

THE LEAST OF THESE:

AMACHI AND THE CHILDREN OF PRISONERS



THOMAS J. SMITH
AFTERWORD BY W. WILSON GOODE, SR.

CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>THE ORIGINS</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>AMACHI IN PHILADELPHIA</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>EXPANSION</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>TEXAS: A CASE STUDY</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>SETTLING IN</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>REFLECTIONS</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>AFTERWORD—W. WILSON GOODE, SR.</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>ENDNOTES</u>	<u>22</u>

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

—Matthew 25:40

INTRODUCTION

There is no rule book for creating, implementing and sustaining a successful social intervention. Hundreds, if not thousands, of now-defunct social programs attest to this reality. These programs may have succeeded in identifying a social need, a cogent and sometimes creative way of meeting that need, and some capacity (both financial and operational) to launch the effort.

These are necessary elements—but not sufficient ones. The social policy field does not consistently recognize or reward good ideas. Success is often as much a product of unusual circumstances—confluence of the right time, the right idea and the right people—as it is a result of inherent program quality and effectiveness.

The Amachi program is a prime illustration of the unpredictable nature of success in the social policy arena. Its success resulted from a nearly unique blend of factors—Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), which had been studying the issue of relationships as a way of helping young people for almost two decades; the Pew Charitable Trusts’ interest in the potential of faith-based organizations to meet social needs; the well-known academic John DiIulio, who was looking for practical ways to put Pew’s interest into action; a source of stabilizing program knowledge (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America); and finally a leader, W. Wilson Goode, Sr., whose combination of personal contacts, managerial knowledge and experience, and dedication to the idea of Amachi was decisive in making the program a success locally, and later nationally.

Politics also played a role: the election of a president (in 2000) interested in faith-based initiatives; DiIulio’s role in steering the president’s attention to Amachi during its early days in Philadelphia; and the way that attention led to a sustained national focus (with federal program funding) on the target group Amachi was designed to serve: children of prisoners.

The interplay of these factors—along with good luck and good timing—is in many ways the core of the Amachi story, which is detailed in the pages that follow.

THE ORIGINS

In 1995, P/PV released *Making a Difference*, the first random assignment study that examined community-based mentoring's effects on young people. The report was something of a capstone for P/PV's seven-year involvement with the issue of relationships and their potential to affect the lives of youngsters. It was also a significant moment for Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, whose national office had signed on to the study—a risky decision if the study found no positive impacts. Instead, it showed that mentoring indeed had significant effects, including lowered rates of substance abuse, less fighting, better grades, and less missed school. These results put mentoring in the national spotlight, and sparked interest in mentoring as a social policy intervention.

Making a Difference also served as a beacon for work to come. A new policy area had begun to gain traction, involving the potential of faith-based organizations to have serious effects on social issues. Several national foundations, including the Ford Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts, had begun to explore whether and how faith-based organizations were uniquely suited to serve low-income populations in ways that differed from secular human-service providers.

A key actor in P/PV's evolving faith-based portfolio was John DiIulio. A noted scholar and a member of P/PV's board of directors since 1995, DiIulio had been focusing much of his research energies on high-risk youth, particularly their connection to the criminal justice system. He had also been an early advocate for the faith agenda, and initiated P/PV's early involvement with Boston's TenPoint Coalition. The exploratory work, after several pilot programs, led to the National Faith-Based Initiative, an effort to reach high-risk youth through faith organizations, a principal tool for which was mentoring.

DiIulio's research in criminal justice also made plain a related finding: that "get tough" crime policies pursued since the late 1980s—particularly mandatory sentences for felony drug offenses—had led to a large increase in the number of incarcerated adults. In turn, the number of children with incarcerated parents had also soared: By the late 1990s, about 2 million children had a father or mother in prison. And evidence suggested that children of prisoners had a higher likelihood of eventual criminal involvement than their peers. Yet these children scarcely registered on the social policy radar.

DiIulio, who was consciously looking to develop a program that might demonstrate the potential of the faith-based community, and that would also serve a clearly needy target group, saw the germ of an idea. Let church members serve as mentors to children of prisoners.

His programmatic thinking was in part shaped by a broader political calculus. He reasoned that a program combining a faith element with a more secularly rooted activity (mentoring children) would have decent prospects of attracting funding—particularly funding beyond the limited scope foundation dollars seemed to offer.

And DiIulio had in fact already made some intriguing political connections. In 1999, he had become an informal adviser to the nascent presidential campaign of George W. Bush, and had sparked Bush's interest in the idea of children of prisoners as worthy recipients of "compassionate conservatism." So the initial idea had "play" in several potential venues: at P/PV, the intermediary organization exploring ways to test the potential of faith-based organizations; at the Pew Charitable Trusts, the key sponsor likewise seeking to develop a faith-based agenda; and in the thinking of George W. Bush, who was to become president in 2000.

