

ADOLESCENCE



AND THE TRANSITION TO  
ADULTHOOD

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## Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood: Rethinking Public Policy for a New Century

Cosponsored by

- **Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago**
- **The MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy**

*Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood: Rethinking Public Policy for a New Century*, a two-day conference held in Chicago in November 2004, assembled a diverse set of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to mark the centennial of psychologist G. Stanley Hall's landmark study on the needs of adolescents. The two-day conference, cosponsored by Chapin Hall Center for Children and the MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy, discussed current research and practice and what it suggests about how well our major social institutions have adapted to support young people as they make the transition to adulthood in the twenty-first century.

This conference was made possible through the generosity of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Eckerd Family Foundation.

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## Executive Summary

The transition to adulthood is an exciting, but also tumultuous time as youth assume the mantle of adulthood: leaving home, finishing school, landing a job, finding a partner, and starting a family. As researchers at the MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy have documented in their recent book, *On the Frontier of Adulthood* (University of Chicago Press), this period has become more uncertain and diverse in the last several decades. Young adults are navigating a playing field that has been fundamentally altered—economically, socially, and culturally. In fact, the road map laid out even 10 years ago is often no longer readable. Young adults in their 20s are juggling work and school, they are living at home longer, and delaying marriage and family. Parents are providing more time and money during their children's 20s than ever before, and many of the programs and institutions that launch youth into careers and support their continued development are not adapting to their changing needs.

Many of these youth have supportive families, with a good foundation underfoot. The road for those without supportive networks, however, is far more difficult. Those in foster care, those with mental health issues, those in the juvenile justice or adult correctional systems, those with health issues, and others often need extra support as they navigate early adulthood.

*Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood*, a conference cosponsored by **Chapin Hall Center for Children** and the **Network on Transitions to Adulthood**, brought together researchers, funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders to generate a better understanding of this period of life, what it means for public policy, and to stimulate dialogue on what is needed to support this emerging time of life. Panels discussed education, workforce development, civic engagement, and issues facing several at-risk populations, including those in juvenile justice, those with mental or physical health problems, and those leaving the foster care system. The conference also convened a panel of federal and state policymakers to map out a plan of action for this group of young adults.

### Highlights from the Presentations

- ◆ The groups of vulnerable youth often share a set of similar challenges. They often have limited abilities or skills, either cognitive, behavioral, or physical, that make the transition a more formidable task. Joblessness rates, for example, are fairly similar, as are rates of school failure. Housing instability, early parenthood, and public assistance use are all common. Some also have unreliable or nonexistent family support, making the tasks of transition even more daunting. Finally, in some cases, the systems with which they were involved may have exacerbated the problems. In addition, on reaching adulthood, many of these youth must navigate wholly new systems of support, with new eligibility criteria, different services, and different responsibilities.
- ◆ Despite their vulnerabilities, many of these youth also share positive aspects and strengths. Many panelists stressed the importance of balancing vulnerabilities with strengths, and argued that it was equally important to look at assets when making policies.

**Chapin Hall Center for Children** is a research center at the University of Chicago that specializes in research on children's services and policies affecting children and families, with a particular focus on the service system for children, and the system and supports available to youth at the community level.

The Center is directed by  
University of Chicago  
Professor Mark Courtney.

[www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org)



- ◆ Better policies benefit not only youth but society. At a minimum, attending to youths' needs during the transition to adulthood should reduce later problems, such as crime. More broadly, thoughtful policy can ensure both their economic contributions as productive workers and their social contributions to family and communities as supportive, engaged citizens.

**Preparing for Jobs**—The country has witnessed a 30-year reversal in employment prospects for youth aged 16–24. In contrast, employment rates for those aged 25 and older have been rising. Providing a route into the workforce, either through higher education or job training, is imperative. Yet federal investment in youth employment has dropped precipitously. The misperception is that nothing works. Yet many programs are quite successful in helping youth make the transition to careers.

**Education**—Many vulnerable youth fare poorly in school, yet without education, their employment prospects are limited. Promising high school reforms include Career Academies, which provides career development, supports academic achievement, and provides clear pathways to postsecondary education and into the job force. Males in the program earned, on average, 15% more over four years than males in the control group. If youth do drop out of school, programs to help them reconnect are essential. Panelists discussed several unique bridge programs underway.

**Juvenile Justice Reforms**—Balancing a punitive approach to youth who have committed crimes with opportunities to gain maturity, social and job skills, and assume responsibilities would help youth reconnect with society in a healthy way after their release, as would addressing the fact that about half of youth entering juvenile justice have mental health issues. On leaving the system, youth should be offered wraparound services and reconnections to more healthy pursuits.

**Health and Mental Health Issues**—Young adults with health and mental health problems often find themselves navigating entirely new, and often multiple, systems of supports at age 18, and they often find themselves without health insurance. Extending private parental health coverage through age 23 and extending Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to age 23 would help, as would streamlining the multiple systems young adults must navigate. Families and state, local, and national leadership all must come together if the field is to develop a comprehensive web of supportive services rather than the categorical approach that now exists.

**Civic Participation**—Although important, jobs and earning a living are not the only aspects of young adulthood. Ample evidence shows that too much investment in material goals and maximizing one's self-interest can be debilitating for mental and physical health. Civic participation can help build well-rounded adults and provide youth an option to invest in other goals than simple material wealth. Youth-led organizations are especially inviting to young adults, and several panelists reported on innovative initiatives that place young adults in leadership positions.

**The MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy** examines the changing nature of early adulthood, and the policies, programs, and institutions that support young people as they move into adulthood. Significant cultural, economic, and demographic changes have occurred in the span of a few generations, and these changes are challenging youths' psychological and social development. Some are adapting well, but many others are floundering as they prepare to leave home, finish school, find jobs, and start families. The network is both documenting these cultural and social shifts, and exploring how families, government, and social institutions are shaping the course of young adult's development. The Network is funded by the MacArthur Foundation and chaired by University of Pennsylvania sociologist Frank Furstenberg.

