RESHAPING THE ADVOCACY DIRECTION ON POVERTY REDUCTION

Bridging Individual and Community Strategies

By Charles Bruner
Child and Family Policy Center

Policy Levers to Reduce Poverty and Build Prosperity
in the Upper Midwest and Pacific Northwest

Northwest Area
Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Public policy matters in people's lives. That is the guiding principle of *PolicyMatters*, a new series of issue papers underwritten by the Northwest Area Foundation.

As we launch *PolicyMatters* in 2009–2010, the Foundation is celebrating its 75th year of service to the Northwest area: Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa. We seek a future for this region in which those who have been impoverished and marginalized, whether in urban, rural, or American Indian reservation communities, share in real opportunity and lasting prosperity. We work toward that future by making grants and mission-related investments. But we are also committed to sharing knowledge of what works, convening conversations about the region's progress, and advocating for change. In that spirit, *PolicyMatters* is intended to spark reflection, discussion and innovation.

Why focus on policy? Because policy decisions shape the flow of the people's resources through government expenditures, with profound consequences in our communities. Public policy touches on issues as diverse as asset accumulation, early childhood and K–12 education, college access, housing, immigration, workforce development, tax and budget policy, and retirement security. In all of these areas and many more, the people's resources are flowing in patterns shaped not by some invisible hand, but by decisions made by human beings. A critical question is: Whose perspectives inform those decisions? Our Foundation cannot achieve its mission if the proven and promising organizations we work with – or low-income people themselves – are absent from the policy debates of our time.

PolicyMatters, therefore, will lift up voices from the field. We hope these perspectives will be useful to practitioners, advocates and decision-makers as they work toward policies to reduce poverty and build sustainable prosperity. Motivating us in this and all our endeavors is a vision for the future of the Northwest area:

- We see a region known for its highly skilled, well-educated population, its living-wage jobs, and its healthy, vibrant communities.
- We see a region characterized by thriving local economies within thriving natural ecosystems.
- We see a region whose strong public institutions, business community, and nonprofit sector collaborate to address pressing needs and help build pathways to prosperity for all residents.
- We see a region whose people are organized and empowered to lift their voices and actively shape the civic, social, political and economic life of their communities.
- Ultimately, we see a region whose rich culture of engagement and opportunity makes it a prized place to visit, to invest, and to live, and where all residents have a fair chance to live free of poverty.

Innovative public policies are essential if that vision is to become a reality. Let us know whether you find *PolicyMatters* helpful in spurring the development of such policies. But more importantly, make sure your voice is heard in what we hope will be a vibrant, ongoing public conversation about the future of our region and our nation.

Kevin Walker
President and CEO

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ABSTRACT

This essay provides an overview of two different but potentially complementary approaches to poverty reduction: "community-building and social justice pathways to community vitality" and "work pathways to economic self-sufficiency." It then discusses the role of advocacy in developing policies that can support these approaches.

Tackling poverty reduction from a community-building and social justice pathway to community vitality has a long history in the United States. During the 1960s and the War on Poverty, the federal government established specific programs and policies to support community building at the neighborhood level, involving significant investments within communities and to people within those communities, largely bypassing state governments. However, the results of these efforts were mixed. There sometimes was a disconnect between the investor and the community, often leading constituents to "fight city hall" and to what was characterized at the time as "maximum feasible misunderstanding." In addition, communities rarely had the capacity to manage and direct resources on the scale expected by the funders nor did funders necessarily provide sufficient resources to truly bring about community-wide change. These results have played out in a number of subsequent public and private foundation efforts to support community development within disinvested neighborhoods as well.

The work pathways to economic self-sufficiency approach is based upon the view that the individual has the primary responsibility for his or her own growth, development and self-sufficiency, a view very compatible with dominant American culture. Current state and federal efforts to highlight poverty as a public policy issue share a number of common policy features that fit within this frame of personal responsibility, fairness and opportunity. Notable to these are a focus on the individual and the absence of community-level strategies, the lack of explicit recognition of discrimination, the inclusion of "safety net" options only under special and usually temporary circumstances, an emphasis upon education and training as long-term strategies for success, and a focus on wealth acquisition as a part of self-sufficiency and poverty reduction.

Significantly reducing poverty requires synergy between both approaches, particularly models that promote work pathways to economic self-sufficiency that go beyond professional client-service delivery to creating mutual assistance networks that support and strengthen community building. This will involve building an advocacy base that bridges those engaged in community organizing activities and those engaged in state policy advocacy. Successful advocacy to reduce poverty may require investments in state-based advocacy efforts based upon "work pathways to economic development" that also work with community-based advocacy efforts based upon "community building and social justice."

