



Photo credit: Charles Eshelman

DAVID TOBIS, PhD, is currently a principal of Maestral International and was the Executive Director of the Child Welfare Fund. For more than three decades, he has worked to reform child welfare in New York and the United States. Beginning in 1991, he worked as a consultant to UNICEF and the World Bank to prevent children, the disabled and the elderly from being placed in long-term residential institutions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. More recently, he has worked with UNICEF and various foundations to strengthen child protection systems in countries throughout the world. He was previously Director of Human Services for the New York City Council President, a Fulbright scholar to Guatemala, and a Revson Fellow at Columbia University. He graduated from Williams College and received a PhD in sociology from Yale University.

“This labor of love draws on the author’s decades of commitment to the cause of children and their families in New York. Tobis nails the argument that— unless they are in extreme danger—children do better with their families than they do in care. Yet the New York child welfare system is, as he sees it, geared towards social control and its own processes, rather than the rights and needs of children and their families. This is a book that speaks truth to power, through the voices of parents who have found the courage to take on the system and have emerged victorious.” —CAROL BELLAMY, ESQ, CHAIR, GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION; FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNICEF

“Cities across the country are struggling to improve the way our families are treated. Tobis’s book, *From Pariahs to Partners*, presents the powerful and moving story of how parents collaborated with New York City’s government to overhaul its child welfare system. The system has improved dramatically as a result. The book presents a lesson for parents and governments everywhere.” —CORY BOOKER, JD, MAYOR OF NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

“The courage and resilience of parents, especially those besieged by poverty and other stresses, are often ignored and misunderstood. *From Pariahs to Partners* shows parents’ potential for promoting real and sustained reform in child welfare and in mental health, juvenile justice, and other child-serving systems. Parents must be engaged in decisions about their children and empowered as advocates for system reforms. I hope we will embrace this book’s call to do so.” —MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, PRESIDENT, CHILDREN’S DEFENSE FUND

“David Tobis’s book takes a long, hard look at the history of child welfare in New York City. What he describes is not always pretty. But what is most encouraging is his portrait of the progress made in the last ten years, especially through greater involvement of parents in the system and in their children’s lives. May the progress continue.” —JOHN MATTINGLY, PhD, FORMER COMMISSIONER, THE NYC ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES

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TOBIS

FROM PARIAHHS
TO PARTNERS

FROM PARIAHHS TO PARTNERS

HOW PARENTS AND THEIR ALLIES
CHANGED NEW YORK CITY’S
CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

DAVID TOBIS

OXFORD

IN THE EARLY 1990s, almost 50,000 children were in New York City’s foster care system. In 2012 there were fewer than 14,000. David Tobis shows how such radical change was driven largely by a movement of mothers whose children had been placed into foster care, who fought to become advocates and stakeholders in a system that had previously viewed them as pariahs. *From Pariahs to Partners* tells the story of the individual parents—most of them women, many of them black or Latina, and all of them poor—who persevered over domestic violence, drug addiction, homelessness and poverty to fight for their rights and for their children, and who, in the process, shifted the dynamics of the foster care system. This book serves as an example of how advocates and their allies can change a system, as told from the perspective of key figures, change agents, and the parent advocates themselves.