[www.pop.upenn.edu/transad](http://www.pop.upenn.edu/transad)



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## Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood is a tumultuous time as youth assume the mantle of adulthood: leaving home, finishing school, landing a job, finding a partner, and starting a family. This period has become more uncertain and diverse in the last several decades. Young adults in their 20s are navigating a playing field that has been fundamentally altered—economically, socially, and culturally. In fact, the road map laid out even 10 years ago is often no longer readable. They are juggling work and school, they are living at home longer, and delaying marriage and family. Parents are providing more time and money during their children's 20s than ever before, and many of the programs and institutions launch youth into careers and support their continued development are not adapting to the changing needs.

“Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood: Rethinking Public Policy for a New Century,” a November 2004 conference cosponsored by Chapin Hall Center for Children and the Network on Transitions to Adulthood, assembled researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to generate a better understanding of what the research says about this period of life, what it means for public policy for young adults and their families, and to stimulate dialogue on what is needed to support this emerging time of life.

“This era from the late teens to the early 30s,” said **Frank Furstenberg**, director of the Network, “is a poorly understood period. We don't know what's going on in the mind and hearts of young adults and how their perceptions change, of themselves and others, as they navigate young adulthood.”

As the Network has found, many young adults continue to rely on their parents well into their 20s. Yet for a significant group, family alone is often not enough. Youth in foster care, those with mental health issues, those in the juvenile justice or adult correctional systems, those with health issues, and others often need additional supports as they navigate early adulthood. This group of vulnerable youth garnered special attention at the conference, as their needs are often profound and their supports limited. In addition to the issues facing vulnerable youth, panelists presented the latest research on the struggles of youth in general to secure an economic foothold and on the yearning among many youth to play an active role in society and in their own futures. What follows is a summary of the two-day conference proceedings.

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*More than at any time in recent history, parents are being called on to provide financial assistance (either college tuition, living expenses or other assistance) to their young adult children. . . . Nearly one-quarter of the entire cost of raising children is incurred after they reach 17. Nearly two-thirds of young adults in their early 20s receive economic support from parents, while about 40 percent still receive some assistance in their late 20s.*

—Contexts (summer 2004)

[http://www.contextsmagazine.org/content\\_sample\\_v3-3.php](http://www.contextsmagazine.org/content_sample_v3-3.php)

**Frank Furstenberg**, Director, MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy, is Zellerbach Family Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania

For more information, including Powerpoint presentations, see [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org)



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## Opening Remarks

Special guest and conference opener, **Maggie Daley**, the wife of Chicago mayor Richard Daley, set the stage for an emerging consensus at the conference that the issues of youth and young adulthood should be reframed from a negative, deficit-driven view to a positive view of youth.

Mrs. Daley is a moving force behind an ambitious afterschool program for youth in Chicago, *After School Matters*. The program, underway in 35 communities in Chicago, transforms the way youth think about their future, exposes them to wide variety of careers, helps them develop caring relationships with adults, and helps them apply their skills in their communities. The program has recently been expanded from its original conception as a program focusing on the arts to one that engages youth in a myriad of activities, with a particular focus on job training and apprenticeships, as well as club activities. The programs are available after school and in the summer at the public schools, parks, libraries, and community-based organizations. *After School Matters* is a life changing opportunity for youth. As Mrs. Daley pointed out, teens want to do something positive, and *After School* gives them the opportunity to do this. “We cannot afford to write off one single child,” she said. “Investing in them is in everybody’s interest.”

### After School Matters

After School Matters transforms the way teens think about their future by:

- Engaging teens in hands-on, interactive programs in the after-school hours.
- Exposing teens to a variety of careers and providing them with experience and marketable skills relevant to school and work.
- Providing teens with the opportunity to develop relationships with caring adults.
- Giving teens opportunities to apply their skills in ways that contribute to their community.

For more information, see [www.afterschoolmatters.org](http://www.afterschoolmatters.org)

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## Vulnerable Populations

Those aging out of the foster care or juvenile justice systems, and those with mental or physical health issues, are some of the most vulnerable youth in any age group. They struggle to find secure jobs, develop social networks, and secure housing. A report by Chapin Hall Center for Children, for example, finds that about one in eight youth leaving foster care will be homeless within a year. Their research finds that foster youth leaving care in three midwestern states experienced mental health and substance abuse problems at three times the rate of a national sample of similar youth not in foster care.<sup>1</sup>

A forthcoming book sponsored by the Network, *On Your Own without a Net* (University of Chicago Press), edited by D. Wayne Osgood, E. Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan, and Gretchen Ruth, chronicles the issues facing vulnerable youth, including the risk of homelessness, mental health issues, disabilities and special health care needs, and the challenges facing youth who are aging out of foster care and those leaving the juvenile justice or adult prison systems. The book documents the prevalence and status of these groups, as well as policy options for addressing their needs.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Courtney, Sherri Terao, and Noel Bost, “Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth,” Chapin Hall Center for Children working paper, 2004.



**D. Wayne Osgood** is Professor of Crime, Law, and Justice, and of Sociology at Pennsylvania State University

**Elizabeth Cauffman** is Assistant Professor in Psychology and Social Behavior at the University of California, Irvine

What the book finds, **D. Wayne Osgood** reported, is that these groups of youth share a set of similar challenges. First, they often have limited abilities or skills, either cognitive, behavioral, or physical, that make the transition a more formidable task. Joblessness rates, for example, are fairly similar, as are rates of school failure. Housing instability, early fertility, and public assistance use are all quite common. Some also have unreliable or nonexistent family support, making the tasks of transition even more daunting. Finally, in some cases, the systems with which they were involved may have exacerbated the problems, or the youths' relation to the systems may have been fundamentally altered on reaching adulthood. About one-half of the youth in juvenile justice, reported **Elizabeth Cauffman**, suffer from mental health issues, yet only about 10–15% receive help for their problems, mainly owing to a lack of funding.

