

FAMILY RE-UNION 10: BACK TO THE FUTURE

Accomplishments and Next Steps

November 19, 2001
Nashville, Tennessee

The most important things in our lives are things that are hard to see and hold or to measure in dollars and cents – the clean air we breathe, the water we drink, the beauty of a sunset. You can't put a price on them, or boil them down to their component parts.

In the same way, the love in a family, the lifelong commitment, the devotion, inspiration, and sharing of joys — you can't measure the value of any of these things in dollars and cents.

The Honorable Al Gore

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INTRODUCTION

Every year for a decade, under the leadership of the Honorable Al Gore, a former U.S. Senator and Vice President of the United States, and his wife, Tipper, citizens from many different walks of life have convened in Nashville, Tennessee. Known as Family Re-Union, this gathering has pulled together advocates for children, youth, older Americans, and families, along with leaders in government, business, philanthropy and higher education, to explore the changing nature of American life, the changing shape of the American family, and how to rethink policy in order to meet the changing needs of families. An ongoing policy initiative with a widespread national impact has sprung from these conferences.

Each of the first nine Re-Unions examined a different critical issue facing families. Family Re-Union 3, for example, looked at the role of fathers in children's lives, while Re-Unions 4, 5, and 6 examined, respectively, the critical importance and transformative effect of family involvement with the media, work, and education. Re-Unions 7, 8, and 9 investigated the intersection of families and health, families and communities, and families and older Americans. These meetings attracted close to 1,000 people from around the country—young people and parents, along with experts working on issues affecting children, youth, and families. Co-sponsored by the Children, Youth & Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota and the Child and Family Policy Center at Vanderbilt University's Institute for Public Policy Studies, Family Re-Union has been generously supported by charitable and family foundations. Each year, it has aimed to stimulate discussion, cooperation, and action plans around the critical issue that is on the table.

Family Re-Union 10: Back to the Future—Accomplishments and Next Steps was a time for celebration and reflection. It celebrated the successes developed at the first nine gatherings and

“There are so many ways in which Family Re-Union has enlarged people’s visions... in ways that strengthen families and help communities thrive. This initiative...was the brainchild of then-Senator Gore, and...has been nurtured and guided by both parents at the head of this large family of which you are a part, Al and Tipper Gore.”

Martha Farrell Erickson

*Director, Children, Youth and Family Consortium,
University of Minnesota*

took the time to think about what the future might hold. It asked important questions. Who were the trailblazers that led the way at previous conferences, and what have they accomplished since? Where are today's pioneers? Who are the visionaries shaking up the current system? How do we put families at the center of policy and encourage young people to start making a difference in the communities around them early in life? More specifically, how can we develop policy to guide the changes that lie ahead, and what kinds of commitments are required to help families and their communities in the future?

Participants agreed with Al Gore when he observed that we need to move away from policy targeted at individuals as though the “membrane of the family” does not exist. The family needs to be considered as an entire unit. As Ralph Smith, Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, put it: “Those of us who care about moving families to the center have to go home and commit to resigning from the child-rescue movement and to joining the family-strengths movement.”

With that insight ringing in the auditorium, Family Re-Union 10 got down to work.

OVERVIEW

It's easy to be a cynic. And it's frequently tempting to conclude that gatherings of advocates and policy experts rarely produce much beyond reports destined to gather dust on shelves. A lot of people have trouble understanding the value of discussion and reflection, when the problems are so pressing and the needs so great.

But in 2003, a new Children's Hospital will arise on the campus of Vanderbilt University, one practically designed from scratch to meet the specifications for ideal pediatric medicine laid out in 1997 at Family Re-Union 7. Based on a commitment made to then-Vice President Gore at that meeting, Vanderbilt set out to build the most "family-friendly hospital" in America. Guided by advice from parents and children in a pediatric advisory council, the new hospital will have drop-in sibling care. Mothers will be able to sleep next to their new-born infants in the intensive care unit. Fathers and mothers of older children will be able to sleep outside their children's rooms, with access to showers, laundries, and kitchens. And the rooms will have more space for kids' toys and parents' overnight kits, and kids will have access to food around the clock. Most significantly, families will be seen as partners with medical professionals in treating their children and arranging for their care.

"We felt you had personally designed Family Re-Union 7 that particular year just for Vanderbilt," reported Terrell Smith, Administrative Director of the Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. With that sort of testimony about effectiveness, even the most hardened observer can come to appreciate the value of these meetings.

Vanderbilt's Children's Hospital is just one of literally dozens of examples of the practical

*"The fear of abandonment,
of poverty, violence, abuse,
rape and incest is
widespread...
Where there is pain, we
pay attention....
We are all broken. But,
when we come together and
hold each other dear in our
hearts, we find a way to
become whole...
From the broken pieces,
we can remake and
recreate ourselves into
beauty and joy."*

Lilly Yeh

*Director, Village of Arts and
Humanities, Philadelphia*

successes that have developed out of Family Re-Union over the years. Attendees heard about a lot that is going well. They listened as artists described efforts to reclaim broken and abandoned city space. They learned of retired physicians providing world-class medicine in communities that had lacked access to hospitals or clinics. They heard from children and youth who are doing wonderful things in their communities. They listened to older Americans who are giving back to a society that has given so much to them. And they worked out some new commitments for the future.

Family Re-Union 10, held on the campus of Vanderbilt University, was convened by Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell and Vanderbilt University Chancellor Gordon Gee. The chancellor, noting that a great university with global interests can “easily lose track of its primary and fundamental relationship with its neighbors,” expressed his conviction that a university is the ideal place for a convocation such as Family Re-Union 10. Then, through a series of panel presentations, structured small group discussions, and films, Family Re-Union 10 explored the success of the past nine meetings and developed an agenda for the future.

Judge Andy Shookhoff, Associate Director, the Child and Family Policy Center at Vanderbilt University and Martha Farrell Erickson, Director, The Children, Youth, and Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota helped open the meeting with reflections on the strengths of Family Re-Union. Judge Shookhoff, laying particular emphasis on the Re-Union’s “healthy disrespect for disciplinary boundaries,” argued that a trademark of these meetings has been their insistence that cross-cutting themes and strategies are essential to improving family stability. For her part, Dr. Erickson spoke of the extraordinary vision and leadership of the Gore team in blazing a trail of family-focused policy for other leaders to follow.

Former Vice President Gore in his opening remarks described the Family Re-Union initiative as not just a conference, but a stream of ongoing activity: “the creation of active networks of people and organizations; commitments to work together to create a better environment for families; the shared learning from past conferences and long experience in the field; participation in the formation of policy and program by those of us who hold these principles dear; and encouragement of the outcomes and the impact of previous years as we go forward.”

He challenged the audience by saying, “we need every one of you to share your expertise, your hearts, and your minds, and with your help, we will help American families and communities to continue to grow and flourish.”

At the close of his remarks Al Gore introduced the short documentary film, *A Place, A Town, A Home*, developed by Jeff Cole, Director of the UCLA Center for Communication Policy, and first viewed at Family Re-Union 8.

The first panel, “Shaking Up the System: Visionaries and Pioneers,” was moderated by Former Vice President and Mrs. Gore. A program leader from each of the Family Re-Unions since 1992 gave a brief sketch of a trail-blazing program and the progress made since that conference. Their accomplishments included innovative strategies to involve families in hospitals and schools, the use of art and performing art to revitalize a community and give hope to families, organizing retired medical professionals to provide free care in needy communities, and creative approaches to community policing and strengthening the role of young fathers.

It was clear that although their programs were very different, they shared an unusual determination to challenge the status quo and to build partnerships that are focused on the well-being of families. In the process they have created stronger communities and resources that reach and support parents in new ways. Many of them spoke movingly of the impact that Family Re-Union had on their work, serving as a catalyst or enabling them to form a network that enhanced and inspired their work.

Next, Mr. Gore—still a “VP” as Visiting Professor at Tennessee State University and UCLA—led a panel discussion of critical issues involved in putting families at the center of policy. The participants were leaders in academia and philanthropy who have spent their professional lives creating dynamic approaches to family involvement in learning, community design, the lives of children and families in poverty, and greater involvement of fathers in children’s lives. In this discussion, the need to move from “child-rescue” policies to a “family-strengthening” approach took center stage, along with a commitment to take back the banner of family issues from interests that had captured the topic for their own purposes.

The following panel, led by Tipper Gore, explored how youth can make meaningful differences in their communities. She led seven young people through a discussion of the leadership roles they have played in their communities, lending their youthful vision and energy to a wide range of projects including recording local history, encouraging organ donation, and creating playgrounds that offer access to children with disabilities.

Next the participants divided into ten working groups in order to revisit the entire range of issues taken up in the first nine Family Re-Unions and to explore lessons learned and future directions and strategies.

The final session looked to the future. Again led by Mr. Gore, it explored how the Family Re-Union movement had reshaped philanthropic attitudes and fostered changes in higher education and social services, and how this new thinking is likely to unfold as the United States moves fully into the 21st Century.

Several themes ran through this meeting. First was the genuine sense that experienced participants in the Family Re-Unions had, themselves, become a family of sorts. Next, was the real pride participants displayed in what their individual and collective efforts had already accomplished. Third, a powerful sense pervaded this meeting that the demographic and cultural forces that have reshaped family life in America in the last two generations are just the beginning. The very face of America, and the shape of its families, will be transformed even further in the next 50 years.

Finally, the conference confirmed that America is up to the challenge. Just as the American people have risen to the occasion in response to the assault on American soil on September 11, so too will they rise to the occasion to support the well-being of children and families in the years ahead.

SHAKING UP THE SYSTEM: VISIONARIES AND PIONEERS

The goals of Family Re-Union are easy to state, but the outcomes are difficult to measure. This opening session was designed to clarify these goals and provide powerful examples of how Family Re-Union has, over the years, helped transform communities.

The core goal, said Mr. Gore, was to bring together all the disciplines and systems that have been working on family issues, often in silos and in their own peculiar jargon, and examine what they have in common and in a shared language. From that primary goal evolved the second major goal: to reinvent family policy so that it could be grounded in a cross-disciplinary, integrated approach. At one point, speaking of the need to replace sprawling, suburban tracts criss-crossed with multi-lane highways with living, breathing communities in which people could meet and speak with each other, Mr. Gore quipped, “It’s as though policy was designed to make sure all the cars are happy!”

