

**Closing Remarks by Douglas W. Nelson  
President, The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
At the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner for the  
National Council on Crime and Delinquency  
New York, New York**

**October 20, 2006**

Thank you. Good evening.

You know I must confess being taken aback when I noted that the program for tonight's celebration entitled my remarks "In Conclusion." But then I realized that many of the NCCD crowd – including the planners of tonight's events – have heard me speak before. It's quite likely that the only part of those speeches they could recall with any pleasure was when I got around to saying "And in conclusion . . ." I take it as a gentle hint not to screw up an otherwise delightful and important celebration. I'll try not to.

Barry actually asked me to opine for a moment or two on what goals we should aspire to for juvenile justice and child welfare in the generation to come.

I have a fairly simple response: In 15 years, our foster care systems should be serving half the children they are today . . . and our juvenile justice systems no more than one-third. Fifteen years from now, race and ethnicity should be a non-factor in determining a child's experience inside any child welfare or juvenile justice system. In 15 years, the children who exit child welfare and juvenile justice ought to have an enhanced prospect for success in life rather than a diminished one.

In large part, achieving these goals means doing more and fighting harder on the reform fronts that the people in this room have already opened. For example, it means making more of the kind of preventive investments that we have long been advocating. It means more and better family strengthening supports for vulnerable families; more and better family preservation for families in crisis; more and better programs to connect at risk youth to positive activities, supportive networks and evidenced-based treatments. And it means more routinely involving family members and community in the decisions that public systems make about the need for placement or confinement.

For those kids who, despite our best efforts, will still come into care or custody, it means persevering in our obligation to banish racially prejudicial actions from the core of all our public systems; it means continuing to lessen reliance on congregate care and institutional confinement; it means more routinely maintaining kids' connection to siblings, family, kin, culture, and community. And it means greater attention to the health, education, and emotional welfare of all children who spend time in state custody.

Finally, it means doing vastly more than we are today to assure that kids who need to come into care are discharged as promptly as possible to permanent, caring social networks that

will protect and support them in their transition to adulthood. Further, kids, and adults, leaving our justice system must have meaningful opportunities and supports in their efforts to rejoin family, community, and the world of work. Without this help, our corrections and justice systems will remain a futile revolving door of crime and recidivism.

Put simply, we must – over the next 15 years – convert the best practices, the innovative assessment and decision-making tools, the evidence-based treatments, the model programs, the exemplary systems, and the promising policies – the very reforms that have been imagined, tested, and advanced over the last 20 years by NCCD and the people and organizations they honor tonight . . . We must convert these ideas and approaches from promising exceptions . . . to the “new normal” . . . to the standard operating practice of all child welfare and juvenile justice systems in the United States.

Can we get to these commonsense and just goals for our kids in the next 10 to 20 years? Can we really apply what we know is better, fairer and more effective, and can we do it at a scale that will actually downsize, humanize, and rationalize our juvenile justice and child welfare systems?

I don't know for sure. I'm not certain we can predict full success. But then again, I'm not sure that 10 or 15 years ago I would have predicted that Vinny Schiraldi would be heading up juvenile justice in the nation's Capital; I'm not sure I would have guessed that John Mattingly would be asked by a Republican to lead the nation's largest child welfare system; or that if one of my own kids had to be incarcerated that I'd recommend he get in trouble in Missouri.

Ten years ago I'm not sure I would have predicted that Bart Lubow's utter abhorrence and determination to undo the reckless harm wrought by juvenile detention across America would become almost conventional wisdom in more than 50 jurisdictions. Five years ago, I would not have predicted the abolition of the death penalty for juveniles. I'm not even sure that 15 years ago I would have predicted that the Vera Institute and the Juvenile Law Center would not only still be going strong, but would be more innovative and more relevant than ever. And who could have ever guessed that a big clumsy national foundation would not only latch on to some good ideas, but, even more miraculously, actually stick with them.

And who, 100 years ago, would have dared imagine that the National Council on Crime and Delinquency would – in the brave new world of 2006 – remain, more than ever, an indispensable voice for fair, humane, and effective solutions to the nation's most vexing justice challenges. I find all these examples of unpredictable achievement a cause for pride . . . for celebration and for optimism about the progress yet to be made.

In conclusion, let me again congratulate Barry and NCCD on a great century and thank them in advance for their continuing leadership in the work yet to be done.