Yet despite these vulnerabilities, many of these youth also share positive aspects and strengths. Many conference panelists stressed the importance of balancing vulnerabilities with strengths, and argued that it was equally important to look at assets when making policies. Policies and programs should recognize ways in which these young adults can assist in their own development and success and tap into their resilience. As Osgood said, "There is the potential for positive development, and if we don't go into our analysis with that assumption, we'll be sending the message that this group is doomed, and that we will need to provide them with services forever."

Approaches guided by notions of social inclusion, many argued, could help shift the view to one of strengths and contribution. In this view, better policies benefit not only youth but society. At a minimum, attending to youths' needs during the transition to adulthood should reduce later problems, such as crime. More broadly, thoughtful policy can ensure both their economic contributions as productive workers and their social contributions to family and communities as supportive, engaged citizens.

What follows is a summary of the issues facing three groups of vulnerable youth: those in juvenile justice, those with physical or mental health issues, and those with special educational needs or at risk of dropping out of school. Policies and programs to assist youth, such as workforce development, civic participation, and government policies are also discussed.

## Youth in Juvenile Justice

Two million 12–17 year olds are arrested each year. At any given time, as **Michael Wald** reported, 100,000 in this age group are incarcerated in facilities ranging from group residential facilities to large penal institutions.

This group is one of the least likely to make a successful transition to adulthood. Unlike other youth systems, in particular foster care, where increased attention is being paid to

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**Michael Wald** is Jackson Eli Reynolds Professor of Law at Stanford Law School



helping youth, the juvenile justice system has moved away from a rehabilitative approach and toward a more punitive approach. “We’ve abandoned many of these kids,” says Wald, “by moving them into the adult system. We no longer make even a pretense of trying to offer these young offenders rehabilitation.”

Often, says **Laurence Steinberg**, we as a society “think of the kids as little criminals instead of young adults who have committed a crime. Their crimes are not to be ignored, certainly, but we’ve become so focused on criminal behavior that we’ve lost sight of their mental health and psychosocial development.” In fact, as Cauffman reported, about half of those who walk in the juvenile justice system have some sort of mental health disorder. This compares with about 20% of youth in the general public. Losing sight of this, says Steinberg, “creates a myopia in juvenile justice.”

*A lot of kids in the juvenile justice population are essentially suffering from arrested development. We take kids at this critical point where they are supposed to be developing these capacities, and we put them in a place with no chance, and then let them out and we wonder why they don't do well.*

One of the key elements of success in early adulthood, Steinberg noted, is maturity. To be gainfully employed, for example, a person needs not only job skills but also the maturity to show up for work every day and assume various responsibilities. Where in the juvenile justice system, he asks, do youth have the opportunity to gain perspective, practice responsibility, and act autonomously, all hallmarks of maturity? Development, he argues, does not simply unfold. It is driven and shaped by the environment and one’s experiences. “A lot of kids in the juvenile justice population are essentially suffering from arrested development.” Entry into the justice system, he says, disrupts family and adult bonds, youth associate with antisocial peers, and they have no or little chance to develop competence. “We take kids at this critical point where they are supposed to be developing these capacities,” he says, “and we put them in a place with no chance, and then let them out and we wonder why they don’t do well.”

Indeed, they do not do well. Only 12% of chronic and serious offenders in the juvenile justice system have received a high school diploma or GED by young adulthood, Steinberg reported. They are seven times more likely to be welfare dependent, and they are five times more likely to be rearrested between ages 17 and 25. They are more likely than others to experience divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing, and their employment prospects are lower than youth in general, which are already quite low.

Compounding their issues is a lack of strong family ties. The family, as most at the conference agreed, is enormously important to youth at this stage in life. Yet, juvenile offenders often have the weakest family links. Many juvenile offenders, in fact, also have a family member in the criminal justice system. Perhaps reflecting this lack of strong bonds and other barriers, recidivism among youth who have been incarcerated is 70% to 90%, reported Wald. “If any other public agency had a failure rate like that,” he said, “heads would roll. Yet we have come to absorb and accept a 90% failure rate, and we don’t even hold people accountable. This is a system that needs dramatic rethinking.”

Wald and Steinberg offered several improvements to the juvenile justice system, including using a least restrictive environment, ensuring that interventions are context-

**Laurence Steinberg** is Distinguished University Professor and Laura H. Carnell Professor of Psychology at Temple University

Steinberg also chairs the Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, which offers additional resources on the topic. [www.mac-adoldev-juvjustice.org](http://www.mac-adoldev-juvjustice.org)



**Bob Schwartz** is cofounder and Executive Director of the Juvenile Law Center  
[www.jlc.org](http://www.jlc.org)

based, not individual-based. They urge that society avoid at all costs placing youth in adult facilities, and they urge a rethinking of the programming to facilitate psychosocial development. Further, when youth leave juvenile justice, they should be offered wraparound services and reconnections to more healthy pursuits.

**Bob Schwartz** offered several suggestions for reconnecting youth based on his and colleagues' work in Pennsylvania.

The first step, he says, is to take advantage of the "balanced and restorative justice" trend. A restorative justice approach addresses both accountability and "competency development," which should build youths' skills. Pennsylvania was an early adopter of such an approach. Restitution often comes in the form of community service, and not just, as he says, "cleaning toilets at a geriatric center." In addition, paying heed to reentry and aftercare services is essential, as is connecting youth to workforce development programs. In addition to job skills, programs must attend to youths' independent living skills, prosocial skills, vocational skills, and moral reasoning. Finally, he suggested, we should use the Title IV-E system, which funds foster care and child welfare services, and which is also used by many states for juvenile justice services, to connect these youth to the child welfare system and take advantage of that system's transition-to-adulthood opportunities. Under this approach, states would also keep dependency cases open so youth can return to care if they have nowhere to go. As he says, although the child welfare system has its flaws, it is more voluntary than the juvenile justice system, and provides more opportunities for youth until age 21.

