



STATES LEADING THE WAY

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS THAT LIFT UP CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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 **ASCEND**
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Ascend at the Aspen Institute launched with the bold vision of an America where a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next. Today, as the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that help children and the adults in their lives reach their full potential, we are pleased to provide you with detailed insights, innovations, and models taking place in states to advance whole family success and well-being. The growing state momentum is fueled by a modern, deliberate two-generation approach that addresses the needs and strengths of children and parents together – to produce more effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes for children and families – especially those with low incomes. The field is rapidly advancing, and families are finding hope as public systems and services are recognizing the importance of whole-family outcomes. Scalable and replicable solutions exist and are expanding. A new network of diverse, cross-sector leaders is driving this exciting transformation of health and human services to put children and families at the center.

We have spent the past seven years working with you, developing a new generation of leaders who have embraced and enhanced the two-generation (2Gen) approach. Across the country, leaders are piloting and scaling systems changes and new supports. We have learned from and with local communities, municipalities, counties, regions, states, and federal partners. We have convened our partners and written about the work we are doing together. The lessons are captured in a range of publications, including state-specific case studies with front-edge 2Gen innovators such as Tennessee and Colorado and field publications such as the first *Top Ten for 2Gen: Policy Ideas and Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*, and *Gateways to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Program and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together*. In Ascend at the Aspen Institute's signature way, we have brought together families, Aspen Ascend Fellows, Ascend Network Partners, researchers, policymakers, and elected and appointed leaders to think deeply about systems change, policy, best practices,

innovations, and outcomes, with a laser focus on racial and gender equity and lifting up the voices of families.

As prospects seem to diminish for the next generation being better off than the current one, it is essential to elevate the successful work being done to address intergenerational poverty and create an intergenerational path of opportunity. **Practical State Solutions** profiles effective solutions from Ascend partners throughout the United States and the work driven by leaders in Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Tennessee, and Utah. It contains recommendations on processes that lead to better outcomes for families, lessons learned on engaging and bringing families to the table as empowered experts, and information on how to move to the next level whether you are starting your 2Gen journey or working to go deeper.

With gubernatorial elections in play in 36 states and 3 territories in 2018, concrete policy innovation and implementation plans are critical. State leaders, from governors and their cabinets to key staff in the offices of early learning and childcare, child support, SNAP, TANF, and WIC, along with critical partners from the social sector and community have leveraged the two-generation approach to advance outcomes for children and families.

While we pause to reflect and lift up this work, the Ascend team continues its diligent work with states, counties, cities, and the business and philanthropic sectors to look to the future. Our leadership work with the Ascend Fellows continues, and we are broadening our Network and investing in the Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community to identify additional avenues to ensure families in the United States thrive.

We know these solutions are effective because we hear it from families and policymakers, the data and evaluation results are impressive, and communities have embraced the system reforms and changes. Approaches are highlighted in the pages that follow due to their outcomes, scalability, and ease of replication. The demand and interest in the two-generation approach is bipartisan and advancing in states and counties regardless of political affiliation.

We remain grateful to our community partners who are working hard to create solutions to intergenerational poverty. We are energized by the families who continue to be active participants and the primary voice for change; by the governors and other elected and appointed leaders who work tirelessly to reform systems; and by our nonprofit, philanthropic,

faith-based, and business partners who invest in their communities and advocate for solutions every day. Throughout *Practical State Solutions*, we reference Ascend publications, Fellows, and Network Partners that have made the work successful. It is an honor to have policy partner organizations such as the American Public Human Services Association, National Association of Counties, and National Governors Association join us on this 2Gen journey. We encourage you to use these materials and want to hear and learn from you as you make improvements and create innovations.

Practical State Solutions builds on the previous work of Ascend and our talented Fellows and Network Partners. It would not have been possible without the input of families from Connecticut to Utah and our many 2Gen leaders. We thank Caroline Austin, Keri Batchelder, Danielle Barnes, Kristin Bernhard, Reggie Bicha, Brittany Birken, Andrea Camp, Frank Daidone, John Davis, Tracy Wareing Evans, Ann Flagg, Tracy Gruber, Raquel Hatter, Jessica Hansen, Melvette Hill, Lynn Johnson, Katherine Klem, Ronald Martin, Janine McMahan, Ellen Muller, Stephan Palmer, Heather Petit, Veronica Rosario, Megan Smith, Richard Sussman, Sara Enos Watamura, David Wilkinson, Ann Silverberg Williamson, Elaine Zimmerman, and the entire Ascend team.

We are also deeply grateful to our many philanthropic partners, in particular those who have supported this work for several years, including the Bezos Family Foundation, the Merle Chambers Fund, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Charlotte Perret Family Trust, the Richard W. Goldman Family Foundation, the Morgridge Family Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Scott and Patrice King Brickman Family Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and The Kresge Foundation.

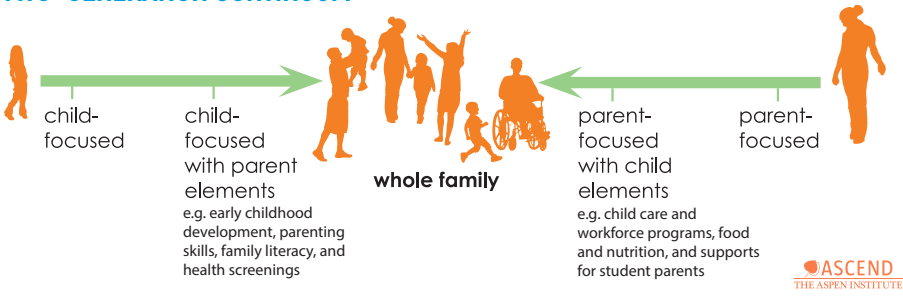
We look forward to your feedback and insights as we work together to sustain, scale, and replicate positive outcomes for children and their parents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ■ ■

Two-generation (2Gen) policies have advanced greatly over the past decade, resulting in positive outcomes for families. 2Gen approaches embrace children and their parents, recognizing that the futures of each are intertwined. These approaches are being adopted by states throughout America, embraced by families, and supported by governments, philanthropies, and businesses. They emphasize the provision of education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being to create a legacy of economic security that passes from one generation to the next.

The field is rapidly advancing and families are finding hope. There is much to celebrate in the world of 2Gen. States, counties, and municipalities are sharpening their focus on outcomes that directly address intergenerational poverty and support a family's economic stability. Scalable and replicable solutions exist and are being expanded. At all levels of government and in communities, there has been powerful support for solutions that engage children and their parents together, involving the entire family. *Practical State Solutions* outlines successful state strategies and solutions that place families at the center of the work, support families as they exit the cycle of intergenerational poverty and enter a path of economic stability, and are designed to help states replicate and scale successful solutions.

TWO-GENERATION CONTINUUM



States are clearly leading the way in supporting families as they break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. While some believe poverty to be intractable, visionary states are implementing practical solutions and creating opportunities to end intergenerational poverty by supporting children and their parents in new and innovative ways. States are looking to each other for what works and how to better tackle intergenerational poverty, recognizing that poverty is one of America's greatest challenges and must be solved in conjunction with families. While changing

2GEN PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Measure and account for outcomes for both children and their parents.
- ✓ Engage and listen to the voices of families.
- ✓ Ensure equity.
- ✓ Foster innovation and evidence together.
- ✓ Align and link systems and funding streams.