He referred to the impact of the Re-Union process and the special magic of the featured programs, “I’ve come to believe that success stories in one place can, in fact, often be replicated elsewhere, but not exactly according to the first success. Because, inevitably, what you find, and what we’ve found in these Family Re-Unions, is that the really successful efforts have grown organically out of the community.

“They’re made up of the dreams, and hopes, and talents, and strengths of the individuals and the families in that community. But, we’ve also found that when these pioneers stumble upon a very successful formula that works for them, it can often be modified and planted like a seed in another community where it will grow organically, but emerge in a different form, taking advantage

“We Americans have a mission of proving that religious and economic and political freedom represent the way human beings are supposed to live... I think ...our second mission is to prove that people of every background can, not only get along, but...create a whole that is much larger than the sum of its parts.”

The Honorable Al Gore

of the strengths in that community.”

So this was a meeting that set out to explore what has been learned from Family Re-Union. It wanted to look into what should happen next. And it hoped to explore issues of scalability so that successful models might be re-produced or re-invented elsewhere.

After the showing of *A Place, A Town, A Home*, a film collage developed by UCLA's Jeffrey Cole, this Family Re-Union got down to work. But the images of community captured in this dramatic short documentary—schools and synagogues, recreation centers and playgrounds, mosques and churches, and families in all their remarkable variety—had a powerful effect. For they reminded everyone in the auditorium that Family Re-Union is much more than an academic policy discussion. It's been an important, living, breathing conversation that America has held with itself about the quality of its daily life and the shape of its common future.

Shaking Up the System

Against that backdrop, Mr. Gore introduced the meeting to nine visionaries who are shaking up the system. Some work at the gritty edges of urban life, trying to redeem abandoned space through art. Others labor in the world of policy and philanthropy, struggling to find common ground between ideals and reality. Many focus on families' youngest members, just as others concentrate on the oldest. A handful consider the entire continuum of human existence within their orbit. All of them are pioneers, creative and boundless in their efforts to strengthen families and build better communities, and they described how their work had grown out of and contributed to Family Re-Union from 1992 through 2001.

- **Linda Money Langham**, former head of “WE CARE” fairs in Manchester, Tennessee, described how a challenge to her from then-Senator Gore at the first Family Re-Union, led her to launch a series of fairs. These efforts were designed to provide services, shoes, clothing, school supplies, and health care to needy children before the school year began. An added benefit is that the Care Fairs bring service providers together in one place, creating new partnerships and greater access for the families. The program has grown in Manchester to involve 1,800 children annually and some 200 volunteers.

Describing their first efforts to launch the program she said, “Honey, we got to shaking. We pounded the pavement. We kissed every baby we could find. We washed everything from fire trucks to cars and aggravated the civic clubs in our community to death. In the meantime, we were ordering clothes, getting those school supplies together, working on getting an in-house boutique set up, also a hairstyling salon. And 40 days after our first meeting, on the first Saturday in August, we had our first care fair.” “A little Dutch courage took us a long way,” she concluded.

- **Jim Bueermann**, has the unusual title of Chief of Police, Director of Housing, Recreation, and Senior Services in Redlands, California. He has reinvented policing strategies in Redlands to encompass housing, recreation, and senior services. The mission of his department is not only to protect life and property, but also to develop a more livable community that supports strong families, resilient youth, and safe and sustainable neighborhoods. Bueermann's department helps provide down payments on homes for struggling families, home improvement loans, after-school services, and health and dental screening, among other services. It even provides transportation, he grinned. "In Redlands, you'll see these busses full of happy seniors riding around and the busses say 'police' on the side. But the seniors are not in custody!"

Describing the philosophy that inspires his work, Chief Bueermann said, "When we were exposed to the Family Re-Union concept, one of the things that happened, and I hope you both appreciate the gift that you gave us, and to all the people in the city of Redlands, is that we realized that we had not been focusing enough on the family."

Chief Bueermann proudly reported that now his department's mission statement says "we're about developing and helping to promote a more livable community by supporting strong families, resilient youth, and safe and sustainable neighborhoods. You don't hear the word crime in there because it's our belief that crime is the absence of strong families, and it's the absence of kids that have a sense of resiliency and positive pro-social orientation to the world, and it's the lack of sustainability and safety in neighborhoods. That's where crime comes from."

- **Joe Jones, Jr.**, developed the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development in Baltimore, Maryland following Family Re-Union 3. Jones described the impact of the absence of men from the lives of children in profoundly moving terms. Acknowledging that he had not always been a model citizen, Jones pointed out that the value of Family Re-Union was that it called him back to the values his family had instilled in him as a boy. It also led his center to establish efforts to raise levels of child support by encouraging city and state agencies to write off past child support debts if fathers would agree to pay child support in the future. "Prior to Family Re-Union, many of us considered child support as an adversary. Now we distinguish between deadbeat dads, and the category we work with, low-income, dead-broke dads."

In describing the toll that fatherlessness takes on children, he said, "The pain associated with growing up not knowing the other half of the person that brought you into this world is so devastating that a lot of children can't overcome it. And we see the negative statistics associated with that."

Commenting on the impact of Family Re-Union 3 on the fatherhood movement, he said, "one of the things that really surprised me about coming to Family Re-Union was that oftentimes folks

from the community view government in a cynical kind of way. And I really thought that I was coming to this government-sponsored conference that really was, you know, smoke and mirrors. And when we were at Tennessee State that year, and without the press being around, we talked openly and candidly about the impact of men being absent from the lives of families and their children. And, at that time, there was very little research about the impact of fatherlessness on children.”

He recalled the remarkable results of that conference: “The several meetings that the field began to have at your office in Washington, and the follow-up through the President’s Memorandum that went out to all the secretary of cabinets, asking them to report back to you on their view of the appropriateness of including fathers in their policies and practices was huge to this field. And that conference has been widely regarded as the milestone and the event that put fatherhood on the national map.”

In response Al Gore commented, “I’ve learned so much from you, Joe. ... You’ve been doing great work. ... You have inspired so many others to start these programs.”

- **David Walsh**, founder of the National Institute on Media and the Family, reported that it, too, developed from a challenge laid down by then-Vice President Gore at Family Re-Union 4. The center conducts research, advocates for responsible media, and works with policy development. For example, it attempts to educate the video and computer game industries and issues annual reports cards on the products of these industries. “Our underlying belief is that the media is powerful. Not good or bad, but powerful,” said Dr. Walsh.

“Family Re-Union 4 was truly a life-changing event for me,” Dr. Walsh confided. “We had all talked about how powerful the media was. What do we do? And I had a number of ideas that I shared. And, Vice-President, you turned to me at the end of that and said, ‘well why don’t you do them?’ On my way back home to Minneapolis that afternoon I literally sketched out a concept paper and sat down with my wife when I got home and said, I want to do this. We had two kids in college, two tuitions, and she said, well, let’s go for it. And that was really the beginning of the idea of what became the National Institute on Media and the Family.”

- **Lisa Farnin**, a cancer support advocate from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, applauded the consistent support Family Re-Union has offered for volunteer caregivers for the elderly and the sick. With regard to families and work, she thought, it is high time to take family-friendly concepts beyond experts and professionals and get them into the heads of managers. Culturally, employers need to look at how their decisions influence families; adults need to make sure that technology does not become a noose tying them to work 24-hours a day, seven days a week; and overtime needs to be re-considered.

“Overwork is a very real possibility in our modern life,” she noted, and went on to say that we must “consider the effects of the volume of work and the stress level of work on the family.”

Responding to her concerns, Al Gore said, “When we talk about work and family, there are lots of families where the principal challenge is not enough work and finding jobs, being able to get the income to make ends meet. But, the predominant topic of conversation that’s going on in families all across America, where work and family is concerned, is how to restore a proper balance. I mentioned in the opening that we’re working harder than any other people on the face of this Earth, meaning more hours, more time away from family. In a sense, in many families, work has begun to cannibalize family, community, sleep.”

- **Anne McGintis** is coordinator of Parent, School, and Community Involvement in Hamilton County Schools, Chattanooga, Tennessee. She explained that “...the key word for Family Re-Union 6 was collaboration. I mean, we had to get families together. We had to get them to the community. ...Parents are first teachers, but we had to get everybody involved if we wanted to do things differently. We had to invite the hospital, we had to invite workforce development, we had to invite the mayor.”

She described her “Family Pack” to the audience: Crayons to represent diversity; Nerds to represent fear of learning; Sweet ‘n Low to remind us that parents are sweet people; Equal to call attention to the need for equality; Roloids as a sign that public agencies should not be giving citizens indigestion; Extra to point out the need for extra work; and Butterfingers as a symbol that no one is allowed to drop the ball. And the last one? “Regardless of what we do, we are all Lifesavers!”

- **Terrell Smith**, administrative director of the Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital, credited Family Re-Union 7 as the driving force in the design of the new hospital. “Family Re-Union could not have come at a more perfect time for Vanderbilt,” she said, “because we had just announced that we were going to build a free-standing Children’s Hospital here on campus. As you recall, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Jacobson, actually made a personal commitment to you, which we recorded and we’ve shown in various venues, that we would build the most family-friendly hospital in the country.

“We had 27 design teams that were involved in the various aspects of the design, and we had family members on all of those teams. We not only invited the parents, but we formed a pediatric advisory council called the PAC. The PAC actually sat down with the architects and the parents, and they helped design the hospital along with the caregivers. It was a very powerful experience.”

- **Lilly Yeh** directs the Village of Arts and Humanities in Philadelphia, a program to reclaim abandoned city lots through art. So far it has converted over 200 degraded eyesores in the city, turning them into community parks, gardens, and green space. The effort includes a two-acre tree farm and a playground commissioned and built with the help of the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles. "Today our young people and our adults are feeling good, because of the sense of hope in the air and the beautiful parks and gardens in our neighborhoods," reported Ms. Yeh, to enthusiastic applause.