To convert the idea into an operating reality, DiIulio had first turned to the Prison Fellowship (PF), an organization founded in 1976 by Charles Colson following his imprisonment in connection with the Watergate scandal. (DiIulio was a member of its board.) PF, a Christian-focused nonprofit whose mission is "to seek the transformation of prisoners and their reconciliation to God, family, and community through the power and truth of Jesus Christ," provides support to families of prisoners, inmates returning from imprisonment, and inmates within prisons themselves.

DiIulio was attracted by one specific PF program: Angel Tree, which provided support and Christmas gifts to numerous children of prisoners. In particular, the Angel Tree program held an important key: an extensive national list of children of prisoners, which would simplify establishing a program in Philadelphia—and eventually, perhaps, elsewhere.

The secular base DiIulio identified was Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), the national, privately funded membership organization, whose member agencies had operated for more than 80 years.¹ He envisioned a partnership with BBBSA and PF, with the former providing the practical knowledge and management experience creating and sustaining mentoring relationships, the latter the faith connection. The new program even had a name—Evergreen, a play on the existing Angel Tree concept.

In March 2000, thinking that the new initiative—at this point being planned and shepherded by DiIulio and P/PV staff—could use a more visible faith presence, DiIulio reached out to W. Wilson Goode, Sr., to be a senior adviser. Goode was an ideal choice on many counts—particularly for the start-up phase in Philadelphia. He was the city's first African American mayor and had served for eight years (1984–1992), making him a well-known public figure. He also brought extensive management skills to the program, having previously served as the city's managing director. Finally, he was a recently ordained minister and had natural entrée into Philadelphia's large community of African American churches.

At just about the time of Goode's arrival, negotiations with PF hit a dead end for several reasons. P/PV's emphasis on how carefully and rigorously the program should be designed and managed differed considerably from PF's more faith-centered (and less programmatic) philosophy of service. Issues about whose program it would be also arose. As the intermediary, P/PV judged that program solidity should be the highest priority, even if this meant losing access to PF's list of children.

While breaking from PF required the initiative's other partners to stop and retool, the basic idea remained. In fact, Goode believed that the program could be launched with several hundred mentoring pairs within a year, and wanted to assume a much broader role than just that of an adviser—a change that P/PV staff and DiIulio welcomed. While searching for naming ideas, a staff member came upon the word “Amachi”—which comes from the Nigerian Ibo language and means “Who knows but what God has brought us through this child.”

Amachi was born. Its first iteration in Philadelphia would have these characteristics:


- Its target group would be children of prisoners.
- The mentoring would be one-to-one (as opposed to group mentoring).
- The mentors would be recruited through churches in Philadelphia.
- Mentors would be expected to meet with their paired children for one hour weekly or two hours twice each month.
- The screening, matching and support for mentoring relationships would be managed by Philadelphia BBBS.²

The program's funding would come from the Pew Charitable Trusts, which had tasked P/PV with designing and implementing local programs that tapped the potential and capacities of faith communities. Its managing organization would be P/PV. And its official partner would be BBBSA.

And it had a slogan: *People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise.*

The practical task of bringing Amachi to life fell to Goode, who proceeded, with directness and considerable energy, to accomplish this goal.

AMACHI IN PHILADELPHIA

f the three major tasks Amachi faced during its initial launch—identifying the children; recruiting the mentors; and handling the screening, matching and support—the last seemed the clearest and least challenging, given that Philadelphia BBBS would bring its expertise to bear. In the short term, however, this task proved the most difficult to achieve.

To identify the children of prisoners, Goode went directly to the source: the prisoners themselves. As a former mayor and managing director of the city, he knew the administrators of the Philadelphia Prison System and knew how the prisons were organized. He approached the prison managers, and through them enlisted the prison chaplains to bring together groups of prisoners to hear his appeal.

He found that the prisoners' enthusiasm was often tempered with caution. Many asked: Was the Amachi mentor going to replace the incarcerated parent? How much would the "other" parent be involved? What about the child's caretaker (often grandparents)? Who would sign permission forms? Despite the questions, Goode's intensive focus on the children themselves—especially in the women's prisons—was persuasive. He began to accumulate information about the potential Amachi children.

Goode's first and broader concern, though, was to have the mentors ready. Again he took the direct path and visited churches and their pastors in Philadelphia, eventually reaching out to more than 40 in 4 areas of the city. From each he sought to recruit 10 mentors, for a total of 400. He emphasized the need for volunteers who could commit to a full year—as a prematurely ended match could be yet another disappointment to the children.

