

All In:

The Story of Joseph Jones, Jr., The Center for Urban Families, and Their Mission To Dismantle Poverty

A Case Study Developed for the Kresge Foundation's Next Generation Human Services Initiative



LEADERSHIP FOR A
NETWORKED WORLD



Contents

Launching CFUF: 1999-2007.....	7
2008-2014: Navigating The Great Recession	9
2015-2017: The Death of Freddie Gray and The Creation of an Ecosystem.....	12
2018: Staffing, Culture, Evaluation, and The Path Ahead	16
Acknowledgements	19



center for urban families



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On a warm afternoon in spring 2018, Joseph Jones, Jr., the founder and CEO of the Center for Urban Families (CFUF), exited the organization's parking lot as he began a driving tour of the West Baltimore community that CFUF had been serving for nearly 20 years. In some ways, the scene was sobering. Across the street from CFUF was the New Shiloh Baptist Church, the site of the memorial service for Freddie Gray, a 25-year old African-American man who was arrested in April 2015 and died after suffering a spinal injury under police custody.¹ Just a few blocks from there was a CVS that had burnt down amid the protests and Uprising that occurred following Gray's death.^{2, 3} And scattered along the route were boarded-up homes that reflected the widespread poverty that CFUF was trying to combat. "I've been in Baltimore my whole life," reflected Jones, "and this is probably the most challenging I can remember it being."

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– Joseph Jones, Jr.
Founder and CEO, Center for Urban Families

In other ways, the tour was uplifting. Jones drove by Mondawmin Mall, a large urban shopping center where CFUF had partnered with local corporations and non-profits to create "TouchPoint Baltimore at Mondawmin," a facility providing co-located services to local residents that the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* identified as an example of an

1 David Graham, "The Mysterious Death of Freddie Gray," *The Atlantic*, April 22, 2015, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/the-mysterious-death-of-freddie-gray/391119/> (accessed on November 4, 2018).

2 Colin Campbell, "West Baltimore CVS, Destroyed in Riot, Reopens," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 6, 2016, available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-penn-north-cvs-reopens-20160306-story.html> (accessed on November 4, 2018).

3 Jones prefers using and capitalizing the word "Uprising" to describe the community response to Gray's death. As he explained, he views this word as more uplifting than the popular narrative, which often refers to "riots." Jones, by contrast, recalled seeing collaboration between groups that often did not cooperate, including a wide array of faith leaders and disparate gang factions. "That's the beauty of what came out of it," Jones elaborated, "and that's why I call it the Uprising and typically capitalize it." Interview with Joseph Jones, Jr., Founder and CEO, Center for Urban Families, May 9, 2018. Hereafter cited as Jones interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Jones come from this interview and additional interviews conducted by telephone.

early-stage innovation that had “great potential to scale solutions and impact around the city.”⁴ Not far from there was The Foundry, a makerspace with which CFUF was collaborating on a workforce development initiative connected to the construction of Under Armour’s headquarters.^{5, 6} Finally, Jones gazed and reflected on the progress embodied by the CFUF office, a multi-story building that served as an anchor for an organization that had served more than 28,000 members since its founding in 1999, placed 3,779 members in full-time jobs from 2010 through 2016, and touched nearly 62,000 children whose parents were CFUF members.⁷ The building also contained a conference room with a picture of President Barack Obama meeting with CFUF members, employer partners, and the board chair in 2013; during the meeting, he had spoken about his upbringing without a father and lauded the fathers there for working with CFUF to change their lives. “For your sons to see you taking this path,” the President said, “that’s going to make all the difference in the world.”⁸

That the President of the United States had visited CFUF spoke to the organization’s impressive impact. Still, Jones felt driven to do more. The mission of CFUF, as envisioned by Jones, was to “dismantle poverty.” Yet what does this mission mean as the community’s extraordinary needs evolve? What form of outcomes does the community and its families need to achieve? Jones’s reflection and questions also stemmed from his sense that the organization was approaching an inflection point. CFUF was a “mid-cap” non-profit, with approximately 50 full-time employees and a 6.5 million-dollar budget; however, Jones and other CFUF leaders believed that, if they continued to hone their model, they could scale their work and come closer to realizing outcomes aligned with their mission.

Thus, Jones found himself wrestling with challenging questions. What outcomes should we strive for as we grow? How could CFUF redesign its governance model and organizational design to increase capacity? What information does CFUF need to evaluate and refine its programs more effectively? How could the organization leverage and expand on its existing corporate and non-profit partnerships? How could he build internal capacity and create a culture that maximized impact? In a racially charged climate, how could CFUF serve as a unifying force? Most fundamentally, given all the challenges, was it actually possible for CFUF to “dismantle poverty”?

