



THE STONELEIGH FELLOWS PROGRAM



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FELLOWS

CANDACE PUTTER

### *ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

We acknowledge and thank Bernardine H. Watson, the author of this article, who tells an inspiring story about Candace Putter. Ms. Watson interviewed Ms. Putter and wrote this profile based on their conversations. This is the fourth in our series of “Meet the Fellows” profiles. The series is intended to provide readers with stories that describe our fellows’ motivation, goals and the philosophies that drive their work.

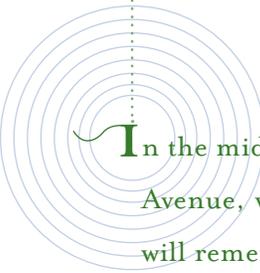
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## CANDACE PUTTER

MSS, LCSW

**Director, Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical Training Alliance**  
**Fellowship Project: Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical Training Project**



In the mid 1970s, Candace Putter lived in Southwest Philadelphia, near 60<sup>th</sup> Street and Woodland Avenue, with her husband and baby son. Anyone who knows Philadelphia neighborhood history will remember that during that time, 60<sup>th</sup> and Woodland was a racial powder keg. Putter describes the area this way, “60<sup>th</sup> and Woodland was the borderline between the black and white communities, and there was an element in the white community that said *this is the border and it’s going to stay the border*. Every day the black kids had to cross Woodland Avenue and walk through the white neighborhood to get to Bartram High School, and the white kids walked through the black neighborhood to get to the Catholic schools that most of them attended. It was a phenomenally tense area.” One day, several black children were shot and one was killed by a white man standing on a rooftop. Shortly thereafter, a white child was shot in retaliation. Putter remembers, “They ended up having to bring in cops, including cops on horseback, to patrol the neighborhood day and night. You couldn’t go out of your house, and the cops had to line the streets, more or less, in order for the kids to go back and forth to school.”



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Putter says there were numerous community meetings, initially split along racial lines, to discuss the violence in the neighborhood. To Putter, that kind of division among the residents did not make any sense. “I met a black woman who had been an activist in the neighborhood for years. Together we started bringing other mothers, who were looking for a way to talk to each other, to the meetings. We called ourselves The Interracial Mothers’ Council.” They met in the neighborhood’s Catholic churches and tried to become a visible presence in the community. “We’d go door to door and talk to people. We called on the residents, particularly other mothers, to help stop the violence and talk about the issues that united rather than divided us. We were a small group, only about 10 mothers and a few others, because people were so afraid to join us. But we got a fair amount of play and helped calm tensions in the area. We appeared on television several times and were involved in area-wide crisis intervention meetings. Larry King came out and interviewed us at my house.” A couple of days after the show aired, a brick was thrown through Putter’s window. She remembers the incident as “unpleasant,” but says, “I was still young enough to think, okay, we can deal with this, it’s not going to stop me.” In recognition of her work, Putter received the Mayor’s Citation for Community Service in 1980.

If you know Candace Putter, this story will not surprise you. Putter is a woman with a reputation—for challenging the status quo, convincing people from different worlds to work together to get things done, and telling it “like it is.” “I am not a quiet person,” she laughs. “I don’t keep my mouth shut.” About her activism, Putter makes no apologies. “I’ve always had a strong sense of right and wrong. Even as a young person, if something felt wrong, I was against it and felt I had to do something about it. I just keep trying to make things right and I refuse to be ignored.”

Putter has always used her skills, persistence and lessons from her work and life experiences to help make systems perform better for the people they are meant to serve. Currently, she is using these assets, as well as her Stoneleigh

Fellowship, to implement the Pennsylvania Academic and Career Technical Training Alliance (PACTT). The aim of PACTT is to work with the courts, residential youth facilities, Departments of Education and Public Welfare, and labor and industry in Pennsylvania’s largest counties—Philadelphia and Allegheny—to improve outcomes for youth released from residential placement. A key goal of PACTT is to improve the education and training offered in juvenile justice facilities, home schools and communities, so that upon release, youth are more likely to make a successful transition to school or obtain meaningful employment. PACTT is funded by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and through Putter’s Stoneleigh Fellowship. The Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers sponsors the effort.