His approach reflected practical knowledge of the African American church community. Patience and persistence were essential tools for reaching church leaders, especially in smaller churches. While many pastors were willing to participate, their time was often far too thinly stretched to spearhead a significant recruitment process. To address this need, Goode set up funding for a part-time position—a church volunteer coordinator. This individual would be trained to identify volunteers and shepherd them through the screening and matching stages. Goode also established a management structure: Each of the four "regions" of the city would have a manager who worked directly with the church volunteer coordinator.

When Goode's energies began to produce results, he turned to Philadelphia BBBS to provide logistical and management support. But the fruits of his efforts—he was nearing both 400 identified mentors and 400 children—far exceeded Philadelphia BBBS' capacity.

Like many of the other BBBSA affiliates, Philadelphia BBBS was a small organization. Its "flow" of mentoring relationships was fairly modest. (In 2000, it had created only about 150 new matches.) Operationally, the agency maintained waiting lists of children referred by parents or guardians and worked to identify volunteers with whom they could be paired. It was a one-by-one operation: Children were referred individually; mentors were generally recruited individually.

What Goode had produced was different—a large influx of both children and mentors that the Philadelphia BBBS was unable to deal with effectively. Thankfully, support came from BBBSA's headquarters (also located in Philadelphia), which loaned staff and management help to begin matching youth with mentors. By mid-2001, Goode had surprised Amachi's creators, who had thought 100 matches would constitute success. Instead, 400 matches had been made (a figure that would rise to more than 500 by the following year).

That success was important in a far larger way. Early in 2001, John DiIulio had been tapped by incoming president George W. Bush to head a new federal agency: the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. This was hardly surprising since DiIulio, who had advised the future president, had promoted the idea of harnessing the faith community and had planted the idea of children of prisoners as a deserving target group. At DiIulio's suggestion, Bush visited one of the sponsoring churches in Philadelphia on July 4. He was impressed by the mentors and children, and Amachi's leader, W. Wilson Goode, Sr. Bush carried back to Washington the notion that Amachi provided a living example of a faith-based program that met an important (if hitherto hardly acknowledged) need, and that fit well with his espoused idea of compassionate conservatism.

EXPANSION

The initial growth of Amachi beyond Philadelphia was modest—to nearby Chester and, at the invitation of New York funders, to a collection of churches in Brooklyn. But the president’s 2001 visit to Philadelphia provided the impetus for expansion that DiIulio had envisioned when he first joined the White House:

Tonight I ask Congress and the American people to focus the spirit of service and the resources of government on the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens: boys and girls trying to grow up without guidance and attention, and children who have to go through a prison gate to be hugged by their mom or dad.

—George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 28, 2003

Bush’s State of the Union Address gave recognition to children of prisoners as a group that needed assistance. Government, the president added, “will support the training and recruiting of mentors, yet it is the men and women of America who will fill the need.”

The State of the Union commitment was fulfilled. Later in 2003, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) committed nearly \$9 million to support 52 programs that provided mentors to children of prisoners. Congress established the Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) program as part of other legislation passed that year.³ At a public announcement of the new program, the president also set an ambitious goal: to mentor 100,000 children of prisoners by 2006. The funding was to be \$100 million annually, but was later cut to about \$50 million, where it remained.⁴

The policy lights came on. The Child Welfare League of America began to undertake work that acknowledged the unique needs of children of prisoners; a flurry of old and new agencies gravitated to the new funding and program opportunity. MCP could provide grants to states and faith- and community-based organizations to provide mentoring services to children of prisoners. HHS officials visited a number of programs—including Amachi—to guide them in developing standards for proposal requests and for monitoring.

For BBBS agencies, the funding opportunity was a close match—but not a perfect one. Certainly—unlike most faith- or community-based agencies—they could tout their program model, which had scientifically valid evidence of its effectiveness. However, most shared some of the limitations, in scale and management expertise, that Philadelphia BBBS

had experienced and had been working through, with assistance. Philadelphia BBBS, with new leadership, had seized on Amachi as an impetus to provide service at a new level. (It was “a transformative experience for us,” one local leader explained.)

Besides expanded management reach, mentoring children of prisoners meant some basic changes in operating style. In the past, BBBS agencies typically did not have to recruit children; parents or guardians came to them, asking for a mentor to be provided for a child. While some of the children BBBS naturally served had an incarcerated parent, MCP required deliberate outreach to this group. This change meant that BBBS would have to actively recruit mentors (the traditional and well-understood role) as well as mentees. However, most agencies lacked the necessary experience with reaching out to imprisoned parents they would need to successfully engage these children.

Luckily, the Philadelphia Amachi program was now positioned to provide a model for BBBS agencies interested in seeking MCP funding. Goode, who had been closely involved in designing the federal program, knew that BBBS agencies would need to be recruited directly and that they would need help devising new programs.