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- 4 Sarah Gantz, “TouchPoint Baltimore,” *The Baltimore Sun*, February 17, 2017, available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/business/bs-bz-touchpoint-baltimore-20170217-story.html> (accessed on November 4, 2018); and Cheryl Dorsey, “Early-Stage Entrepreneurs Can Drive New Social Movements,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, January 19, 2018, available at https://ssir.org/articles/entry/early_stage_entrepreneurs_can_drive_new_social_movements (accessed on November 26, 2018).
 - 5 Jess Mayhugh, “The Foundry Pilots New Workforce Development Program,” *Baltimore Magazine*, January 17, 2017, available at <https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/2017/1/17/the-foundry-pilots-new-workforce-development-program-sagamore-center-for-urban-families> (accessed on November 4, 2018); Lorraine Mirabella, “Sagamore Launches Workforce Training Program,” January 10, 2017, available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/business/under-armour-blog/bs-bz-sagamore-workforce-training-20170110-story.html> (accessed on November 4, 2018); and Jones interview.
 - 6 The Foundry offers classes in (among other areas) metalworking, blacksmithing, woodworking, laser engraving, and textiles. “The Foundry,” available at <https://foundry.com> (accessed on November 4, 2018).
 - 7 “2017 Impact Report,” Center for Urban Families, p. 21, available at https://issuu.com/cfuf/docs/final_impact_report_2018_2?e=32067539/56279798 (accessed on November 4, 2018).
 - 8 “Center for Urban Families Recognized by President Obama as Nationwide Model of Successful Programs,” Center for Urban Families, May 17, 2013, available at <http://www.cfuf.org/blog/2013/center-for-urban-families-recognized-by-president-obama-as-nationwide-model-of-successful-workforce-development-programs> (accessed on November 4, 2018); and Aaron Blake, “Obama opens up about his father’s absence,” *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2013, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2013/05/17/obama-opens-up-about-his-fathers-absence/?utm_term=.1d10bab1119b (accessed on November 4, 2018).

Background

Located in the heart of West Baltimore, CFUF serves an area that is beset with significant poverty, crime, and racial inequity. In 2018, the median household income for the zip code in which CFUF was located was \$27,065, and 34.8 percent of the population fell below the poverty level.⁹ Safety was a major concern as well. In 2017, Baltimore had the country's highest murder rate per capita. Many of those murders were connected to drug crime and gang activity, and more than 90 percent of the victims were black—a fact that points to the city's sharp racial divide.¹⁰ That racial tension was most palpable in the aftermath of Freddie Gray's death; however, it was also a byproduct of decades of divisive and discriminatory activities, including racial profiling by the police, government corruption, redlining and block busting by banks and realtors, and government policies that “disproportionately direct[ed] low-income black families to segregated neighborhoods.”^{11, 12} From the perspective of Alicia Wilson, the Senior Vice President of Impact Investments and Senior Legal Counsel for the Sagamore Development Company, these discriminatory practices had “prevented Baltimore from reaching its fullest potential in all segments of its body.”¹³ Baltimore, added Wilson, is “really challenged” but also a “really great city.”^{14, 15}

Joseph Jones, Jr.

Born in the East Baltimore projects, Jones, who was an altar boy and boy scout, grew up in an apartment with pictures of JFK, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesus Christ on the wall. He would also see a powerful image outside every weekday: as Jones wrote in CFUF's 2017 Impact report, there were “proud Black men gathered on the corner with brown paper lunch bags in their hands.” These men were looking for a lift to work so that they could save for a row house and their children's education. “I liked how these guys showed up everyday like clockwork,” Jones wrote. “Collectively they left me with a single impression: *This is manhood.*”

9 “American FactFinder,” United States Census, available at https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml (accessed on November 5, 2018).

10 Amer Madhani, “Baltimore is the nation's most dangerous city,” *USA Today*, February 19, 2018, available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/02/19/homicides-toll-big-u-s-cities-2017/302763002/> (accessed on November 5, 2018); and Gary Gately, “Baltimore is more murderous than Chicago. Can anyone save the city from itself?” *The Guardian*, November 2, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/02/baltimore-murder-rate-homicides-ceasefire> (accessed on November 5, 2018).

11 “Baltimore Police Implement New Program To Reduce Crime,” *CBS Baltimore*, February 16, 2014, available at <https://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2014/02/16/baltimore-police-implements-new-program-to-reduce-crime/> (accessed on November 5, 2018); and Valerie Strauss and Richard Rothstein, “From Ferguson to Baltimore: The consequences of government-sponsored segregation,” *The Washington Post*, May 3, 2015, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/05/03/from-ferguson-to-baltimore-the-consequences-of-government-sponsored-segregation/?utm_term=.b95a46287031 (accessed on November 5, 2018).

12 For a detailed look at redlining in Baltimore, see Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City*, Ivan R. Dee: Chicago, 2010.

13 The negative impact of these discriminatory practices was especially noticeable in the incomes of black males. In a study released in 2015, just days after Freddie Gray's death, Harvard economists Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren “found that every year a poor boy spends growing up in Baltimore, his earnings as an adult decrease when compared with that same boy growing up in the average place in America. By the time that boy from Baltimore is a 26-year-old man, he can expect to earn 28 percent less than he would have had he grown up in the average city from the study. Indeed, of the 100 largest jurisdictions Chetty and Hendren studied, Baltimore ranked dead last in this measure of economic mobility.” Ben Seigel, “Investing in Opportunity: Addressing the Root Causes of Civil Unrest in Baltimore,” *Cascade*: No. 100, Fall 2018, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, available at https://www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/cascade/100/05_investing-in-opportunity (accessed on November 27, 2018).

14 Interview with Alicia Wilson, Senior Vice President of Impact Investments and Senior Legal Counsel, Sagamore Development Company, May 10, 2018. Subsequent quotations from and attributions to Wilson come from this interview.

15 Sagamore Development is owned by Under Armour CEO Kevin Plank. The firm is responsible for the development of Port Covington, the Baltimore neighborhood where Under Armour is building its new headquarters. “Sagamore Development,” Plank Industries, available at http://plankindustries.com/business_investments/sagamore-development/ (accessed on November 8, 2018).

Jones's life took a difficult turn when, at the age of nine, his parents were arguing, and he watched his father put his military duffel bag in the car and drive away. Jones recalled, "He never came back home again." Four years later, Jones picked up a hypodermic needle and injected heroin for the first time. "It helped to mask all the pain that I had from my father not being around," Jones explained. "I didn't have a way to articulate it. I just knew that I yearned for him. That was no longer a part of my reality, and the drug helped me to compensate for that."