INTRODUCTION

The issue of poverty reduction has re-emerged as a potentially prominent American public policy issue for the first time since the Kennedy-Johnson administration's War on Poverty in the 1960s. The federal policy direction more than 40 years ago was stimulated in part by President Kennedy's reading of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, which depicted poverty and the absence of economic opportunity largely in the context of neighborhood and community – poor rural communities and inner-city neighborhoods without the indigenous economic resources to support their people in pursuing the American dream.

The Head Start program and Community Action Agencies established at that time to combat poverty remain as federal legacies from that era. Then, the causes of poverty were seen in significant measure as rooted in the lack of investment within poor neighborhoods and communities, their residents, and organizations. A major thrust of the many programs that were established, "maximum feasible participation," involved supporting changes that would enable those in poverty to be leaders in designing and implementing strategies to become part of America's economic mainstream. Tied to the civil rights movement, community development and poverty reduction also were seen as critical to combat the both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination that had blocked different racial and ethnic groups, particularly African-Americans, access to the middle class. When the Department of Labor's publication known as the Moynihan report, *The Negro Family in America*, was published in 1965 and attributed some of the causes of poverty among African-Americans to single parenting and the "breakdown of the family," there was a strong outcry against that report as "blaming the victim."

To oversimplify, the approach to poverty reduction taken in the 1960s largely was based upon a community-level theory of change related to "community-building and social justice pathways to community vitality."

Today, a growing number of states and communities again have begun to tackle the issue of poverty as a major policy issue. Drawing upon international efforts, particularly in Great Britain, these state and community spotlights on poverty reduction are based upon a belief that raising the issue of poverty to prominence and setting specific goals for reducing it will create the visibility, salience and public will to tackle the issue.

At a state level, Vermont, Delaware and Connecticut have established commissions with missions to reduce poverty in their states by at least one-half. Minnesota has implemented a legislative commission to reduce poverty, while Iowa lawmakers have established a bipartisan Successful Families caucus to promote poverty reduction policies. Wisconsin has developed a broad state coalition to mobilize public will to reduce poverty. New York City has created its own Commission for Economic Opportunity. In his Presidential primary campaign in 2007, Democratic candidate John Edwards chose poverty reduction as a major campaign theme. Other Democratic and Republican candidates also developed policy positions on reducing poverty and ensuring family economic stability.

This new focus on poverty reduction generally has been upon child and family poverty. Since the 1960s and the expansions of social security, Medicare, and other benefits, the poverty rate among those over age 65 has dropped dramatically. Children are now the age group most likely to be poor, and the gap in their poverty rate in proportion to the adult working age population has remained constant and pronounced over the last 50 years. Poverty is seen as jeopardizing America's economic future by impacting the development of America's young into skilled and productive adults. President Bush's administration selected the phrase "no child left behind" for the title of his education reforms, to focus on the need to address educational gaps in achievement within federal education policy. That phrase

itself was borrowed from the Children's Defense Fund's "Leave No Child Behind" mission, which spoke to larger social, economic, health and justice system gaps, as well as education disadvantages, that too many American children experience.

There also is a growing body of communications research that indicates that it is possible to frame poverty reduction around basic American values of work, personal responsibility, fairness, opportunity and reciprocity. Americans are concerned about poverty and its impacts upon children, but have not yet coalesced around a set of policies to reduce it, which requires setting those policies within a values frame consistent with the American public. Communications research from Yankelovich on the seven stages of public policy formation, Lakoff on dominant political frameworks for making public policy, and the Frameworks Institute on values as a driving dynamic in capturing public support for policies all suggests the need to develop public policy approaches from the base of mainstream American values.

This new focus on poverty reduction has, in large measure, sought to do this. It differs significantly from the emphasis in the sixties and is focused largely on the individual – and not group, neighborhood or community – level. Dominant American culture itself is very rooted in individualism, personal responsibility and people having control of their own destiny. Pathways out of poverty are largely viewed through this policy frame.

According to this frame, people should be expected to work and be willing to build their skills to secure family-sustaining employment. Government's role is to provide those educational and work opportunities and the supports needed for individuals to take this path. While Americans also are concerned about fairness and social justice, most do not view social injustice as at the root of poverty and want to look forward rather than behind. Again, to oversimplify, this approach to community building is based upon an individual-level theory of change related to "work pathways to economic self-sufficiency."

Clearly, it is not a matter of choosing between "social justice and community-building pathways to community vitality" or "work pathways to economic self-sufficiency" approaches – both are needed to reduce poverty. The challenge is to incorporate them into an overall strategy and to build an advocacy base that can influence public policy and mobilize public will to help ensure that the goal of poverty alleviation can be realized.