She explained her strategy for involving families, by saying, "We build family through an organic process and we start from the most vulnerable link, which is often a child. At the beginning, it was the children who responded to our dream of rebuilding their vacant lots. Those were the children who roam about the street with nothing to do and nobody there to supervise them.

"They came to us and we worked with them on mixing cement, on cutting wire, and mosaic and sculptures. And through working with the children for three years, we gained the trust of the community. And then, adults begin to drift in, and some of them were parents of some of the children in our group.

"And that Family Re-Union 8, my god! ...It helped us grow in very significant ways. It started from me going into the community with one adult and a bunch of children, and now...we engage the participation of over 10,000 people, mostly from Philadelphia, but also people from different parts of the country and in the world.

"We always create jubilantly, celebrate jubilantly the gift of life and living with songs, drumming, and dance. We mark the passing of the year with festivals and wondrous ceremonies in which we bless our community, families, and the children. Witnessing the coming of the age of our young people, we pledge to them our unswerving support and commitment to stand by them, and they to us their respect and their full attention to realize their potential and to bring the light of their inner flames to the future."

- **Jack McConnell** is retired from a distinguished career in the pharmaceutical industry where he co-invented and directed the development of the tuberculosis tine test, directed the development of Tylenol, and directed the development of the first commercial MRI system in the United States. He and his wife moved to Hilton Head, South Carolina determined to play a lot of golf. But something interfered with his plans: he learned that hundreds of people on the island lacked access to health care. Working with retired medical professionals and lay

volunteers he set out to build an institute and clinic for professionals to serve as Volunteers in Medicine. The 7,000 square-foot facility now provides examining rooms, dental offices, x-ray laboratories, a chiropractor's office, and an eye clinic. It has provided more than 100,000 patient visits to working poor people over the last seven years. "And we're starting 41 others around the country – 17 are up and running and the other 25 are on track to open over the next several months," Dr. McConnell proudly reported.

"We've not only created a community, we've created and achieved Dr. King's vision of the beloved community because this town says to the working poor, we not only care about you, we are going to care for you. And every one of them received care. That's the beloved community."

When Dr. McConnell looks back on the past seven years and the over 100,000 patient visits with families who live in poverty, he said he wonders "what would they have done if that clinic hadn't been there? And I'm asking you, in your communities, you have working poor there, and what are they doing now for care?"

Dr. McConnell challenged conference attendees, "If you or someone in your community wants, insist on helping them. This is not a job for somebody that wants it to happen. Insist on it happening. Call us. We'd be delighted to help you. And we have been adopted now by one of the pharmaceutical companies, and they pay all of our salaries, just transportation and margin is the only cost there's going to be to you."

What came through in this discussion was the conviction expressed by Mr. Gore, that watching "Friends" is not the same as having friends, and that having a purpose in life is much better than simply waiting in place. In fact, reported Dr. McConnell, according to a study completed at his clinic, volunteering to help in programs like the projects these visionaries pioneered, actually improves health and may extend life. Volunteers required less medication, took fewer sick days, and had remarkably few visits to the hospital and days spent in the hospital.

In many ways, the vision statement of Jack McConnell's hospital sums up not just the entire Family Re-Union movement but the powerful commitment of these pioneers as well:

...may we have eyes to see those who are invisible and excluded...open arms and hearts to reach out and include them...healing hands to touch their lives with love... in the process...we will heal ourselves.

FAMILIES AT THE CENTER OF POLICY: CRITICAL ISSUES

Next on the agenda was a powerful discussion of critical issues involved with putting families at the center of policy development. Moderator Gore led a panel through a searching conversation spanning issues affecting family security, education to improve life in America, emerging family patterns, the on-going effort to define family issues, and promising new practices. The panel included: Larry Aber, professor of public health at Columbia University and director of the National Center for Children in Poverty; James Comer, M.D., Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale Child Study Center; Samina Quraeshi, Henry Luce Professor of Family and Community, University of Miami; and Ralph Smith, Vice President, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The conversation began with an observation from Mr. Gore that the lens through which most human challenges have been viewed in the past one hundred years has been the individual. Now, he suggested, it is time to put families at the center of policy and use the family lens as the filter through which we view the individual.

Family Security

“I want to suggest that two issues are at the heart of family security, today,” noted **Larry Aber**, as he launched into his comments, “economic security and basic psychological and physical security.” Both are related.

With regard to economic security, the last decade has produced a sea change. Welfare reform sent out the message that all American are required to work, including parents of very young children. Important policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and the burgeoning economy of the 1990s helped this process along, putting more and more low-skilled and under-educated people

“Family Re-Union helped end decades of silence on the part of liberals and progressives on three important issues...We allowed a welfare system that was intolerable to continue... We got silent on the issue of faith...And we lost our way on families, because... we ceded...the rubric of family values.”

Ralph Smith

*Vice President,
Annie E. Casey Foundation*

to work. Investments in child care and child health insurance have helped these changes along and produced an unprecedented decline throughout the 1990s in the welfare rolls.

At the same time, said Aber, demographic considerations have changed in complex and subtle ways. There has been a 50 percent decline in the number of families on welfare. We have seen a significant decline in the child poverty rate, combined with the lowest poverty rate among African Americans in the history of the United States. Yet not all low-income families have done well. In particular, families headed by parents with less than a high school diploma have lost income, while families headed by those with better education have prospered. Families with mental health and substance abuse challenges continue to face problems, and families struggling to get by on incomes of \$20,000 annually are overworked and over-stressed in a society where an income of \$36,000 is necessary to provide the basics to a family of four.

As a result, he suggested, policy needs to reflect the fact that the United States, for the first time since the Great Depression, is entering a recession without a safety net for the most vulnerable. The test of the next decade will be whether this challenge can be faced. Aber suggested that it could if three tests are met: First, a stimulus package that actually supports low- and moderate-income families, not one that doesn't. Next, making sure that major Federal legislation for food stamps and welfare are reauthorized and are more supportive of families. Finally, he urged the same transformation for state and local government so that they fully understand and utilize the flexibility they already enjoy under current legislation.

Dr. Aber noted the devastating impact of the events of September 11th on the children and families in his native city of New York. He explained that he had studied the effects of war on children in the Middle East and Southern Africa and in Central America for ten years, and said, "I didn't imagine studying it in my own home town. In addition to thousands of children losing their parents, 7,000 children in southern Manhattan, seeing people fall from buildings, and things that children shouldn't see, 100,000 parents have lost their jobs due to September 11th, in New York City. So, for us, physical and psychological security is tied together with economic security. Thank God we have the last ten years to build on because we have enormous challenges, but we will be up to it."

Family Involvement in Learning

James Comer spoke of the importance of families that function well in promoting "bonding and attachment." The internalization of attitudes and values, brain growth and development are all linked together. "You can't have one without the other," he said. Therefore, he argued, education policy must support and recognize the developmental needs of children. The need that children have for a strong, functioning family that allows for healthy bonding, carries over into the need to

form close supportive relationships in the school environment. He concluded that “it is good development, good academic learning that prepares you for life, that is really what we need for domestic security. It is the closest thing we have to the silver bullet for preparing children to live and function well in society and, in turn, for the good of the society.”

Dr. Comer noted, sadly, that the educational establishment is still committed to the notion that school success hinges on will and intelligence, and is unprepared to fill developmental needs. “The development that takes place at home should continue in school, but too many school people are not prepared to support the development of children in school,” he observed, and went on to say that we must work to “create the kinds of conditions in school in which families can participate, support the development of children, and aid their growth so that they can learn at a necessary level.”

Next, Dr. Comer pointed to educational policy, which needs to provide for a “very large pool of teachers and administrators in school who can create these conditions at the building level.” Finally, although standards, testing, and accountability are important, as are infrastructure changes and smaller class size, Dr. Comer said that the most critical factor in achieving school success is an educational culture that can support healthy child development and can “pay attention to relationships, the relationships that will support the development of children in school and will enable them to learn.”

“If we can do that,” Dr. Comer concluded, “if we can create that kind of policy, we can then have workers who can meet the demands of the present age. We will have people who can participate in an open, democratic society, and we will have people who can find satisfaction and meaning in all that they do.”

Families and Communities

As Vice President Gore turned to **Samina Quraeshi**, he noted that she has joint appointments at the University of Miami in the schools of Medicine and Architecture, which is an excellent example of the importance of a cross-disciplinary approach to family and community.

“We used to be able to walk to schools,” noted Professor Quraeshi. “We used to be able to walk to the market. Now everybody has to drive everywhere. Sprawl is one of the great problems that’s working against families.”

The sheer amount of time involved with getting to and from work and school often means that by the time family members return home they are exhausted. “To rebuild our inner cities, we need to stress mixed use, multi-income, easily-accessed institutions. The whole idea, as Joe Jones said

earlier, is that neighbors have left the neighborhood, leaving behind only the 'hood. That's a very important point.”

If we intend to honor the concept of family, the environment has to be recreated in such a way that people can converse, interact and relate to one another, instead of committing the nation to endless sprawl and greater distance from the nucleus of hearth and home.

“In too many of the communities in this country,” agreed Mr. Gore, “we seem to have followed the guiding principle of ‘Make sure the cars are happy!’ ”

Dr. Quraeshi commented that the conference was like an extended conversation. “What I have learned from Family Re-Union and from the example of Professor Gore and Tipper is the art of conversation,” she said, “and I would encourage all of you to become advocates for conversation and for true curiosity about other people. Just as one family is not like any other, one culture is not like any other. And through opening our minds and our hearts ...we can enrich our own and, I think, widen the whole idea of extended family that will, ultimately, in my optimistic view, be the resolution of conflict.”

Putting Families at the Center of Policy

In terms of the larger policy debate, what Family Re-Union has done over the last decade was to permit progressive Americans to reclaim the right to talk about family issues, asserted **Ralph Smith**. In an impressive overview of the politics of the discourse about families and family issues, he noted that before Family Re-Union, liberals could not afford to talk about work, without embracing work fare. “So we became silent and allowed a welfare system that was intolerable to be continued.”