This marked the beginning of a lengthy period during which Jones dealt and abused drugs and was incarcerated on multiple occasions. Then, in 1986, in what proved to be a turning point, he was admitted to an in-patient drug treatment program. He then reenrolled in a community college where he had begun taking courses years earlier. After graduating as the top student in the accounting program, Jones—who would later obtain a degree from the University of Maryland Baltimore County—shifted his focus to social services work, including serving as a counselor at an assisted living facility and working with people with disabilities who had been discarded by their families. These experiences led to a post as a social worker in the Baltimore City Health Department where Jones developed a pioneering Men's Services Program under the Healthy Start Program. This helped to seed Jones's and later CFUF's unique focus and groundbreaking work on fathers and fatherhood, including his and the organization's advocacy to transform how welfare policy treats fathers.^{16, 17}

While at the Health Department, Jones received the opportunity to participate in conversations with national leaders, including a dialogue on the role of men in children's lives facilitated by then-Vice President Al Gore. Initially, Jones was reluctant to speak; however, as he grew frustrated with what he considered to be a superficial conversation, he mustered the confidence to seek out the microphone and say, "The folks who I care about and who I represent, they don't know who you are." Soon thereafter, Jones received an invitation to come to the White House and became an advisor to Vice President Gore on family and fatherhood policies.

Reflecting on this path, Jones said, "The journey has been one that only God could give somebody. I have a lot of deficits, just like anybody, but I also have assets. One of the assets I have is to be able to get to certain tables; what I've had to learn to do is take advantage of the table once I get to it."

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– Joseph Jones, Jr.
Founder and CEO, Center for Urban Families

¹⁶ "History," Center for Urban Families, available at <http://www.cfuf.org/History/> (accessed on November 9, 2018).

¹⁷ "The Healthy Start Program provides health insurance to low-income, uninsured women in order to improve access to early, comprehensive, and continuous prenatal care to improve the health of newborns and their mothers." "Healthy Start Program," Boston Medical Center, 2018, available at <https://www.bmc.org/pediatrics-special-kids-special-help/pay-your-childs-healthcare/healthy-start-program> (accessed on November 5, 2018).



Launching CFUF: 1999-2007

In 1999, with support from Baltimore's Mayor and Health Commissioner, Jones spun off from the city and founded CFUF.¹⁸ He made the transition because he felt that he could make a more significant impact being a social entrepreneur; there was also a sense that the work about which he was most passionate—helping low-income fathers and families—was supportive of but not integral to the Health Department's core mission of improving public health.

As he launched CFUF, Jones faced difficult tasks. One was establishing credibility, so he sought support from community leaders who, as Jones said, “knew [him] and would lend their names to the organization.” A second challenge was ensuring that the organization had sufficient financing and staffing. He leveraged his relationships in the philanthropic community and brought along several staff members from the health department to create an initial operating budget of approximately \$250,000 and a roughly eight-person staff. Another priority was fostering a respectful culture. CFUF adopted the norm of calling participants in CFUF programs “members”; this signaled both their worth and the humility of staff. Explained Brian Lyght, who became CFUF's Chief Operating Officer in 2017, “We don't see ourselves much different from our clients. In fact, there are staff here who were members.”¹⁹

And most importantly, Jones had to move his ideas from concept to an actual program. Initially, the organization offered two programs that extended the work that Jones had led with the City. The first was the Men's Services Responsible Fatherhood program (now the Baltimore Responsible Fatherhood

“He [Joe] will say that it doesn't matter how smart you are. You have to be respectful of how you work with people, and you have to be able to lift up the dignity within each and every person.”

– Brian Lyght
Chief Operating Officer, Center for Urban Families

18 The original name for the organization was the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development (CFWD). In October 2007, as part of the organization's capital campaign, Jones and his colleagues decided to shorten the name to CFUF to make it more concise. (See additional details on the capital campaign on page six). However, they preserved much of the language and themes from the organization's original name in a tagline that appeared on the CFUF logo: “Helping fathers and families work.” That logo and tagline were featured prominently in many places, including the front of the CFUF building. Jones interview.

19 Interview with Brian Lyght, Chief Operating Officer, Center for Urban Families, May 9, 2018. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Lyght come from this interview and a prior telephone interview in which Joseph Jones also participated.

Project), which focused on delivering “services to low-income fathers in the areas of child support, parenting, healthy relationships, and employment readiness.” The second was the STRIVE Baltimore Employment Training Program, which continued the effort begun at the City to create job opportunities for low-income men and women, with an emphasis on fathers.²⁰

CFUF leaders soon realized that they needed to broaden their work. Specifically, they concluded that it would be beneficial to introduce services that would support low-income parenting couples, not just fathers and individuals.²¹ Unfortunately, this would be challenging because the existing literature on how to support strong relationships and marriages focused on upper-middle class or middle-class whites; and even when the interventions included African Americans, they were still targeting the middle class or above. “The work was messy,” Jones reflected. “When it came to providing support for low-income, fragile families, there literally was no intervention.”