Each of these two theories is discussed in some additional detail in this essay, followed by a discussion of the role of advocacy in promoting them.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PATHWAYS TO COMMUNITY VITALITY

In America, poverty is not evenly dispersed across neighborhoods, communities and states. In fact, when poverty is described as a confluence of factors related to socio-economic status and the opportunity for advancement and self-sufficiency, poverty often is very clearly demarcated by place. Even families who are above the official federal poverty level and live in high-poverty neighborhoods and experience many of the same challenges to pursuing self-sufficiency and advancement as those below that line. They generally experience the same institutional and social connections that exist in those neighborhoods, which often are far different from those in more affluent neighborhoods. An analysis that categorized all 65,000 census tracts in America by their "child-raising vulnerability" on 10 economic, employment, education and social indicators available through the census shows that the highest vulnerability neighborhoods have starkly different demographics than those for the majority of tracts that had no vulnerability factors.

The Importance of Place: Differences Across Census Tracts by Child-Raising Vulnerabilities
(Education, social, economic and wealth indicators)

CHILD-RAISING VULNERABILITY FACTOR	TRACTS WITH NO VULNERABILITY FACTORS	TRACTS WITH SIX OR MORE
% Single parents	20%	53%
% Poor families with children	7%	41%
% 25+ year-olds with no high school diploma	13%	48%
% 25+ year-olds with at least a B.A.	27%	7%
% Head of household on public assistance	5%	25%
% Head of household with wage income	81%	69%
% Head of household with savings, dividend, or rent income	42%	11%
% Owner-occupied housing	71%	29%
% Limited English proficiency households	2%	18%
% 16- to 19-year-olds not in school or working	3%	15%
% of population 0- to 4-year-olds	6%	9%
% of population 0- to 17-year-olds	26%	33%
% of population White, non-Hispanic	83%	17%

2000 census data for all census tracks

Source: Bruner, Charles. *Village Building and School Readiness: Closing Opportunity Gaps in a Diverse Society.*
Des Moines: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, 2007.

Moreover, these highest vulnerability census tracts clearly show the segregation of a significant segment of America's persons of color into such neighborhoods. While only 1.7 percent of White, non-Hispanic Americans lives in those highest vulnerability census tracts, 20.5 percent of all African-Americans and 25.3 percent of all Hispanics do. Conversely, census tracts with no vulnerability factors are 83 percent White, non-Hispanic and 17 percent persons of color; those with six or more vulnerability factors are just the reverse. Given these demographics alone, a place-based, community approach to poverty reduction must also involve a race-based, social justice approach, as well.

Tackling poverty reduction from a community-building and social justice pathway to community vitality has a long history in the United States. With the exception of the African-American population, who came to America in slavery and experienced two centuries of legal servitude that blocked all pathways to independence and self-sufficiency, most immigrant groups coming to the United States located themselves within ethnic neighborhoods that started at the bottom of the economic ladder but managed to advance economically. This occurred, in part, because of their ability to create and share some wealth and opportunity within and among members of that community. While the Chinese brought into the West largely to build railroads and serve as agricultural laborers in work camps were treated very harshly and subject to discrimination and persecution, they also were able to combine their own resources within their ethnic communities to build generational pathways out of servitude. Like the Jews in New York's garment district and the Italians or Irish in Northeastern and Midwestern cities, the Chinese often pooled resources they were able to acquire from poverty-level wages to invest in education and economic development for their own and other children within their community – thereby creating a ladder into America's middle class.

Moving out of poverty and into the middle class typically was a generational aspiration and reality. Largely, this movement occurred without any explicit public policy or support, and sometimes required community organizing and activity against policies and practices that sought to keep people and their communities at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. The growth of the labor movement in the early 20th century also contributed to the ability of workers to have upward economic mobility. At the same time, the Native American population experienced a very different set of explicit policies to deny this opportunity for community advancement. Largely forced onto reservations that had minimal opportunities for economic advancement, many children were actually taken away from their families to be placed into schools that systematically sought to expunge their native cultures and associational ties.

This history is important in setting a context for the different perspectives Americans have on opportunities for economic growth and advancement. White America largely wants to view racial discrimination as in the past and look at poverty reduction and economic opportunity through a colorblind lens, assuming that a level playing field largely exists today. People of color, particularly within the African-American and Native American communities, see discrimination and racism both as the historical cause for their current economic status and a continuing barrier to their advancement. The history of white America and its different European ethnicities is largely one that offered generational opportunities for economic advancement through the rising tide of economic growth opportunities American society enjoyed. This enabled these ethnic communities to raise their ships largely without government assistance (although the G.I. bill after World War II produced a government-supported avenue into the homeowning and middle class, which also was race-based as it was largely denied to African-American servicemen).

