sector, research, legal, and private sector consulting experience.

Currently, Casey Strategic Consulting is active in one start-up site and reviewing the possibility of new work in a few other sites. In Georgia, the involvement was triggered in late 1999 by publicity surrounding deaths of children in the foster care system in Atlanta and subsequent dialog between Foundation officials and the governor’s office. The group is working with the Foundation’s Technical Assistance Resource Center to assist in data collection and other reform tasks to increase the momentum of the change effort.

The Casey Strategic Consulting Group is working with the governor’s cross-agency partnership to improve state child welfare outcomes by developing a comprehensive community-based system to connect children and families with critical services and supports in their communities.

The group is also building a network of key resource people at national organizations and institutions.

From left to right, Jim Dimas, a member of the Casey Strategic Consulting team, meeting with Becky Winslow, Eddie Gordon, and Wilfred Hamm of the Georgia Division of Family and Children’s Services.





RAY CHAVEZ/THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE

Young people helped convince the California Board of Corrections not to fund a major expansion of Alameda County's juvenile hall.

should be spending more money to keep kids out of jails, not spending millions of dollars to put more youth in jail,” said Adam Gold, executive director of the Youth Empowerment Center.

Books Not Bars and the Youth Force Coalition were also planning a July 28 concert and rally, including community leaders, poets, dancers, and Hip Hop artists, to speak out against the county's plans to borrow money to finance the facility without a public vote.

REBUILDING COMMUNITIES' NOTABLE WINS FELLOWSHIP

Maggie DeSantis, executive director of the Warren/Conner Development Coalition in Detroit, has been selected as a Fellow in the Rockefeller Foundation's Next Generation Leadership program. Warren/Conner is the lead organization in the Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI) in Detroit.

DeSantis is one of 24 candidates selected from more than 100 applicants nominated by national leaders. The two-year program is designed to build a network of leaders who can identify solutions to social, economic, and technological disparities that threaten democracy. In the first year, Fellows will travel extensively to study challenges to democracy relating to race, economics, immigration, globalization, and communication. In the second year, they will work on community projects that put theories of democracy into action.

DeSantis wants to study a topic near and dear to her RCI work—the role of community development in revitalizing “the most devastated large city in the United States.”

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A NOTE OF RECOGNITION

YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT CAMPAIGNS FOR 'BOOKS NOT BARS'

A well-organized youth-led movement in California has been gaining momentum in an impassioned struggle to promote alternatives to juvenile detention.

Two groups that the Casey Foundation supports—the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in San Francisco and the Oakland-based Youth Empowerment Center, an umbrella group that sponsors several youth organizations—have been working to challenge Alameda County's plans to construct the largest juvenile hall in the country.

Books Not Bars, a project of the Ella Baker Center, and the Youth Force Coalition, one of the organizations sponsored by the Youth Empowerment Center, have been lead partners in a wide range of groups joining forces to “Stop the Super Jail.”

Young people and their allies showed up in force at a Board of Corrections meeting in San Diego last May and convinced the Board not to provide \$2.3 million in requested state funding for a major expansion of the county's juvenile hall. “We told them that the state



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FAIR RIGHT: CONNECTICUT POST PHOTO BY PHIL NOEL



Left, Maggie DeSantis was named a Fellow in the Next Generation Leadership program; Margie Powell receives a Liberty Bell Award and is congratulated by Judge Carmen Lopez.

NOTE OF RECOGNITION
CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

“Over the last 20 years, Maggie has demonstrated significant leadership in strengthening Detroit’s local community development practice,” said Garland Yates, manager of RCI. “Under her guidance the Warren/Conner Development Coalition is recognized across the country for its innovative work.”

BRIDGEPORT ACTIVISTS HAILED FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN’S INTERESTS

Two grassroots community activists have won “Liberty Bell Awards”—an honor bestowed every year by the Bridgeport Bar Association.

The awards were presented to mark “Law Day”—a day set aside May 1 for Americans to reflect on how laws make possible the freedoms we enjoy. This year, the theme for Law Day was protecting the best interests of children.

Margie Powell and Marta Calderon both hold leadership positions in Parent Education and Resident Leadership (PEARL), a parent-run nonprofit group that collaborates with others to provide

parent education and training in advocacy and community organizing. PEARL is a spin-off from work done in Bridgeport under the Casey Foundation’s New Futures Initiative.

Calderon says her activism began when she got involved with Bridgeport Futures in 1992, which propelled her onto many boards and councils focused on child advocacy. “It is important to be out there to fight for children,” said Calderon, who doesn’t own a car and takes public transportation to work and community meetings.

Powell has worked hard to advocate for more funding for school readiness and continued support for at-risk children in the early grades. PEARL’s emphasis is “informing parents of what’s out there and how they can get involved and not be intimidated,” said Powell, who has two grown sons and four grandchildren, has adopted three foster children, and is in the process of adopting a fourth.

“These two women are being recognized for their persistence in helping to keep policymakers’ hearts and minds stay where they should be with regard to children,” said Carmen Lopez, a Connecticut Superior Court Judge.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

innovator, and gatherer of critical data that can be used to help shape public policy at the local, state, and national levels. “We want to transform the way communities view their responsibility to youth who have been removed from their families and placed in foster care,” he said.

The initiative will support statewide and community-based efforts through grants, technical assistance, and coalition building. It will also help child welfare agencies and private organizations share best practices.

The Jim Casey Initiative has pilot initiatives for foster care teens in St. Louis, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Nashville, and Atlanta. Stangler expects the initiative to make grants in 15–20 states over the next three years and to operate in every state within five years.

Ruth Massinga, president and chief executive officer of Casey Family Programs, believes young people who have been in foster care should have a voice in everything from program design and evaluation to the allocation of resources. “As with any enterprise, you need to understand your customers and what their needs are,” she said.

For more information, go to www.jimcaseyouth.org.