CFUF began working with other nonprofits and academic partners to design programs to support low-income, black families. This resulted in a pair of new initiatives that CFUF introduced in 2005: the Baltimore Building Strong Families program, which focused on helping parents with newborn infants develop communication, conflict resolution, and life management skills; and Couples Advancing Together, a program that, as CFUF’s website explained, responded to “the expressed desire of our clients to receive financial education and information while simultaneously developing their skills as couples to sustain healthy relationships and families.”²²

CFUF’s pioneering work helped to build the organization’s profile. Most notably, in 2007, with support from the Federal Office of Family Assistance, CFUF received support “to provide training and technical assistance to over 96 organizations nationwide that were Promoting Responsible Fatherhood, Healthy Marriage, and Economic Stability Grantees.”²³ This paved the way for the creation of the Practitioners Leadership Institute, which provides an academy, community of practice, education and training, and a summit for organizations in this space.²⁴ Buoyed in part by this growing stature, CFUF launched an eight-million-dollar capital campaign in October 2007 to build a new facility.

Thus, eight years after spinning off from the Health Department, Jones had built an organization with a distinct expertise and a national profile. The future appeared incredibly bright.

20 “History,” Center for Urban Families; and “CFUF Programs,” Center for Urban Families, available at <http://www.cfuf.org/CFUF-Programs/> (accessed on November 5, 2018).

21 CFUF decided to begin engaging with this work in part because of the initial findings from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, a large research effort begun in the late 1990s that aimed to understand the relationship status and needs of unmarried parents. The study found that, at the time of a child’s birth, many unmarried parents wanted to stay in a relationship but that those relationships disintegrated over time, often to the child’s detriment. As Jones recalled, “What it led to was public investment in research, policy, and practice around strengthening fragile families.” Jones interview; and “Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Study,” Princeton University, available at <https://fragilefamilies.princeton.edu> (accessed on November 5, 2018).

22 “History,” Center for Urban Families.

23 “History,” Center for Urban Families.

24 “CFUF Programs,” Center for Urban Families.



2008-2014: Navigating The Great Recession

The enthusiasm surrounding the launch of the capital campaign soon changed to concern following the onset of the Great Recession in late 2007, which created a conflict for CFUF. On the one hand, the needs of the population CFUF served increased. On the other hand, the organization's capacity to meet those needs decreased because of fundraising challenges. The organization had to intensify its focus on the capital campaign and, to the detriment of programmatic fundraising, concentrate its resources and efforts on paying off the construction loan for the new building. By 2010, they had accomplished that goal, but the stress took a toll. "I don't know that I have ever really exhaled from that activity," Jones reflected. "Because it was a heavy lift. Every waking minute, we were focused on fundraising."

Fortifying the Board

As difficult as this stretch was, the aftermath provided an opportunity to take a step back, beginning with a board retreat held shortly after CFUF paid off the loan. The organization had initially had a fairly informal board that depended heavily on Jones's relationships. Then, during the recession, the board had added business leaders who helped CFUF navigate the downturn but, as Jones said, "did not necessarily have a true sense of what it means to run a non-profit."

The retreat seeded a conversation about ways to strengthen the board. One was creating a formal governance structure. Supported by a grant from a local foundation, CFUF created term limits for board members as well as committees focused on the annual audit, program quality, and development. The board also discussed the need to become more diverse, both in terms of the professional backgrounds of its members and its racial, ethnic, and gender composition. This led to the recruitment of members from a variety of professions, including law, venture capital, accounting, academia, and government.²⁵ The board also now includes multiple women, African Americans, and other leaders from diverse ethnic backgrounds—a change that has resonated across the organization, "The idea came from

25 "Board of Directors," Center for Urban Families, available at <http://www.cfuf.org/Board-of-Directors/> (accessed on November 6, 2018).



the staff that we had a bunch of white men on the board who could write nice checks,” said board chair Henry Kahn, “[and] that we needed...our clients to see that there were people on the board who looked more like them.”²⁶

The Family Stability and Economic Success Model

To ensure that CFUF was responding to its members’ growing needs, the organization also sought to hone its programs. A key part of this was redefining and reinvigorating the mission of dismantling poverty. This meant that the agency could not be satisfied with helping members access jobs that pay just above the minimum wage; it also had to position them and their families for long-term success. “It would be easy to declare victory [after helping people get jobs],” said Dr. Erik Devereux, who in 2018 became CFUF’s Interim Director of Research and Evaluation. “But [we] just don’t think that’s good enough. We [know] it’s not good enough.”

CFUF began working to define more clearly how its programs would help lift people out of poverty. This resulted in the introduction of the Family Stability and Economic Success (FSES) model. FSES rested on the assumption that lifting people out of poverty required supporting all family members, not just fathers or couples. FSES 1) identified ways to build on and accelerate CFUF’s core programs (e.g., moving from “immediate housing support” to “long-term housing support”); 2) created target outcomes; and 3) laid out a strategy to scale the program and generate national impact through practitioner training, information dissemination, and advocacy work. “Our groundbreaking FSES model,” the agency argued in a grant proposal, “is a comprehensive and replicable program that changes ‘whole family’ trajectories.”²⁷

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– Dr. Erik Devereux
Interim Director of Research and Evaluation,
Center for Urban Families

26 Interview with Henry Kahn and Swata Gandhi, May 9, 2018. Subsequent quotations from and attributions to Kahn and Gandhi come from this interview.

27 “The Center for Urban Families,” Rootcause.org, available at http://www.rootcause.org/docs/IBMA-Events/CFUF_Prospectus.pdf (accessed on November 6, 2018).