## Physical and Mental Health Issues

Another group that faces more precarious futures owing to their circumstances is youth with mental and physical health issues. These youth are less likely to be gainfully employed, they are less likely to gain the critical postsecondary education needed in today's economy, and they are more likely to be socially isolated. Youth with disabilities, for example, are more than twice as likely to be living with parents at age 30 than youth without disabilities. They are more likely to be single, even though their aspirations of marriage are the same as their peers, and they have fewer friends.

In addition, critical supports that these youth tapped in their childhood either end or change fundamentally as they become adults. Other responsibilities surrounding privacy and personal decision-making also change. After age 18, for example, young adults with mental health issues assume responsibility for their medication and care, yet often without the needed resources. As **Hewitt Clark** said, "Could we have created a crazier system? Everything cuts off at 18, new eligibility has to be established." Adding to the confusion, if youth suffer from both physical and mental health issues, they must navigate two completely separate systems.

Even for youth without specific health problems, access to health insurance is often cost-prohibitive. One-third of the total uninsured population nationally is young adults aged 19–29. Only one in five young adults in their 20s is insured. Extending private parental coverage through age 23 and extending Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to age 23 would go far in closing this gap, says Clark.

Several efforts are underway to aid youth with physical and mental health issues as they make the transition into adulthood. The **Transition to Independence Process (TIP)**, for example, is a model being developed and tested at the University of South Florida

**Hewitt Clark** is Professor at the University of South Florida

**Transition to Independence Process**  
<http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu/>



## Health Statistics for Young Adults

- About 20% of adolescents suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year, and a significant majority of these disorders will continue to affect youth as they age into adulthood.<sup>2</sup>
- Mortality rates among teens have declined since 1998, while those for young adults are on the rise.
- Homicide and victimization rates are highest among 18–24 year olds, especially black males, and mostly involve guns.
- 20% of youth aged 18–24 report that they are daily smokers, a rate significantly higher than teens. Native Americans have the highest rates of alcohol, drug, and smoking, and youth who do not go to college report more alcohol and drug use than the college-bound. White males are more frequent users of alcohol.
- Young adults now die at twice the rate of teens, a sharp upswing from one age group to another.
- HIV-AIDS rates are increasing among this age group. About one-half of all HIV cases occur among young adults aged 20–34. About 15% of cumulative HIV cases occur among youth aged 20–24, while another 35% of HIV cases occur among 25–29 year olds. In addition to HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise among this age group.
- Good news: Rates of violence, suicide, and teen pregnancy overall have fallen in the last decade. Also, youth report exercising more, although about one-fourth report that they are overweight, which is likely an underestimation given that these are self-reports of weight.

that provides developmentally appropriate services for youth with mental health issues, involves parents, and helps youth move into adulthood. The TIP is working to align programs to support this practice, and at a community level, to establish networks of services and supports that young adults need. The program is centered on the events that really matter to young adults: employment, education, and independent living.

The field, says Clark, needs more focused research on the active ingredients that will matter, and performance measures are needed to advance understanding of what works and what does not. Programs must also ensure that implementation follows the model that has been developed and tested. Implementation should also recognize the importance of community to youth and to families.

In addition, multiple, categorical systems serving youth naturally create complexity in funding (in money flowing from one system to another), in treatment (balancing rehabilitation and punishment, for example), and in leadership. Financing, youth engagement, family involvement, and state, local, and national leadership all must come together if the field is to move forward and develop a comprehensive web of supportive services rather than the categorical approach that now exists.

**For more information** on health statistics, see the presentation by Dr. Charles Irwin, Jr., [www.about.chapinhall.org/conferences/novATA/presentations.html](http://www.about.chapinhall.org/conferences/novATA/presentations.html)

**Dr. Charles Irwin, Jr.**, is Professor and Vice Chairman of Pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco

<sup>2</sup> J. Heidi Gralinski-Bakker, Stuart Hauser, Rebecca Billings, and Joseph Allen, “Risks along the Road to Adulthood: Challenges Faced by Youth with Serious Mental Disorders,” in *On Your Own without a Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations*, edited by D. Wayne Osgood, E. Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan, and Gretchen Ruth. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2005.



**Diego Navarro** is founder and Director of Cabrillo College's Watsonville Digital Bridge Academy [www.cabrillo.edu/academics/wdba/](http://www.cabrillo.edu/academics/wdba/)

**Career Academy** [www.mdrc.org/publications/366/overview.html](http://www.mdrc.org/publications/366/overview.html)

**National Guard Challenge** [www.pop.upenn.edu/transad/research/ng.htm](http://www.pop.upenn.edu/transad/research/ng.htm)

**Opening Doors** [www.mdrc.org/project\\_24\\_2.html](http://www.mdrc.org/project_24_2.html)

## Youth at Risk of Educational Failure

Those who have dropped out of school or who fail to connect with postsecondary education are also at risk for difficult transitions. **Diego Navarro**, in his **Watsonville Digital Bridge Academy**, a program for at-risk and high-risk students in California, works with youth who have dropped out of school, been involved in gangs, start families early, and whose own families are often poor and struggling. His program focuses not on remediation but on accelerating at-risk youth to college-level performance.

An integral aspect of the Digital Bridge Academy is the "Fire Within" program, which focuses on identifying youths' individual learning styles. Because youth often do not understand or believe in their capabilities, it is necessary to reorient them to a more positive view of themselves. "They've been told they're something other than they are," says Navarro.

Having completed the "Fire Within" program, the youth enter the core program, which consists of an educational arm (which prepares them for high-wage careers), a set of student support services, and opportunities to develop work experience (students run the office, run the mentoring program, and other programs).

Another program bolstering the transition to college is the **Career Academy**. Career Academies are high-school based, small learning communities with five to eight teachers who are responsible for the same youth during their high school career. They target large urban schools, most of which are low-income and have largely minority student bodies with high dropout rates. The goal of the program is to prevent dropout, provide career development, support academic achievement, and provide clear pathways to postsecondary education and into the job force.