Particularly in the 1960s and during the War on Poverty, however, the federal government did establish specific programs and policies to support community building at the neighborhood level. These involved significant investments within communities and to people within those communities, largely bypassing state governments (which were seen in the South in particular as otherwise blocking racial

advancement). The Model Cities projects were comprehensive, if not necessarily comprehensively financed, efforts to give residents in distressed neighborhoods resources and supports to build up from within.

"Maximum feasible participation," however, proved to be highly controversial policy, and even came to be described by some as "maximum feasible misunderstanding." First, government investment in community organizing often resulted in organizers identifying barriers within public systems and then mobilizing constituents to "fight city hall," with a resultant pushback and drawback of government support. There is a distance between an even well-meaning investor, who usually has an expectation of being praised for that investment, and those being invested in, who do not necessarily differentiate among the holders of wealth and power or see the investor as doing enough to make a difference.

Second, institutions with the immediate capacity to manage and direct resources, at least according to the procedures and accountability and outcome expectations of those providing the funding, usually did not exist within the communities being served. Either well-meaning absentee service providers (idealistic individuals willing to take on these positions within distressed communities) were enlisted to serve as managers and project directors, or indigenous leaders with skill sets other than those of program managers were selected to take on managerial roles. The former often were able to turn their organizations into acceptable service providers from the perspective of those investing in them, but rarely created strong pathways for residents to take over actual leadership, organizing and management roles within their own, let alone other, organizations. The latter often were accused of mismanagement and lack of accountability for resources or given only enough support to enable them to maintain their personal base within the community, not broadening out to new leadership or resource management. Over time, the resident-driven community organizing and leadership development mission was replaced by a more palatable and less volatile service-based mission that involved providing the brick-and-mortar for improved housing, business development through incentives for business location, and services to clients for education, training and workforce preparation.

This experience has played itself out in a number of subsequent public and private foundation efforts to support community development within disinvested neighborhoods. The Ford Foundation's Grey Areas Project, the Clinton Administration's Empowerment Zone Initiative, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative are three major and significantly funded demonstration efforts to rebuild disinvested neighborhoods through a combination of resident engagement, leadership development and service provision that have had many of the same experiences related to those from the War on Poverty regarding the difficulty of establishing resident-led poverty reduction efforts that can also secure community and state commitment to share power and resources. The Northwest Area Foundation's Venture Partnerships and Horizons programs represent two decade-long commitments to building capacity and community leadership in poor, largely rural communities to eliminate poverty. The Hewitt Foundation has been willing to share its "lessons learned" in its most recent effort to reduce poverty through community building and leadership development. *Hard Lessons About Philanthropy and Community Change from the Neighborhood Improvement Initiative*, commissioned by the foundation and researched and written by Chapin Hall, draws from the experiences from that initiative in clearly raising critical issues that must be addressed for such strategies to hope to succeed and the tensions that come from the different worldviews, experiences, capacities and power relationships that exist between the larger investing community and the residents they seek to assist. Most recently, President Obama has pledged to commit new resources to Promise Neighborhoods, building upon the Harlem Children's Zones as a place-based strategy to move a neighborhood out of poverty, starting at birth and moving from "cradle to career."

Despite decades of work and substantial public sector and foundation investments in community-building initiatives, there remain limited success stories from such efforts, particularly ones that can show community-wide impacts on reducing poverty and producing community vitality. While urban renewal, urban revitalization, and other blighted areas' projects often have resulted in changing the physical landscape of neighborhoods and communities, often through gentrification, these often have done so by displacing residents into equally or more disadvantaged situations – "the myth of community development," as one critic described it.

Direct investments strictly in neighborhood-level capacity-building efforts, while they have shown both the promise and capacity for leadership development within poor, disinvested neighborhoods and dispelled any myths that that there is not the human capacity for change, eventually run up against public systems that need to change. This change involves: (1) recognizing the need for place-based strategies that counter the effects of disinvestment and therefore involve targeted and different public sector investments, (2) sharing power and decision-making, (3) changing the culture of service provision from a deficit-based to asset-based perspective and (4) building social capital and activating nascent community leadership that also can threaten existing power relationships in the community. Neighborhood-level capacity-building efforts may work somewhat better when first-generation immigrant and refugee populations are involved, as opportunity is seen in context and the context for first-generation immigrant and refugee populations is based upon what was left behind and not what other groups in America experience. In the end, however, issues of identity versus assimilation do emerge.