Increased Advocacy and National Recognition

CFUF simultaneously began advocating for policy changes that would benefit members. Some of the organization's most-impactful policy work stemmed from a talk that Jones delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 2011. Drawing on CFUF's work with Couples Advancing Together, Jones argued that one of the central problems with welfare was that, when a pregnant woman or a woman with children applied for benefits, the system did not recognize the involvement of the father unless he and the mother were married; instead, it automatically connected the man to the child support system, which, as Jones noted, created financial conflict and trust issues for the couple. This presentation led to a dialogue with members of the state legislature and the passage of a bill creating a pilot version of the Couples Advancing Together program in the Maryland Department of Human Resources.²⁸ From Jones's perspective, this was a critical step to begin to change the conversation and policy surrounding what it means for a family on welfare to be intact. More broadly, it reflected his belief that policy advocacy was integral to CFUF's work to dismantle poverty. He explained:

We're going to do our damndest to create interventions.... But our folks are going to run into policy issues, whether it's child support, whether it's getting exploited by proprietary schools who get these folks to take out loans that don't have any real intent on helping them to secure real opportunities in the labor force. Policy reform...is a critical thing that organizations like CFUF have to be attentive to...because practice and programming alone is not going to get us out of the circumstances we're in.

The success of this advocacy, as well as Jones's relationships with elected officials from across party lines, contributed to CFUF's growing national profile, highlighted by President Obama's visit in 2013.²⁹ According to Jones, who served as an appointed member on the Obama Administration's Taskforce on Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families, that opportunity provided a confidence boost to CFUF and helped to increase the organization's profile.³⁰ It also served as a defining moment for the members who met with the President and talked about creating ladders of opportunity and fatherhood. "It was so beautiful," Jones reflected, "to see our members step into that space."

28 "Maryland House Bill 333," LegiScan, available at <https://legiscan.com/MD/bill/HB333/2013> (accessed on November 6, 2018).

29 Jones also worked on an initiative led by First Lady Laura Bush. Jones interview; and David Karas, "Responsible Fatherhood: He's Been A Key Voice in the National Conversation," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 23, 2017, available at <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/2017/0323/Responsible-fatherhood-He-s-been-a-key-voice-in-the-national-conversation> (accessed on December 19, 2018).

30 "History," Center for Urban Families.



2015-2017: The Death of Freddie Gray and The Creation of an Ecosystem

As CFUF and Jones grew in prominence, they had to navigate a series of community crises, none of which was more significant than the death of Freddie Gray and the Uprising and protests that followed. In the aftermath of that event, the CFUF facility—which is located in the same zip code where Gray had lived—was inundated with community leaders, media, and other stakeholders.³¹ “We’re in the epicenter of where all that stuff took place,” said Jones. What’s more, many were looking to Jones specifically for guidance because of his significant role and stature. “When I look at the Baltimore landscape,” he reflected, “and I look around for my compatriots, there are very few non-profit organizations that are led by a black man in Baltimore.”

“For me, it’s having a seat at the table, having a voice in the discussion, and having a vote in the decision. If you don’t have those three components, it’s really hard to have racial equity.”

– Joseph Jones, Jr.
Founder and CEO, Center for Urban Families

Jones and CFUF began identifying ways to help the community move forward.³² Most notably, CFUF partnered with the University of Maryland School of Social Work and obtained funding from PNC bank to organize a three-part series of community conversations focused on identifying solutions to the community’s challenges.³³ “We wanted to be really

31 For additional background on Sandtown-Winchester, the neighborhood in which Gray had lived, see Jeremy Aishkenas, Larry Buchanan, Alica Desantis, Haeyoun Park, and Derek Watkins, “A Portrait of the Sandtown Neighborhood in Baltimore,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2015, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/05/03/us/a-portrait-of-the-sandtown-neighborhood-in-baltimore.html> (accessed on November 6, 2018).

32 Several days after Gray’s death, Jones took a picture of himself with a white police officer. Later, in October 2017, he posted the picture on his Facebook page with the caption: “Is it possible to have positive relationships and mutual trust and respect between law enforcement and the community?” The post went viral within the West Baltimore community. Jones interview.

33 For additional details on this meeting and the dialogue that followed, see “Community Solutions Survey Report,” Center for Urban Families, available at <http://www.cfuf.org/FileStream.aspx?FileID=167> (accessed on November 9, 2018).

thoughtful,” Jones said, “that this was not just an exercise to bring people to have a conversation. But how can we do this in the context of developing solutions?”

Jones used these dialogues—and, more broadly, the time after Gray’s death—to reflect on what changes, if any, CFUF should make to its long-term approach. He sensed that he had to strike a balance. On the one hand, he did not want to allow the issues that the Gray incident brought to the fore to derail CFUF’s pursuit of its primary mission. “From my vantage point,” Jones explained, “if you focus on race and class too much, it can consume and absorb so much of your time, you might not get anything else done.” On the other hand, he saw a valuable lesson: CFUF could do more to collaborate with an array of community partners. “I think historically we have been a culprit in that ‘work-alone mentality,’” said Jones. “But I do think that in the last couple years, and particularly post Freddie Gray, we’ve recognized that there’s no way that one individual, one organization, even a municipality can go about dismantling poverty.”

Fulfilling this collaborative vision would require participating in and helping to build an ecosystem, “a network of organizations, machines, and services that coproduce new solutions to address and solve the root causes of individual, family, and community health and human services challenges.”³⁴ Establishing this network would require Jones and CFUF to navigate tricky questions surrounding how to work with partners to blend services to achieve new outcomes, build trust and ensure cultural alignment, and navigate the politics of change. Simply put, as Jones and his colleagues began to examine opportunities to work with outside organizations, they had to repeatedly ask themselves: do the potential gains for advancing CFUF’s mission of dismantling poverty outweigh the risks inherent in any partnership?