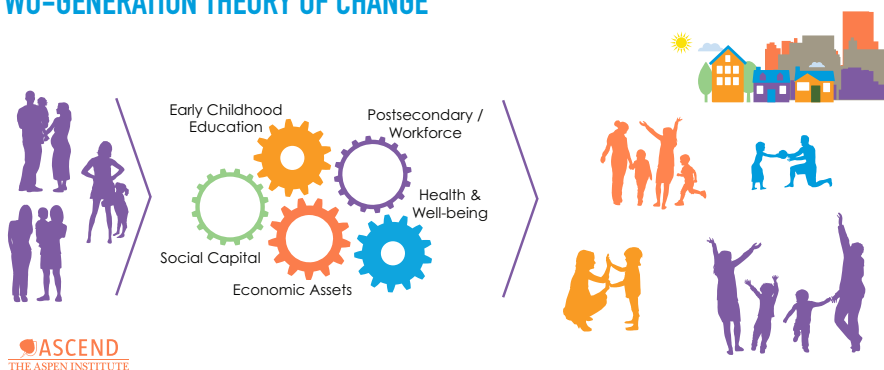
demographics, social inequality, a decline in economic mobility, and persistently high child poverty rates are an immediate as well as a generational concern, these challenges are not insurmountable. States are finding practical solutions.

The Two-Generation Theory of Change has been put to the test across the country, with measurable results from states as varied as Utah and Colorado to Florida and Connecticut. 2Gen is a national movement with strong and ever-growing support throughout the United States. The momentum continues to build as states adopt 2Gen programs as “the way of doing business.”

What follows is a series of interconnected yet separate actions — undertaken by states to address intergenerational poverty — that can grow to scale and help more families. This document highlights practical efforts that are illustrative of work throughout the United States. Individual examples are provided to help others learn from and replicate these efforts. The goal is to provide a roadmap for learning, discussion, replication, innovation, and improvement for those new to 2Gen and those looking to expand their work. In addition, there are references to materials developed to support each strategy. The work has been categorized into the following areas for easy reference:

- Increased social capital;
- Engagement of fathers and noncustodial parents in parenting and economic supports;

TWO-GENERATION THEORY OF CHANGE



This graphic illustrates, in very broad terms, the 2Gen theory of change: a family forms and together all members draw on education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being. When this occurs, current and successive generations enjoy economic security and stability.

Intergenerational poverty is generation after generation where the grandparents, parents, and now the children, are trapped in poverty. We're trying to break that cycle.

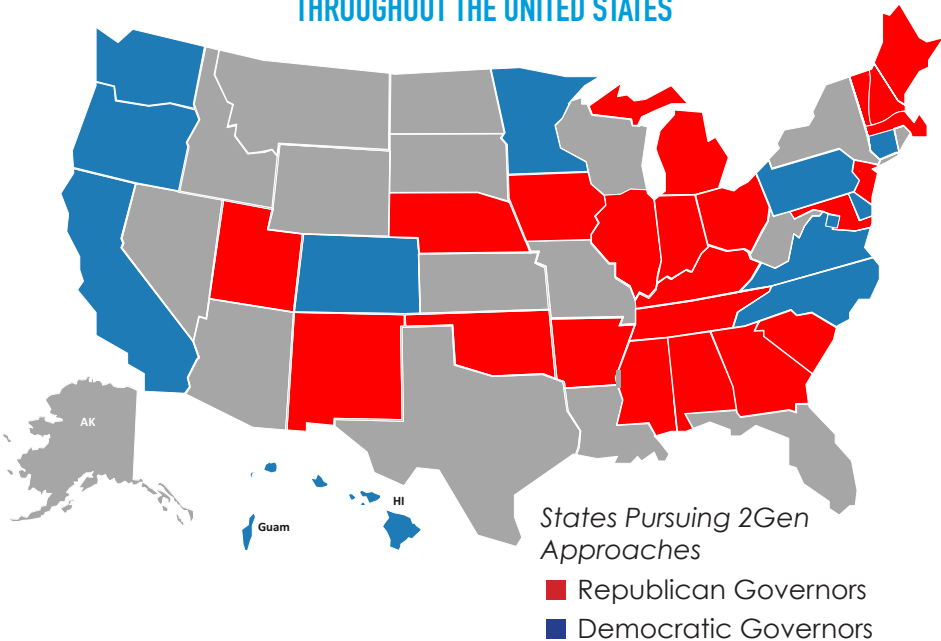
- Governor Gary R. Herbert, Utah

- Systematic integration of change and accountability for families;
- Legislative and executive support for 2Gen family outcomes;
- Culture change to support 2Gen systems change;
- Incorporation of brain science, resiliency, and trauma-informed care into family supports;
- Systems and funding working together to support the whole family; and
- Reduced cliff or benefits effect to support working families.

INCREASED SOCIAL CAPITAL

Effective policy and system change starts when states learn from and with families. Families throughout America are engaging in the challenging work of systems reform, consequently developing their own social capital and experiencing system-wide improvement in emotional and

2GEN IS A NATIONAL MOVEMENT WITH STRONG AND EVER-GROWING SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES



Honestly, at first I thought these were just a bunch of deadbeats who don't want to pay child support. But my attitude has changed. Most of our participants really do want to support their children.

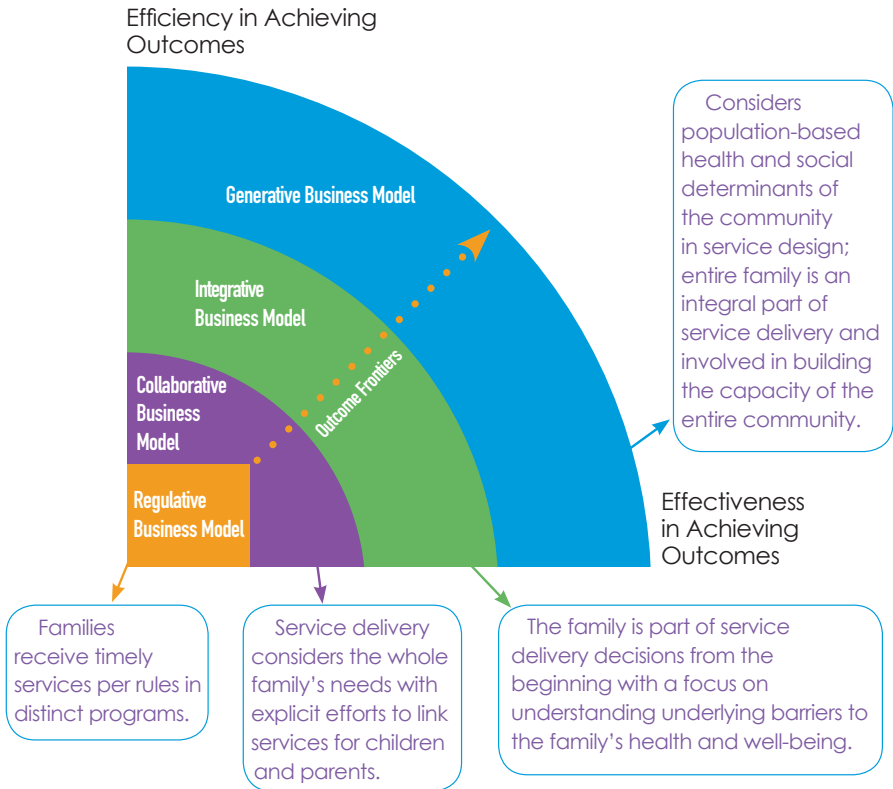
- Colorado child support staff member

financial support for their children. They are experiencing systems responding to their voices.