## Connecting Youth to Continued Education and Training

The Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy has dedicated substantial resources to two programs that assist youth and community colleges better connect for success. The first, the **National Guard Challenge** program, occurs during the early stage of the transition. The program targets youth who are about to drop out or who have dropped out of school and places them in an intense program with active mentoring. Currently, 9,000 youth are involved in 26 sites. The Network will evaluate the success of this program in collaboration with MDRC.

The second program is the **Opening Doors** initiative. This program works with community colleges to mount

programs that will strengthen the attachment of young adults to the colleges and enable the colleges to better serve youth. It focuses on three areas:

- curricular and instructional innovations and enhanced orientation courses to help students navigate through the college experience;
- enhanced financial aid; and
- enhanced student services encompassing stronger academic advisement, personal counseling, career counseling, peer support, and tutoring.

The Network, also in collaboration with MDRC, will evaluate this program as well.



**James Kemple** reported on recent findings from an evaluation of the program. The evaluation showed substantial effects on future employment and earnings for the young men—some of the strongest Kemple has seen from a high school program. The males earned, on average, \$212 more per month over four years than males in the control group, or a 15% increase in earnings.

However, the effects did not extend to girls, or to academic performance, such as test scores. The program did seem to result in on-time graduation rates that were higher than similar schools nationally, however. Among the academy sample, 73% graduated on time for their age, while only 48% of similar youth in a national study graduated on time. The results suggest, says Kemple, that high school programs can positively affect outcomes of certain youth.

These findings are especially encouraging given the growing gap between the college and noncollege bound. As **Melissa Roderick** argued, “There is a developing crisis in the U.S. around the transition to adulthood. We are not seeing any change in the proportion of kids making it into college nor those graduating four years later.”

In Chicago, despite a transformation of the public elementary schools, there has been little change in the proportion of students leaving high school who are ready for college. More than 90% of Chicago public school students entering community colleges failed entrance math exams. When asked how many teachers had talked with them about college, most Chicago seniors surveyed reported none or one. Of the seniors who did go on to postsecondary education, only 57% ended up in a four-year college, while 42% were in a two-year school. The results of the survey suggest that students are not receiving the support they need to fully prepare for college. Latinos, especially, report a disconnection from their high schools.

A first step in better preparing youth for college, Roderick said, is to gather data on aspirations and plans and get that data into the hands of schools and teachers. A second step is to establish performance goals for high schools and judge them by their success, as measured by postsecondary outcomes. High schools, Roderick argues, are the first line of defense in addressing many of the problems during the transition to adulthood.

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## Workforce Development

Vulnerable youth are not the only ones struggling to gain a foothold. In today’s changing economy, young adults of all stripes are finding a new playing field before them. The new economy demands new and higher-end skills. In fact, most of the employment gains during the last 30 years have gone to those with college degrees or higher. Several panelists addressed the issues facing all young adults and the supports available to them.

**Edward Montgomery** reported that youth today continue, as they have in the past, to enter the career ladder in fits and starts. Although in the past youth eventually moved into a stable job, today that job market is in considerable flux, and jobs are less stable, with fewer fringe benefits and lower pay.

The country, he reported, has witnessed a silent 30-year reversal in employment prospects for youth aged 16-24. This is particularly true for African Americans and

**James Kemple**  
is Senior Fellow at MDRC

**Melissa Roderick** is Associate Professor at the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, and Codirector of the Consortium on Chicago School Research

For more information on the changing job market, see [www.pop.upenn.edu/transad/news/17.pdf](http://www.pop.upenn.edu/transad/news/17.pdf)

**Edward Montgomery** is Dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, University of Maryland and former Deputy Secretary in the U.S. Department of Labor



Asian Americans, as well as youth in inner cities and among low-income youth. In contrast, employment rates for those aged 25 and older have been rising. Employment rates for women are also rising. Whereas 16–24-year-old men have seen their employment prospects decline steadily, women, benefiting from widening opportunities, have seen their rates rise. Today, the gender gap is closed with 55% of both men and women aged 16–24 working.

When youth do find work, Montgomery said, they typically work in retail or in small businesses. Youth, in fact, are overrepresented in small businesses, which is a significant, and recent, change. Youth also often work part-time, and they also change jobs frequently. Between ages 18 and 34, youth will, on average, hold 10 jobs, the majority of which are in the first six years of their working life. Perhaps unique to today's job market, youth face stiff competition not only from their peers, but also from adults without college degrees who are likely competing for the same job. They also work, as Montgomery put it, "for pretty crummy wages," and here there is little distinction by race or gender. "Unlike adults, the good news about these crummy earnings," says Montgomery, "is that when youth change jobs, their wages tend to rise." Montgomery views the economy as the main barrier to youth employment and progress. "Youth won't do well unless the economy does well."

Several initiatives are underway to help youth prepare for the job market. **Sheldon Danziger** noted that many of the current interventions to help youth navigate the job market are more comprehensive and intensive than in the past. However, funding is drastically reduced. As **David Brown** noted, federal investment in youth employment has dropped from its peak in 1979, when funding stood at about \$15 billion in current dollars, to just over \$2 billion today. Only Job Corps has seen increased funding in recent years, despite the current record low-youth employment rates.

The misperception, says Brown, is that nothing works. Yet, he says, many programs are quite successful in helping youth make the transition to careers and postsecondary education. Interestingly, he said, reductions in federal funding for youth employment programs have occurred during a period when we have seen significant declines in youth employment rates. Usually, federal investments increase during periods of low youth employment.

The research has shown, he said, that what is required are programs that offer youth more than a narrow range of work readiness and occupational training opportunities. Youth programs that are grounded in the principles of youth development and that help youth acquire academic and soft skills show promise. The **Sar Levitan Youth Policy Network** has identified the following key elements of successful programs:

- A continuity of contact with caring adults;
- A focus on centrality of work;
- Connections to employers;
- Contextual educational options for competency certification;
- Opportunities for leadership development;
- Positive peer support; and
- Opportunities for postsecondary education (and not just access, but success).