This discussion is not meant to suggest that the community-building and social justice pathway to community vitality not be pursued as too difficult or problematic. The pathway to self-sufficiency for residents, disproportionately of color, who live in high poverty and high child-vulnerability neighborhoods, requires collective as well as individual action. In addition to providing services, the larger community needs to be willing to support self-determination and community building. Public policies need to support this work. These public policies involve different approaches to economic and community development than have been provided in the past.

What the discussion does indicate is that there are tensions and contradictions that need to be resolved to be more successful in future actions than has been the case in previous ones. There are many "lessons learned" from prior thoughtful efforts. Their mistakes can be learned from in order that that they are not repeated. Resolving these tensions and contradictions ultimately requires more explicit, concerted and intentional effort to spell out the gulfs in expectation and worldview regarding causes and solutions to community impoverishment that exist between those holding policy power and public resources and those within the neighborhoods seeking to advance. Although simplified and potentially overstated, Table Two provides a summary of some of these gaps. These too often exist but remain unexpressed, without any dialogue that might begin to bridge and address them. Both foundation-supported and publicly funded initiatives that place an emphasis upon supporting community building within disinvested neighborhoods as a means to reduce poverty need to consider the potential for these issues and tensions to arise in their work, and to formulate some strategies for addressing them.

Two Views of Barriers and Pathways to Community Vitality:
Developing Bridges to Avoid "Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding"

RESIDENT ACTIVIST VIEWS	COMMUNITY POWER-HOLDER VIEWS
Legitimate Community Leadership	
People who step forward and want change need to be recognized and heard. The neighborhood will decide who its leaders are (which does not require consensus or formal action).	We will not bow to the demands of self-anointed spokespersons for the community. We will recognize people who demonstrate they are legitimate, offer approaches that can gain consensus in the community, and understand and respect the decision-making rules by which we operate.
Resident Participation and Decision-Making	
Those with the most stake in the decisions being made should have a majority voice in the decisions. We are not here to be co-opted or to have people who are co-opted represent us.	As residents gain experience, and decision-skills and knowledge of the current systems around which decisions are made, they will gain increasing voice in those decisions.
Roles for Expertise	
Professionals do not know us nor do they necessarily have our interests at heart. Part of the problem is that professionals are committed to retaining their authority and the status quo.	There is expertise and knowledge that needs to be respected and applied in decision-making, management and service provision. We rely upon expertise and need to draw upon rather than question it. We cannot go forward as a society without building and using that knowledge and expertise.
Accountability	
We are accountable to our people and their goals and aspirations. We do not accept accountability that is based upon following rules, particularly those designed for reasons of social control and maintaining the status quo.	We cannot make investments that do not adhere to accepted rules and procedures and meet the conditions upon which they are provided. We need to be accountable for showing public funds were used appropriately, including monitoring and record-keeping.
Racism, Classism and Discrimination	
Racism, classism and discrimination are at the root of our poverty. Power-holders need to accept their role in keeping us down.	We need to get beyond issues of race and discrimination. We need to make sure there is equal opportunity today, not dwell on the past.
Personal Initiative and Responsibility	
We need collective actions and responses. Our people are ready; it is institutions that hold us back.	People must accept personal responsibility and develop their skills and move up the ladder through hard work. We will provide a hand up, but not a hand out. There is a culture of poverty that exists that doesn't accept this personal responsibility, which is a precondition for success in American society.

WORK PATHWAYS TO ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Far more comfortable and within the dominant culture frame is the theory of change that places primary responsibility on the individual for his or her own growth, development and self-sufficiency and views work as the pathway to avoiding poverty – with government providing needed supports for those who accept their personal responsibility.

The enactment of federal welfare reform in 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, was emblematic of the dominance of this frame within the public. The temporary assistance to needy families (TANF) program replaced the aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) program as the source of income support for families with children at the lowest end of the income scale. While AFDC's mission was to ensure that basic needs were met for children who lived in families who could not otherwise provide for them (often because their circumstances precluded employment, particularly in instances where the head of household was the primary caregiver), TANF's mission was to provide time-limited supports with the expectation that families enter the workforce (also providing some assistance with child care for those who needed that in order to work). Only if families accepted personal responsibility for securing employment and advancing their skills would they be eligible for assistance.

Welfare reform has been successful in reducing the number of families on welfare, but it has been mixed in terms of its success in achieving greater self-sufficiency and lifting families out of poverty. Importantly, however, it also has shifted the debate away from welfare policy as producing a "culture of dependency and poverty" to a dialogue on working families who "live by the rules" but still struggle to get by. Public opinion polls show that, provided families work hard to get ahead, voters believe government should provide supports so that they have sufficient resources to raise their children.