The meeting of BBBSA’s Large Agency Alliance (a subset of the overall national membership) in 2003 provided a key opportunity for Goode to win support from agencies nationwide. He addressed the meeting by eloquently describing the needs of the children of incarcerated parents—and revealed that he himself had had an incarcerated parent. He entreated the agencies represented to take up the cause. Moved by the personal and inspirational nature of the speech, the agencies followed suit.

In the six months following the meeting, Goode visited more than a dozen BBBS programs in medium-to-large cities. During the visits, he described the program and met with local officials and ministers; he also addressed the national BBBS conference.

During that year, P/PV was designated an AmeriCorps National Program, which came with an allotment of VISTA volunteers who could be assigned to support individual mentoring programs nationwide. The VISTA volunteers gave P/PV the additional capacity needed to provide wider support to the Amachi replication effort.

At the same time, Amachi developed and began offering a standardized training in Philadelphia, called the Amachi Training Institute (ATI). During each five-hour ATI session, programs focused on understanding the Amachi model, how to identify church mentors and how to find potential mentees. Many ATI sessions included a visit to the Philadelphia Riverside prison.

The members of BBBSA’s Large Agency Alliance were fully energized. Goode’s presence and consistent encouragement played an important role in their decision to wade into mentoring children of prisoners. By the time the first large round of HHS funding became available, many BBBS agencies had assimilated the Amachi model, began to style their children-of-prisoners programs as “Amachi” initiatives, and began applying to HHS for funding.

The ATI, meanwhile, became a resource to many non-BBBS agencies looking to implement mentoring programs for children of prisoners. Catholic Charities affiliates,

individual faith organizations from across the country, and state correctional institutions all sent representatives to the ATI to learn how the program worked and how it could be implemented in a variety of settings. HHS funded a complementary organization—Dare Mighty Things—to provide technical support and added training to the growing network of MCP programs HHS was funding.

The Amachi model grew into a kind of practice standard for the increasing numbers of organizations interested in mentoring children of prisoners. And Amachi's growth continued as federal funding kept flowing: Agencies ranging from faith- and community-based organizations to BBBS affiliates to public agencies (e.g., county youth and family service agencies, corrections agencies) were all implementing the model. A number of the programs even took the Amachi name: Amachi Pittsburgh; RSVP/Amachi (North Dakota); and a small Chicago program simply called Amachi.

Foundation support for the new initiative appeared, both regional (for programs in individual cities) and national (with the Annie E. Casey Foundation becoming a major funder in 2006). In many cases, local mentoring-children-of-prisoners programs leveraged local funding to supplement what they received from HHS; in a few instances, the programs existed without the federal dollars altogether.


Goode's attention was turning to ways of solidifying support for mentoring-children-of-prisoners programs. He received a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to provide training (through the ATI) and to encourage states to create dedicated funding for mentoring-children-of-prisoners programs. Eventually, this effort would lead to commitments from some 20 states.

By 2008, due in large part to Goode's untiring efforts on behalf of Amachi, and his broader advocacy for children of prisoners, HHS estimated that some 100,000 children had been served by the more than 200 organizations receiving MCP funding. By then, Goode had visited 42 states and Washington, DC, and more than 160 MCP programs (including 109 of the BBBS agencies). More than 3,000 staff had attended some 120 ATI sessions, representing 47 states, 537 cities and almost 900 separate organizations. Local governments and private organizations were providing funds to supplement the HHS grants.

By 2010, the Amachi effort had grown still further—to more than 1,000 organizations and nearly 3,600 attendees at ATI. A 2009 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) initiative known as the National Mentoring Coalition funded P/PV and Dare Mighty Things to provide structured technical assistance to the network of programs being funded by HHS. Amachi also worked to establish partnerships in states where statewide agency coalitions were being formed—to help them widen their reach while maintaining service quality.

The network of MCP programs—and BBBS agencies in particular—that sprang up in response to the combination of federal funding and Goode's work of persuasion on the road has remained in place, even with the loss of the HHS funding in 2010. Some of these programs are substantial, such as those in Atlanta and Minneapolis. In Texas, as the next section shows, Amachi's history and results have proved outsized, like the state itself.

TEXAS: A CASE STUDY

harles Pearson, president of North Texas BBBS (a then recent merger of three smaller BBBS agencies), returned from the 2003 Large Agency Alliance meeting inspired to start an Amachi program. He teamed with other BBBS agencies to form a group that received HHS MCP funding.

North Texas BBBS invited Goode to speak to a variety of community leaders and the media, including newspaper editors and two radio talk shows. He was taken to the federal women's prison in Fort Worth, where he spoke to a group of inmates and collected the names of 200 children.⁵ Goode left Texas invigorated; he was brought back as adviser and motivator several times.