ENGAGEMENT OF FATHERS

Noncustodial parents, particularly fathers, are reengaging with their children and increasing their level of economic support. Through the Colorado Parent Employment Program, or CO-PEP, Colorado created a new department to help noncustodial parents overcome barriers to employment so they can financially support their children. Connecticut took on this issue by enacting new legislation to incorporate fatherhood initiatives in grant efforts, engage noncustodial parents in child support, and require programs receiving grant funding to incorporate fathers in their programming.

2GEN APPROACH THROUGH THE LENS OF THE HUMAN SERVICES VALUE CURVE



Source: Adapted from the American Public Human Services Association.

SYSTEMIC INTEGRATION

Leaders in every community doing 2Gen work, are focusing on how to create and then sustain changes for families. A roadmap of the stages of change that Georgia and Colorado undertook, and that Tennessee and Utah tested, is included. Each state enters 2Gen work at a different stage, but the similarities in the process are remarkable and the outcomes for families are replicable.

LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

Elected leaders have supported 2Gen by creating systemic reforms to benefit families. In Utah, legislators tackled the challenge of juvenile justice reform with a 2Gen approach. This work has brought together diverse systems, including corrections, education, human services, and probation to focus intentionally on at-risk youth and serving youth and their parents together. In Maryland, the governor issued an executive order to create a 2Gen commission, signaling executive-level support and ensuring public awareness of his intent to support families through innovative ways of doing business.

CULTURE CHANGE FOR SYSTEM CHANGE

Staff and community awareness of the need to work with children and families together combined with system change results in new, practical solutions and pathways out of poverty. From data collection to legislative change to staff education and support, the approach to working with children and their parents is changing. States are publicly declaring their support for a 2Gen approach and providing the public with the data on the changes.

BRAIN SCIENCE, RESILIENCY, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

As part of their 2Gen journey, states are learning how to better work with children and parents to build upon their resiliency by maximizing health and brain development. Through evidence-based, proven practices and emerging efforts, families are being served with a greater understanding of the science of the brain, resiliency, and toxic stress. Dr. Sara Enos Watamura, Ascend Fellow and Associate Psychology Professor at the University of Denver, has done groundbreaking work in brain development, demonstrating the changing nature of the brain for both parents and children.¹ This, coupled with the research from the Center on The Developing Child at Harvard University, led by Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff, the Julius B. Richmond FAMRI Professor of Child Health and Development, is being applied by Ascend Network Partners such as Nurse-Family Partnership and Mental Health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership. States are learning to bring together formerly disparate systems to meet the needs of the parent and child together.

BRINGING TOGETHER SYSTEMS

Through braided funding, the system aims to provide coordinated supports for the family to decrease the amount of time the family spends trying to access multiple supports and to increase the effectiveness of the work. In Georgia, early childhood has partnered with technical education to help parents return to school. Minnesota and Utah are bringing together workforce and housing supports for families who are eligible for TANF. Utah has successfully braided together funding for TANF-eligible families with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to coordinate supports. Families can access health care, child care, and housing and further their education and careers. The braided funding allows the family to work with one case worker who can help with access to all supports. Minnesota has worked with private nonprofits to create a more supportive system in which the families experience work, housing, child care, and education supports together. Minnesota's success with the Jeremiah Program is already being replicated in New York, North Dakota, Massachusetts, and Texas.

SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

A parent's ability to earn an income that supports the family is key to economic success and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. From Florida to Maryland to Colorado, states are working with families and businesses to identify and remove barriers to economic mobility and support pathways to prosperity. "Fiscal cliffs" occur when a marginal increase in wages results in a loss in public benefits, often leaving families with fewer resources as their income increases. This is referred to as the cliff or benefits effect, and it occurs when families are not able to accept additional work hours or raises due to the loss of child care and other supports for their children. No parent should have to choose between economic mobility and quality care for their child. Particularly in times of low unemployment, when the need for workers is high, business leaders are coming to table to help solve this challenge.

Across the United States, there is much to celebrate with respect to 2Gen work, and there are many opportunities for replication. Regardless of where you are in the 2Gen journey, *State Solutions* is meant to support your efforts, provide practical solutions, and help you engage with families to create greater economic prosperity.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS THAT PUT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AT THE CENTER: STATE STRATEGIES

SOCIAL CAPITAL



Social capital

is a key success factor of the 2Gen approach. Research shows that social capital manifests as peer support; contact with family, friends, and neighbors; participation in community and faith-based organizations; school and workplace contacts; leadership and empowerment programs; use of case managers or career coaches; social networks, such as cohort models and learning communities; and mental health services.

Families want and deserve the respect that comes from choices, meaningful work, and pathways to greater economic opportunity. And they want the sense of purpose from feeling they are contributing to individual and systemic change. They appreciate the opportunity to be civically engaged, particularly as it impacts their lives and the lives of their children. The inclusion of families in program design, legislative action, and systems change is essential to understanding lived experiences, particularly as they relate to race and poverty in America. Family voices can ensure that program design appropriately meets the needs of families and that supports are effective and easy to use. Understanding how families experience current supports helps identify barriers to effective engagement and results.

Social capital builds on the strength and resilience of families, bolstering the aspirations

RESOURCES

- Strategies for Centering Families: New Narratives, Better Policies (webinar)
- *Becoming Visible: Race, Economic Security, and Political Voice in Jackson, Mississippi*
- *Building a Thriving Tennessee: A 2Gen Approach*
- Harvard Kennedy School Social Capital Toolkit
- Promoting Social Capital to Increase Children's Attendance in Head Start
- *Home Grown Social Capital: How higher education for formerly incarcerated women facilitates family and community transformation*
- Ascend website: (<https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen>)
- Social Capital and the American Dream

parents have for their children and for themselves. It is a powerful component in programs that help move families beyond poverty.²

When families are engaged in service delivery and design, they often build social capital in the process. Social capital is based on the belief that people will do better, in part, because they establish larger, more supportive, and useful networks. Social capital is a powerful predictor of economic development, well-working schools, safe neighborhoods, responsive governments, and people's health and happiness.³

Family voice from program design through implementation improves results, increases responsiveness, and helps families build social capital. Behavioral science assumes there are reasons for how people respond, and behavioral change is more likely when the reasons for such actions are understood. When principles of behavioral science are used to engage families, a deeper understanding of how families are experiencing the systems and of parental motivation and desires is obtained.

In Unanticipated Gains (2009), Dr. Mario Small, Ascend Fellow and Grafstein Family Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, demonstrated that the ways in which services are offered or programs operate have a direct impact on how families engage.⁴ Parents who share

common goals and repeatedly interact with one another are more likely to form social ties. Program evaluations conducted by the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University showed that as parents' level of connection and trust increased, they were increasingly committed to their children's education and to supporting other parents.

Direct service programs have a greater history of family involvement and incorporation of family voice. With support from Ascend, states are learning with families and

supporting families as they form advocacy skills, networks, and relationships. Families at the Jefferson County (Jeffco) Prosperity Project in Colorado noted that they are more engaged and more likely to participate in supports when there is a community and an environment that encourages family voice. The professional staff members learn to listen more and talk less; they become coaches who are dependable, trustworthy, and empathetic while also motivational. Questions are used as the primary mode of interaction, and social time is built into the activities. For Jeffco Prosperity Project participants, dinner and conversation are a frequent part of their interactions. They see each other, communicate regularly, and provide ongoing feedback to their staff coaches. Honest feedback becomes a two-way street — to and from the participants and from and to the coaches. These families also report an increase in social capital as they help and support each other and share ideas, learnings, and expertise.