Putter’s story is a fascinating one. She has been a civil rights worker, student activist, factory worker, union organizer, paralegal for the poor, and, of course, an advocate for troubled youth. She did all this while raising four children: Ben, Becca, Sam and Nick. Putter says her activism is rooted in the Quaker values she learned as a young girl. “When I was a kid, growing up near Berkeley, California in the early 1960s, my mother would take my brother and me to Quaker meeting. I got very involved in the American Friends Service Committee High School group in San Francisco and was exposed to a lot of ideas there. I became very conscious of the race and class differences in our society, and the impact they have on people. I began taking part in sit-ins around San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley to protest areas of employment that were closed to black workers. I knew things were changing in our society and wanted to be a part of it.” Putter’s mother was born in France and, periodically, would take her there to live. “I was also involved with a Quaker group in France that was teaching reading to refugees from Algeria so they could pass the citizenship test. I was just this young kid and I would take the subway off to these crazy places in Paris to do this work. My parents had no idea what I was up to.” Putter’s early political experiences deeply influenced the



life choices she has made over the years. As a student at Swarthmore College in the 1960s, Putter was very involved in the anti-war movement. She recalls, "Working with the Quakers, I led demonstrations and taught others how to remain non-violent in difficult situations." After earning a B.A. in French and English literature in 1969, she joined an organization called Resistance, a national, largely youth-driven group dedicated to the anti-war effort. She even worked with the American Friends Service Committee to organize a peace conference in Paris, meeting with representatives of all sides of the conflict, including North Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian negotiators.

By the early 1970s, Putter had become disenchanted with the peace movement. She says she moved "further to the left," getting involved in the labor movement and union organizing. "I began to feel the peace movement was talking to itself most of the time and that significant change would only happen when working people were deeply involved in making the change." In spite of her college degree, Putter took a job as a machine operator and piece worker in a small factory in Philadelphia, working alongside poor black, Latino and immigrant women. She describes the job as a "hard, eye opening experience."

"The union at the shop just wasn't democratic. They controlled what job you got and whether or not you got representation when you had a problem. Workers were almost more afraid of the union people than of the bosses." Putter immediately started stirring up trouble. She helped to form a strong rank-and-file committee

that focused on improving the contract between workers and manufacturers. Putter admits that her experiences working in the factory made her a little less idealistic.

After leaving the factory in 1976, Putter trained as a paralegal and worked at Community Legal Services (CLS), an organization founded to provide legal help to the poor. She worked on landlord-tenant disputes and unemployment and social security claims. But she continued organizing workers—it was in her blood. Putter helped organize the non-attorney employees at CLS into a local chapter of the National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Workers (IU99C) and was elected to the union's executive board. She and her first husband divorced in 1979. In 1984, she left CLS and took several years away from full-time work to be with her children.

In 1994, when she was forty-six years old and her two youngest children were 7 and 10, Putter applied to Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. Excerpts from her letter of application reveal a great deal about where she was in her life and why she applied to social work school. She wrote, "*I have not participated in any political activity of substance for about 10 years. I dearly miss having a sense of connection with the broader community, a sense that I am an active, constructive member of society outside of my own family and friends. I believe that with training, I could use the lessons I have learned from my life's experiences to provide significant supportive service to others. I realize my candidacy is out of the ordinary and my own situation will not make returning to school easy. However, I have been placing my ambitions on the back burner for a long time, waiting for a period that would be less stressful for me and my family. But I do not want to lose any more time.*"



Putter was admitted to the Bryn Mawr program and earned a Masters of Social Service in 1996; she later became a licensed clinical social worker in 2002. Putter very consciously chose the clinical tract because she wanted to help people change “person to person.” “I had had it with trying to change the world. I didn’t have a clue anymore what would help the world.” Putter also decided to work with juvenile offenders when she finished her degree. “My son, Ben, had been a fairly troubled kid— and I thought about how difficult it would have been for me to keep him out of real trouble if I hadn’t had resources at my disposal that most poor folks don’t have.”