Quickly, Goode and the first small group of funded BBBS agencies in Texas were planning for a more ambitious task: how to take the Amachi model statewide. Meeting that challenge would require two things: more funding and more organizational infrastructure. The first was addressed in good part by a senior North Texas BBBS staff member who had run unsuccessfully for Congress but had established a fairly rich network of political contacts. She enlisted her former campaign coordinator (who had previously worked in the governor's office) to help gain the support of legislators in Austin, the state capital, and to reach the governor personally.

The effort paid dividends: Governor Rick Perry earmarked \$300,000 for Amachi in 2006, which helped fund a statewide Amachi network. In 2007, the state legislature provided a two-year grant of \$500,000 for the program, and renewed the grant in 2009. Along with HHS funding, North Texas had the resources to build its network and expand its services.

For management and monitoring help, North Texas BBBS contacted the national BBBS office for assistance with instituting new systems. Agency match records were reviewed and used as the basis for establishing targets for each individual agency and for the statewide effort as a whole. Rather than providing agencies with direct grants, they were reimbursed on a per-match basis.⁶ Each agency had both quarterly as well as annual targets, and all were closely monitored.

While these new systems represented good management practice, they had an important secondary purpose: to convince the legislature that its investment in Amachi

was worthwhile. The annual report BBBS provided to the legislature provided not only numbers served but also information gathered in local surveys of mentees regarding school performance and involvement in the criminal justice system.

From 2008 to 2011, ICF International, a research consulting firm, undertook an 18-month randomized control evaluation of Amachi programs, drawing on matches in Lone Star, San Antonio and Austin. A relatively small sample size ($n = 222$) and significant attrition meant that findings from the later stages of the study were far less robust; and the Texas-based survey meant that the results could not be generalized to Amachi programs nationwide. The six-month findings, however, do show statistically significant effects on a number of social characteristics of the Amachi children. In particular, those children are:

- More likely than controls to report a positive caring relationship with family members
- More likely than controls to report positive feelings about themselves
- More likely than controls to have a positive attitude about the future

Some of the study's results were less encouraging: The short-term findings showed no difference in attitudes toward school, perceived academic competence and disciplinary issues. This may reflect in part the difficulty in maintaining an adequate sample size among a highly mobile group of young people.⁷

It is notable, however, that even in a study of relatively modest scale, statistically significant effects could be detected during the first six months of the mentoring relationship. This constituted a small but worthy addition to the field's knowledge about the effectiveness of programs that serve children of prisoners.

As the statewide infrastructure of the Amachi Texas program grew, so too—through a series of mergers—did North Texas BBBS. By 2010, the entity had been renamed Lone Star BBBS, and it is now the largest BBBS affiliate in the country. Lone Star BBBS also operates Amachi Texas—the single largest Amachi program in the U.S, serving more than 1,800 children annually at its peak.

SETTLING IN

The Texas experience was a kind of high-water mark both for Amachi and for mentoring-children-of-prisoners programs generally. But the story after 2009 paralleled that of the broader national economy, which was far from rosy. The recession made fundraising difficult, and public support began to shrink. The Texas programs saw their state funding halved in 2010, and further reduced the following year.

At the national level, the HHS MCP program was halted, somewhat unexpectedly, in 2010. It was a setback for larger BBBS agencies, which relied on this funding to support their efforts to identify children of prisoners (always a time-intensive task) and match them with volunteers.

For smaller agencies of all kinds, the effects of the program's termination were harsher: For many, the HHS funding had supported operations across a variety of mentoring programs. Their experience was altogether typical of the accordion-like nature of much public funding, though a harder blow in view of the national recession. Worst of all, the funding cuts slowed the momentum that had been building for programs to mentor children of incarcerated parents.

Still, Amachi's accomplishments were considerable: 100,000 children of prisoners matched by 2008, with additions (though not well documented) through 2010 and 2011. If mentoring children of prisoners slid somewhat as a goal for many BBBS agencies, it nonetheless remained a visible focus, with the Amachi name prominent in many cities. In addition, a number of states (alongside Texas) have set up statewide partnerships to mentor children of prisoners.

But while the number served is impressive, greater scale was accompanied, to some degree, by a loss of quality. HHS funds were driven by numbers—with the publicly announced 100,000 match goal driving the effort. Amachi was but one approach among many put forward by a diverse spectrum of faith- and community-based organizations. Inevitably, as with any rapid program expansion (especially one funded by the federal government, which routinely lacks the resources to carefully monitor local activities), quality suffered.