Current state and federal efforts to highlight poverty as a public policy issue and seek to reduce it and improve economic self-sufficiency generally share a number of common policy features that fit within this frame of personal responsibility, fairness and opportunity.

At the national level, the Center for American Progress Task Force on Poverty's 2007 report, *From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half*, recommended 12 steps to reduce poverty, based upon four guiding principles: (1) promote decent work, (2) provide opportunity for all, (3) ensure economic security and (4) help people build wealth. United Way of America's national initiative, Financial Stability, incorporated eight specific recommendations to help low- and moderate-income workers be economically secure through three steps: (1) increase income, (2) build savings and (3) gain and sustain assets. The fall 2007 volume of the *Future of Children*, devoted to "The Next Generation of Anti-Poverty Policies," included eight articles by leading thinkers (representing both liberal and conservative thought) on emerging strategies to address poverty in the country. An expert panel to Connecticut's Child Poverty and Prevention Council identified 13 specific policies from the Council's 67 recommendations and described them under four major areas: (1) family income and earnings potential, (2) education, (3) income safety net and (4) family structure and support. Similarly, under a Northwest Area Foundation grant, the Child and Family Policy Center identified a set of state policy actions to reduce poverty organized around five key themes: (1) making work pay, (2) providing needed work supports, (3) developing worker skills and fostering entrepreneurship, (4) encouraging savings and reducing debt and (5) welcoming new workers.

Table Three provides a matrix of the recommendations from these five different efforts, under a consolidation of the headings from the different efforts: (1) make work pay, (2) provide needed work supports, (3) promote asset development, (4) invest in skills/workforce development, (5) invest in education and two-generation strategies, (6) instill personal responsibility and (7) provide a safety net.

TABLE THREE

Specific Poverty-Reduction Recommendations from Five Sources

CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS	UNITED WAY OF AMERICA	*FUTURE OF CHILDREN*	CONNECTICUT COMMISSION	IOWA CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY CENTER
Make Work Pay				
1. Raise the minimum wage 2. Expand the EITC/child tax credit 3. Promote unionization/employee free choice act	1. EITC	1. EITC for single men	1. State EITC	1. Raise state minimum wage 2. Increase state EITC
Provide Needed Work Supports				
4. Guarantee child care assistance 5. Create 2 million housing vouchers	4. Accessing public and employer benefits	3. Child care supports 4. Health care policy	2. Child care 3. Housing Subsidies 4. Health Care 5. Expand use of public benefits 11. Eliminate marriage penalties	3. Raise child care subsidy level 4. Expand Title XIX coverage of parents 5. Expand SCHIP for children
Promote Asset Development				
11. Reduce high cost of being poor and increase access to financial services 12. Expand and simplify the Saver's Credit	3. Credit repair and debt reduction 6. Savings products 7. Savings campaigns 8. Split refunds 9. IDAs 10. Asset protection			6. Curb predatory lending – car title, payday, RALs, and subprime mortgage lending 7. Increase IDAs
Invest in Skills/Workforce Development				
6. Connect disadvantaged youth with school and work 8. Help former prisoners find work	2. Workforce development		13. Improve skills and prospects of fathers	8. Expand adult education/workforce development 9. Support microenterprise development 10. Reduce reentry barriers
Invest in Education and Two-Generation Strategies				
7. Simplify and expand Pell grants		6. Invest in preschool 7. Improve education for poor children	5. Early childhood education 6. Teacher quality 7. Secondary/post-secondary education	11. Enact Dream Act
Instill Personal Responsibility				
		2. Mandatory work policy for men 5. Decrease non-marital births/strengthen marriage		
Provide a Safety Net				
9. Ensure equity for low-wage workers in unemployment insurance		8. Improve safety net for single mothers with serious barriers to work	8. Intensive case management high-risk families 12. Avoid abrupt benefit changes/loss of benefits	

EITC: Earned Income Tax Credit
IDA: Individual Development Account
SCHIP: State Children's Health Insurance Program
RALs: Refund Anticipation Loans
Title XIX: Grants to states for medical assistance programs

While the language describing them is somewhat different, the list of recommendations from these five different efforts to define a comprehensive poverty-reduction policy agenda contains much overlap. It is notable for:

- Consistency with a values framework related to personal responsibility, opportunity and work.
- Absence of community-level strategies and the focus upon the individual.
- Absence of explicit recognition of discrimination as a causal factor or explicit focus for policy attention.
- Inclusion of "safety net" options only under special circumstances.