When Colorado was designing a new child support pilot intervention, one of the first steps was engaging families and counties. State staff members wanted to understand why noncustodial parents were disengaging from their children and how to help them reengage emotionally and financially. They understood that enforcement of orders was not the end game. Through a series of focus groups in three counties, they asked noncustodial fathers and child support enforcement staff questions about parents' desire to be engaged with their children and their ability to provide financial support. "Despite these barriers, many staff noted participants' strengths, specifically a desire to be involved with and support their children and a willingness to work. One job developer said, 'Honestly, at first I thought these were just a bunch of deadbeats who don't want to pay child support. But my attitude has changed. Most of our participants really do want to support their children.'" Another said that in his experience, the participants "are really interested in working, not just getting freebies." As a result, Colorado redesigned its system based on family input and lessons from the initial pilot and saw dramatic improvement in parental engagement and compliance with support orders.⁵

Doors were opened for me to have my voice heard. 2Gen has helped me as a parent create awareness. We now look at the family. Grants have even become 2Gen.

- Veronica Rosario, parent advocate

In Connecticut, 65 parents participated in a Two Gen Parent Academy in February 2017. The vision was of both child and parent excelling as learners and contributors to the current and future workforce. Envisioned and designed by parents who were inspired by the 2Gen framework, a planning team of 15 created a day of classes, an inspirational overview, and policy panels for attendees.

State legislators; commissioners; the Commission on Children, Women and Seniors; the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; the Administration for Children and Families-Region I; guest speakers; parents; nonprofits; and scholars convened to offer information on everything from how to start a small business to selecting child care and reducing chronic absenteeism. Parents also learned skills to improve their leadership in the community and how to advance at work and in school.

Parents were filmed telling their stories from a two-generational perspective. They discussed what helped and what was missing as they strove to build strong and resilient families. There were activities also for children and parents together, including poetry and drumming. The Parent Academy built on the state's 2Gen legislation, which brought culture change to the state agencies, put families at the center, and provided resources to sites for innovations in 2Gen practice.

The backdrop of the Two Gen Parent Academy's approach to family engagement is years in which the state worked with philanthropists such as the Hartford Foundation and local communities to bolster parents as leaders and partners. Connecticut has a parent trust that matches state and philanthropic dollars for proven parent leadership curricula and innovative family civics strategies. There are tested models of parent leadership for families throughout the state, such as the Parent Leadership Training Institute and Parents Supporting Educational Excellence.

Reflecting on the Two Gen Parent Academy and the continued efforts in Connecticut, one funder reported, "There were ripple effects. Nonprofit organizations changed. For example, parents now provide services that were done by paid professionals in the past." Janine McMahon, a parent advocate, reported, "There was a willingness to involve parents. 2Gen changed the dynamics, they embraced our thoughts and feedback. Together we created a plan. Families were embraced as partners based on their experience." Another parent advocate, Veronica Rosario, reported, "Doors were opened for me to have my voice heard. 2Gen has helped me as a parent create

awareness. We now look at the family. Grants have even become 2Gen.”

Families in Connecticut refer to this work as important from both a programmatic and systemic perspective. The state started the work with legislation to pilot change in programs and has expanded the work to change systems and how systems work together, account for outcomes for the parent and child, and support intergenerational change. A statewide advisory board with parents at the table to help create systemic change is also underway.⁶

In both Colorado and Connecticut, parents formed supportive networks with each other. In Colorado, noncustodial parents became significantly more likely to engage with their children, increased their payment of support, and increased work activities. In Connecticut, parents became active on the state advisory board, were hired as peer mentors and coaches by local nonprofits, and have stayed involved working on system reform.

Including families in decision making is an effective way to improve program outcomes as well as a powerful tool for supporting families in articulating their own needs and desires. But perhaps just as important, families that are part of the decision-making process are more likely to trust and engage with other families. Such social capital can be a powerful driver of positive outcomes for families, and it can help build strong communities.

There was a willingness to involve parents. 2Gen changed the dynamics, they embraced our thoughts and feedback. Together we created a plan. Families were embraced as partners based on their experience.

- Janine McMahon, parent advocate

ENGAGED FATHERS

ENGAGEMENT OF FATHERS AND NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS IN PARENTING AND ECONOMIC SUPPORTS

According to the US Census, in 2017, approximately half of all US children live in single-parent households. This number has tripled since 1960, disproportionately affecting Latino and African American children. Noncustodial parents are more likely to disengage both emotionally and monetarily from their child's life. This reduced support from the noncustodial parent impacts household stability and can threaten optimal child development (e.g., hindering academic achievement, exacerbating behavioral problems). Current policies concerning child support and jobs may inadvertently encourage reduced economic and emotional support for children, thus negatively impacting many child and family outcomes. Colorado, Connecticut, and Utah have models for effectively engaging fathers, who are overrepresented among noncustodial parents.



RESOURCES

- State Human Services Model: Colorado as a Case Study for Policymakers
- The Colorado Guide to 2Gen
- Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas and Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts
 - Finding Fatherhood: New Hope for Families in Colorado
 - Finding Fatherhood (video)

In Colorado, the Department of Human Services has used a 2Gen approach to dramatically change objectives, policy, and performance in child support, working to deliberately engage noncustodial parents, of whom 85 percent are fathers. The state created the Colorado Parent Employment Program, or CO-PEP. Through a series of focus groups in three counties, they asked noncustodial fathers

and child support enforcement staff questions about parents' desire to be engaged with children and their ability to provide financial support. After hearing the input, Colorado created a new and renamed Division of Child Support Services, which focuses on helping noncustodial parents overcome barriers to employment so they can financially support their children. Initially, the state implemented the new system in four counties and used the reforms to change the culture of child support statewide. This work is part of a national pilot program that received federal grant funding.

The Department of Human Services switched from a punitive approach to one focusing on helping the noncustodial parents overcome barriers to employment, which resulted in increased engagement and financial support. Colorado found a preponderance of absentee parents who were “willing but unable” to pay child support and who wanted work, treatment, and other supports. Central to Colorado's success has been the inclusion of family voices in the original design. Using a behavioral approach, the department sought to understand why fathers were absent from their children's lives and what would help them re-engage. The results are very encouraging. While there had been a perception that fathers wanted to be absent, the reality was that they felt ashamed and unable to contribute. Parents wanted to connect with their children but felt they were failing. The system of sanctions was not helping them recover financially or feel confident in their ability to engage as parents. With intensive coaching and case management, they received assistance to address mental health and addiction issues, increase their education levels and employment prospects, and provide a greater level of financial support. As they felt more confident as parents, they also reengaged with their children, and this behavior was reinforced with positive messaging from staff members and, more importantly, from family members.

Colorado engaged in robust data collection and recruited partners outside state government to support the work. The state formed partnerships with county departments of human services and hired staff members who understood the innovative approach. Of the 1,500 parents who were behind on their support payments, half were assigned a case manager to explore the reasons for nonpayment. In return for parents agreeing to engage

RESULTS: COLORADO PARENT EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

- ✓ Within 6 months, 2/3 of parents in program had full-time employment.
- ✓ Within 1 year, 3/4 were working and could increase child support payments.
- ✓ Many report increased engagement with their children.
- ✓ Families have less need for social supports.

in services, the division agreed not to suspend driver's licenses or seek other sanctions. Within six months, two-thirds of the parents had full-time employment, and within a year, three-quarters were working and could increase their payments. Many of the participants report increased engagement with their children, and the families have less need for other social supports. The pilot is now expanding to additional counties.