TouchPoint Mondawmin

One opportunity emerged to foster these partnerships when Calvin Butler, the CEO of Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE), and Timothy Regan, the CEO and President of Whiting-Turner Construction, approached CFUF about participating in a community services center at Mondawmin Mall. The idea for the initiative came about when Butler called Regan after attending a meeting of corporate leaders about ways they could support the community after the death of Freddie Gray. As Regan recalled, Butler told him, “I just came out of a meeting, and we decided to give \$25,000 to patch up storefronts at Pennsylvania and North. The whole time I’m sitting in this meeting, I’m looking out the window and I’m thinking, ‘This is not about \$25,000 worth of glass.’” Butler then added, “And for some reason, I thought about you.”³⁵

Butler, who is black, and Regan, who is white, began meeting for breakfasts on Saturdays where they would brainstorm strategies. “We would sit there for two-plus hours drawing on the placemats,” Regan said. “We were trying to figure out what can you do besides writing a check?” They concluded that the challenge they wanted to address was isolation. “The isolated communities that have been created over generations are very difficult for people to break out of or even to break into,” explained Regan. “And so what we determined to do was try to invent something that could just, in a modest way, crack the isolation.”

This led to the creation of TouchPoint Baltimore, an organization that was financed by BGE and Whiting-Turner and was devoted to creating neighborhood service centers that brought together human services organizations.³⁶ They wanted to open the first TouchPoint location at Mondawmin Mall and bring together four organizations: Thread, which focused on providing academic and personal support to high school students “confronting significant barriers outside

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– Tim Regan

CEO and President, Whiting-Turner Construction,
describing the genesis of TouchPoint Baltimore

34 “The 2018 Health and Human Services Summit: Designing Generative Outcomes,” Leadership for a Networked World, available at <https://lnwprogram.org/event/2018-health-and-human-services-summit> (accessed on November 27, 2018).

35 Interview with Timothy Regan, Chief Executive Officer and President, The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, and Lea Ferguson, Vice President of Inspiration, Thread, May 10, 2018. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Regan and Ferguson come from this interview and an interview that occurred with Ferguson and her colleagues at TouchPoint Mondawmin on May 9, 2018.

36 “What We Do,” TouchPoint Baltimore, available at <http://www.touchpointbaltimore.org/what-we-do/> (accessed on November 7, 2018).



the classroom”; Baltimore Corps, which “enlists people to work in social innovation”; Invested Impact, which “partner[ed] with visionary philanthropists and social change investors to identify, cultivate, and fund emerging leaders and transformative ideas”; and CFUF, whose Family Stability and Economic Success Model complemented the other organizations’ emphasis on child and workforce development.^{37, 38} The hope was that co-locating the organizations would make it easier for community members to access services while also providing opportunities for the nonprofits to collaborate. “We wanted nonprofits that could have synergies with one another,” Regan explained. “If Thread is working with a kid, they could easily refer the mom to the Center for Urban Families, and that’s what happens. It just keeps bouncing around the room.” “The mission,” he added, “is making people comfortable coming together.”

“The mission is making people comfortable coming together.”

– Tim Regan

CEO and President, Whiting Turner Construction,
describing the purpose of TouchPoint Baltimore

It was not immediately clear that participating in TouchPoint Mondawmin would benefit CFUF. Unlike the other organizations, CFUF had a dedicated physical space, so it was not looking for new office space, particularly in an area that was so close to its building. Jones and other CFUF leaders ultimately concluded that there were several advantages to participating. The first was that it would allow the organization to strengthen its relationship with two major corporations. The second was that Thread, one of the nonprofit partners, could provide a valuable programmatic complement to CFUF’s work. Thread provided mentorship to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, whereas CFUF

37 “TouchPoint Baltimore opens at Mondawmin Mall,” *WMAR Baltimore*, February 17, 2017, available at <https://www.wmar2news.com/news/region/baltimore-city/touchpoint-baltimore-opens-at-mondawmin-mall> (accessed on November 7, 2018); “Thread,” available at <https://www.thread.org> (accessed on November 27, 2018); Stephen Babcock, “Baltimore Corps Receives \$500K Donation To Expand Programming,” *Technical.ly Baltimore*, May 17, 2018, available at <https://technical.ly/baltimore/2018/05/17/baltimore-corps-receives-500k-donation-to-expand-programming/> (accessed on November 27, 2018); and “Invested Impact,” *Strong City Baltimore*, available at <https://www.strongcitybaltimore.org/donations/invested-impact/> (accessed on November 27, 2018).

38 Thread was featured in a *New York Times* column by David Brooks titled, “Where American Renewal Begins.” He described Thread as an organization that “weaves an elaborate system of relationships, a cohesive village, around the task of helping kids. The social network is as much for the adults and the city as for the kids.” He added, “There is no way to repair national distrust without repairing individual relationships one by one. This is where American renewal begins.” David Brooks, “Where American Renewal Begins,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2018, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/opinion/thread-baltimore-american-renewal-community-program.html> (accessed on November 27, 2018).



focused more on the parents in relationships. An organization focused on children could help to augment a whole-family approach and generate new outcomes for the community.

Since opening in February 2017, TouchPoint Mondawmin has had to navigate several challenges. Most notably, the founder of Invested Impact left the Baltimore area, creating a void in leadership within the organization. Nonetheless, the benefits of the collaboration were beginning to manifest themselves. In spring 2018, the member organizations were preparing to apply for a joint grant to integrate their services. More importantly, there was a sense that the intangible qualities that were necessary for an initiative like this to succeed had taken root. "It's still in its developmental stages," Jones acknowledged, "but it's really a set of partners that trust one another." There was also a deep appreciation that this cooperation would not have been possible without CFUF's participation. Lea Ferguson, Thread's Vice President of Inspiration, observed, "There's a weight that CFUF brings because of their credibility and longevity. Them wanting to be invested in this idea of a TouchPoint Center was really a gift to us.... I view it as something that was really generous and important."

