The Human Services Workforce Initiative

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Commitment

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The primary mission of the Casey Foundation is to foster public policies, human services reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

The Human Services Workforce Initiative: A Commitment to Change

The Human Services Workforce Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is a multi-year effort to address the critical condition of the workforce that serves America's most disadvantaged children and families. The initiative will highlight the urgent need to recruit and retain workers who have the appropriate training and support to deliver crucial and pivotal help in shaping the lives of vulnerable children, youth and families. Through its extensive experience in the field, the Casey Foundation has found that a stable, prepared and motivated human services workforce is essential for real system reform and better results for children and families.

The Foundation's early findings already suggest:

- The human services industry consistently fails to prepare, attract, retain, support or reward frontline workers that are ready and willing to take on the jobs asked of them.
- Nationally, billions of dollars are wasted.
- Research shows that change is possible. The unprecedented levels of mission-driven motivation among these workers point to a uniquely idealistic workforce that represents a key asset in reform—a pool of people who want to do well by those they serve and who are eager to do what it takes to make a difference. Conditions such as these help make reform both powerful and probable.

Through the Human Services Workforce Initiative, the Casey Foundation will:

- Undertake more research to understand these conditions
- Promote promising strategies for change
- Escalate the issue to capture the public and policymaker's commitment to reform

Casey Foundation Initiatives: Long Commitment to Systems Reform

For more than a decade, the Casey Foundation has concentrated an increasing proportion of its resources on a variety of strategies and major initiatives designed to reform inefficient service systems that, too often, have failed to meet the most pressing needs of the nation's most disadvantaged children and families. The emphasis on reforming public child and family-serving systems remains a cornerstone of the Foundation's grant making tradition. This

commitment to provide direct services and craft major system reform has focused primarily on several areas of work:

Direct Services

Casey Family Services: Comprising nearly 20 percent of the current budget, Casey Family Services is the Foundation's direct-services arm that capably translates more than 25 years of success and knowledge into on-the-ground, child-centered approaches to thousands of children and families across seven states. Its comprehensive range of services includes long-term foster care, permanency planning, family reunification, post-adoption, family preservation, family-based treatment, therapeutic foster care, and transition to independence for youths formerly in foster care.

Recently, the Foundation also launched a major joint national effort with Casey Family Programs—**The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative**—to help the approximately 17,000 young people who annually "age out" of foster care successfully become independent adults. Another effort, the **Casey School-to-Career Partnership**, links vulnerable youths, including many who have been in foster care, to a good "first job" experience with quality employers such as UPS, Home Depot and Marriott.

Building Public Awareness

KIDSCOUNT: Since 1990, KIDS COUNT has been the cornerstone of the Foundation's efforts to increase public awareness of the condition of children and to foster greater accountability for improving child outcomes. As a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the U.S., it provides policymakers and the public with annual benchmarks of child well-being through the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* to enrich local, state and national discussions about better futures for all children. The Foundation also funds a nationwide network of state-level KIDSCOUNT projects that provide a more detailed, community-by-community picture of the condition of children.

System Reform

Child welfare: The Foundation has advanced a long-standing campaign to demonstrate that child welfare systems across the nation can decrease the number of kids who enter or remain in foster care. This has been achieved through high-quality, neighborhood-focused, cost-effective efforts that help children remain safely with their families or find new permanent homes. Through the highly regarded **Family to Family** initiative, the Foundation now influences how services are provided to about 70 percent of the nation's out-of-home child welfare population.

Juvenile Justice: The Foundation's **Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)**, and related projects, have proven that it is possible, through revamped screening tools and more effective community-based alternatives, to eliminate unnecessary incarceration of youth in overcrowded, unsafe, unhealthy, and poorly supervised detention facilities—without posing a basic threat to public safety. JDAI practice models are now being replicated statewide in five states and in many more localities across the country where Casey Foundation-supported reforms are influencing the way the juvenile justice field thinks about and implements detention for young offenders.

Education: The Casey Foundation has long believed that strong, high quality schools can be created and can thrive in tough neighborhoods. Foundation grants have been used to support a wide range of innovative demonstrations and technical assistance to help create charter and community-based schools, develop accountability systems, increase involvement and satisfaction of parents with their children's schools, and improve core academic test scores. Additionally, the Foundation is beginning to support neighborhood-scale child and family development systems that will help young kids in the poorest communities arrive at school ready to learn.

Health Care: The Foundation's health-related investments have sought to demonstrate and replicate strong, neighborhood-based, family-focused health care and public health models that can make a real difference in low-income communities. Our efforts have included support for outreach models that increase Medicaid enrollment, recruiting and training neighborhood residents to conduct household health surveys, enrolling kids in health insurance programs and improving access to care. The Foundation has also led efforts to promote reform in traditional mental health systems that historically have ignored or underserved disadvantaged children and families. Additionally, through the **Plain Talk** initiative, the Foundation supports new ways to promote and improve communication between adolescents and adults about tough subjects such as responsible sexual behavior.

Welfare Reform: The Casey Foundation has been a key player and partner in many efforts to improve the financial security of poor families. Current investments help identify and advance some of the best state and local welfare reform practices, including successful Casey-supported models for transitional jobs programs.

Casey Strategic Consulting Group (CSCG): This recently created enterprise builds on the Foundation's system reform initiatives by offering consultation to human services leaders and their organizations and assisting them with efforts to bring about change. CSCG seeks to turn a time of crisis or transition in human services systems into an opportunity for more durable reform by establishing key relationships and providing strategic counsel.