For the federally funded MCP programs, the reduced oversight often led to fewer mentor-mentee contacts and a shorter duration of mentoring relationships.⁸ For Amachi-named programs, it often meant an added limitation. One facet of the original Amachi model (recruitment of mentors from faith organizations) typically faded as programs—BBBS or otherwise—sought to meet numerical goals. The effort to identify the children—a new function for many BBBS agencies—was itself considerable. Adding to that, the (not always straightforward) task of establishing relationships and operational arrangements with local faith leaders stretched resources too thin. And the numerical “yield” of mentors recruited that way did not always match the numbers of volunteers that agencies could enlist by more traditional means.

Yet Amachi, as an informal brand name for programs that mentor children of prisoners, has gained much currency. To be sure, in many cases Amachi-named programs do not encompass all elements of the original program. And since the HHS funding came to an end, most mentoring-children-of-prisoners programs are relatively small.⁹

Amachi will continue to exist as a freestanding organization, spinning off from Public/Private Ventures as a separate 501(c)(3). This new nonprofit will continue to provide training, technical assistance and pass-through funding for Amachi programs. Children of prisoners will remain a visible and discrete target for its mentoring efforts.

REFLECTIONS

Indeed, the most significant accomplishment of Amachi has been the wide recognition of the importance of children of prisoners as a target group, one for which mentoring is a constructive response—especially if the Texas research results are any indication.

The plight and prospects of these children might have been documented in academic circles and otherwise gone unnoticed if not for the research John DiIulio began conducting more than a decade ago. DiIulio's varied roles—as respected academic, board member (and adviser) at P/PV, board member at the Prison Fellowship—and his strategic instincts enabled the move from research finding to solid program idea. His political connections with an incoming national administration provided the means to elevate children of prisoners onto a higher plane, in terms of both funding and visibility.¹⁰

On the programmatic side, DiIulio relied on the intermediary role played by P/PV. The organization had strong background in thinking through program design and feasibility; research capability and awareness; extensive experience with mentoring and mentoring organizations; an understanding of the importance of strong management in agency programs; and (in 2000) growing knowledge of how to work successfully with the faith community. In particular, Joseph Tierney, then a senior staff member at P/PV, played a critical role: as planner, coordinator and to some degree a foil for DiIulio in pushing forward the thinking and generation of ideas.

P/PV functioned as the social entrepreneur in the creation of Amachi. To begin with, it knew how to enlist outside expertise for its work in timely and effective ways. (Its recruitment of DiIulio is a prime example.) Its relationship with funders, the connection with BBBSA, and the ability to broker connections, reach out to a needed leader (Goode), and even make the difficult decision to sever formal ties with the Prison Fellowship and build a different kind of program exemplified the intermediary role.

In Amachi, P/PV followed the “classic” role of program innovator: Design a well-formed program, pilot it, determine its viability, and then promote replication. The pilot was not studied in a way that would yield definitive evidence of its impacts, but it did show that the program could indeed be effectively implemented. Antecedent evidence of mentoring's effects and necessary program practices (the 1995 BBBSA impact study) would serve as the measure of success.

Amachi was, in spirit and frequently in operation, a faith-based program; it thus had appeal at its inception to the private funding source (the Pew Charitable Trusts) that launched it. But it also had (through the BBBSA connection) a strong secular anchor. Recruitment of volunteers through churches would be an emblematic feature of the program, but there was also a solid management infrastructure—screening, matching, monitoring of matches—that was essential to maintaining the program’s integrity and quality.

Mentoring, the “treatment” core of Amachi, was and is a popular social intervention on a number of fronts—all of which helped make mentoring-children-of-prisoners programs a public policy goal with which a conservative Republican president could feel comfortable and even enthusiastic. It was local. It involved the efforts of volunteers. It was relatively inexpensive. It did not require much public bureaucracy. And—as P/PV’s research had determined—mentoring produced detectable results.

The “compassionate conservatism” slogan and the new administration’s interest in faith-based programming made Philadelphia Amachi, in 2001, an ideal and timely exemplar of low-cost, high-effectiveness caring. The president’s visit on July 4, 2001, was obviously no accident; it served multiple interests in the short term, and became a stepping-stone to the elevated visibility that children of prisoners would achieve.

Amachi in Philadelphia had a pivotal effect on how mentoring programs in general, and those for children with incarcerated parents in particular, could be operated at scale. The Philadelphia BBBS, until 2001 a small organization with fairly unsophisticated management structures, was compelled to become, almost overnight, a stronger agency with management systems that could be “scalable”—that is, able to handle more matches and greater demand. It had to learn how to recruit children, not previously a needed capability, and how to work more effectively with faith organizations.

In some respects, then, Amachi was not just a pilot in its own right: It became a template for other BBBS agencies that were, with the urging of the national office, beginning to look for ways to expand their operations and reach more children in their communities. And if Amachi’s expansion was, in the end, not a pure replication (in the social science sense), it did become something equally valuable: a compelling program idea, anchored by established and generally replicable practice.