– Lea Ferguson
Vice President of Inspiration, Thread

Under Armour and Port Covington

Another opportunity to employ an ecosystem-based approach involved the construction of the new Under Armour headquarters. The company had agreed to build the headquarters in Baltimore after receiving extensive public financing from the city. That support was contingent on Under Armour fulfilling the requirements of an extensive community benefits agreement; still, the move had been controversial because many feared that Baltimore's hardest-hit residents would not realize the benefits. According to Alicia Wilson, the Senior Vice President of Impact Investments

and Senior Legal Counsel for the Sagamore Development Company, concerns about racial equity featured heavily in this discussion. She explained: “This is the largest public financing ever for the City of Baltimore. So, now, how do you navigate that in a city that’s majority black with an entity that looks majority white and is very wealthy post Freddie Gray?”^{39, 40}

As leaders from Under Armour and Sagamore Development attempted to navigate this delicate question, they reached out to CFUF to seek input about how to create a community benefits agreement that would genuinely benefit the city’s hardest-hit populations. CFUF was an attractive partner because of the organization’s expertise in workforce development initiatives, its broader ties and credibility in the community, and Jones’s outstanding reputation. “I have a belief about problem solving,” said Wilson, who was responsible for securing passage of the public financing. “We should try to tap our network before we tap our bank account or our wallet.”

“I have a belief about problem solving. We should try to tap our network before we tap our bank account or our wallet.”

- Alicia Wilson

Senior Vice President of Impact Investments and
Senior Legal Counsel, Sagamore Development
Company

CFUF leaders initially had some trepidation about entering a fraught discussion; however, as they reflected on it, they felt that the potential gains exceeded the costs. Jones explained:

When we thought about the fact that any city in America would want to have Under Armour in its backyard and the number of jobs that was going to be produced, it outweighed the concerns as long as we could, as best we could, control the messaging around it. So we took a public stance in support of the project.

As of late 2018, the long-term impact of the financing arrangement remained to be seen, in no small part because the construction timeline kept shifting. Regardless, some of the benefits were taking shape. One was a partnership between CFUF and The Foundry, a maker space supported by Under Armour, where CFUF members could receive training. That collaboration had already led to some CFUF members getting jobs as well as many memorable moments, including one instance involving a CFUF member who participated in a boot camp at The Foundry and built a Ninja Turtle’s dresser with lights for his son. As Wilson recalled, “When he finished, he brought his son to come and see him, and I think his son was really excited about the dresser, but I think he was more excited about seeing people around him proud of his Dad.”

More broadly, there was a feeling that the initiative and the presence of CFUF in the discussion was elevating the voice of some of West Baltimore’s most-disadvantaged communities. Wilson reflected:

I can’t forecast the future...[But] I think that the work that we’re trying to do is to ensure that when this project is built, that we all feel good about what was done, not just from the fact that fancy buildings went up, because those fancy buildings were going to go up regardless. Or, from the standpoint that we feel good about the fact that as many Baltimore city residents were able to participate and not just those that we knew we were going to get, but there’s some folks that otherwise don’t get an opportunity to participate.

That the boat did rise with the rising tide, that they did see progress in their community, that they felt a part of it. They still feel a part of it. That this isn’t an enclave for the wealthy, but that it’s an amenity for all.

Jones concurred: “For me,” he concluded, “it’s having a seat at the table. Having a voice in the discussion. And a vote in the decision. If you don’t have those three components, it’s really hard to have racial equity.”

39 This support came through Tax Increment Financing, a tool “that allows municipalities to promote economic development by earmarking property tax revenue from increases in assessed values within a designated TIF district.” Richard Dye and David Merriman, “Tax Increment Financing,” Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, January 2006, available at <https://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/articles/tax-increment-financing> (accessed on November 7, 2018).

40 Sagamore Development is owned by Under Armour CEO Kevin Plank. The firm is responsible for the development of Port Covington, the Baltimore neighborhood where Under Armour is building its new headquarters. “Sagamore Development,” Plank Industries, available at http://plankindustries.com/business_investments/sagamore-development/ (accessed on November 8, 2018).



2018: Staffing, Culture, Evaluation, and The Path Ahead

In 2018, as CFUF approached its 20th anniversary, Jones and his colleagues were exploring ways to amplify their impact. To some extent, this focused on how CFUF was branding its work. For example, CFUF partnered with the marketing and communications team at Under Armour to develop a more concise branding approach for the FSES model. Specifically, they began describing their approach under the umbrella of “*All In*.” As the organization explained in its 2018 Impact Report, “*All In* is CFUF’s comprehensive strategy to accelerate social and economic opportunity and advocate for policies that promote equity and racial justice.”⁴¹ From Jones’s perspective, this demonstrated another advantage to partnering with a large corporation: branding and communications is often a challenge for non-profits with limited resources, and leveraging Under Armour’s creative team helped CFUF to overcome this obstacle.

At the same time, CFUF focused on internal transformation involving people and culture. There had recently been significant turnover in senior management positions as well as a letdown in staff morale following layoffs. This had forced Jones to focus more on managing CFUF’s operations and less on honing its external partnerships. With hopes of resetting that balance, CFUF brought on a new Chief Operating Officer, Brian Lyght, an accomplished leader who had served in the Department of Labor during the Obama Administration, held high-level posts with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and had private sector experience.⁴²

One of Lyght’s first priorities was working with Jones and other senior leaders to reenergize the organization’s culture. CFUF partnered with Community Wealth Partners, a consulting firm, on a “culture refresh.” This began with a staff survey and a series of focus groups, the results of which Lyght shared across the organization. The data demonstrated

41 “20 Years of Impact: 2018 Impact Report,” Center for Urban Families, p. 16, available at <https://issuu.com/winstonphilip/docs/cfuf-annual-impact-report-web?e=7041224/66030693> (accessed on December 19, 2018).