Next, he said, progressives got confused about the “establishment clause” of the constitution, “so we got silent on the issue of faith and we ceded territory that we should not have ceded. We could not figure out how to deal with the common sense reality that spirituality and faith are important ingredients for action, commitment, recovery, and healing for many people.” Finally, liberals averse to the “patriarchal model” could not develop a language to talk about family values in a meaningful way.

He noted that, “What Family Re-Union helped to do was to recapture that terrain. It brought folks from around the country to come here to Nashville to say: we care as much about families as anyone does, and we can figure out how to talk about it. We can figure out how to act on it. We can figure out how to transform the conversation and the policy environment of this country so that family is moved to the center. ...We need to commit to raising the income, to helping these

families build assets, to help them accumulate wealth, to help them get access to affordable consumer products and services, and to make sure that in their neighborhoods they have access to financial services and products in such a way that their neighborhoods aren't being stripped of assets and wealth, the assets and wealth that these families need."

Throwing down a compelling challenge to the conference attendees he stated, "If we take on the enduring disparities which have essentially segmented the society on the basis of race and color, as well as class, we will conclude that Family Re-Union helped, helped not only to end the decades of silence, but helped to create an enduring legacy, a legacy which is worthy of the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, worthy of their leadership, worthy of their participation, and worthy of the time we spend with each other."

Changing Pressures and Dynamics on the Family

Mr. Gore then noted some statistics that demonstrate the rapid change in demographics in the past century. While the lifespan has increased by 30 years, the divorce rate has gone from 3% to 50%, the percentage of mothers of young children working outside the home has increased from 20% to 80%, with 30% of children in this country born to unwed mothers.

In a lively discussion of changing family structures and dynamics launched by Mr. Gore, Dr. Comer pointed out that until the Industrial Revolution children had always grown up in close proximity to their parents. In today's wired world where children watch on average 35 hours of television a week, we have rapidly developed a culture, he said, in which children learn about the world from someone other than their parents.

Dr. Comer felt that we must do a better job of using schools, community organizations, and faith communities as places where we can involve families and transmit our cultural and social values to the next generation.

Meanwhile, the panelists agreed, technology, commercialism, and consumerism have combined into such an onslaught that many people feel threatened by it. Some, like the character Tevya in *Fiddler on the Roof*, resort to tradition, suggested Smith. Others move further into traditionalism and reach for fundamentalism. Still others are completely overwhelmed, unable to enter into what Comer has called the "essential adult conspiracy" that makes it possible to raise children.

And, in many cases, concluded Smith, "our communities are fragmented." Parents, in isolation, are trying to raise children alone. Social institutions hold faith-based organizations at arms length. Churches often don't relate to schools.

The Common Theme. “What’s always intrigued me about school movies,” said Mr. Gore, drawing the discussion to a close, is that there’s always a hero principal or a hero teacher, or a hero coach who has a problem kid, lots of them.” Although one student always exemplifies the problem, the real issue is always obscure and mysterious.

And then the hero makes a journey, said Gore. “He or she dodges crack dealers, avoids gunshots, and finally...finally...gets to the family. And then the hero understands the inner life of the child. And, transformed by that journey, armed with this new knowledge, the hero returns to the classroom and transforms the child....It’s inspiring. And the key to it is reconnecting the family to the school and the school to the individual child.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE EARLY IN LIFE

It is not always easy for adults to admit that young people often have a better idea of what they want and a better sense of community needs than the grown-ups around them. Throughout the life of Family Re-Union, however, the contributions of young people have always been encouraged and respected. Family Re-Union 10 was no different, as seven very impressive young people described what they've been doing and how it has helped them and their communities. All but one of them had been important contributors to the prior meetings, and like the first session they represented, as Judge Shookhoff's daughter Laren commented, "Family Re-Union's 'Greatest Hits.'" A member of the preceding panel noted that, "while children are a diminishing proportion of the number of citizens in the country, and households with children are a diminishing proportion of households, they are still 100 percent of our future."

"All of these young people have shown tremendous courage and resilience. They have overcome great odds to share their stories with us today."

Tipper Gore

Under the skillful moderation of Tipper Gore, this representative cross-section of young people, boys and girls, majority and minority, and from communities of poverty and affluence, spoke of their hopes and dreams for themselves and their communities.

- **Matthew Cavedon**, a 7th-grade student in Berlin, Connecticut is an advocate for children with disabilities. He helped establish "Boundless Playgrounds," an organization that has assisted 30 communities across the United States to provide accessible playgrounds where children with disabilities can laugh, play, and grow together.

He explained that, "I work to educate people that we are all the same, though we may walk different, talk different, or look different. One way to help the differences disappear is to interact early in childhood. One place that helps differences disappear is the playground. If I

can play alongside you, than I am equal to you. If I am forced to only watch or play somewhere else, than I am segregated from you, and this will change the way each of us perceives each other forever.”

Matthew designed the “Dreamer,” a glider boat big enough to hold two people in wheelchairs or six without wheelchairs. His advocacy helped enact Connecticut Senate Bill 33 in 2001, to provide \$1 million in matching state funds to help communities build Boundless Playgrounds. “I can’t wait until every kid who has wished they could play independently is laughing in a Boundless Playground,” he concluded.

- **Jose Diaz** is a senior at the University of California, majoring in communications. At Family Re-Union 6, Jose’s mother described the work of the Mar Vista Families Center, in Culver, California, founded in 1977 as a cooperative preschool and now offering summer camps, a community center, youth programs for leadership, writing, and the study of nature. Jose serves as Youth Coordinator for the Mar Vista Center and has been working to establish a By Youth for Youth National Network. He works with at-risk, low-income youth on a variety of projects, including efforts to help the elderly, sports programs, community clean-ups, fundraisers for trips, and college planning. “We have young people interested in engineering, medicine, and law. When we finish, we’ll be able to help out the program in whatever way we can,” he noted.

Building on a recurring theme of the conference, he stressed the importance of an intergenerational strategy. “We’re trying to create a new building where we’re going to have the youth program, as well as an elderly program, where we’ll be able to work together. So far, it’s been very productive and actually, I guess, I’m the product of that.”

- **Brandon Laws** lives in a vibrant, intergenerational community called Generations of Hope in Illinois and participated with his extended family in Family Re-Union 9. An elderly widow, “Miss Irene”, has served as a foster grandparent to and a mentor to his adoptive mother. Across racial boundaries this extended family has created strong bonds, hope for the future and support that has enabled Brandon and his sister to excel. Eleven years old, Brandon is an honors student, a member of his school’s cross-country team, and the proud possessor of a yellow belt in karate.

“I had lived in the [foster care] system for six years. I had learned how to steal, lie, and shoplift, but I didn’t know my ABCs or my numbers and colors. I could not write or spell my name. Now I can read and write. I’m on the honor roll. I was pitiful, but today I am proud,” said Brandon, who is impressive evidence of the healing power of love and stability in young people’s lives.

- **Jennifer McGintis**, Anne's daughter, is a 12th-grade student leader at Boyd-Buchanan School in Chattanooga. A talented dancer, she dances with Ballet Tennessee dance company, and shares her talents with the community in "Dance Alive," a summer program offering children the opportunity to experience the world of dance. She also dances at local nursing homes, after-school programs, and for various civic and service organizations, including an NAACP birthday celebration honoring the late Reverend Martin Luther King. "The children are so intrigued by our movement and how much fun we have as dancers. We're giving them something they can always cherish in their hearts and that's what I love about working in the community and sharing my talents with other people," she said.
- **Daniel Moretz** is a ten year old elementary school advocate for organ donations from Augusta, Georgia. Born with complex congenital heart disease and required to undergo twelve heart-related surgeries, Daniel himself received a new heart at the age of eight. A member of the children's advisory council at the Medical College of Georgia's Children's Medical Center, Daniel advocates for organ donation awareness through the American Heart Association. He also finds time to participate in Wee Can Ski programs and sing with Bell and Angel Choirs at the Lutheran Church of the Resurrection. "It's important to tell someone you love, before you die, that you want to be an organ donor," said Daniel with the simple power of a statement and a presence that required no other words.
- **Kayt Norris** is a junior at Quincy Senior High School, Quincy, Illinois, and has been a volunteer leader since third grade. Among her accomplishments: establishing "Helping Hands" when she was in the 4th grade, an organization that helped provide the community with a butterfly garden and a tulip garden, along with numerous other community projects. These include completing two videos on famous Quincy citizens, Arthur Pitney and General Paul Tibbets, with another ten planned. Helping Hands now has 150 members with over 10,000 service hours to their credit. Kayt also serves as vice-president of TEAM, an anti-discrimination group that sponsored a forum on Islam and Middle Eastern cultures in 2001. "I can't tell you what an amazing feeling it is to have the mayor of your town recognizing that young people are involved. I tell you, when the mayor asks us to do something, we get right to it," smiled Ms. Norris. Urging the audience not to overlook the tremendous potential of young people, she said, "there's all sorts of youth out there ready, willing to get involved; you've just got to ask us, and we'll be there."

Seven different stories, but all with common themes. When it comes to children, families and communities are important. And each of these young people, too, has been an essential component of their own families and a vital and vibrant part of their communities. And all of them are clearly making a difference.

WORK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Inspired by these presentations, participants in Family Re-Union 10 then moved into ten working groups to expand the discussion and think about next steps. Each of the working groups was asked to concentrate on one of the topics of the ten Family Re-Unions, with panels of leaders in each field to inform, inspire and guide the discussion.

These proceedings outline the conversations in each of these discussions.

WORKING GROUP 1

Basic Principles

Martha Farrell Erickson, Moderator, Director, Children, Family & Youth Consortium, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

Larry Aber, Director, National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, New York City, NY

Moises Perez, Director, Alianza Dominicana, Inc., New York City, NY

Ann Segal, Senior Manager and Director of the Washington Office for Building National Capacity for Children, Packard Foundation, Washington, DC

The first working group's discussion touched on language, partnerships, leadership, and the politics of change. Partnerships, relationships, and connections in and among families and units of government and the private sector are an essential catalyst to community change. For effective change, the entire system—and each component part of that system—must work as a whole and those for whom change is sought must be active partners in the process.