As more agencies adopted (or adapted) the Amachi model—with the advocacy and training support available through Goode’s Philadelphia operation—they too had to learn how to recruit the children and tap the potential for volunteers offered by the faith community. The national BBBSA office, which had increasingly been working to support the ability of its affiliates to expand and grow, was able (beginning in 2003) to offer its affiliates a uniform service-delivery system, which codified many of the ad hoc practices of individual affiliates into a consistent package. This allowed many of these agencies to respond effectively as MCP funding became available.

Much of this activity might have proceeded more slowly and fitfully if it were not for the work of W. Wilson Goode, Sr. He was indispensable to the success of Amachi and, in many respects, to that of the federal Mentoring Children of Prisoners program as well. He breathed life into the Philadelphia program when it had reached a stopping point by

a combination of wholehearted dedication, relentless energy and a personal willingness to travel to visit prisons and faith institutions. In each setting, his fervor (and, in truth, his evangelism) sparked enthusiasm, cooperation, commitment and effort.

With his orator's skill and dedication to his cause, Goode brought the extensive experience of a longtime public manager. He could engage and persuade but also take a pragmatic view of how a program like Amachi would change as it grew larger. He could, for example, recognize and promote the benefit of recruitment outside the faith community, under the Amachi banner, if it helped more children get the services they needed.

This rare combination of skills and capacities meant he could galvanize an audience to action when needed, and give thoughtful advice to local agencies on how best to do their work. Certainly in Philadelphia, his role as champion, advocate and organizer was essential. Those abilities, as the program developed, were equally effective in other venues as well.

National expansion only enlarged the stage on which the former mayor could work. He met, in city after city, with public officials, agency directors, ministers, and business and civic leaders. His message was not that funds were available. His message was that the children of prisoners were a too-long-ignored population that deserved help and support from whatever source could be found. Amachi was the standard he could raise to show how those children could be helped.

In his own presentations, he might very much have embodied the "faith-based" element of Amachi, but his concern in the end was secular: to expand programs for the children. Yet the catchphrase remains: *People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise*. And the meaning of the word "Amachi" ("Who knows but what God has brought us through this child") makes the faith connection more explicit.

Many of the more than 200 named Amachi programs may not recruit exclusively in faith organizations, but (as one staff person pointed out) volunteers who come forward to mentor are quite likely to have their own faith-based connection. The faith dimension of Amachi remains—no matter how "secular" its varied program settings—as part of the history and the nature of its accomplishments.

AFTERWORD

BY W. WILSON GOODE, SR.

The last 12 years have been a journey. I put my energy and creative leadership into an effort to rescue children and prisoners. From the very first conversation I had with John DiIulio about children of prisoners, I have been inspired by the opportunities this presented. For in a real sense I saw myself in all of these children. I, too, am the son of an incarcerated parent.

In a spiritual sense, I have felt an obligation to work on behalf of this invisible population: the children of inmates. And I believe the route of my earlier journey—in public service as chairman of the Public Utility Commission, managing director of the City of Philadelphia and then a two-term mayor—prepared me to lead Amachi to success.

This journey has also been like a dream. I know it happened, but I can't quite explain how it was done. I did not start out to create a national program; I just wanted to help a few thousand children over a few years to stay out of jail. I wanted to demonstrate that parents in prison for the most part loved their children and wanted the best for them. I wanted to prove that if one adult mentored one child, for one hour, once a week for at least one year, we could change the outcome for that child. I wanted to demonstrate that people of faith could add value to the lives of these children.

But sometimes the journey we set out on takes unexpected and positive turns. And this is precisely what happened with me and Amachi. All I really wanted to do was to help these children. So I spent 12- to 14-hour days, 7 days per week, in the first two years to ensure that we succeeded in Philadelphia. But along the way, I learned a valuable lesson: These are lives, and when a problem is so compelling, the mere description of that problem will bring a large and passionate response.

And that is precisely what happened at the Large Agency Alliance meeting of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) in Denver, Colorado, in 2003. It reminded me of an old-time revival in the country church that I grew up attending. I know I had a written speech, but I do not recall reading it, nor do I recall every one of the words I spoke on that day. Yet before I knew it, people were openly crying and walking up and hugging me. Some were unable to speak, and all of them seemed visibly moved by my words. All seemed to want to go back and do something. I knew, then, that Amachi was something more than a little program in four sections of Philadelphia. I knew then that it would be a national movement.

This was confirmed a year later when I was invited to be the keynote speaker at the First Annual Mentoring Children of Prisoners Grantees meeting. I reviewed the history of

Amachi and the critical plight of children of prisoners. I challenged the grantees to meet the children where they were, and told them they had an obligation to help these children succeed and avoid prison.

