

After-Lunch Remarks for the Annual JDAI Inter-site Conference

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Thanks to all of you for giving me the chance to share some thoughts with you today.

Thanks also to the core group who planned and coordinated this conference, which as you can imagine took months of work—Bart Lubow, Gail Mumford, Raquel Mariscal, Julie Pope, Stephanie Vetter, and DeShaun DeVaughn.

I also want to ask that we give our special appreciation to Melodee Hanes, counselor to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Administrator, who has been instrumental in helping us shape a new partnership with the Federal government to take the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and similar detention reform to a whole new level. I hope you'll allow me a moment to thank publicly the entire Annie E. Casey Foundation team, under the uncommon leadership of Bart Lubow, and the unparalleled commitment, dedication and skill of the network of grantees, technical assistance providers, and close-in consultants who have helped shape our juvenile justice work, and are largely responsible for the success that has been achieved.

I want to give special recognition to the inspiring leadership of Bart Lubow for over more than 20 years. There is no one else in the entire country who has done more to end our reliance on secure detention as the default option for young people who have been arrested, nor anyone who has been more effective, dedicated, or savvy in the movement to rethink our entire juvenile justice field.

Finally, and above all, I want to acknowledge the commitment, courage, perseverance, vision, and the hard work of all of the JDAI site teams, who are truly most responsible for leading this important work. You are leading this country toward a new way of thinking about how to respond to juvenile delinquency.

We have an incredible gathering of the country's top experts, policy makers, and movers and shakers in juvenile justice in this room, which is very exciting and more than a little intimidating as I think about what I might bring to your conference.

As most of you know, Casey has been working on juvenile justice reform for 20 years now. JDAI is our flagship initiative. Over the years, we've invested almost \$100 million in JDAI, and we believe the return on this investment has been one of our best: significant reductions in the number of kids who are locked up, a range of alternative programs launched, co-investment from both public and private resources, and considerable taxpayer savings, all with no increased risk to public safety.

We've also invested in a range of other issues, including joining with those working to eliminate the death penalty for crimes committed by juveniles, and to eliminate the inefficient and ineffective practice of wholesale transfer of kids to adult courts. In recent years, we've added strategic consulting to the work, with long term engagements in Louisiana, and more recently Alabama.

We are one of just a handful of national foundations that have engaged in this work over the long haul. We do this work because our mission as a Foundation is to improve the odds of success for America's most disadvantaged children, and the kids in juvenile justice systems are the kids with the worst odds. We do this work because too often incarceration is a brainless response to very difficult problems, a kind of safety net for system stakeholders that allows them to avoid the need for innovation. We do this work because detention and incarceration consume far too many of the resources that could be put to much better use on behalf of struggling children and their families. Most of all, we do this work because it's the right thing to do as long as there are kids unnecessarily and/or inappropriately being locked up.

And we will not only continue to do this work in the future, but we will expand the work to take on the "deep end" beginning in 2011, as Bart will discuss in detail in his "state of the initiative" comments on Wednesday morning.

Bart suggested it would be helpful to share with you all my thoughts about current and future directions for the Foundation.

Let me begin with the obvious: like most foundations, we're confronting challenging times for our endowment, which now stands about a billion dollars lower than just two years ago. Unlike most foundations, however, even before the economic downturn, we routinely spent between 7 and 7 ½ percent of our endowment each year, rather than the 5 percent minimum required by the IRS to avoid higher excise tax. And although we've managed to reduce our spending over the last two years, we're now spending closer to 9 percent of our endowment, which is simply unsustainable over the long haul. So, at the very least, we need to bring our spending down to the historical range of 7 ½ percent. We'll do that gradually over the next several years, and we'll do that without backing away from any of our commitments.

But over the long haul, we will end up doing fewer things, and if we take full advantage of the opportunity to think about our priorities, we'll end up doing those few things better. So let me share with you my current thinking about the criteria we should use in making some tough decisions. I also want to share in broad outline my thinking about the major areas of work we will continue to invest in, and some of the relatively newer investment areas that I believe we will expand. Finally, I want to talk a bit about what all this means for our juvenile justice work in the years ahead.

