

REFLECTIONS

on Making Connections

Bringing a Passion for Juvenile Justice System Reform To Making Connections

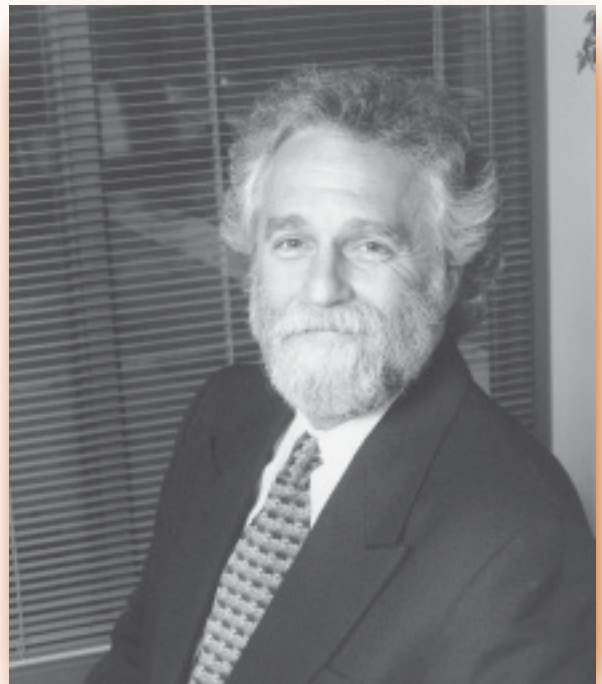
In each Making Connections' site, a Casey Foundation staff person serves as the "Site Team Leader." These "STLs" have brought a very diverse set of experiences to this role. They also do other work for the foundation that reflects their experiences and knowledge.

How does the background that each STL has brought to MC influence their MC work? What insights about MC come out of their experience and knowledge? Diarists will be asking STLs to reflect on these and similar questions.

In Oakland, Bart Lubow serves as the STL. He also directs the foundation's programs for High Risk Youth and Their Families and its Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative.

ROOTS OF EXPERTISE

The roots of Bart Lubow's expertise in the area of alternatives to incarceration and other aspects of justice and public safety reforms can be traced to his activism against the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. His anti-war work in the late 1960s and early 1970s was supported by two nonprofit organizations, Pacific Counseling Service, and the National Lawyers Guild.



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“I was an antiwar organizer. I spent a lot of time in brigs and stockades because my organizing was with soldiers and servicemen who resisted the war. A lot of them ended up behind bars and became our clients from a legal defense perspective. That created an interest in what was happening in jails and prisons,” he said.

He expanded his political organizing work to include civilian prisoners. In 1974, he joined the Legal Aid Society of New York as a social worker to develop alternative sentencing plans for felons. This was in the wake of the prisoner uprising at Attica, the big New York state facility. The riots shocked officials in the public and private sectors of the state, and concerted efforts to “put a more progressive shine on the criminal justice system” cropped up in the form of initiatives to develop alternatives to incarceration.

Lubow spent almost ten years with Legal Aid. During that time, he became director of a program called Special Defenders Services, which applied social-work skills to criminal defense. This program addressed the question of “How can we improve the quality of representation for people by giving more information and options to courts?” In his tenure with Legal Aid, Lubow developed a level of expertise in this specialized area of criminal justice and gained valuable policy experience as well.

THE CUOMO YEARS

Mario Cuomo was elected governor of New York in 1982, and within two weeks of his assuming office, Sing Sing, another major New York state prison, experienced a prisoner riot that echoed Attica's unrest a decade or so earlier. The Sing Sing riots profoundly affected Governor Cuomo's criminal-justice agenda. Among other things, he wanted to develop alternatives to incarceration to avoid prison overcrowding and other problems that led to the riots in the first place.