Similarly, in Connecticut, parents involved in the 2Gen Parent Academy raised a concern regarding the lack of fatherhood supports. While the state had been working for several years to deepen the commitment to fatherhood, parents highlighted areas for additional work and progress. Stephan Palmer, a parent participant, said, "I asked how could we make changes to incorporate fathers since it seems they are forgotten.... After several meetings of me vigorously asking and fighting for fathers, they began to seek ways to include fathers." New legislation was created to incorporate fatherhood initiatives in grant efforts, engage noncustodial parents in child support, and require programs receiving grant funding to incorporate fathers in their programming.⁷ Palmer added, "Next was fighting for change in the court system. Fathers in our programs are protected to finish the program without fear of jail and can obtain jobs." Another parent advocate, Caroline Austin, stated, "Parents spoke up.... Without Stephan speaking up about fatherhood, it wouldn't have been included." Parents felt that their concerns and interests were being included in public policy and that they were being encouraged to be active parents.

In Colorado and Connecticut, parents changed the narrative. They advocated and they were heard. As a result, they were also able to fulfill additional parenting roles, including providing emotional and financial support for their children. State leaders ensured that decision makers were listening and that parent recommendations were included in the overall design.


In Utah, concerns regarding formerly incarcerated fathers lead to innovations in work programs. Through its work in "Next Generation Kids," Utah has been creating new public-private partnerships that provide community college and technical training for parents. After demonstrating success with mothers in its "Invest in You, Too" efforts, Utah created "Invest in Dads, Too." The program helps fathers who were formerly incarcerated become certified in diesel technology. Similar to "Invest in You, Too" which supports mothers in medical manufacturing, "Invest in Dads, Too" also provides education in executive functioning, life skills, and parenting.⁸ A full evaluation is underway, but preliminary results show increased parental engagement and work activities.

SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

SYSTEMIC INTEGRATION OF CHANGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

States that have had the most success in implementing a 2Gen approach have integrated the work into the heart of how they operate. They track and publish outcomes, deliberately and intentionally engage the community, and think about children and parents together.

2Gen is the way they now do business. Each state started with a key leader and champion who had authority to direct resources, including employees and programs, toward positive outcomes for children and their parents together. The states have moved through the stages of 2Gen implementation, while understanding that these stages are iterative and new partners, whether additional state and county resources, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, businesses, elected leaders, or philanthropists, will enter at each stage in the process and need time for support and learning. Additionally, these state efforts are reinforced by national partners such as the National Association of Counties, National Governors Association,⁹ and American Public Human Services Association¹⁰ — which have all incorporated components of 2Gen in their work. For example, national efforts can support



The Two- Generation (2Gen) Approach

is an approach designed to deliberately meet the needs of more than one generation at a time; it includes children and their parents in the same conversations and supports.

Resources for engaging staff and partners:

- 101: Trying on a 2Gen Approach
- 201: 2Gen Action Plan
- 301: Community Guide to 2Gen Approaches

STAGES OF 2GEN IMPLEMENTATION

- 1. 2Gen Unaware:** Fragmented programs and systems due to limited understanding of the 2Gen framework.
- 2. 2Gen Awareness Raising:** Stakeholders beginning to learn about 2Gen and engaging others to learn more. Primary activities centered on 2Gen framework education and training.
- 3. 2Gen Approach:** Stakeholders aware of and support existing 2Gen organizations, and move on to "development" if there are any gaps.
- 4. 2Gen Strategy:** Cross-sector stakeholders working collaboratively to align and/or coordinate programs, policies, organizations and systems to reflect the 2Gen framework and ingrain it in their mission. Primary activities centered on alignment and coordination across sectors to meet the needs of all family members.
- 5. 2Gen Program:** Cross-sector stakeholders working collaboratively to provide services to both children and adults simultaneously. Primary activities centered on the provision of services and the ongoing evaluation of outcomes for both parents and children, or the family as a whole.
- 6. 2Gen Integration:** Both children and adults are being simultaneously served in multiple programs across multiple sectors. Shared public will leads to more organizations that have an underlying mission and values conducive to serving the whole family comprehensively.
- 7. 2Gen Accountability:** Sustained understanding of the 2Gen framework; sustained development of 2Gen organizations, programs and policies; sustained alignment and/or coordination of programs, policies, and systems; sustained provision of services to children and adults simultaneously; and sustained evaluation of outcomes for both parents and children to support improved outcomes for families.

culture change, staff training and development and best practices.

2Gen unaware is the initial stage. In Colorado, Georgia, Tennessee, and Utah, Ascend and other leaders in the 2Gen movement worked with cabinet-level leaders to initiate a

dialogue about intergenerational poverty with peers and other stakeholders. These meetings were most effective when well-known community leaders, such as philanthropists or nonprofit leaders, helped arrange or participated in them — pairing established local trust within national leadership. The starting point in each state differed but shared common themes: leadership, the desire to better address poverty, willingness to engage with local and national leaders, and a commitment to understanding what is not working for families.

For example:

- Colorado philanthropists who had long worked on poverty brought Ascend at the Aspen Institute to the attention of the governor's office and helped initiate the dialogue.
- Utah worked with Voices for Utah's Children which believed a 2Gen approach was essential to fighting poverty and requested support from Ascend at the Aspen Institute.
- In Georgia, Sheltering Arms and the United Way of Greater Atlanta were the first organizations to request support from Ascend at the Aspen Institute and help initiate the further conversations with state government.
- In Tennessee, the governor asked each department to conduct a top-to-bottom review of its mission and programs. At the Tennessee Department of Human Services, the commissioner and an internal taskforce conducted a 360-degree examination of services. The process focused on answering the question, "Are the people we serve better off because we have been a part of their lives?"¹¹ As they sought to make changes in response to the review, the commissioner, aware of the 2Gen movement, requested support from Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

2Gen awareness raising is the next step. Key stakeholders educate themselves and other leaders within and outside of government about how the 2Gen framework supports families. Whenever possible, working with local influencers increases the traction and speed of the work. For example, Tennessee launched a 2G for Tennessee Consortium with representatives from multiple departments and national and local nonprofits, along with other state leaders, to raise awareness and engage allies to expand the work. Tennessee, like many other states, has relied on support from Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the American Public Human Services Association, and others to support convenings and provide peer-to-peer support and technical assistance.

2Gen Approach is a key stage for parent, staff, and community involvement. It is the process of infusing the work across families, staff, and the community. Utah and Colorado helped the community and staff members understand that 2Gen approaches are not a new funding mechanism or a new initiative; rather, the goal is to change mindsets around **how** families are supported, focusing on outcomes across generations.

For example:

- Colorado wrote 2Gen program outcomes into job descriptions to reinforce the approach in working with families. Colorado engaged noncustodial parents in conversations about connecting to their children and growing together. A culture shift from compliance to a focus on first meeting the needs of families is essential to success.
- Georgia developed a series of trainings on brain development and trauma-informed care to help caregivers and frontline staff understand how toxic stress can impede progress and brain growth for children and parents. In Georgia, this meant that technical schools included information on early childhood education at their student recruitment fairs and new student orientations. Parents could learn about their child's learning development at the same time they were investing in their own growth.