“Whoever tells the stories defines the culture... Stories are critically important in terms of transmitting values from one generation to the next... Because of that power, I think it becomes increasingly important that we figure out a way to make those storytellers and those media a force for good.”

David Walsh

National Institute on Media and the Family

The group felt it was important that the members of these partnerships carefully identify the barriers to their success. In all of this, leadership becomes essential. Leadership development and succession deserves some policy consideration. Interdisciplinary and cross-cultural training and education in the many issues surrounding family-centered community building are essential. Leaders must derive from the community itself. While ideas and program concepts are transferable, leaders are not.

The panel noted several important areas that should be addressed. Even as we are meeting the needs of families, we often fail at addressing the needs of those who deliver services. There must be a neighborhood focus for this service delivery, and clear accountability for success or failure. Agencies must work together and create a systems approach. The business and faith communities are a critical part of this process. Schools can provide an ideal locus for family-centered activities. Families and children should be involved in the planning of these initiatives. We should take special note of the barriers and opportunities in public housing communities.

Finally, the politics of an issue are crucial to long-term success. In many ways, a child and family impact statement might be a useful way to remind political leaders of the consequences of their actions across the policy spectrum. Larry Aber noted that language creates a frame of reference that sets a standard for a group or a policy. While the success of all these approaches hinges on strong interpersonal relationships, the family-centered agenda will not be moved forward until there is political will behind the concept. We must focus on shared values, mutual responsibility and positive outcomes. Language, partnerships, leadership and politics form a daunting agenda, but one that is essential to family policy.

WORKING GROUP 2

Reinventing Family Policy

Anne Peretz, Moderator, Founder and Chair of the Board, The Family Center, Inc., Somerville, MA

Paula Duncan, M.D., Youth Health Director, Vermont Child Health Improvement Program, Professor of Pediatrics, University of Vermont School of Medicine, Burlington, VT

Gaetana Ebbale, Executive Director, Children’s Services Council of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, FL

Bob Ross, M.D., Director, The California Endowment, Woodland Hills, CA

Working group 2 considered what the family policy process would look like if driven by families. In general, participants agreed that family-centered policy would emphasize:

- community empowerment;
- commitment to whole families, rather than individuals;
- a focus on ensuring that young people have an active role in building community;
- determination to involve parents as active partners in the process of change;
- decategorization of funding and accountability for results;
- shifting the paradigm from the service provider at the center, with the families revolving around it, to placing the family at the center of services;
- building on the strengths and assets of families and communities, not their weaknesses;
- focusing on prevention; and
- providing universal services and valuing diversity.

Dr. Paula Duncan of the University of Vermont noted that Vermont's reforms stem from a spirit of commitment focusing on what's right more than what's wrong and treating the community and families as the experts. She noted that accountability hinges on identifying clear goals and specific objectives and keeping them simple: healthy births, children ready for school, school achievement, and youth who have useful roles in the community. In Vermont, these goals have resulted in universal home visits to newborns, Family Resource Centers and Beacon Schools. The biggest challenge is to engage the entire community in achieving these goals.

In addition to partnership programs with parents, she stressed the importance of active involvement of youth in communities. Engagement of youth serves as an indicator of community health as well as a great resource. Young people must be given genuine decision making roles.

Gaetana Ebbola of the Children's Services council of Palm Beach County highlighted the importance of relationships: parent to parent, parent to child, and parent to caregivers. She noted that communities need "proactive frameworks of support". A three-step application of family policy works in the following way:

- Specific programs are developed with parents working step by step through the process.
- Universal countywide practices are established, such as newborn home visiting.
- Funding streams are integrated and maximized.

Resistance comes when professionals don't understand asset-based services and want to be the "experts" who "rescue" children.

Anne Peretz of the Family Center in Somerville, MA described in detail how her center puts families at the center of their own services. In an interactive process, members of a family are urged to tell the stories of their families and to consider specific things that they are proud of or positive actions they have taken, along with those that have not been so positive. She noted that it is

critical to train and reward with adequate funding those providers who learn the essential skills of asset-based services instead of the treatment of pathology. They must start by treating parents with respect and by seeing them as the experts on their own family.

Dr. Robert Ross of the California Endowment explained that he had formerly worked in health and social service systems in Philadelphia and San Diego. He described how he led the process to integrate Public Health, Aging Services, Social Services, and Drug and Alcohol Abuse into regional teams. Now as head of a large charitable foundation he sees that a key problem is still the lack of non-categorical funding. Flexible funding is at the core of success, but funding streams are currently “driven by diagnosis and disease.” Dr. Ross reiterated the need for clearly defined goals, the importance of devoting resources to prevention, valuing the strength of diversity, and educating others in what’s succeeding and why.

Like the preceding panel, the overarching themes were (1) supporting community-based strategies and (2) focusing on strong relationships within the family, between the family and community, and between the families and caregivers. Like many of the conference participants, this working group called for (3) a summoning of national political will. It was pointed out that this could be achieved if citizens were more broadly aware of the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of these preventive strategies.

WORKING GROUP 3

Fathers and the Role of Men in Children’s Lives

Preston Garrison, Moderator, Executive Director, National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, Washington, DC

Ken Canfield, Founder and President, National Center for Fathering, Shawnee Mission, KS

Joe Jones, Jr., President, Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development, Baltimore, MD

Kyle Pruett, M.D. Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine, Yale Child Study Center, New Haven, CT

This working group covered an evolving field that was often overlooked until Family Re-Union 3 put it on the national radar screen. Moderator Preston Garrison of the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families reminded the participants that the fatherhood movement is still a “fragile field” without consistent public funding, and since “foundations have issue fatigue,” the agenda must be persistently advanced.

The group addressed the importance of men in fragile families, the impact of “fatherlessness”

on children, and the lack of research on fathering. In practically every fragile family, fathers or absent fathers are at the heart of the issue and are identified with negative outcomes, such as abuse, lack of child support, and pending criminal proceedings. However, their strengths and the vital role they can play in the lives of their children have been largely ignored.

The lack of a strong “father figure” in the lives of young people can be devastating. Often boys who are raised in fatherless households grow up to repeat the mistakes of their fathers. Shockingly, there is very little research on father/child relationships. The numbers are quite startling: the volume of literature on mothers and children outweighs that on fathers and children by a factor of about 7:1

Joe Jones of the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development described the state of the issue before Family Re-Union 3 and noted that the conference was a catalyst for change. The Practitioners Network was formed, the Father to Father program strategy was launched, and there was a major federal initiative spurred on by a Presidential Memorandum. But there is a long way to go. The initial period of demonstration and testing must become sustained practice.

One of the practical approaches that has led the way is Joe Jones’ Center for Fathers, Families and Work Force Development proving that one of the greatest motivators in getting and holding a job is the desire to stay involved in a child’s life. He was the first in the country to bring fathers into a Healthy Start program successfully. He believes the devastation in a child’s life caused by an absent father is mirrored by the pain in a father’s life.

We must unite behind the need to strengthen fatherhood. We ask men to go to work and to go to war, but we do not honor them as nurturers. There is a tension between the women’s movement and the fatherhood movement that belies the importance of working together for the good of children. We must address the fact that 60-70% of people who are incarcerated are parents, and they need support to resume their roles when they are released.

It is absolutely necessary for men to support one another in the demanding role of father. Training and support are crucial, and many men have never had anyone to transmit fathering skills to them the way women transmit mothering skills. Parenting education from an early age is important for boys as well as girls. One way to do this is through community-based partnerships. Getting fathers involved in pre-school, school, reading programs, community clean-ups with kids, and other civic activities can be a great motivator.

Ken Canfield of the National Center for Fathering also recalled the history of the movement to strengthen fatherhood. He asked the audience to consider the life-span implications of fatherhood, and the way that attitudes toward fathering pass from generation to generation. Men

can overcome a negative personal experience with the support of a group of other fathers. He placed great emphasis on the importance of training and outreach to vulnerable fathers and suggested that schools offer a great setting in which to “nurture” fathers.

Kyle Pruett said that the various men in a child’s life can create a “quilt” or “mosaic” of trust, and “it’s a great gift to have a dad who is in charge in many ways of our growth.” His research shows that men are incredibly important to the psychological health of children. “Our babies come into this world ready to make use of the men in their lives,” he argued, and “children are far better off from the beginning to the end of their life if they have a father in their life.”

There has been positive change since Family Re-Union 3. Dr. Pruett said that “it took the greatest leap of faith for (Al Gore) to use his power and influence and for Tipper to put this issue on the same level as families and health and families and education... It was a bold stroke.” An example of cultural change is that men’s rooms frequently have changing tables for fathers traveling with babies. Structural changes in policy are demonstrated by the fact that Head Start has a growing father involvement component and there are now thousands of male involvement specialists working in Head Start. Research is on the increase.

As Dr. Pruett noted, “Men are incredibly important to the psychological health and development of our children precisely because they are not mothers. Children can tell the difference between fathering and mothering at the age of six weeks”, and they clearly thrive on the combination of approaches.

WORKING GROUP 4

Family and Media

Lorna Lathram, Moderator, Executive Director, Omidyar Foundation, Alameda, CA

Jeffrey Cole, Director, UCLA Center for Communication Policy, Los Angeles, CA

Ranny Levy, President, Coalition for Quality Children’s Media, Santa Fe, NM

David Walsh, Founder, President and CEO, Institute for Family & Media, Minneapolis, MN

Working group 4 agreed that the fourth Family Re-Union had had a huge impact for the better in terms of television and electronic media and the family. The parents’ V-chip to guide television programming was one result; the industry’s agreement to provide three hours of programming daily for children was another; and a transformed national discussion was yet a third. The conversation no longer revolves around whether media have an impact on children and families, but how to make sure it’s positive, since the average child spends about 35 hours in front of a screen per week.

One impetus for the topic of Family and Media was recognition of the negative portrayal of men and the role of fathers in much of the media at that time. Another stark recognition of the potential damage that media can do was the awakening caused by the school shootings in various parts of the country, and the impact of the “teacher” or “third parent” that lives in a box in our homes.