To reaffirm some core beliefs: We continue to believe the root cause of much of the rotten outcomes for kids and families is poverty, and therefore, we have an over-arching commitment to increasing the odds that today's children will be on a path to economic security and success as adults. In other words, if we're successful, we should see fewer kids on the track to long-term poverty and therefore fewer families in the next generation in poverty.

Second, we continue to believe that a permanent connection to a nurturing and supportive family—a family for life—is a critical condition for improving outcomes for kids, and therefore, we have an over-arching commitment to reducing the odds that families will be disrupted, and to increasing the odds that children who do experience disruption will find a family for life,

hopefully through reunification with their birth families, or kin, and if not, through another family willing to make that lifelong commitment.

Third, we continue to believe that families do best when they live in communities that support their ability to raise their kids, including safe streets, good schools, access to economic opportunity, and quality housing. Therefore, we will continue to work with communities on all of these issues.

So how are we going to make decisions, what criteria will we use in choosing among all the good ideas that come to us? In looking at our work going forward, I've asked folks to pay close attention to three words: Families, Evidence, and Scale. Expect to hear me using them a lot in the coming months and years. Why? Because they represent what we do best and what we need to do more of. They provide the context for our work at the Casey Foundation and all our efforts to improve outcomes for disadvantaged kids and families.

First and foremost, families: We are a Foundation that works to improve outcomes for children through strategies that also strengthen their families. This two-generation approach underpins everything we do at Casey; it is the language we speak as we frame our efforts to push for greater support for children at the state and national levels. While we believe that there are many very effective and very worthwhile strategies for improving outcomes for kids that are basically child-focused, the strategies we invest our time and money in will be those that result in stronger, better-resourced, more resilient, more secure families, as the path to improved outcomes for children.

We believe the over-reliance on detention and incarceration weakens families, that it communicates the devastating message that families are incapable of guiding their adolescent children to a more productive life, and that it routinely leaves families out. We rarely consult families, either about their own individual children, or about ideas on how to improve our systems. We not only ignore their strengths, we routinely assume they are the cause of all of the child's problems. Yet even a quick review of the most effective prevention and intervention programs for adolescent delinquency reveals that almost all focus on strategies to engage

families as allies, and to strengthen their capacity to guide and nurture and discipline their children. What opportunities for more effective strategies might open if we were to redesign our juvenile justice systems to become truly family-focused? And shouldn't policy be informed by the experiences of families in trying to help their children not only succeed when wards of the system, but also in general?

Second, why do I stress evidence? Making the case for policies or programs requires both compelling stories that explain why the issue is critical, and it also requires a sense of hope that something can be done. In other words, if we're going to motivate folks to act, we need to convince them that a problem is critical, and we need to convince them that there are successful strategies to address the problem. In other words, we need evidence.

So let's examine the evidence in the field of juvenile justice. We know a few things about young people who commit delinquent acts, because almost all young people commit delinquent acts of one sort or another. Most don't get caught, and only a tiny fraction goes on to commit serious offenses as adults. Of those who become chronic or serious offenders, we know from research that they tend to associate with delinquent peers, that they don't see themselves as having much prospect of success, that they have low self-esteem, low attachment to either education, or the workforce. They tend to craft an identity around deviance from social norms, and they are seen by others as deviant.

So how do we typically respond to young people who commit delinquent acts? We group them together with delinquent peers, we diminish their prospects of success, weaken their ties to education and the workforce, reinforce their identity as deviant, and contribute to the sense of stigma they carry.

More than twenty-five years ago, the prevailing wisdom among researchers was that "nothing works" to reduce the odds that certain young people would become chronic or serious offenders; moreover, we were told to anticipate a generation of super-predators, which would contribute to an adolescent crime wave the likes of which had never been seen. Again, if we

look at the evidence, we actually didn't have to be terrified by our children—at least no more than our parents were terrified by us. In truth, we now have even more evidence that our current approaches to juvenile corrections produce awful results on almost any measure: recidivism, youth development, family outcomes, and public safety, not to mention the abuse, scandal, litigation and unhealthy conditions that are all too often associated with our detention centers and training schools. The evidence shows us that large congregate care facilities don't work, are almost impossible to operate safely, cost ridiculous amounts, and fail miserably the “my child” test.