The 2Gen approach was particularly successful when implementation was under the auspices of a 2Gen champion with a position of influence and power. In Colorado, Hawaii, Tennessee, and Utah, the first 2Gen staff people were located within the Department of Human Services or Workforce Services along with the 2Gen champion — the commissioner or executive director of human services. In Georgia, the champion was in the Department of Early Care and Learning, with a charge from the governor to work across departments. These states repurposed existing open positions to focus on outcomes for the entire family. The staff people or person was responsible for coordinating service delivery to multiple generations within the same family. These 2Gen coordinators, managers, and directors also had the authority to assess programs and identify gaps and unmet needs. Ascend at the Aspen Institute was a key partner in supporting these staff members in including 2Gen language in requests for new funding from federal demonstration efforts, the National Governors Association, and private philanthropic organizations. These resources provided incentives and accountability for the development and implementation of the 2Gen strategy.

2Gen strategy ensures business is done in a new way. In Utah, this meant working with parents, educational systems, and

juvenile justice when considering the removal and return of the young person from detention services. The end goal was a decrease in the removal of children from their homes, and Utah closed two juvenile facilities as a result of this work. Utah included parents, family resource facilitators, and peer support specialists in the delivery of integrated care from intake through treatment and transition to the home. These individuals have lived experience in public human services and champion the family, parent, and youth in driving care-planning efforts.

In Colorado, it meant renaming Child Support Enforcement to Child Support Services and supporting noncustodial parents with their education goals and desire to connect in safe and appropriate ways with their children. These strategies led to full incorporation of 2Gen principles in programs that are now known as 2Gen programs.

2Gen programs are successful when cross-sector stakeholders work collaboratively and use a 2Gen lens to align programs, policies, organizations, and systems as part of the overall mission.

In Georgia, this work progressed after the Department of Early Care and Learning conducted a landscape assessment and survey of nonprofit partners to understand how they were or were not serving children and their parents together. The department then made small grants to several communities to deepen the 2Gen work.

2Gen integration means that the children and adults are being simultaneously supported across multiple programs and sectors with the ability to evaluate outcomes for the entire family. Colorado, Georgia, Utah, and Tennessee have all brought together multiple systems to support families in receiving technical and higher education and quality early child care and education. Examples include the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) funded by the US Department of Labor¹² and Parents and Children Thriving Together: Two-Generation State Policy Network (PACTT Network) funded through the National Governors Association in partnership with the Center for Law and Social Policy and Ascend.¹³ Another example is the annual Resilient Families convening hosted by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, which brings together grantees, other departments, parents, key federal representatives, and national influencers to identify and accelerate integration and partnership opportunities.

SWFI is focused on providing support and guidance for student parents to enroll in college or vocational training, and

supporting them once they are enrolled. Using a 2Gen lens, SWFI helps parents obtain the credentials they need to obtain jobs in high-demand, high-growth professions such as health care, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. SWFI brings together participants in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) with the postsecondary and vocational education systems, and with employers who need well-prepared employees. This unique model connects policies, practices, and services in a way that benefits whole families.

The PACTT Network provides funding for the governors of five states — Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Oregon — to deepen their 2Gen work. The funds support states in designing a 2Gen plan and work across departments and with each other to create positive outcomes for families. The five states come together to learn, share solutions, and improve outcomes. Each state has developed a community outreach strategy to ensure the work is responsive to and embraced by the community and meeting the needs of families.

2Gen accountability occurs when systems are aligned to track outcomes for the entire family. This is the most rigorous stage because data systems frequently do not interface, departments and grantees do not share family-specific information, and privacy issues present challenges that must be addressed. Colorado, Georgia, and Utah approached this stage by writing 2Gen program outcomes into their grant-making and evaluation process for both internal and external grantees.

Colorado has a data-sharing team that develops data-sharing agreements focused on human services, public health, and higher education. In Georgia, the state encouraged applicants to identify the 2Gen program outcomes they were seeking to address and then developed performance measures for them. In Utah, counties are required to track outcomes across four areas of well-being and develop plans with cross-sector collaboration and measurable outcomes. Family engagement and involvement is one of the outcomes and performance incentives Utah has built into funding applications and contracting.

Once states have successfully moved between these stages, applying a 2Gen approach becomes easier: Opportunities for expansion across systems are readily identified, awareness grows, data systems become easier to coordinate, and communities come to expect outcomes for parents and children. From initial awareness to data collection and accountability, states are proving that solutions exist, families want to participate in the work, and outcomes for families improve.

If you're not working with the parents, you're never going to succeed with the kids, and if you're not working with the kids, the parents won't be successful.

- Governor John Hickenlooper, Colorado

LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE SUPPORT FOR 2GEN FAMILY OUTCOMES

For states to effectively create a 2Gen approach to solving intergenerational poverty, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches must come together independently or with the help of community providers to create change. Executive orders in Maryland to create a 2Generation Commission, legislation in Connecticut to improve coordination and outcomes, and judicial responsiveness in Utah to bring systems together to work with families are examples of large, independent systems coming together on behalf of families. States have chosen to act on the cliff effect, legislate the inclusion of 2Gen efforts and outcomes in programs for the entire family, and involve the judicial system in change.

Colorado passed the Child Care Reform Bill,¹⁴ landmark legislation to increase access to the state child care assistance program. Following the legislation, the state continued to support changes in child support with the Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program,¹⁵ which increased the ability of Colorado counties to deliver child support services, including case management and employment support. Utah passed legislation to help families with a child facing incarceration using a 2Gen frame.¹⁶ This important legislation directed resources to early intervention for youth and support for families while promoting public safety and strengthening early intervention and diversion services. The legislation led to greater involvement and coordination between the courts, K-12 education, and

COLORADO: CHILD CARE REFORM BILL HB1317

In May 2014, the Colorado legislature approved landmark legislation to increase access to the state child care assistance program (CCCAP), decrease red tape, and promote higher-quality services. With a two-generation focus, the law:

- Allows job seekers and those enrolled in postsecondary education or workforce training to be eligible for CCCAP.
- Removes application barriers by allowing presumptive eligibility and aligning income verification with other programs, for instance.
- Adjusts co-payment requirements and tiered co-pay increases to mitigate the “cliff effect.”

Highlights for small businesses include:

- Higher floors for provider reimbursement rates.
- Holiday and absence policies tied to program quality ratings.
- Tiered reimbursement so providers can provide higher-quality care.

[HB14-1317, 69th Gen. Assem., Reg. Sess. (CO. 2014)]

social services when considering the removal and incarceration of youth and their subsequent return to the community. It also created a 20-person commission to improve system coordination. Utah passed further legislation that created a system of care that has opened the door for integrated funding for 2Gen solutions,¹⁷ and in 2018, Utah updated the Juvenile Justice bill to clarify the role of prosecutors, schools, and school discipline to better support the coordination of care and the role of families.

Connecticut passed 2Gen legislation¹⁸ to support inclusion of family voice, school readiness, and workforce development in poverty-reduction efforts. The legislation initially passed with funding for 2Gen pilots; however, fiscal constraints hindered funding but not the work on systems change. The legislation included “a comprehensive two-generational service delivery approach.” The initiative promotes systemic change to create conditions across local and state public sector agencies and the private sector to support families with early child care and education, health care, workforce readiness, and self-sufficiency across two generations in the same household. “Households may include, but need not be limited to, mothers, fathers, noncustodial parents and other primary caregivers,” the legislation states. The Office of Early Childhood is the designated 2Gen coordinating agency and was also able to incentivize 2Gen program outcomes for families including creating an incentive payment for outcomes in home visitation. In addition,

a Two-Generation Advisory Council was established and includes elected and appointed officials, families, advocates, businesses, and academic professionals.