Jeff Cole said that we must recognize that the issue is not only the amount of television viewing time, but also the content that is viewed. Homes that use computers have decreased television viewing by 28%. However, computer use does not seem to result in as much isolation and depression. Although computer use frequently improves school performance, parents should be aware of the sites that children visit.

Ranny Levy stressed the importance of media literacy, especially a Kids First program that enables children to evaluate and rate media using standardized criteria. Participants suggested national standards for media literacy to teach children how to read, interpret and analyze media.

Segmentation of the viewing audience by demographics that suit the advertiser affects quality and content. It discriminates against various age and cultural groups in order to appeal to audiences that are commercial targets. There is a horrible lack of diversity in programming, and what there is tends to be filled with negative stereotypes.

There have been positive developments since Family Re-Union 4, but much remains to be done. Accountability in the industry needs to be motivated by clear consequences. And, parents need to actively participate in their children’s entertainment decisions.

Family and Work

Faith Wohl, Moderator, President, Child Care Action Campaign, New York City, NY

Alfred Babington-Johnson, President, CEO, Stairstep Initiative Co, Minneapolis, MN

Lisa Farnin, Cancer support advocate, work/family pioneer, Bucks County, PA

Jeanette Laws, Adoptive and foster mother, Generations of Hope, Rantoul, IL

Looking back to 1996, the year of Family Re-Union 5, participants agreed that employers now seem more interested in employees’ contentment and that they are generally more willing to consider more options for the workforce. Unhappily, non-parents in the workforce often feel they have been left out of these benefits, and it is still the case that life is planned around work instead of the other way around. Families are changing. Jobs are changing. Appropriate responses should

WORKING GROUP 5

involve flexibility, cultural change, and a redefinition of the boundaries of work.

In considering what we have learned since Family Re-Union 5: Families and Work, the presenters and the group as a whole felt that the entire subject of balancing work and family is now a more acceptable one to discuss openly and is better understood. Employers understand that workplace flexibility enables businesses to compete for and retain, highly qualified employees, especially women.

However, the same flexibility that has allowed family members that care for children or elders to enter the workplace has robbed communities of a great resource of those who were “keeping the community together.” Employers are not as eager to allow workers to do the community volunteer work that they did prior to employment.

We are not adequately harnessing the changes in family styles and technology that could leverage change in the workplace. One issue is that people are changing jobs and careers more frequently, so that employers and employees don’t have the opportunity to build relationships leading to creative solutions or commitment to a particular community. The urgent need for more quality child care has not changed. The working group urged more flexibility in the structure of jobs, including telecommuting, job sharing, flexible workweeks, and working 2/3 time.

The group agreed that change in the workplace is not sufficient, we need a change in our culture that builds the capacity to strengthen both work and family. We need to redefine the boundaries of work, both to create greater flexibility of time and place, and to limit the intrusions of technology in family time. These changes must be part of an intentional process with the clear goal of helping families balance their responsibilities to each other and to their jobs. Community organizations need to work together with the business community to achieve these goals.

This is an enormous agenda. But it would be hard to progress with anything else. The family and the employer are among the major institutions mediating between the individual and society. Rethinking the relationships between the two is clearly a demanding task.

WORKING GROUP 6

Families and Learning

James Comer, M.D., Moderator, Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale Child Study Center and Associate Dean, Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, CT

Yvonne Chan, Principal, Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, Los Angeles, CA

Lucia Diaz, Executive Director, Mar Vista Family Center, Culver City, CA

Anne McGintis, Coordinator of Parent, School, Community Involvement, Hamilton County Schools, Chattanooga, TN

The sixth working group explored the social stresses tearing apart many of the communities and community agencies in low-income areas. It looked into the promise of integrating school services with community centers and how to bring gang members into community and school activities in meaningful ways. Participants explored educating parents “about the system” and extending school hours to benefit children, parents, and community. Individual empowerment, individual responsibility, and local leadership were developed in this sixth group as guides for action.

Yvonne Chan, Principal of the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in Los Angeles, gave vivid illustrations of the way that an inspired family-centered school can rebuild both family and community. The center acts as a catalyst to help families help one another and a source of support for parents. Among the services provided are a parent-run service exchange bank, clothing for job interviews, home visits, site based clinics, classes in computer repair for parents, counseling, peer coaching, and a children’s museum. Gangs and drug dealers have been driven out, and families are optimistic about the future.

Lucia Diaz, Executive Director of the Mar Vista Family Center and Institute in Culver City, California, was originally one of the parents who work to help make this center a success. Parents assist teachers in the classroom and assess community needs. They plan community improvements and pull community organizations together. Teens hold conferences and workshops and learn how to be actively involved members of their community with generations working together. Gang members have been enlisted to do outreach work. Again, we learned that this intergenerational civic engagement brings hope to the whole community.

Anne McGintis, Parent, School and Community Involvement Coordinator for Hamilton County Schools in Chattanooga, TN, directs the city’s first Family Resource Centers. She offered another stunning example of the ways that education can lift up several generations and a whole community when schools become a true resource for all family members and families are active partners in their children’s education. She has adopted these strategies that ensure family-school partnerships: educating parents about standards and content, providing childcare for every parent meeting, coordinating transportation, providing translators, and going to meet the parents where they are, even at Wal-Mart. Classes offered through the Parent Resource Centers include GED, job search and job development, budgeting, nursing and classes for seniors. 21st Century Learning Centers—called “Lights On” because “when school is out, lights stay on for family help”—offer classes before and after school that are open to parents as well as children. Subjects range from computer skills to homework help in Math, English and Science, and from GED to ESL tutoring.

Jim Comer, Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale Child Study Center, reminded the working group that there is a great need for better training and preparation for educators in the critical developmental needs of children. The teachers, parents and community members who come into contact with a child must be informed by the core developmental needs of children from infancy to adulthood. It is important that we help children develop skills in social and emotional interaction, so they can learn, thrive and be responsive to both their own needs and the needs of others.

A fascinating conversation, all the more so as community leaders envision a school agenda entirely different from the standards-based reform discussion that dominates policy discussion at the state and federal levels.

WORKING GROUP 7

Families and Health

Bev Johnson, Moderator, President & CEO, Institute for Family Centered Care, Bethesda, MD

Bernard Arons, M.D., Director, Center for Mental Health Services, Rockville, MD

Terrell Smith, Administrative Director, Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, Nashville, TN

Neal Halfon, M.D., Professor of Schools of Medicine and Public Health, and Director, UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, Los Angeles, CA

Focusing on strategies to create a truly family-centered health care system, this group noted that the nation's existing system is focused on illness, biomedical science and technology, and is missing opportunities to collaborate with families to promote health and well being. Health care facilities often function in isolation in the community, and providers do not understand the experience of care. Little attention is given to communication and relationships.

As a result, patients and their families feel that the system is a nightmare to navigate, that they are not involved in decision-making and that their caregivers are not emotionally supportive. In defining "family-centered care," moderator Beverley Johnson cited the following principles:

- People are treated with dignity and respect
- Providers share complete, useful and unbiased information with patients and families
- Collaboration between providers, patients and families occurs in delivery of care and in policy, program development, professional education and facility and protocol design as well as evaluation.

Dr. Evelyn Davis described the intensive family centered care that is offered at Harlem hospital, especially to families of children with HIV/AIDS. She discussed the support that is necessary for grandparents who are left to care for these children.

Milagros Batista, Project Manager of Best Beginnings in New York City, was scheduled to present at this panel but was unable to stay because of emergencies arising in her community following the events of September 11, and a subsequent plane crash that caused a huge loss of life in the Dominican community. Terrell Smith of Vanderbilt Children's Hospital agreed to take her place on the panel and reiterated the crucial role Family Re-Union 7 played in inspiring the planning process for the hospital that focused on family input and teamwork. "We had 27 design teams that were involved in the various aspects of the design, and we had family members on all of those teams. We not only invited the parents, but we formed a pediatric advisory council called the PAC. The PAC actually sat down with the architects and the parents, and they helped design the hospital along with the caregivers. It was a very powerful experience."

Dr. Bernard Arons explained the nature and importance of family centered care in delivering mental health services. The federal Center for Mental Health Services is mandated to care for the nation's mental health, which is seen as essential to physical health. As a funding agency, the CMHS is able to encourage active collaboration with consumers and their families. Families must be part of the grant development process, implementation, and proposal review. In order to build skills, CMHS funds state and local family networks with a strong component of family-to-family support. Many of the networks are led by family members. CMHS has emphasized linking mental health and primary care in programs such as Starting Early, Starting Smart. At the other end of the life-care spectrum, CMHS has placed psychosocial professionals with providers of primary care for seniors.

Dr. Arons explained that violence in communities is a major threat to mental and physical health. And, CMHS has funded a series of community action grants to encourage collaboration among families and neighborhood agencies to prevent violence and promote healthy, safe communities.

The panel outlined three major revolutions in health care in the last 100 years: the focus on communicable disease, the focus on chronic illness, and now the promotion of good health and function over the entire life span. They stressed that in order to be successful this new phase must have an integrative, transformative model of care that brings together biomedicine, psychology and social relationships. In order to achieve this, we must stamp out the enormous disparities that allow some people with poor health histories and few resources to have limited access to quality health care. And, we must fight continually for mental health care to be integrated into the primary care system.

The Institute of Medicine, in a new report, calls for family-centered care to be based on continuous healing relationships, giving patients control, increasing access to information, and making the system “transparent” to all. The group seconded these recommendations and, further, suggested the creative use of storytelling to draw out the narratives of patients and families, the mandatory inclusion of the principles of family-centered care in professional education, and the integration of medical education with business, law and architecture.

WORKING GROUP 8

Family and Community

Samina Quraeshi, Moderator, Luce Professor in Family and Community, School of Architecture, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL

Jim Bueermann, Chief of Police, Housing, Recreation, Elder Affairs, Redlands, CA

Louis Quijas, Chief of Police, High Point, NC

Lily Yeh, Executive Director, Village of Arts and Humanities, Philadelphia, PA

Working Group 8 worked its way through a remarkable collection of issues. These and other issues received attention from this group: public safety and community policing, the arts in the community and as part of daily life, the importance of understanding risk and protective factors and their relationship to children’s development, the need to support parolees with options after release, the value of providing gangs with constructive alternatives, and the impact of the physical environment on behavior and mental health.