For her Masters thesis, titled “Are We At War With Our Youth,” Putter analyzed and critiqued Pennsylvania’s 1995 Juvenile Act. The Act modified the state’s original Juvenile Justice law in two major ways: first, it shifted the juvenile justice system beyond its original, sole purpose of juvenile rehabilitation and toward the principles of Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ). BARJ principles focus the system on accountability in three areas: keeping the community safe, providing compensation to crime victims and providing young offenders with competencies that will help them become more responsible citizens. Second, the new law made it easier to transfer juveniles over the age of 14 who were accused of committing certain felonies, from juvenile to adult criminal court and allowed serious juvenile repeat offenders to be sentenced as adults. In her thesis, Putter argued that the new law, with its calls for “balance” and “accountability,” should be implemented in a way that helps youth actually learn from their experiences in detention and gives them opportunities to change their lives and reintegrate successfully into society.

In 1996, Putter joined the staff at St. Gabriel’s Hall (St. Gabe’s), a residential placement facility in Pennsylvania for approximately 200 adjudicated males between the ages of 10 and 18. Putter says that St. Gabe’s was her training ground for everything that followed, including PACTT. Of the relationships she developed with families at the facility, Putter says, “I’m a very direct person and I think that resonated with the kids and their parents. I may have looked different from them and I may have clearly had more opportunities in my life, but they also knew that what I told them they could count on—they could go to the bank with it. I think that helped me connect with them.”

The therapeutic work she did at St. Gabe’s gave Putter the sense of connection she had been looking for and written about in her application to Bryn Mawr. “I had every intention of just being a therapist. But my policy instincts kept kicking in. I kept seeing that the system wasn’t working and I began to see that you can’t make change one person at a time in a broken system. I became convinced that young people in the delinquency system would continue to fail in disastrous numbers without significant systemic change.”

As Putter moved into management at St. Gabe’s, she set out to change that system. And she used her union organizing experiences to guide those changes. Putter says, “One of the things I learned while doing union work is that change has to be organized in a way that makes organic sense to the folks living it. You can’t just impose it. Change has to happen in conjunction with those directly affected.” Putter began working with St. Gabe’s staff— teachers, youth care workers and therapists—to create a system where they worked together as a whole, rather than separately, for the benefit of the youth. She helped develop opportunities for staff to participate in joint decision-making, work more closely with youth’s families and collaborate on program and curriculum development.

Putter also began to infuse the principles of Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) into programming at St. Gabe’s. While she had been critical of the legislation, she believed in some of its basic principles and thought it would be effective if implemented well. She worked with staff at St. Gabe’s to develop a victim empathy program designed to help youth understand how victims think and feel about crime, and how crime had affected their

own lives. She organized the *Increase the Peace* Program, which brought speakers, including city leaders and victims of violent crime, to St. Gabe's and gave youth an opportunity to reflect on the impact of violence and drugs on the community. She is particularly proud of the Student Leadership Committee she developed, which took St. Gabe's youth to Philadelphia schools to speak with students about the negative effects of crime and violence.

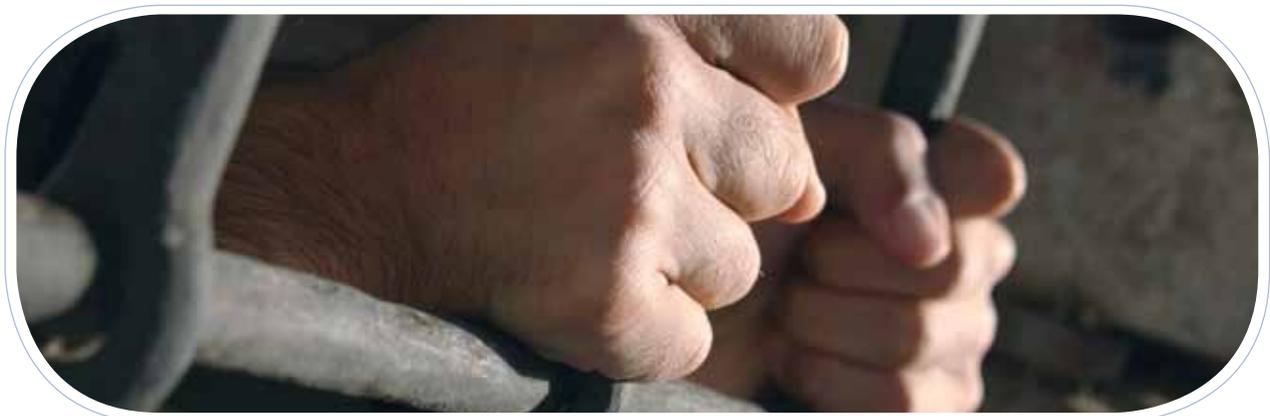
Putter explains why she felt it was so important to make these changes at St. Gabe's, "The communities these kids came from had fallen apart, so they had no sense of belonging, no beliefs, no models, and no sense of hope. I got a glimpse of the depths of despair that a lot of these kids felt—not that they knew how to express it. I started to really understand that they needed concrete support, tools and opportunities, if they were going to make it."