The timing was perfect for Lubow. He and his wife were looking to move closer to Albany, the state capital. They had purchased a country home, which they wanted to renovate. “It just so happened that the one job I would have defined for myself had just been created” by the Cuomo administration. He was hired as the state director of alternatives to incarceration. His charge was to develop systems of alternatives to incarceration around the state to reduce incarceration rates. He began working in Albany in March of 1984.

Under his leadership, Lubow's office created an agenda and a variety of programs. Eventually, and perhaps inevitably, the work collided with politics and bureaucracy.

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people had a brainstorm to take my unit and merge it with the division of probation and create the division of probation and correctional alternatives, and we were somehow going to breathe life into this moribund agency,” Lubow said. Ultimately, it didn’t work, souring Lubow’s disposition toward the job.

As deputy commissioner of probation, Lubow found himself constrained and having to soften his alternatives agenda, in part because probation department officials weren’t receptive to Lubow’s reforms. The internal politics of the Cuomo administration dashed Lubow’s enthusiasm as well.

“It was clear to me we were winning the programmatic battle, but losing the policy battle,” he said. “Mario Cuomo was building prison beds faster than you could count, all the while patting me on the shoulder and saying, ‘Look at my alternatives to incarceration agenda.’ I finally got to the point of saying, I am not going to be the foil for this.”

He found himself skirting conventional procedures. “The last four years of my time there, I struggled a lot. I did a lot of stuff behind the scenes with the legislature that I would have gotten fired for had people known about it,” he said. For example, he negotiated budget details outside of the probation agency’s oversight.

Despite his unhappiness during the last half of his eight years in the Cuomo ad-

ministration, Lubow furthered his skills in correctional population management.

JUMPING SHIP TO CASEY

One of the many people Lubow met in his years with the Legal Aid Society and the Cuomo administration was Kathleen Feely. Feely had been a New York city justice system official when Lubow directed Special Defender Services for Legal Aid. She once was also Lubow’s wife’s boss. In other words, Lubow and Feely were friends and associates. She knew of his growing unhappiness in the Cuomo administration. In the early 1990s, Feely was the Casey Foundation’s director of systems reform, and the foundation wanted to start a juvenile detention reform project. So she inquired about Lubow’s interest in participating in that effort.

Lubow joined the Casey Foundation, first as a consultant in December 1991, then six months later as a new senior program associate in charge of the new Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). JDAI was designed “to demonstrate that jurisdictions could safely reduce their reliance on secured detention,” Lubow said. “That is, they could stop putting kids in detention without affecting public safety.”

JDAI launched some demonstration projects to test strategies to reduce juvenile incarceration. It invited publicly operated

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juvenile detention facilities of a certain size (60 beds or more) and conditions (overcrowded) to apply to be demonstration sites.

After an extensive search, Lubow and his associates identified 10 possible sites. Through visits and other screening devices, Lubow chose five sites “that we thought had the most political will and had the greatest administrative capacity to do this complicated reform.” The Casey Foundation support for each of these five sites was \$750,000 a year for three years.

Despite “the most poisoned policy environment imaginable” during the mid-1990s, Lubow said, JDAI worked. Its demonstration sites have proven the efficacy of progressive approaches to addressing juvenile detention issues. The work is documented in a series of publications called Pathways.

“We have a successful model, and places are coming to us and saying, ‘We would like to do that, can you help us replicate what you have done?’”

MAKING CONNECTIONS IN OAKLAND: AN EARLY DILEMMA

At about the time that the Casey Foundation announced the success of the JDAI model, it began its

Making Connections initiative in 22 sites across the country to help transform neighborhoods and assist low-income families achieve better outcomes. Oakland, California, was among those sites. Bart Lubow was named the Oakland Making Connections Site Team Leader.