CULTURE CHANGE

CULTURE CHANGE TO SUPPORT 2GEN SYSTEMS CHANGE

Ensuring that organizational change is occurring and has the potential to be sustained is key to longer-term outcomes and success. Essential to the work is leadership, staff members who can champion the work, resources to implement change, data and evaluation, and community and legislative champions. From building awareness to tracking outcomes, there are proven steps to inform the work. As described earlier, starting the process by listening to families is also fundamental for a successful culture shift. Their voices help create change with legislators, community members, and staff while giving families the opportunity to build social capital.

An additional component to culture change is “going public” with the vision, outcomes, and direction. Public statements and reports allow the community to be involved and help the community and families hold government and each other accountable and set expectations.

The Colorado Department of Human Services website starts with a bold statement: “CDHS uses a Two-Generation (2Gen) approach to guide all of our services. The 2Gen approach encourages CDHS programs to serve children and their caregivers together, to harness the family’s full potential and to put the entire family on a path to permanent economic security.” Colorado provides

RESOURCES

- *Making Tomorrow Better Together: A Guide to Outcomes for 2Gen Policymakers*
- *State Human Services Model: Colorado as a Case Study for Policymakers*
- *The Colorado Guide to 2Gen*
- *Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas and Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*
- *Utah Annual Report on Intergenerational Poverty, Welfare Dependency, and Public Assistance*
- *A Two-Generation Approach to Ending Poverty in Utah*
- *The Earned Income Tax Credit: A Time-Tested Two-Generation Strategy for Poverty*
- *A Two-Generation Strategy: Healthy Parents and Healthy Kids*
- *A Two-Generation Strategy Right From the Start*
- Tennessee Department of Human Services 2G for Tennessee website
- Family-Centered Coaching Toolkit and Assessment

specific examples of programs adopting a 2Gen approach and lists key partners, including Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the National Governors Association. With a county-administered system, the state also highlights the 2Gen work occurring within counties.¹⁹ As Colorado's work has moved beyond the Department of Human Services to incorporate public health, higher education, workforce development, and housing, the governor's promotion of 2Gen approaches as a way of conducting business in the state is institutionalizing the work across departments.²⁰ Tennessee posted the Two-Generation Continuum from Ascend on their website as a way to reinforce the work; focused on a "strengths-based perspective" as a guiding principle; and included testimonials from Ascend Executive Director Anne Mosle, staff members, community advocates, and family members.²¹ The state also established the community-based Tennessee Consortium. The Consortium is charged with "constantly searching, identifying, and highlighting promising practices focused on creating cycles of success" with a special emphasis on "practices that adhere to a multigenerational approach, strength-based practices, brain science, informed practices and results."

Utah uses the term "intergenerational poverty" to focus its 2Gen work and has created the Utah Intergenerational Poverty Report, an annual report to track progress on this issue. The report has been published for several years through the Department of Workforce Services. Published for several years, by the Department of Workforce Services, the report includes input from the Departments of Health, Human Services, Education, Higher Education, Corrections, Juvenile Courts and the Utah Data Alliance. The clear message is "this is how Utah is tackling poverty." The 2017

report also discusses the outcomes of multigenerational programs such as Women, Infants, and Children; home visitation; and child homelessness.²²

2GEN APPROACH, STRATEGY, SYSTEMS CONTINUUM

APPROACH

A new **mindset** among policymakers for designing policies and funding streams that serve children and parents simultaneously.

STRATEGY

Aligning and/or **coordinating** services with other agencies and levels of government to meet family needs.

SYSTEMS

Providing services and supports to both children and adults **simultaneously** to achieve population level outcomes.

Throughout the continuum, inclusion of parent voices and a focus on equity are prerequisites.

 **ASCEND**
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

BRAIN SCIENCE

BRAIN SCIENCE, RESILIENCY, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

The most effective 2Gen solutions have incorporated the latest research on brain formation, resiliency, and in trauma-informed care into parental supports and services for children. Brain science has shown that the development of children and parents is inextricably linked.²³ *In Two Open Windows: Infant*

and *Parent Neurobiologic Change*, Dr. Sarah Enos Watamura, Ascend Fellow and associate psychology professor, and Dr. Pilyoung Kim, assistant psychology professor, both at the University of Denver, highlight the evidence that parent's and children's brains are developing and changing during the transition to parenting and early life.²⁴ With the arrival of a new infant, new parents undergo a reorganization of their priorities and goals to focus on caregiving. Their research found that all parents report increased anxiety and concern about their infant's well-being and health, and there is a resulting change in the parental brain regardless of socio-economic status.

Parents are also incredibly resilient. Understanding and supporting resiliency in parents and children is critical to encouraging further growth. Using tools such as the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) Survey Toolkit²⁵ can help staff identify areas of family resiliency and ability to overcome adversity.

Science shows that traumatic events are represented in memory differently than other types of events. Parents who have been exposed to trauma have a low activation threshold and unusually strong response to elements that challenge feelings of safety. Additionally, parents who have experienced trauma often isolate themselves because trauma impacts the formation of social ties, self-esteem, optimism, goal attainment, emotion regulation, and inhibitory control and conspires against amassing social and coping reserves. Increased pessimism, less effective interpersonal skill development, hyper-vigilance, and stress-response are all indications of trauma in parents. Children growing up in adverse environments have been shown to have significantly weaker social connections in childhood and adulthood as well as more negative and distrustful

**RESULTS: MOMS
2GEN PROGRAMS**

✓ 93% of the program's Community Mental Health Ambassadors who are parents are still employed 12 months after their date of hire.

✓ 78% of participants complete the program compared to a national average of 30 percent of a similar population who adhere to their mental health treatment.

✓ Children of participants attend six more days of school per year compared to children of non-participants and demonstrate improvements in key domains of child executive functioning, such as working memory and self-regulation.

✓ Increase in lease compliance for families in Section 8 housing.

tendencies in perceiving others and future possibilities.

When Tennessee was developing its 2Gen approach, staff members underwent education and training to ensure that interventions would focus on root causes and how to support families. This helped the department select local partners — including Nurse-Family Partnership, a home visitation program — and apply a 2Gen approach with an understanding of trauma, toxic stress, and brain science. Nurse-Family Partnership has a long history of evidence-based outcomes, including improved parental engagement in work and school, healthy birth, and better child health and has incorporated the work of Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, led by Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff.²⁶

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Education has also incorporated trauma-informed care and brain science in its rate card pilot for outcomes in home visitation. The rate card established a system for linking incentive payments to positive outcomes, such as healthy birth, safe children, family stability, and caregiver employment.

Focused on home visitation agencies, including Parents as Teachers, Child First, Early Health Start, and Nurse-Family Partnership, this federally funded pilot is providing potential bonus payments of 3-4 percent of the total contract value for each provider as outcomes for parents are proven. The guiding principles for outcomes include a focus on two-generational impacts, such as caregiver employment and child health.

We are no longer just checking the boxes when an applicant comes into the office to see if they meet our program criteria for benefits. We are absolutely figuring out how to meet their needs. We are transforming lives.