The group was inspired by the presentations of Police Chiefs Louis Quijas of High Point, North Carolina and James Bueermann of Redlands, California. Quijas reminded the group that, “Public safety is not just law enforcement, it is a community task...To be a police chief one must be a convener, someone who can bring community leaders and resources together.” He went on to observe, “When a community like ours supports parolees with options after release such as a comprehensive case management meeting with community leaders and clergy, and a follow-up in one year with congratulations for staying out of trouble, it greatly reduces recidivism.”

Samina Quraeshi of the University of Miami talked about a “paint-off” between rival gangs that succeeded in transforming two houses. “Community revitalization teams made up of ex-cons, volunteers, and local students have played a large role in the community.” Quershi teaches both medical and architectural students, and her work personifies the interdisciplinary approach to community building espoused by the group.

Lily Yeh of the Village of the Arts and Humanities in Philadelphia reminded the group of the

healing and community-building power of the arts. She said that “art is kept on the fringes of society, but art is actually anything that touches your life.” She described how she has used visual and performing arts to reconstruct her community and to give confidence and a future to families and children who were filled with despair. Quaershi and Yeh agreed that the impact of the environment on behavior is a critical factor. As Yeh said, “The transformative power of art in the community is vastly under utilized.”

Jim Bueermann is using a “risk and resilience” model in his police and community work, which was originally designed to prevent heart disease and adolescent substance abuse. His model relies on assessing both positive and negative factors in the neighborhoods. The largest risk factor for juvenile delinquency is school failure before the 4th grade. Working across disciplines and in collaborative partnerships, Bueermann puts money from drug raids into “Peace Builder” conflict resolution classes in the elementary schools. He warned that, “We don’t value everyone’s children enough anymore. America’s children aren’t enough of a priority, and life will take care of them in the absence of community.”

The complex issues and partnerships essential to community building illustrate the challenge inherent in bringing communities into alignment with the needs of families. The working group specified that communities have the responsibility to:

- value children and focus the entire community on good outcomes for children
- work across boundaries to tap all resources
- create options/rewards/sanctions that reinforce positive outcomes
- work across agencies with agreement on universal terms and definitions
- explore and use non-traditional approaches
- employ short term intervention and long term support
- serve families best by encouraging forgiveness as part of the culture
- disseminate core principles and publish success
- invest heavily in early intervention, reducing risks and enhancing protection for children, instead of just building more jails
- challenge the traditional boundaries of the roles of community leaders and be fearless in expanding their involvement in the community
- revitalize, redefine and reorganize police, clergy, and community arts
- utilize community strengths to build cohesion and positive outcomes
- research and document strategies, interventions and successful outcomes and make them available to community leaders and police departments nationwide.

Families Across the Generations

Donna Butts, Moderator, Executive Director, Generations United, Washington, DC

Brenda Krause Eheart, Founder, Executive Director, Generations of Hope; Director of Hope for the Children Research and Policy Program, University of Illinois, Rantoul, IL

Jack McConnell, M.D., Founder and CEO, Volunteers in Medicine Clinic and Institute, Hilton Head, SC

Sally Newman, Emeritus Faculty/Researcher, University Center for Social and Urban Research, University of Pittsburgh, PA

This working group addressed the potential for strong relationships between generations and the rapidly growing resource of elders with energy and willingness to offer time, talent and wisdom. Participants discussed strategies to bring the talents and knowledge of older Americans into the community, and ways to engage several generations in active partnerships.

Strategies discussed included bringing the generations together in intergenerational living arrangements so that the children are not wards of the state but the community's children, and mobilizing retired health care professionals to deliver high quality free care to needy communities. Dr. Jack McConnell of Volunteers in Medicine described a process by which his volunteers learn to identify patients as people not a "problem or disease." As they escort their patients and learn in detail about their lives, they become "locked in a moment of caring and sharing."

Brenda Eheart of Hope Meadows reminded the attendees that the "human relationships" in that intergenerational community "are the building blocks of healthy development," and that the "cumulative burden of multiple risk factors is mitigated by the cumulative buffer of the community." Instead of being in competition for scarce resources, the former foster children, their adoptive parents, and the formerly lonely and isolated seniors in her program are in a community and a set of relationships that benefits all concerned.

Donna Butts of Generations United outlined four areas in which intergenerational relationships within families and communities benefit all. Elders are able to provide

- "time witness" that satisfies our need for "calm and continuity" and assures younger generations that "we will survive";
- care in the absence of parents, whether parents are ill, deceased, missing in the aftermath of September 11, or stationed overseas;
- cross-cultural traditions and tolerance; and
- civic activities such as "Seniors for Home land Defense."

Dr. Sally Newman outlined the tremendous benefits gained by all generations when seniors are involved in early childhood education. She and other panelists noted the need for training and preparation in human services for intergenerational work. There is a need to reach out to older citizens with information about community needs and the active roles they can take in their communities. The media could play an important role in this effort to advocate for greater intergenerational connections and more opportunities for vital older Americans.

One of the major barriers to implementing intergenerational efforts is the categorical funding in both public and private sectors that addresses only certain age groups. Another barrier is the lack of funding to demonstrate the effectiveness of intergenerational programs. There should not be income limitations to participation in programs intended to serve older citizens, as there have been in the past. We would all benefit from earlier attention to the activities we hope to participate in as we age.

The group noted that community planners should be developing functional environments in which different age groups share resources and sites. Older citizens should be partners in the design process, and there must not be barriers of age, income, or ability in designing these programs. We all need more varied options for our later years, as elders, as caretakers of elders, and as active people who want to give back to the communities we love.

Families and the Future

Andy Shookhoff, Moderator, Child and Family Policy Center, Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies, Nashville, TN

Michael Benjamin, Executive Director, National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN

Rich Lerner, Bergstrom Chair in Applied Developmental Science, Tufts University, Medford, MA

Aaron Lieberman, President and Founder, Jumpstart, Boston, MA

Working Group 10 looked to the future. This discussion was framed by three over-arching themes. First is the theme of intergenerational families and communities. People are living longer, and there are more generations living together. Second, the challenges and opportunity of diversity. There are more families of color, significant demographic changes with respect to age cohorts, and changes in racial/ethnic composition of the emerging America. Finally, there is the issue of choice. Non-family households are growing more rapidly than family households. The

WORKING GROUP 10

group called for a focus on family-centered community building, and a new vision of what it means to be a healthy, striving individual or family.

Michael Benjamin of the National Council on Family Relations offered some interesting statistics on the changing American family. As more of us live longer, families have fewer children, grandparents are more often raising the children, and the family structure has gone from a pyramidal one with a few seniors at the top, to a linear intergenerational one. Greatly increased diversity is exemplified by the fact that 53% of children age 0-18 are now children of color. Family structure is also changing with non-family households growing at a 20% rate. Many are choosing to remain single and with many minority men in the nation's prisons, marriage options are reduced.

Dr. Richard Lerner of Tufts University focused on family-centered community building, the title of the course designed and taught by Vice President Gore, which explores the ways in which communities empower families to raise healthy children. Youth are a critical factor in building and maintaining healthy communities. They should be viewed as tremendous resources not problems to be managed. But, families need help in coaching their youth to be active citizens.

Dr. Lerner also addressed the changing demographics of youth. He noted that one billion new children, mostly children of color, would be born in the next decade. Of 40 million young people aged 11-19, half engage in high-risk behaviors. We need to promote a vision of what it means to be young, healthy and thriving. This vision is composed of 5 C's: competence, confidence, connection (positive relationships), character, and caring/compassion. Caring adult relationships are essential to achieving this vision.

Aaron Lieberman of JumpStart moved from that concept to outline the program's strategy to get adults active in the lives of pre-schoolers and to help prepare them for kindergarten. A crucial element of the strategy is to forge long-term relationships between college age mentors and the children and their families. They work with the lowest achieving 5-10% of Head Start classes. The required elements of the work include:

- involving parents as partners
- crossing boundaries of class, culture and race
- seeking "scalability" and how to make the program grow
- being accountable to the children and their families with systems of measurements and clear results.

The success of the program lies in the fact that it is truly transformative for the child, the family and the mentor.

Getting youth involved, placing a high value on all children, actively involving families and evaluating programs – all these were put forth as keys to improving both family life and family policy in the future. Judge Shookhoff challenged the group by reminding them that Vice President Gore has provided us in the past with a champion for these concepts at the federal level, and we have an obligation to carry on the work at the state and local level.

Strong Families in Healthy Communities

What tied together the conclusions of these working groups was a sense that children are best served if they are grounded in strong families, with the families, in turn, grounded in healthy communities. Whether it was Working Group 3 concerned with fathers and men in our families, or Working Group 9 focused on aging family members, all came back sooner or later to the family in the community. The successful strategies that were described in the various working groups had certain elements in common:

- active involvement of families in creating and implementing solutions
- strong personal relationships within families, between families and caregivers, and among families, caregivers and the community
- creative partnerships between community organizations and agencies
- a willingness to look beyond traditional roles and solutions
- an ability to create a positive vision of the future that offers opportunities for all generations to work toward achieving goals
- a consistent ability to define the objectives and to measure and replicate success
- an ability to change the way that practitioners are trained, educated and prepared for this challenging work
- an ability to attract non-categorical or flexible funding from a variety of sources that understands and supports this interdisciplinary work.
- leadership that arises from, or is nurtured within, the community itself
- serious effort to expand and replicate the strategies that work

It is significant to note that the conclusions of the first working group on basic principles, the second one on reinventing family policy, and the tenth one that looked to the future all identified similar principles, methods and goals. Given the effectiveness of this approach, it is disappointing that these principles are not more deeply embedded in our human services and public policy, and it is challenging to think how we might create the public will to insist on a more family-centered approach. As Dr. Robert Ross said, “We have to get federal leadership to look at this – we must demonstrate, disseminate, share information and brag on this. We have to get beyond our little family to share, tout, and spread this like wild fire!”