42 Sitting on a table in his office is a copy of a book titled *Riding Shotgun: The Role of the COO*, a text that informed Lyght’s philosophy. “Joe’s the visionary,” Lyght explained. “As Chief Operating Officer, I’ll translate his vision into what it is that we need to do on the ground to bring about the kinds of outcomes that we want to see for the members we serve.”



that 90 percent of staff saw CFUF as a “family-oriented organization” and that “the mission of the organization is what’s keeping most people here.” It also showed that there was room for improvement with regard to transparency (including communication with senior staff), accountability, and the value of treating everyone with dignity. Lyght felt that Jones embodied this last trait: “He [Joe] will say that it doesn’t matter how smart you are.... You have to be respectful of how you work with people, and you have to be able to lift up the dignity within each and every person.”

Another major focus of senior leadership was continuing to define, evaluate, and refine their programs to ensure that they were working toward their mission of dismantling poverty. In the past, the organization had primarily focused on metrics that were driven by what their funders wanted; according to Ben Seigel, a CFUF board member who chairs the Program Quality Committee, these “types of indicators tended to be more about scale than impact” (e.g., the number of people enrolled in CFUF’s programs or the number of people placed into jobs). While this data was valuable, CFUF wanted to drive deeper to understand whether it was actually helping people transition out of poverty. Seigel elaborated, “We’ve been trying to do this paradigm shift of how you can go from this kind of activity output to a point where you can actually measure progress. Can you measure, pre and post, how someone grows over time with the organization?”⁴³

In February 2018, CFUF hired Dr. Erik Devereux as the organization’s Interim Director of Research and Evaluation. He was working closely with Jones, Lyght, and Seigel to develop a “person-centered approach” in which its programs and evaluation methods focused on the needs and progress of individual members. A key facet of this was designing ten evaluative dimensions that actually reflected peoples’ progress: workforce engagement, education, financial capability, transportation, housing, child support, child care, behavioral health, safety, and criminal justice involvement. To obtain this data, CFUF was also experimenting with new ways to track members’ progress, such as a standalone app for Androids and iPhones.

As CFUF refined its model and evaluative measures, it faced difficult decisions. For example, the center modified a randomized controlled trial funded by the federal government after community members objected to some people not receiving services. CFUF also had to deal with internal disagreements about how to evaluate its work. In particular,

⁴³ Interview with Ben Seigel, Board Member, Center for Urban Families, by telephone, November 14, 2018. Subsequent quotations from and attributions to Seigel come from this interview.

some board members still wanted to prioritize metrics that focused on scale. “It’s almost like there’s this tension,” said Seigel, “between wanting to maximize how many people we serve even if at the end of the day, the average impact we have is just moving the person from a one to a two versus, say, serving a quarter of that number, but moving them from a one to a four.” Even as CFUF grappled with these challenges, the rigor of its approach stood out. Devereux reflected, “I’ve never encountered an organization that has spent this long slowly but surely feeling its way forward to a different model and being very careful and thoughtful and also riding through a variety of community crises in the midst of it to try to figure out what exactly we can do differently.”

The Path Ahead

The question of how best to enhance and evaluate the *All In* model was one of several significant issues with which CFUF had to grapple. A related challenge was how CFUF could scale its work to other communities. Still another looming concern was how to sustain CFUF if and when Jones—who as Kahn, the board chair, noted, was an “icon in the community”—decided to transition. “The things I wake up and worry about,” Kahn said, “are management succession and funding.” The board and Jones were therefore discussing how they would handle succession. Jones explained:

I’m not going to be the founding CEO of this organization forever. I’m at a place where I’m comfortable thinking about what succession looks like. But I also think I am in a place where I’m able to have conversations with my board, particularly my executive committee, about what my succession looks like. And not allowing the board, or the organization more generally, to pigeonhole what a successor may look like. In a very thoughtful and a very humble way, I believe I have a sense of what my strengths are, and I have a sense of what my limitations are. I recognize that I have somewhat of a high profile in relation to the work that we do. But that can be very unfair to someone who would be my successor.

So how do I temper that process so that there are not unrealistic expectations put into a recruitment process at the appropriate time? I’m not leaving tomorrow. But realistically, how do we begin to set the stage for what succession looks like? Because everybody will have an opinion about what they think a successor to me may look like, including me. And so, we’ve got to very thoughtful about not setting up the next person to fail.

Yet even as CFUF confronted questions about what would come next, there was a sense that the organization had made an enormous impact. Jones identified numerous highlights, including the organization’s initial succession from the City Health Department; the capital campaign in the midst of the Great Recession; the nearly 30,000 people that CFUF had served; the agency’s advocacy work around child support and welfare reform; 20 years of unqualified financial audits; President Obama’s visit; and the organization’s ability to operate ambidextrously at the intersection of direct services, program design, and policymaking. Underscoring all of this was the ambitious, bold, and deeply service-oriented ethos that animated all of Jones’s and CFUF’s work. As he said in the organization’s 2017 annual report, “We provide the authentic love every human being, regardless of age, craves and deserves.”⁴⁴

“We provide the authentic love every human being, regardless of age, craves and deserves.”

– Joseph Jones, Jr.

Founder and CEO, Center for Urban Families,
Center for Urban Families 2018 Impact Report

44 “2017 Impact Report,” Center for Urban Families.



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