The message resounded deeply, and they were prepared for the closing of the speech. I told them they were like the priests who were with Joshua when they were about to leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land. The priests (grantees) were told to proceed through the Jordan River, even though it was flood season and, in spots, the river was 40-feet deep. But God told the priests that as soon as their feet touched the water, he would stop its flow and they could safely leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land.

But the priests did not first enter the Promised Land. They stood flat-footed in the riverbed (on the floor of the Jordan River) until all of the children had left the wilderness and entered the Promised Land. So, I raised the question: Is there anyone here who will stand with me symbolically in the riverbed, until all the children of inmates can enter their Promised Land? Dozens of people started coming one at a time until everyone in the room had left their seats, cheering, crying and affirming these children by their actions.

This became known as the “Riverbed Speech,” and it was repeated over and over again by recruiting volunteers. I would visit prisons to talk to the incarcerated parents, especially mothers, and I would always start every speech to these parents with these words: “I am here on behalf of your children. I am here to represent them because they cannot come here to represent themselves. I am here to advocate for them.” Parents had an overwhelming response to this message, and about 200,000 children were ultimately recruited.

And indeed, Amachi became a national movement that would take me into more than 120 cities in 42 states, while visiting 131 prisons in 41 states. During this time, I logged more than 500,000 frequent flyer miles. I spoke at annual meetings and fundraising events for the national BBBS organization. I spoke at meetings for various agencies to help them raise money.

Each speech at a fundraising event or annual meeting would start with: “I went to a prison, and I saw in that prison a grandfather, a father and a grandson—all in the same prison at the same time. They met for the first time in prison. As I was leaving, the grandson pulled me aside and said, ‘I have a son that I have never seen. Do you think I will see him for the first time in here?’” I would remind them of the coincidence that it was possible to have four generations of the same family in prison at the same time. I would conclude my speech with the riverbed analogy.

As the Amachi work took me from city to city, I felt I was on a spiritual journey. I felt I was in complete harmony with God’s calling in this season of my life. I felt everything I had ever done prepared me for this moment. So, what do I make of all this? Lives have been changed forever, including mine. Systems have been transformed, and a group of children who were invisible are on the public agenda in every state. The name Amachi is uttered with pride from the lips of federal officials, governors, mayors, mega-church pastors, BBBS agencies, incarcerated parents and their children. An idea from the brain of John DiIulio has borne fruit and transformed the lives of millions of children.

The Amachi program, first established in 42 Philadelphia congregations, has now been brought to scale in institutions in every state of the nation. So what's next? The Amachi program (now Amachi, Inc.) is evolving still. It is in the hearts and souls of millions of children across the country—though, for now, an important source of federal program funds for children of prisoners has disappeared.

Still, there are support opportunities with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which is providing funding to expand statewide efforts on behalf of these children. And now, resources from the Department of Defense are being used to extend the work to children of families with parents on deployment.

Many states and cities will continue their work using local funding. Some of the agencies will use private dollars to fund their ongoing services to at-risk children. Amachi, Inc., continues to raise money so that these children will never again be forgotten.

So, I will continue to stand in the riverbed until all children of prisoners have left their wilderness experience and crossed safely into their Promised Land. To achieve this, I will remain a passionate advocate for these once invisible children. I am convinced that we can provide them hope and support so that, when someone asks, "How are the children?" the response will be, "The children are well."

ENDNOTES

1. Interestingly, Big Brothers—the original 1914 manifestation of the program—had come about as a forum for keeping juveniles out of prison by offering an adult mentor to guide them.
2. Through a series of mergers, Philadelphia BBBS eventually became BBBS of Southeastern Pennsylvania (BBBS SEPA).
3. The program was reauthorized in 2006, but as part of different legislation—perhaps an early indicator of its uncertain future.
4. The largest annual outlay appears to have been about \$37 million; and though the total amount of grant funding has been publicly reported at \$150 million, actual outlays through 2010 were about \$130 million.
5. Of course, many were not local, and only about 25 of the names were of children in the North Texas BBBS service area.
6. The amount was \$1,500 per match, a kind of industry cost standard for one-to-one matches among mentoring programs nationally.
7. Exploratory studies of the later-stage data suggest possible improvements on some of the academic indicators over time. And one 18-month finding shows a statistically significant improvement in Amachi children's ability to make new friends—where there was no difference at 6 months.
8. HHS guidelines required mentors to spend at least one hour per week with a child for a period of at least one year.
9. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania, for instance, reports a significant reduction in the numbers of these children it can generate the resources to serve.
10. Interestingly, the 2012 Miss America, Laura Kaeppler, has taken up the cause of children of prisoners, revealing that she has a parent who was previously incarcerated and now mentoring a child with whom she had been matched by Amachi Pittsburgh.