She remembers a young boy at St. Gabe's who not only left a big impression on her but directly influenced where she would next take her work. "There was one kid I still think about every time I drive up Broad Street. He was a very young kid from Cambodia who couldn't have been over 13. The other kids used to make fun of him for being Cambodian. He knew very little English and I had to use an interpreter to talk with them. I found out that they had migrated to the United States after escaping from Cambodia and had endured years of incredible hardship in a refugee camp. To help the other kids to understand what this young man had been through, I invited the family to St. Gabe's to tell their story through an interpreter." The family decided to make a dinner for the young people to expose them to the food of Cambodia. Over the meal, the kids heard about what it meant to this family to be Cambodian in this country. "It was a very moving experience for everyone."

Putter says this Cambodian youngster reinforced for her that young people, no matter their background, just want to belong, to feel valued. "This kid had a tattoo representing gang membership. It was a long time before he would talk to me about being a member of a gang, which is a growing phenomenon among Cambodian kids. This kid's family had no English and no way of guiding him through the new world he was in. That's what a gang does, right? The gang supported him and provided him with an American home. But he was a really smart kid and after a while, was beginning to recognize how dangerous the gang was."

But once he left St. Gabe's, Putter lost track of the young man. She later found out that he was in jail charged with murder. "I was devastated," she says. "This kid fell off the track after showing such promise. That's why the whole issue of aftercare became my life, because you would do so much positive work and then the kids would get out there and not have the support they needed to make it."

In 2001, after leaving St. Gabe's, Putter began consulting with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) to improve their programming for delinquent youth. Her ultimate goal was to completely reform services for youth returning to the community after placement. Despite overwhelming cynicism from all sides about the possibility of significant change, Putter wrote a proposal for an overhauled reintegration system. She then met regularly with the leaders of juvenile probation, DHS, the Defender Association, District Attorney's office, school district and the behavioral health system in an attempt to come to agreement about how a reformed aftercare system should operate.

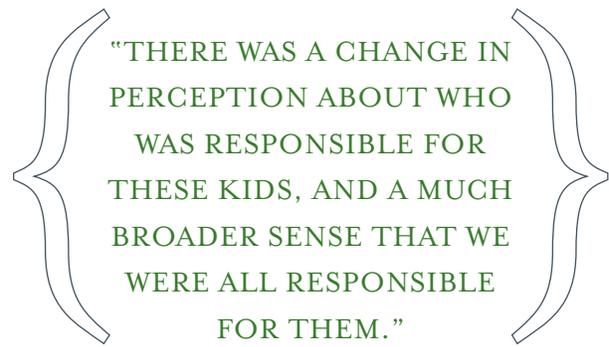


Putter also began meeting with the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), an organization dedicated to ensuring that the city’s youth are prepared to participate in the workforce. “I had heard about their work, started going to their meetings and I was really intrigued. There were all these job programs that I hadn’t known about. I thought, why on earth aren’t delinquent kids benefiting from this; they are one of the most vulnerable groups. I started opening my big mouth at their meetings and soon I was on the Out of School Youth Committee; I opened it wider and louder, and pretty soon PYN had a focus on delinquent kids.”

The relationship with PYN was critical to Putter’s education about deeper reasons for delinquency among youth. “It’s a domino effect. Kids get in trouble, then they get expelled and pretty soon they’re delinquent, right? Part of the problem is they couldn’t read.” It became clear to Putter that illiteracy, academic failure and delinquency went hand-in-hand – something that, while easy to identify, is considerably more difficult to correct.