COMMITMENTS TO POSITIVE CHANGE

With the hard work of the working groups behind them, participants gathered once again in a plenary session to look to the future. Mr. Gore led a panel of eight philanthropists, academics, and organizational leaders through a discussion of how they planned to continue the work of Family Re-Union in the future. The conversation centered on three topics: community building, youth, and expansion of “community cousins.”

Community Building

Richard Baron, of Baron-McCormick Associates in St. Louis, is a builder and community developer. He argued that there aren’t enough people in the United States who understand how to rebuild impoverished urban areas and that universities need to get moving on this important problem. Moving beyond their territoriality and disciplinary boundaries, academic leaders should develop interdisciplinary program to combine economics, architecture, business, law, and finance so that a new generation of community builders would be armed with the wide array of skills necessary to build communities that are sensitive to the needs of families.

Two years earlier, a challenge from Mr. Baron had led Al Gore to convene a consortium of universities to explore ways in which a multi-disciplinary course of study could be developed. A leading organizer of the consortium was **Dr. Neal Halfon**, Professor of Community Health Services at UCLA. Some faculty members of those universities have played important roles in developing and co-teaching the course on Family-Centered Community Building that Visiting Professor Gore is teaching at Fisk University and Middle Tennessee State University. “Universities are, for the most part, cities on the hill,” said Halfon, with enormous influence for community good if they can work out how to engage their communities. “If, in fact, we were going to start to build a family-centered

“My husband and I thought we were doing this for mankind, but we’ve been the most blessed of all. We’ve made wonderful friends. We’ve shared our babies being born, funerals of grandparents, and we’ve become part of each other’s lives. And, we’ve developed a shared history for our children. They’ll have that forever.”

Diane Bock

Co-Founder,
Community Cousins

community building curriculum and departments of family-centered community building over the long-run, we really needed to come together as universities and start to support each other, share the knowledge, increase the dialogue, share the innovations as we try to develop new curriculum, new ways of teaching, and new platforms in communities to do that.”

Vanderbilt, Columbia, Tufts, Cornell, UCLA, and the University of Minnesota and other institutions are going about that important work. The first task has been to develop a family-centered, community building curriculum. The second has been to establish a National Community and Academic Consortium to work as a center of gravity for this work.

Thanking Professor Halfon for his efforts, Professor Gore said that planning the course just a few weeks before he began teaching the first session “was like building an airplane while taxiing out onto the runway, and finishing the second wing just before lift-off,” smiled Gore.

Anne Peretz, founder of the Family Center in Somerville, Massachusetts, then described a similar effort underway at Cambridge College, an institution for working adults. While the course taught by the former Vice President is designed for graduate and undergraduate students, Cambridge College has developed a bachelor’s degree program in community building designed for working adults. It is grounded in seven principals developed for community improvement by the Persistent Poverty Project funded by the Boston Foundation. The principles work to:

- incorporate those directly affected by policy into the heart of the dialog;
- value race and cultural diversity;
- promote active citizenship and political empowerment;
- build on community strengths and assets;
- ensure access to opportunity;
- support and enhance the well-being of children and families; and
- foster sustained commitment to coordination and collaboration based on a shared vision and mutual respect.

Each of these principles is addressed in a module of nine hours of academic instruction. The target populations for the course include grassroots neighborhood leaders, community development corporations, parents united for child care, tenant councils, Boston city-wide parent advisory groups, and youth leadership programs.

Youth

Richard Lerner, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University, has also developed a family-centered community building course at his institution. A semester long course, coordinated with

Al Gore's vision, it will emphasize the family in the community and family and community assets, not weaknesses. The vision is of families empowered to raise healthy and productive children and youth. As Dr. Lerner explained, "Folks with a strength-based approach see young people as resources to be developed, not as problems to be managed." This asset-based approach will emphasize five attributes in young people: competence in school and in social situations; connection to family, peers, schools, teachers, and the business and faith communities; and caring and compassion, in the sense of a belief in social justice and equity. What we want ultimately, he said, is what the great developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner once defined as a caring adult: "an adult who cares irrationally for the well-being of a young person."

Deborah Delgado, who works with Ralph Smith at the Annie P. Casey Foundation, took youth development one step further. Youth development work at the foundation, she reported, is entirely organized around the "family-strengthening" approach outlined earlier by Smith. "It is a different lens for helping program operators, foundations, policy makers, look at families as partners for ensuring that our young people master the developmental skills needed to successfully transition into adulthood," explained Delgado.

As an illustration of the ways that older generations strengthen youth development she cited her grandfather's influence on his fifty grandchildren: "Number one, my grandfather viewed himself as a resource to my parents. He knew that raising children, particularly teens, can be hard and that, at some point, all parents benefit from knowing that they can shuttle the kids to somebody else. Secondly, although he always took the time to deal with his grandchildren as individuals, he also saw the benefit of group activities... to help create a sense of confidence by allowing us to test our skills in a very safe space. Thirdly, he always emphasized the positive."

She stated that the foundation wants to continue to invest in outstanding youth development programs; to work through intermediary organizations to identify technical supports and resources needed to help communities; and to work with academics to "get smarter about the intersections between youth development policy and family development."

In summarizing this discussion, Professor Lerner observed, "If we can build in our young people during this period of time as much attention to civic literacy and civic competence as we do to intellectual competence and intellectual literacy, we have the opportunity to harness the great energy of young people and really make them agents of positive change in society."

Mr. Gore provided an apt closure for this discussion, noting that recent research indicates that although adolescents often demonstrate a posture that they do not want their parents bothering them, when push comes to shove what they really want is a parent who is there for them.

Expanding “Community Cousins”

The goal of a program begun in southern California called Community Cousins is to break down barriers between people from different backgrounds. In the aftermath of race riots in Los Angeles, **Diane Bock** and her family set out to attack racism directly and resolutely by establishing a program to match families of different races so that they become “cousins.” “The whole picture changes, and issues are very different, when they affect someone you care about personally.” Bock and **Shazeen Mufti**, a participant in the program, described its benefits. As Bock explained, “The goal of Community Cousins is to encourage every human heart to redefine ‘Us’ and ‘Them’”.

Citizens may sympathize with the troubles of others in the abstract, but when they know someone directly affected by a calamity, they are much more likely to respond in effective ways. Community cousins, therefore, get together at events, they meet for pizza or go to the park. “Many parents say skin color doesn’t matter, but what we do speaks a hundred times more loudly than what we say,” said Bock.

What this means in practice was described by Mufti. “In the wake of the September 11 attacks on our country, it was a very scary time for Muslim-Americans. One of the first calls I got was from Diane, to make sure that my family was safe, that I was safe. It really meant a lot to me... But it got me to thinking that many Americans don’t know what a Muslim looks like, and don’t know any Muslims personally....We fear what we don’t know....So, now we’re reaching out to people of Muslim background, of Arab background, and what that means is that we’re reaching out to Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, Nepalis, and Sikh Americans.” In a moving vignette, she described how close these families can become, telling the audience that a single white mother from Eastern Europe had decided to arrange her will so that her African American “community cousin” family would have custody of her children if something should happen to her.

If **Bob Ross**, head of the California Endowment, has his way, Diane Bock and Shazeen Mufti will be able to reach out to many more people. Impressed with the vigor of the Community Cousins strategy, Ross has persuaded his board to provide a \$100,000 grant to Community Cousins to expand its work. “We knew a lot of people were sending checks to the September 11th victims’ fund. But we wanted to step back and look at the bigger picture,” said Ross. “What’s going on in the communities? And what can we do about the hate crimes, particularly focused on Muslim-Americans and South Asian communities?”

The grant will make possible new sites and a new partnership between the YMCA and the National Council on Community Justice, formerly the National Council on Christians and Jews. Training materials are being developed that can be distributed to sites across the country by these organizations.

In describing the value of the Family Re-Union tradition, Dr. Ross said, “this is really an example of what Family Re-Union has meant over the years, not just for me personally, but I think for many of us who have attended —the ability to network with people that are doing great things... This is a field that has a lot of jargon and code: ‘asset-based’ and ‘strength-based’ and ‘diversity’ and ‘family-centered’ ...[but] the value of Family Re-Union has been to de-jargonize these terms and say, well, here’s a family-centered approach.”

Dr. Ross concluded by calling for “a political movement and a sense of political advocacy...[so] that there is a compelling persuasive case made by Americans that these are the kinds of services and programs we want for our kids, for our families, or for our seniors. ... They’re not just interesting pilots that someone has been gutsy enough or brilliant enough to come up with, it’s the way the system should work for all families. And I hope that perhaps the cumulative outcome of the ten years of Family Re-Unions somehow translates into that being the next important step.”

A Fitting Finale

The commentary on Community Cousins provided an fitting conclusion for the gathering. As Mr. Gore put it, “We know from history and from experience that we, as human beings, are vulnerable to the temptation of seeing a difference as an excuse for being afraid, or drawing the line, or forming up in groups. It’s just a vulnerability of human nature.”

What Community Cousins affirms is that just as there are certain things that healthy communities exhibit and do, so too there are certain behaviors that healthy communities do not exhibit and do not do. As Bob Ross reminds us, “Healthy communities do not have hate crimes.” In spreading the word and supporting the work of Community Cousins, and programs like it, Family Re-Union has spread that message, too.

In conclusion, former Vice President Gore observed that one of the missions of America, “as a destination land where people from all over the Earth come to chase their dreams, ...is to prove that people of every different ethnic, racial, religious background not only get along, but really enrich one another and create a whole that is much larger than the sum of its parts.”

Speaking further of the richness of perspective achieved by differing points of view, he used as a metaphor the greatly increased knowledge of the universe achieved by a pair of powerful new telescopes that see far into space by linking each other’s different vantage points. “If we can connect with others through a Community Cousins program or through friendships, through community involvement, if we can see that same object of curiosity from our own point of view and see it from a point of view enriched by someone else’s ethnicity and cultural experience, historical background, that is very different from ours, then we have a chance to enlarge our understanding of why we are here on this Earth, what our nation is all about, what we as human beings are all about.”