Shortly after beginning his work in Oakland, Lubow learned about Alameda County’s plans to expand its juvenile detention facility from 300+ beds to 540. “I went through the roof,” Lubow recalled his reaction. “The whole idea was so absurd and so crazy as a matter of public policy that it raised a fundamental question, ‘Should we be in Oakland for Making Connections?’” Oakland is the county seat of Alameda County

Summoning up his experience and expertise, Lubow began publicly questioning the county’s plan. He spoke at a public forum organized by a local children’s health initiative attended by prominent city and county officials. He reviewed the work of JDAI and offered alternative strategies to the county to address juvenile detention. He met activists from the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in San Francisco, which had a “Books Not Bars” project that embraced similar principles as JDAI. Lubow decided to support Books Not Bars’ efforts to oppose the county’s juvenile-detention expansion plans.

At one county board of supervisors meeting, Lubow was scheduled to testify

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(at Board request) while Books Not Bars protesters demonstrated against the expansion. The youthful protesters, who numbered about 100, cheered Lubow’s presence. Lubow told the county leaders, “What you are witnessing here is the beginning of a new civil rights movement that’s going to focus largely on issues of incarceration, and you have to decide where you stand on this in the same way you may have challenged your parents when you were their age.”

Lubow then offered the Casey Foundation’s support for a utilization study that would offer alternatives to expanding a facility that critics felt was unnecessarily large. The county’s projection of the number of beds needed was flawed, Lubow said. He noted that the county had hired an architect to recommend the number of beds a new juvenile detention facility would need.

“That’s like asking Lockheed Martin how many jets the Air Force needs.” He said the county didn’t have to build such a large new facility. “I can tell you how to safely build much smaller, and I can send you to places that have done it.” The county supervisors declined Lubow’s offer.

Lubow’s public opposition was gaining attention. The local newspaper wrote a series about the county’s plans, and JDAI and Lubow were prominently featured. This continuing exposure caused Lubow to rethink his own strategy. He decided to “go below the radar.”

“My only interest was to be of help. I didn’t want recognition for myself or the foundation,” Lubow said. “I wanted to help the county do the right thing.”

Going “under the radar” for Lubow meant working with Mike Howe of the East Bay Community Foundation. For example, when grantees of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s children’s health and safety initiative gathered in Chicago, Lubow and Howe arranged for the Oakland delegation to stay later to learn from the JDAI model site how its alternatives to incarceration reforms were working.

Lubow also facilitated the attendance of Alameda County officials at a national conference on detention reform in Portland, Oregon. It was at that conference that Rachel Jackson, a leader of Books Not Bars, gave a stirring keynote address opposing the county’s expansion plans.

Lubow also worked behind the scenes with a leader of the Oakland League of Women Voters, who helped bring together JDAI demonstration site officials with Alameda County officials.

The result of these private meetings was a changed vote by one supervisor, Scott Haggerty. His vote reversed the county’s earlier plans to expand the juvenile detention facility.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS IN OAKLAND: WALKING A TIGHTROPE

Lubow felt he was walking “an odd tightrope” in Oakland. For one thing, he was engaged in introducing Making Connections to Oakland. That meant meeting and conferring with a wide range of city and county officials, non-profit organizations, community advocates, and potential funding partners. He had also engaged in a well-publicized campaign to oppose the county’s plans to expand its juvenile detention facility.

“I didn’t want to preclude the possibility that we would do JDAI in Alameda County, I didn’t want to screw up Making Connections by getting the Casey Foundation sideways with the county and city,” Lubow said.

Lubow has no regrets for his prominent role in opposing the county’s plans. “As a matter of public policy, this was completely on the table and the right thing for us to do,” he said. “No one here (at the Casey Foundation) blinked at what I was doing. I would go to midyear reviews and show videotapes of Books Not Bars demonstrations, and said this is our resident engagement.

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Making Connections was not the reason Lubow chose to downplay his public role opposing the juvenile detention expansion plans. “That decision was made primarily because I would have more chance at influencing this public policy if it wasn’t, ‘The Casey Foundation is in our face again, or Bart is in our face again.’ I had just become a lightning rod...If I was the one constantly going to these meetings and telling people how screwed up they were, there was just too much negative stuff around that. They thought I wasn’t there to help, they thought I was there to pursue an agenda.”