She also studied data about recidivism in the Philadelphia juvenile justice system, and learned that of the more than 1,300 delinquent youth returning to Philadelphia from residential placements each year, over one-fourth are being re-arrested within six months of release and about one-third are back in placement within a year. Further, studies show that the most common offense of re-committed youth is selling drugs, indicating that at least some of them may have had no other way of earning money for themselves or to help their families. All of this information re-affirmed Putter’s belief that the aftercare system needed a complete overhaul. She was also convinced that the issues of academic failure, disconnection from school, and lack of job preparation and marketable skills needed to be central to any reform effort.

Based largely on Putter’s work, the Reintegration Initiative was officially launched in 2005. With the unique title of Cross-System Reintegration Coordinator, Putter reported to both DHS and the Philadelphia Probation Department. This was “an experiment in collaborative work and I was the link between the two organizations,” she says. With Putter at the hub, the Initiative worked to install the elements of a new aftercare system at all the facilities in the City that housed delinquent youth, with a particular focus on the



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six largest providers. These elements included focusing on reintegration as soon as a youth is placed in a residential facility; and academic and technical education and training that aligns with school and industry standards.

Putter managed the reintegration effort for nearly four years and is particularly proud of several accomplishments. For example, she considers the amount of collaboration achieved in the Initiative a major feat. Drawing on her past experiences at St. Gabe’s, Putter says she brought DHS service providers into the aftercare redesign process. Because of Putter’s link to both DHS and Probation, she was able to coax the providers and probation officers into working much more closely together to prepare youth for re-entry into the community and to support them at home. Finally, Putter says, the Initiative helped mend the broken communication between the school district, probation and DHS. “I developed a strong relationship with the leaders of alternative education at the Philadelphia School District and we began to focus together on improving the process of school re-entry. The collaboration between these agencies drew almost \$6 million from the Department of Labor to improve academic and career/technical training for disengaged kids, particularly those transitioning from detention back to school.” Putter recalls that because of the stronger relationships among institutions, “there was a change in perception about who was responsible for these kids, and a much broader sense that we were *all* responsible for them.”

Part of Putter’s work as manager of the Reintegration Initiative was to meet with the heads of Probation from the six counties in Pennsylvania that receive funding from the MacArthur Foundation’s Model Systems Aftercare Project—a national initiative designed to accelerate reform in juvenile justice systems across the country.



During the meetings, it became clear that Philadelphia and Allegheny, the two largest counties in the state, were facing similar issues in their aftercare reform efforts. Both were attempting to improve the transition from placement to community schools, while increasing the quality and quantity of education and training options for returning youth. At meetings, Putter kept raising the issues she was learning about through PYN. “I kept repeating, *‘if we want kids to be productive citizens and get jobs when they come back home they have to be trained for real jobs.’* The folks from Allegheny County were very interested in this issue. It seemed clear to me that we could use the leverage of the two largest counties in the state to impact how the probation system looks at these problems and try to impact how the other two big systems, DHS and the PA Department of Education (PDE), deal with these kids.” Putter says that Allegheny and Philadelphia counties had never worked together on these issues and initially, collaboration seemed unlikely. But she had been building *unlikely* coalitions throughout her working life and refused to give up. “We began talking about working together to solve joint problems. That is how PACTT was born.” Putter believes one reason PACTT got the support of top juvenile justice leaders is because the Initiative clearly reflects one of the three BARJ principles: *to provide delinquent juveniles with competencies that will help them be productive citizens.* “PACTT’s focus on education and employment fits right into BARJ.”

PACTT completed its first year of operation in June 2009. It expanded on the Reintegration Initiative to include nine residential facilities that house the majority of placed youth from Philadelphia and Allegheny County. PACTT not only seeks to improve education, training and transition services for youth in placement, but focuses on the systemic, regulatory and operational policies that keep key agencies from working together in the best interest of these young people. PACTT has an Advisory Board, which Putter says helps provide leadership in these areas. “All the key state, county and local players that need to be involved in changing aftercare are there,”