Notably, as well, there are several features common to these lists that do point to new policy emphases within poverty reduction. These include:

- Recognition that work alone, and particularly low-wage employment, will not be sufficient to lift households from poverty and that additional work supports are needed.
- Emphasis upon the role of fathers as responsible for at least the economic support of their children and the need to address their employment as well as the employment within the household.
- Emphasis upon wealth acquisition as a part of self-sufficiency and poverty reduction, particularly as wealth enables parents to make investments in education and skill development.

As indicated, these work pathways to economic self-sufficiency represent a policy thrust – both nationally and within states – that is gaining new advocates, both within the traditional human needs and child advocacy community and with some broader community groups and stakeholders as well.

TOWARD A CONVERGENCE – ADVOCACY AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The distinction between the "community-building and social justice pathways to economic vitality" and the "work pathways to economic self-sufficiency" can easily be overdrawn. Significantly reducing poverty requires both approaches, and these approaches ultimately must be integrated at the community level.

Further, at a service provision level, there are select approaches that suggest there can be synergy between the two, particularly when models that promote work pathways to economic self-sufficiency go beyond professional-client service delivery to creating mutual assistance networks that also can support and strengthen community building. Project Match's work with some public welfare agencies in implementing welfare reform has shown the potential for group processes to support families entering the workforce and also create social ties and networks that help sustain individual efforts and create additional nexuses within the neighborhood that support employment. Community leadership teams in Iowa evolved to be both peer support networks supporting families in their individual pathways toward work and economic self-sufficiency, and avenues for community organization and advocacy that brought the larger community to the table in strengthening those pathways. Some Centers for Working Families developed through the Annie E. Casey Foundation's work play this role of offering individual assistance to people seeking employment and building social ties and community cohesion around strengthening the neighborhood as a whole in its support for families. Time banking programs and coproduction strategies spearheaded by Edgar Cahn represent explicit efforts to build wealth within disinvested neighborhoods through reciprocity and collective engagement.

All these represent a different form of service provision from the traditional professional-client dyadic relationship; one that relies upon mutual assistance and reciprocity across peers as a motivational and accountability mechanism for taking personal responsibility. While professional-client service

delivery still may be needed to address specific individual needs, it does not afford the opportunity for reciprocity and leadership development. The movement within and across a variety of professional fields – health, mental health, child welfare, family support and education – toward more preventive, asset-based approaches to service delivery opens the door for incorporating mutual assistance and community building into those systems.

If public investments are to be directed toward poverty reduction in a significant manner across both the approaches, this will require building an advocacy base that bridges those engaged in community organizing activities and those engaged in strengthening service provision.

One step toward this convergence involves dialogues and relationship building across child advocacy and human needs advocacy groups and social justice and community organizing ones in seeking to come forward with a common agenda. Another step involves strategic investments in promising approaches that, at the ground level, seek to merge the two. This also will require recognizing – and bridging – the different cultures under which current anti-poverty activities operate within disinvested neighborhoods, particularly across community economic development, community organizing and service system reform efforts.

Specifically, this will require new ways of looking at social policy and consequent service delivery within the current child and human service communities, where the major public resources directed within those neighborhoods reside. The amount of funding that goes into poor and disinvested neighborhoods – through health care, child welfare, TANF, child care subsidy, and supplemental nutrition assistance programs – is very substantial, yet is almost exclusively focused upon poverty maintenance rather than poverty reduction. Commensurate investments in building better links with community organizing groups and community economic development efforts also need to be made.

State-based child advocacy organizations are well-positioned to take on this challenge in many states, but there needs to be an intentional strategy developed to engage and support them in this task. This also requires establishing bridges across state-based advocacy and neighborhood-based community building.

Unless the current efforts to reduce poverty move beyond individually based strategies focused upon personal responsibility to incorporate community-based strategies focused upon social justice, it is likely that in the future poverty reduction will be seen as yet another unmet social goal espoused by well-meaning liberals in the beginning of the 21st century.

FOR FURTHER READING

For elaboration on some of the points raised and perspectives provided in this report, see the following publications by the same author.

Bruner, Charles, and L. Parachini. *Building Community: Exploring New Relationships Across Service Systems Reform, Community Organizing, and Community Economic Development.* Washington, D.C.: Together We Can Partnership, 1997.

This paper examines three different types of reform efforts (which are rarely linked to one another) to improve the lives of families in poor neighborhoods. It examines exemplary efforts to improve child and family outcomes within each and describes some common purposes across them, but often very different cultures and purposes within them. It poses opportunities for synergy across the three reform efforts and the manner in which their collective work is needed to achieve both individual and community results.