#### **Sheldon Danziger**

is Henry J. Meyer Collegiate  
Professor of Public Policy at the  
University of Michigan  
and Network member

#### **David Brown**

is Executive Director of the  
National Youth Employment  
Coalition  
[www.nyec.org](http://www.nyec.org)

#### **Sar Levitan Youth Policy Network**

[www.levitan.org/youthpolicy/  
network.html](http://www.levitan.org/youthpolicy/network.html)



**Clifford Johnson** also noted the importance of cross-system initiatives. “We’re all aware that those youth most at risk already have contact with or are involved in multiple systems,” he said. This multiple involvement raises issues of coordination and efficient use of public funds.

National League of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education, and Families has conducted extensive phone surveys to determine which cities have made the most progress in developing collaborative approaches to the needs of disconnected youth. The sobering news, he said, is that only a handful of cities seem to offer examples of well-established, cross-system initiatives. Current innovators include Boston, Albany, San Diego, Philadelphia, Corpus Christi, Baltimore, San Francisco, and San Jose.

*Federal investment in youth employment has dropped from its peak in 1979, when funding stood at about \$15 billion in current dollars, to just over \$2 billion today. Only Job Corps has seen increased funding in recent years, despite the current record low youth employment rates.*

Boston, for example, has launched an innovative effort on behalf of older, court-involved youth (aged 16–24). The Boston Police Department is a key driver of the city’s youth initiatives, in partnership with private industry groups. The program offers strong youth counseling in violence prevention, coupled with direct links to participating business leaders. The program also emphasizes strict adherence to social norms, but coupled with genuine offers of help. Johnson summarized this key message as follows: “We’ll work with you on jobs or housing, but we’re watching you and if you cross the line, you’re on the fast track to rearrest.”

In Albany, schools and state social service agencies work together, with a common intake process and common assessment and referrals. The program, which is located in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) one-stop offices, works closely with six community-based providers and ensures that families and youth can easily navigate the services and programs offered.

Another innovative program is found in Chicago, in the **Alternative Schools Network**. The program, says Director **Jack Wuest**, offers high school dropouts a second chance to gain their degree and (a second chance) to connect to the job market. The youth are, on average, five to six grades below where they should be when they enter the program, and they have typically been out of school eight to nine months before they come to the program. About 85% transition to jobs or training after the program.

“We know what works,” Wuest says. “You have to have a structure for these kids.” In addition, programs must have high-quality staff, a comprehensive focus, enough funding to pay staff, local control, and strong leadership.

**Clifford Johnson** is Executive Director of the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families at the National League of Cities  
[www.nlc.org/IYEF](http://www.nlc.org/IYEF)

**Jack Wuest** is Director of the Alternative Schools Network  
[www.asnchicago.org](http://www.asnchicago.org)



## Civic Participation

Although important, jobs and earning a living are not the only aspects of young adulthood. Ample evidence shows that too much investment in material goals and maximizing one's self-interest can be debilitating for mental and physical health.<sup>3</sup> Thus, exploring alternative "selves" in relationships, in civil society, in community or faith-based work, and in other outlets is adaptive and healthy. This civic participation, in fact, can develop the kinds of "soft skills" that employers are clamoring for: team work, leadership, perspective taking, ability to work with diverse groups, habits of participation and expectation. Civic participation also offers youth an option to invest in other goals than simple material wealth. Finally, civic participation, especially with diverse groups and in charity work, bolsters social trust (a positive view of humanity as being fair, helpful, and trustworthy), a necessary ingredient for a healthy democracy.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Kasser, "The Dark Side of the American Dream," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65(2), August 1993, pp. 410–422. See also Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (MIT Press, 2002).

**Constance Flanagan** is Professor of Youth Civic Development at Pennsylvania State University

Democracy, noted Network member **Constance Flanagan**, is not just a form of government. It requires organizations and habits of its citizens to make society work. In short, it calls for strong civic engagement. To remain relevant, however, democracy and civic engagement must encapsulate a fresh way of looking at people. Rather than viewing certain groups as problems to fix, society should view them as assets, she says. Consider teens and young adults. The popular press today tells us youth are cynical, disengaged, and self-involved, or poor, uneducated, and violent, and more than likely, in many people's view, to be future welfare recipients or prison inmates. Although some of these descriptors are warranted, the majority are erroneous. For example, although not widely known or appreciated, juvenile crime in all categories has fallen in each of the past 10 years. For democracy to continue to be vibrant and inclusive, we must upend that view, as Flanagan says, "by reversing the stereotype of young people from one we fear to one where we appreciate the readiness of young people to give back to their communities. What they need is a structure to do that."

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## Youth-Led Organizations

The panelists discussed how civic engagement and youth activism are gaining currency in the field of youth development. Panelists provided examples of new organizational forms that put action behind words by offering youth an opportunity to lead and give back to their communities. The **National Student Partnership (NSP)**, with 1,600 volunteers in 43 colleges, is founded on the belief that university students have the best set of skills to advocate for disadvantaged youth.

The NSP works with universities to create meaningful civic programs that benefit everyone. The program was founded in 1998 by two Yale graduates who recognized a gap between the university and the New Haven community. The program engages

**National Student Partnership**  
[www.nspnet.org](http://www.nspnet.org)



college student volunteers to work one-on-one with youth in the community because the founders believe that university students have the best set of skills to advocate for disadvantaged youth. The students help with job preparation, offer computer access, assist in securing housing, health care, transportation, or child care, among other supports.

Foundations also are becoming aware of the potential of civic engagement and youth activism to promote young people's development and to contribute concretely to community betterment. The **Surdna Foundation** supports young people taking direct collective action to improve their communities, and become active shapers of their own development. As **Robert Sherman** explained, youth civic engagement involves youth directly in their own development, in the improvement of youth organizations, and in crafting effective policy solutions to thorny community problems. Young people, he says, have been stepping up to the plate to propose new solutions to old problems, and in doing so are reshaping how we think of them.