THE FINAL CONNECTION

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It is clear that there is a connection between Lubow’s expertise and Making Connections, even though the Common Grounds Outcomes do not explicitly embrace issues of alternatives to incarceration.

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“I think everybody involved in Making Connections at this foundation would agree that the more of the foundation’s core systems reform initiative that you can nest in a Making Connections place, the more likely it is that that place is

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going to be thinking in the right way about how to achieve better outcomes for children. If you can influence the county board and a juvenile justice system to get smarter and more efficient and more effective, and if you can say to them, ‘Look, you’re going to waste a quarter of a billion dollars [on an unnecessary facility]. How about \$10 million a year over the next 20 years for kids’ programs?’ That would have an enormous influence.”

The connection between Making Connections and his expertise in progressive justice and public safety reforms is obvious to Lubow. “The likelihood that neighborhoods will change in substantial ways and that families will be strengthened is greatly diminished as long as there are high victimization and crime rates, or even just perceptions that the place is unsafe. It’s just not going to happen.

“Businesses are not going to relocate to those neighborhoods. Parents aren’t going to get involved in community organizing and outreach efforts if they don’t think things are safe. They’re not going to let their kids out. It’s just hard for me to imagine any Making Connections site succeeding if it doesn’t do something about justice and safety.

“In most places, it will emerge as a safety issue, but I would argue the issues can’t be separated. You can’t separate justice and safety in this country in the way people traditionally do. That is why

we fail at both ends. So you have to deal with both things, and that is where I think the connection will be.”

Lubow sounded a cautionary note about the Common Grounds Outcomes. “One of the dangers of the Common Grounds Outcomes is narrowing the opportunities to promote change,” he said. “All the strategies could be reduced to the ones related to the Common Grounds Outcomes. Other strategies that are clearly relevant both in the short term and in the long term—perhaps especially to outcomes for poor kids and families that have to do with the reform of the systems that are supposed to be there to help them—could get totally abandoned.”

He cited the example of Casey’s Family-to-Family initiative in Alameda County. “I think that’s going to be a terrific thing. Will it show up somehow in the Common Grounds Outcomes? I don’t think so. But it will form alliances [with county officials], it will give the Casey Foundation credibility and leverage with the county board, all the same things that would happen if JDAI goes in there. If we don’t change the public systems in these places, Making Connections has much less chance of success.”

This summary and the interview of Oakland STL Bart Lubow were prepared by William Wong, Diarist of Oakland Making Connections.

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The Diarist Project

This is one of a series of “Reflections” about the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections Initiative. These Reflections come through The Diarist Project, a new approach the foundation is trying to learn from its efforts to strengthen families and transform struggling neighborhoods.

Diarists work to capture strategies and insights of the people who are leading the neighborhood transformation work. In Making Connections, the diarist works most closely with the Casey staff person who leads the work in each city, the “Site Team Leader.”



• **The Annie E. Casey Foundation** works
• to build better futures for disadvantaged
• children and their families in the United
• States. Its primary mission is to foster
• public policies, human service reforms and
• community supports that more effectively
• meet the needs of
• today’s vulnerable
• children and families.

For more information about **The Diarist Project** or to receive copies of its “Reflections,” contact:
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Making Connections is a Casey Foundation initiative to support work that demonstrates the simple premise that kids thrive when their families are strong and their communities supportive.

What began in 1999 as a demonstration project in selected neighborhoods in 22 cities is now an intricate network of people and groups committed to making strong families and neighborhoods their highest priorities.

• **Making Connections—Oakland** is an
• initiative to improve life for families
• living in the Lower San Antonio neigh-
• borhood. It combines economic,
• networking and service strategies,
• bringing together residents, nonprofit
• organizations, local government and
• funders. For more information contact
• Fred Blackwell, 510-763-4120.