Bruner, Charles, et al. *Wise Counsel: Redefining the Role of Consumers, Professionals, and Community Workers in the Helping Process.* Brief 8. Des Moines: National Center for Service Integration Resource, 1998.

This collection of papers examines how community workers can contribute to providing needed services in communities, partner with professionals to improve professional effectiveness, and foster mutual assistance and community building through coproduction. It also describes the transitional role of outside leaders and administrators in identifying and mentoring those who will be indigent successors in leading and operating community programs.

Bruner, Charles. "Social Service Systems Reform and Poor Neighborhoods: What We Know and What We Need to Find Out." *Community Change: Theories, Practice and Evidence.* Eds. K. Fulbright-Anderson and P. Auspos. Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, 2006. 387–482.

This paper explores five different theories of change and their philosophical and empirical underpinnings that have been employed in seeking to improve child and family outcomes in poor neighborhoods through service reforms. These include: (1) investing in prevention, (2) integrating services, (3) transforming frontline practice, (4) planning comprehensively and establishing outcome accountability and (5) building grassroots activity. The paper concludes that these have proved insufficient operating alone and that an additional focus upon creating a critical mass of activity and leadership development also needs to be considered in new efforts to achieve success. (Retrievable at: www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/community-change/publications.)

Bruner, Charles, et al. *Village Building and School Readiness: Closing Opportunity Gaps in a Diverse Society.* Des Moines: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, 2007.

This resource brief shows the segregation of child vulnerability by census tracts in the United States and offers a series of essays on helping ensure children are healthy and start school equipped for success within these vulnerable neighborhoods. Exemplary programs are featured that have distinctly different relationships between staff and the families they serve than are present in traditional professional-client service relationships. (Retrievable at: www.finebynine.org.)

Bruner, Charles. *Thirst to Learn Dialogue Paper: Building an Early Childhood Development System for America's Future*. Greensboro: Build Initiative, Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education Initiative, and Smart Start Technical Assistance Center, 2009.

This paper explores new opportunities presented at the federal and state level to move beyond either-or approaches to supporting young children and their families – either professional services or family and community initiative. It suggests further changes to the early childhood systems framework to incorporate mutual assistance and community building as core elements of effective programs and services and raises key questions that must be addressed by all stakeholders and systems serving young children. (Retrievable at: www.cfpciowa.org.)

BIOGRAPHY

Charles Bruner serves as Executive Director of the Child and Family Policy Center, a nonprofit organization established in 1989 "to better link research and policy on issues vital to children and families." He holds an master's degree and a doctorate in political science from Stanford University, and received his bachelor's degree from Macalester College. He served 12 years as a state legislator in Iowa.

Through the Child and Family Policy Center, Bruner provides technical assistance to states, communities and foundations on child and family issues. Bruner's current interests relate to developing more neighborhood-based service systems that integrate professional and voluntary supports and serve in community-building as well as family-strengthening roles.

Bruner has written widely on public policy approaches to developing more comprehensive, community-based responses to children, family and neighborhood needs. Among Charles Bruner's publications are:

- *Thinking Collaboratively: Ten Questions and Answers to Help Policy Makers Improve Children's Services*
- *Making Welfare Work: A Family Approach*
- *Getting to the Bottom Line: State and Community Strategies for Financing Comprehensive Community Service Systems* (with Frank Farrow)
- *Making a Difference: Moving to Outcome-Based Accountability for Comprehensive Service Reforms* (with Lisbeth Schorr, Soraya Coley, Sid Gardner and Nancy Young)
- *More Than Health Insurance: Comprehensive State Initiatives to Improve Infant and Child Health* (with Jim Perrin)
- *Getting to the Grassroots: Neighborhood Organizing and Mobilization* (with Maria Chavez)
- *Building Community: Exploring the Linkages Between Service System Reform, Community Development, and Community Organizing in Poor Neighborhoods* (with Larry Parachini)
- *Wise Counsel: Redefining the Role of Consumers, Professionals, and Community Workers in the Helping Process*
- *Clinical Health Care Practice and Community Building: Addressing Racial Disparities in Healthy Child Development* (with Dr. Ed Schor)

Charles Bruner heads the technical assistance activities of the federally established National Center for Service Integration. He also heads the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN). Through SECPTAN, Bruner has produced a number of policy briefs on early learning and school readiness, including *Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know About School Readiness, Health Care and School Readiness*, and *Village Building and School Readiness: Closing Opportunity Gaps in a Diverse Society*. Bruner also serves as the national research and evaluation director for the nine-state Build Initiative, designed to help states develop comprehensive and accountable early learning systems.