The foundation recognizes that the teen years are powerful for cultivating activism. Young people are leaders of today, not tomorrow. They have an opportunity during the teenage years to form identities as community-builders and stewards. Moreover, young people are primary consumers of our major public systems and investments: education and juvenile justice. Who, Sherman asked, could be more interested in reforming these systems than youth whose lives revolve around them? Youth voices are being raised loudly now because many large public systems have been dysfunctional and failing young people for a long time.

One reason youth often fail to connect is that the institutions to support them are limited. **Karen Pittman**, cofounder of **Forum for Youth Investment**, a catalyst for youth policy, works to sustain youth involvement by ensuring that youth are involved in organizations and organizations are involved in youth. Communities differ broadly in their civic supports, she said. The worst neighborhoods often have the least support. Improving programs in these neighborhoods is necessary, but not enough. Youth, she said, do not grow up in programs; they grow up in communities.

When the Forum first began considering the idea of youth involvement, youth participation was seen as a solution to keeping youth in programs. By the mid-1990s, this approach was applied to youth participation in communities. However, the expectations for community gains from youth participation were low; participation was still defined from a youth developmental perspective, with the benefits accruing to the youth only. Youth participation in other countries, in contrast, does not separate the two possibilities. Young people are expected to contribute to the family, the neighborhood, the community, and to society, and they are also expected to gain from the participation themselves.

As a result, community action and participation is more organic. "People don't say, 'let's make a program'; it was already happening," says Pittman, whose organization studied youth participation from an international perspective. "Growing this idea to scale in the United States," she says, "means encouraging adults to be change agents as well."

If this approach is truly the means for change, then the question begs, what is the federal government doing? **Anne Marie White** discussed why government does or does not commit to or adopt these approaches.

**Surdna Foundation**  
[www.surdna.org](http://www.surdna.org)

**Robert Sherman** is Director of the Effective Citizenry Program, Surdna Foundation

**Karen Pittman** is Cofounder of Forum for Youth Investment

**Forum for Youth Investment**  
[www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)

**Anne Marie White** is a member of the faculty at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Rochester Medical Center. She was also a Congressional Science Fellow with Senator Dodd.



**A Younger American's Act**  
[www.nydic.org/  
nydic/yaanew/YAA.html](http://www.nydic.org/nydic/yaanew/YAA.html)

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 mandated youth councils to guide youth work development. However, said White, new WIA legislation is interested in making youth councils optional, not a mandate, mainly because such an approach used too many resources. Currently, although many programs serve younger children, few serve young adults. A federal agency survey of programs, she reported, identified 335 federal programs serving youth, 68 of which served school-aged youth, and 150 of which served youth up to age 21. Youth development has a small foothold, she said, but the approach is still scattershot.

Recent legislative efforts include A Younger American's Act, which created a national policy focusing on youth aged 10–19, with strong positive youth programs. Although considered an easy sell in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, with strong grassroots support, it was not signed into law. Partisanship is a partial explanation for its failure, as was the difficulty in finding the right language to describe it. As always, funding played a part. With a post 9-11 shift to defense spending, a \$5 billion price tag was simply too much.

Youth development programs face many of the same issues in the most recent Congress. Gridlock continues, says White. However, opportunities exist, she says, in some of President Bush's initiatives, such as the administration's faith-based initiatives. However, advocates must widen these issues to include youth. Because the current focus is on early childhood prevention in Congress, advocates must educate staff and Congress on the importance of this later period of life. Pressure points exist, she said, and advocates and others must take advantage of them. "Getting this type of framework in a piece of legislation is the way to think of advocacy."

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*Advocates and researchers should also deconstruct the myth that only urban youth are incarcerated, or that crime and welfare only happen in blue states. Advocates might find an audience if education is framed as an economic development issue. Juvenile justice might gain more attention if it is cast as a fiscal problem, with the potential lost tax revenue over a lifetime of an ex-offender who is out of work.*

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## Policy Implications and Recommendations

**Jane Oates** expanded on White's comments, suggesting that, although the election did not swing the way she and her office would have liked, there is still room to effect change. "It leads us to talk about new priorities," she said. "After all, issues don't wait for the next election." She cautioned that no one in Washington is looking at the programs that are so fundamentally important to children, such as Head Start, Individual's with Disabilities Education Act, the Higher Education Act, WIA, and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. She urged those who believe in these programs to take action immediately. She also called for the research community to continue providing the data necessary to move policy forward.

"When you're working in the minority, you need to have the backing of fact and reality," she said. "A lot of people don't have the right information. We need to educate them

**Jane Oates** is the  
Senior Education Adviser to  
Senator Edward Kennedy



about the things we're hearing today." The education community, she said, is too insular, whether that be on issues of juvenile justice or the transition from high school to college, and beyond. "We tend to talk only to ourselves. We must broaden that discussion to include elected officials."

She called for action to revise the current Pell grant, which since 1992 has prohibited the formerly incarcerated from using Pell grants to fund higher education. She also stressed the importance of opening access to higher education to a broader range of youth. Former foster care youth or those leaving the juvenile justice system at age 19 or 20 often do not have the parental umbrella that is required to borrow or apply for financial aid. Youth councils and youth opportunity grants under WIA should be reinstated, she said, but such action will not happen without first making it clear to officials that these programs work. Advocates and researchers should also deconstruct the myth that only urban youth are incarcerated, or that crime and welfare only happen in blue states. Advocates, she said, might find an audience if education is framed as an economic development issue. Juvenile justice might gain more attention if it is cast as a fiscal problem, with the potential lost tax revenue over a lifetime of an ex-offender who is out of work. Reframe workforce development from the reality that retail jobs are not going away. "An undereducated coffee salesperson is going to hurt a Republican just as much as a Democrat: the coffee will taste lousy and they will shortchange you."

**Ron Haskins** injected the reality of budget deficits in policy efforts. As he said, "Budget is policy. Today, the budget picture is so grim that it's going to affect all policies for the next decade. It is going to make normal policymaking all but impossible. The idea that we'll have \$2 billion for youth coming out of jail, or whatever, that's just not going to happen."