At the same time, we have a fairly robust body of evidence on interventions that actually work, from prevention to early intervention to alternatives for detention and incarceration. For example, Multi-systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Multi-dimensional Therapeutic Foster Care all have impressive evidence of delivering much better results than traditional juvenile corrections, including better outcomes for young people who have committed felony-level offenses. And the evidence shows that JDAI works: it enables jurisdictions to safely reduce confinement and stimulates a wide range of other reforms. When you do something like JDAI in 100 places, and 85 percent achieve similar results, that's strong evidence, even if it doesn't meet the gold standard for evidence-based programming.

These approaches deliver much better recidivism and public safety results, at less cost, which is perhaps reason enough to have them become standard treatment. But I'd like to suggest that the juvenile justice system shouldn't be satisfied with improving recidivism results, as important as that is. We need to recognize the role and responsibility we can play in improving the overall odds of success for the young people who become involved with our systems, including helping them get on a path toward economic success and security, educational attainment, and the kind of social, emotional and relationship stability that we want to see for our own children.

Finally, some thoughts about the challenge of scale: From my point of view, we have much more evidence than scale—in other words, we know much more about interventions and services and policies and supports that have proven effective in helping families and children

than we actually use at any large scale. Today, we have managed to achieve true scale only in those programs and strategies that the evidence suggests do not work.

I think it's safe to say that in juvenile justice, the programs in the United States actually invest the bulk of their resources into interventions and programs that clearly don't work, either for the kids or for public safety. Twenty years ago, the consensus among researchers was simple, as expressed in a famous summary: "Nothing Works" and perhaps that justified the failure to hold ourselves accountable for the failures of the incarceration-centric juvenile justice system. We no longer have that excuse.

I think the Casey Foundation and our network of grantees and other partners are well-positioned to take up this challenge—the challenge of solving the ongoing problem of scale, or how to take strategies that have had success at the program level to a level in which they can improve the odds of success for whole populations of kids and families.

One of the strongest examples of scale Casey can point to is JDAI. We started with five demonstration sites some 18 years ago, which has grown to more than 120. It's fair to say the entire field of detention and even juvenile justice has been fundamentally changed by the work of the people in this room.

At the same time, we face two key "scale" challenges for JDAI. The first is getting to scale in states, especially because detention is either a local function or largely determined by local legal culture. JDAI states are now wrestling with plans to scale up and there are no simple solutions. State government doesn't want to get drawn into local operations. However, states need to scale up JDAI because (a) it's the right thing to do and (b) because it will provide huge payoffs for the state in the form of fewer kids going to deep-end and general juvenile justice reform opportunities.

The second challenge of scale facing JDAI is how to embed what's already been built (the training and technical assistance or TA; the Help Desk; the network; model sites, the publications; etc.) "in the field". How do we establish a permanent infrastructure that will

continue to inspire change, support sites in the difficult work of juvenile justice reform, establish standards for the field, and publicize innovations? Should there be regional associations of JDAI sites? Should there be training and TA resource centers? What do we need to build to ensure that this work continues as the field grows?

We look to all of you to help us find answers to these questions.

And we'll be looking to you for ideas and suggestions and supports for the great remaining challenge in juvenile justice. It's time now—in fact, it's long past time—to put an end to our reliance on incarceration, on the so-called training schools that continue to fail our youth and our communities.

Let me be clear. It's time that we go beyond simply demonstrating that some states or localities can safely reduce incarceration. That's already been demonstrated. We're looking to build a model for community-based alternatives that can be applied at sufficient scale that in five -10 years, there will be, at a minimum, 50 percent fewer youth in America locked up in any facility. Just as important, for the remaining youth who require some form of secure confinement for a period of time, we're looking to help develop alternatives to the traditional training school model.

In short, let us be the leaders who say we've seen enough of failure, abuse and waste—waste of money, and waste of the futures for so many young people. Let us be the leaders who say we can find a better way, that we have the imagination, the creativity and the will to find another path, a path that rejects the too-often brutalizing conditions of today's training schools.

Quite simply, let us be the leaders who witness the closing of the last training school, and the blossoming of a new generation of family-focused treatment, care and support for our most troubled youth.

We are indeed privileged and honored to have all of you in this room as partners in this critically important work.