Putter says PACTT is recognized around the state as one of the most successful reforms undertaken by the Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers and cites a number of accomplishments to date. For example, all of the participating facilities have improved their academic programming, aligning curricula with PDE standards. PACTT is also working closely with neighborhood-based E3 (Education, Employment, Empowerment) Centers run by PYN in Philadelphia and with the counterpart agencies in Pittsburgh, to make sure youth transitioning home get the education and employment supports they need. Juvenile facilities have also revised their career and technical training programs to align with industry standards and all now offer entry-level certifications required by employers in high-demand areas. PACTT has completed “The Employability and Soft Skills Competencies Manual” that is being used in all the facilities to guide and standardize workforce preparation training. In a very promising development last summer, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (WIB) awarded PACTT 90 summer jobs for youth in residential facilities, 60 of which were in the facilities themselves. Several other local WIBs are following this example and the number of subsidized, facility-based jobs available to these youth is expected to increase considerably this year. This strategy allows many youth to have a valuable work experience in a protected environment. It also allows them

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to show actual positive history of work—a mark *for* them—when widespread criminal background checks in many industries are a mark *against* them. In recognition of this work and its potential, Putter has been appointed to the PA Council for the Workforce of Tomorrow and the Youth Council of the Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board.

Finally, Putter says, collaboration between facility schools and the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia School Districts has improved considerably. “For years, the failure of schools and facilities to exchange school records prevented young people from getting credit for work they had done in the facilities. This problem is finally being corrected in the two largest districts in the state, providing a template for others to follow.”

Because of these accomplishments, PACTT’s Advisory Board has asked Putter to begin expanding the Initiative’s scope of work to include the rest of the state’s probation departments and residential facilities. In addition, PACTT has been asked to include DPW-run juvenile justice facilities in its expansion. The PACTT model is also getting notice from other states. PACTT was identified as a promising practice in the recommendations made by the New York State Governor’s Task Force for Juvenile Justice Reform. Other jurisdictions are beginning to use the PACTT “soft skills” manual to help prepare their young people for work.

While Putter is excited about PACTT’s success and the attention the Initiative is receiving, she acknowledges that there are still significant challenges. For example, she says, all systems and institutions that work with detained youth and sit on the PACTT Advisory Board are not involved in the initiative to the same degree, which can

make implementation of reforms uneven. And while the cross-system collaboration Putter has pioneered in this project has had some success, she acknowledges that juvenile justice practitioners still rarely think to include the schools and the workforce world in programming unless they are prodded to. Further, to be fully effective, the reforms PACTT is implementing will require additional funding, and Putter says there is little or no funding available. She understands that while PACTT’s successes to date are significant, they will only lead to fundamental change if they are sustained over time and become institutionalized.

Putter has always tried to take lessons from her experiences. She’s quick to acknowledge what she has learned from working on PACTT and what the Stoneleigh fellowship means to her work. “I’ve learned to use my training as a family therapist when working with systems. Being a therapist is listening to what is being said underneath the words and trying to help people understand each other and see each others’ points of view, so they can at least begin to find common ground and move forward. That is the basis of collaborative work.” Putter says she has also learned to modify her goals based on what can be accomplished, and use her sense of humor to get through frustrating times instead of “beating her head against resistance.”

“As a lifelong head beater, that has been a hard lesson.” Regarding the role of Stoneleigh, Putter says the fellowship has given her the independence she needs to be effective. “Being independent has increased my ability to be flexible and increased my self-confidence as I establish an independent presence in the juvenile justice, education and workforce development worlds.”

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Ever since she was a young girl, Putter has worked to change institutions for the better. Sometimes the change has not always met her expectations, but she has learned to take the long view. Putter is hopeful about the ultimate impact of PACTT. “I think that when you work for systems change, things don’t always go as smoothly as you want, but if you are right and if you work with people in such a way that they feel included and they understand what is being done, change can occur. It may not happen in the way you thought it would and you might have even been wrong about how you thought it should happen, but fundamental, important change can happen over time, and I think that’s what is going to happen with PACTT.”

In spite of the road she has traveled and what she has achieved, Putter keeps things in perspective. “I don’t believe that true systems change can be dependent on any one individual, no matter how persistent or charismatic.” That may be true. But there are people all over the state of Pennsylvania who will tell you without hesitation that when it’s time to change a system, you want Candace Putter on *your* side.

Stoneleigh Foundation is a Philadelphia-based foundation established to help improve the well-being of children and youth. Focused on work that promotes change in our country’s youth-serving systems, we meet our mission through fellowship awards that support outstanding individuals whose work unites research, policy and practice.

Learn more about our Fellowship Program and other work at [www.stoneleighfoundation.org](http://www.stoneleighfoundation.org)

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