



Marguerite Casey Foundation

Seattle, WA

caseygrants.org

NCRP: Why is empowerment and grassroots organizing for low-income families your main funding priority?

MCF: In 2001, Marguerite Casey Foundation was created as a grantmaking foundation to address the root causes of child and family poverty. To better understand how to effect social change, the foundation commissioned 40 papers from stakeholders to get ideas about what to do. The foundation then sought feedback from community members by holding listening circles in six sites across the nation. The foundation learned that it should focus on empowering families through movement building, rather than direct service.

Marguerite Casey Foundation is guided by a philosophy that believes that families have the best solutions to their problems. The importance of focusing on the family as a whole, rather than isolating children as a target group to be served, emerged as a core strategy early on. Recognizing that children thrive when families are secure, the foundation developed a commitment to support parents (and grandparents, and other extended family members) as the advocates for their children and acknowledging that families are the repositories of solutions to the challenges they and their communities face.

NCRP: How do your grantees benefit from the multi-year, general operating support you offer?

MCF: Marguerite Casey Foundation recognizes that no foundation or single organization can create or sustain a movement. Therefore, to develop and support an ac-



Photo courtesy of Marguerite Casey Foundation.

tive and engaged constituency of families who can lead a sustained movement, organizations must have the skills, knowledge and resources to achieve their missions; develop grassroots leaders and engage families in policy and campaign work; build power and coordinate efforts through networks and achieve policy reforms at all levels that improve the lives of families. We know from experience that providing long-term general support grants to community organizations provides organizations with the operational capacity and flexibility to focus on organizing and advocacy – critical pillars of movement building.

NCRP: Why has the foundation chosen to invest so heavily in the American South? What signs of progress are you seeing there?

MCF: Thirteen years ago, when we chose our four grantmaking regions, the Southern states were among the poorest in the country, according to the Census Bureau. The South is also, however, a region of rapidly changing demographics, now home to more African-Americans than any other part of the country as well as increasingly large Latino communities.

Over the long term, we have seen that Southern grantees have strengthened their organizational capacity and

developed social movement infrastructure. Movements and campaigns are more connected now, thanks both to deeper relationships amongst organizations, increased use of technology and a new crop of young dynamic leaders. These changes have led to recent signs of progress including the following:

- Grantee Florida Immigrant Coalition spent more than 10 years pushing for state college tuition equity for undocumented graduates of Florida high schools, culminating in the ratification of House Bill 851 in June 2014. The law allows the estimated 200,000 undocumented graduates of Florida high schools to apply to waive out-of-state tuition at Florida's public universities, making Florida the latest of 20 states to recognize that education is a good investment.
- As part of the Moral Mondays movement, organizations in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi have held actions, rallies and legislative meetings on issues including labor and wages, education, criminal justice, voting rights, women's rights, LGBT rights, immigration, healthcare and environmental justice.
- Organizing efforts spanning from halting ICE detentions in Georgia to combating pro-gun policy reform in Florida in the wake of Trayvon Martin's death have spawned regional and national coalitions and organizing campaigns to address all structural attempts of disproportionately criminalizing marginalized people. ■