The difficult budget situation and the looming Baby Boom retirement, with its Medicare and Social Security burdens, will likely, says Haskins, break the bank. Something must give, and he predicts that domestic discretionary funding will be cut before entitlements. Because all youth and education programs are appropriated, they are especially vulnerable. Means-tested programs will also likely be cut given that they are

**Ron Haskins** is Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former Senior Adviser to the President on welfare policy at the White House, with 14 years on the staff of the House Ways and Means Human Resources subcommittee

## Profile of Young Adults

*All data are from the U.S. census, except where noted.*

- Population of young adults ages 20–24 is expected to increase by 11% between 2000 and 2020.
- Almost one-fourth of young adults aged 23–27 live with at least one parent; this is highest for non-Hispanic blacks and Asians/Pacific Islanders.
- Almost half of the females (ages 23–27) have had a child; two-thirds of these young mothers have incomes at 100–199% of the federal poverty level.
- Among young adults aged 24–26:
  - 26% high school graduates
  - 30% some college/AA degree
  - 28% Bachelor's degree or higher
  - 35% are married, and more than one-tenth are cohabiting (12%)

*Source Child Trends, 2003*

Youth are increasingly diverse. In 2000, about 61% of young adults aged 20–24 were white. By 2020, that will drop to 57%. Hispanics and African Americans will both increase as a proportion of the young adult population.



**Gary Walker** is President of Public/Private Ventures, a nonprofit organization that managed demonstration and evaluates initiatives in youth and workforce development  
[www.ppv.org](http://www.ppv.org)

**Mark Courtney**, Director, Chapin Hall Center for Children, is Associate Professor at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration  
[www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org)

politically easier to cut. In fact, Haskins warned, the open-ended entitlement for foster care funding under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act could end. He also warned that the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act might be swept into a block grant. In addition, any program with unfavorable evaluations will be threatened.

Data, he said, are critical, especially cost-benefit data. “If you can convince them you can save money, you’ll get their ears.” However, even with data, it will be a tough climb to overcome the current dubiousness of Congress. Haskins suggested that criminal justice was a good place to start. “You wouldn’t have to have a very big impact to save some serious money,” he said, given the social costs of crime.

**Gary Walker** repeatedly hears four things about 40 years of social policy: 1) not much really works; 2) early investments are better than later; 3) congressional staffers look to outcomes, and as such the field should demand more; and 4) education matters.

The first 40 years of social policy, he said, were morally inspired. However, a new phase is upon us, and this phase will be utility inspired—outcomes based. The sentiment, he said, is “if you can’t figure out how to help them, why commit money?” The political culture is not an idea culture; it is a problem-solving culture. This administration no longer wants the problem laid out. Leaders want solutions.

If the field can generate the political will to care about adolescence and beyond, “if you can tell them what it is that will solve those problems,” they will listen. “Most see adolescence as a tumultuous period. We have to tell them what it is, truly.” Although the idea that the transition to adulthood is taking longer, it is a nonissue policy-wise. It is too vague. It is not a political issue, he says. Instead, it is seen as a product “of pansy parents.” The larger vision of viewing youth as an asset, while laudable, is not political. Policy is about solving problems that are worth solving. However, he said, shift the discussion to high-risk populations, to public problems, and people will listen. He urged advocates and researchers to propose concrete solutions as specifically as possible. “Avoid phrases like service integration, systems reform. You have to nail down what it is we want.”

He also urged advocates and others to tie solutions to issues for which the public assumes responsibility, such as education. “Most people believe we have some responsibility to educate kids,” he said. “Finally,” he said, “we must move beyond partisanship.”

**Mark Courtney**, director of Chapin Hall Center for Children, offered a final view of the policy arena, noting that there has been a long-term disconnection between knowledge, research, and policy, and that disconnect is more profound in research and policy for older youth. Yet we depend on knowledge to move forward. The field offers many promising practices for connecting with this older age group. However, few of the practices are grounded in evidence. The field must improve practice and provide the research to advance policy. Toward that end, he said, “it is always valuable to come together as we have here.”



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## Panelists

Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood • Chicago, November 8–9, 2004

### Welcome and Opening Remarks

Maggie Daley, First Lady of Chicago

Mark Courtney, Director, Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago

Frank Furstenberg, Director, Network on Transitions to Adulthood & University of Pennsylvania

### Panel 1: Health and Mental Health

Vonnie McLoyd, University of North Carolina

Robert Blum, Johns Hopkins University

Hewitt “Rusty” Clark, University of South Florida

Charles Irwin, Jr., University of California, San Francisco

### Panel 2: Vulnerable Populations

D. Wayne Osgood, Pennsylvania State University

Michael Wald, Stanford Law School

Laurence Steinberg, Temple University

Gary Stangler, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

### Panel 3: Youth Development and Civic Engagement

Constance Flanagan, Pennsylvania State University

Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment

Robert Sherman, Surdna Foundation

Kevin Simmons, National Student Partnerships

Anne Marie White, University of Rochester Medical Center

### Panel 4: Workforce Development

Sheldon Danziger, University of Michigan

Edward Montgomery, University of Maryland

David Brown, National Youth Employment Coalition

Clifford Johnson, National League of Cities

Jack Wuest, Alternative Schools Network

### Panel 5: Education

Melissa Roderick, University of Chicago, & Consortium on Chicago School Research

Diego Navarro, Cabrillo College Digital Bridge Academy

James Kemple, MDRC

### Panel 6: Juvenile Justice and Adult Corrections

Michael Wald, Stanford University

Elizabeth Cauffman, University of California, Irvine

Robert Schwartz, Juvenile Law Center

Laurence Steinberg, Temple University

### Panel 7: Policy Roundtable

Mark Courtney, Chapin Hall Center for Children

Jane Oates, Office of Senator Edward Kennedy

Ron Haskins, Brookings Institution

Gary Walker, Public/Private Ventures