- Danielle Barnes, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Human Services

RESOURCES

- *Making Tomorrow Better Together: A Guide to Outcomes for 2Gen Policymakers*
- *State Human Services Model: Colorado as a Case Study for Policymakers*
- *The Colorado Guide to 2Gen*
- *Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas and Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*
- *How to Sustain 2Gen Success During Transitions*
- *Two Open Windows: Infant and Parent Neurobiologic Change*
- *Building a Thriving Tennessee: A 2Gen Approach*
- *ACEs Toolkit for Providers, The National Crittenton Foundation*

Another effective solution is Mental Health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership, which is providing positive 2Gen program outcomes for families who are overburdened and under-resourced. Launched in New Haven, Connecticut, and funded by state TANF dollars, the MOMS Partnership builds on parents' resiliency and offers coaching, parenting supports, job readiness, skill-building, and eight weeks of cognitive behavioral therapy. The program operates in grocery stores, laundromats, shelters, community colleges, libraries, and nail and hair salons, places where the program also conducts outreach and enrollment. MOMS is structured around key tenets of brain development, early care and attachment, and the impact of stress and brain development on child outcomes. MOMS expands the capacity of caregivers through life skills coaching focused on increasing executive functioning, work readiness, and interventions that reduce depression. It focuses on trauma-informed care through an understanding that trauma impacts a mother's beliefs about herself, the future, and the world. MOMS does not stop mothers from engaging in programmatic activities if they miss one, two, or more sessions because the program recognizes that the same core life skills it seeks to build for parents are heavily influenced by a mother's experience of trauma. Fear networks are easily activated by a wide variety of environmental cues, and MOMS has incorporated into the program the need for consistency, rewards/incentives, and frequent feedback on progress to reduce feelings of pervasive threat. MOMS heavily focuses on improving social connectedness among mothers through group meetings, community hubs, and a specialized mobile app that promotes and incentivizes social engagement.

By understanding the science of brain development, trauma, and toxic stress and applying it in working with communities and families, states and localities can design appropriate supports that lead to lasting, positive outcomes and help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

ALIGNING SYSTEMS

SYSTEMS AND FUNDING WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT THE WHOLE FAMILY

Early childhood education, postsecondary education, employment pathways, economic assets, health and well-being, and social capital are core components that create an intergenerational cycle of opportunity.

Bringing together funding streams for these supports is essential for 2Gen success. In the current environment, families interact with multiple supports across multiple systems with widely varying eligibility requirements and extensive, duplicative proofs of eligibility.

Families report spending entire days and weeks each month just in the enrollment, eligibility, and recertification process. In addition, different case managers often provide conflicting guidance on priorities. Dealing with this takes parents away from work and school and limits their ability to increase their own financial resources.

Utah has successfully braided together funding for families who are eligible for TANF with WIOA funding. The effort, "Next Generation Kids, Invest in You, Too" is focused on single mothers who have experienced intergenerational poverty and have struggled to attach to the workforce. The family-focused project seeks positive work and education

RESOURCES

- Gateways to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together
- Making Tomorrow Better Together: A Guide to Outcomes for 2Gen Policymakers
- State Human Services Model: Colorado as a Case Study for Policymakers
- The Colorado Guide to 2Gen
- Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas and Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts
- How to Sustain 2Gen Success During Transitions
- Building a Thriving Tennessee: A 2Gen Approach

RESULTS: UTAH DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

- ✓ All children had a primary care doctor and dentist
- ✓ All the child care issues identified as reasons for missing work or school at the start of the program had been resolved with support from a family success coach.
- ✓ Parents reported progress on their children's behavioral issues, improved school responses on Individual Education Plans (IEP), and improved reports on grades and behavior.
- ✓ Positive case closures for families who were not enrolled in the braided support ranged from 76-81%; for similar hard-to-employ families in Utah, the rate has been 44%. For families who were involved in the braided supports, positive closures were to 89-100%.

RESULTS: JEREMIAH PROGRAM

- ✓ 88% of the children at Jeremiah's Child Development Centers are performing above age appropriate benchmarks.
- ✓ 77% of graduates over the past 5 years have significantly decreased reliance on public assistance and have an average annual income of \$47,609
- ✓ 100% of the graduates are able to afford safe housing.²⁷

outcomes for the parents as well as for their children. One case manager is assigned to help the family, and he/she has access to all the potential supports for the family. Parents receive intensive education and training to become certified in the medical manufacturing industry, and 14 business partners are potential employers. Parents receive assistance with supports, including housing, domestic violence, past substance abuse, transportation, and mental health. Since the goal of the blended program is to ensure that the family as a whole can stabilize, concerns regarding child care, child behavior, and access to health care and education are also addressed as the parents enter the education program and then employment.

In Utah's demonstration project, two cohorts of families were served in 2017 with varying levels of coordinated supports. The evaluation started with approximately 50 potentially eligible families; half of the families completed the program and 30 families were involved in the evaluations, which were conducted by the Social Research Institute at the University of Utah.²⁸ The goal of the program is employment at graduation, increased wages at day 90 and 180, and, eventually, the family's case being closed due to employment. By the end of

the second evaluation period, the project achieved the results outlined in the box on page 36.

Another successful approach to the braiding of supports is when states work with nonprofits to bundle support. The Jeremiah Program, headquartered in Minneapolis, has done this. The program offers residential campuses that offer myriad supports for single mothers and their children in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Austin, Texas; and Fargo, North Dakota. In Boston and Brooklyn, the group partners with local housing, early childhood, and higher education institutions to serve mothers and children together.

Jeremiah Program employs a proven holistic approach that begins with establishing a supportive community for determined single mothers to pursue a career-track or college education. With this support — and quality early childhood education, a safe and affordable place to live, personal coaching and empowerment, and life-skills training — families find stability and a pathway out of poverty. Jeremiah blends public and private dollars to build supportive housing and fund operations. The families pay 30 percent of their income toward housing and child care expenses. Families access assistance through a variety of public supports, including TANF; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and state child care and rental assistance programs. While Jeremiah does not directly access workforce funds to administer its programming, the participants benefit from employment programs — such as the Minnesota Diversionary Work Program — that leverage workforce opportunities. The organization then relies on state general operating funding, including from Housing and Urban Development, child care assistance for low-income families, and Head Start and US Department of Agriculture Meal Reimbursements (for the child development centers).

These examples illustrate the power of bringing together supports to serve the family as a whole unit. Rather than separating the parent and child and assuming their needs are different, braided systems recognize that health care for children supports a parents' work attendance, that stable housing promotes work and school attendance, and that adequate food and nutrition is tied to brain development. When systems work with the entire family, that family has better access to pathways to prosperity.

REDUCE THE CLIFF

REDUCED CLIFF OR BENEFITS EFFECT TO SUPPORT WORKING FAMILIES

Family stability and self-sufficiency are inextricably linked to children's development, including their brain development, school success, and health. The "cliff or benefits effect" occurs when a family's income increases and they lose their eligibility for other financial supports. Often due to the tight income restrictions associated with the supports, a slight increase in hourly wages can be less than the amount the family loses in benefits. Research in Colorado, Maryland, and Florida has shown that income requirements force parents to choose between the needs of their child(ren) and wage increases that lead to the loss of critical supports including SNAP, TANF, child care assistance, health care coverage, subsidized housing, and the Earned Income Tax Credit. The cliff or benefits effect is particularly problematic for families who are struggling to exit poverty. The states listed above are working to eliminate these disincentives to increased wage earnings.

Colorado passed the Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program legislation to pilot and then expand programs to reduce the cliff effect. This law has gone through several revisions, starting in 2012 and most recently in 2016. The pilot program is operating in 15 of the 64 county-administered departments of human services to mitigate the cliff effect for low-income families. Counties are encouraged to collaborate with community partners, early childhood education experts, and families to develop a revenue-neutral approach for each family as income rises. Evaluation efforts have sought to determine if the parents in the pilot program changed their behaviors and were more likely to accept promotions, work additional hours, and take higher-paying jobs, all of which would result in increased income.

The Bell Policy Center conducted a qualitative review to assess the Colorado Cliff Effect Pilot Program. It found that families and county administrators were positive about the program and its potential for improved family outcomes. Survey and anecdotal evidence from families and county officials found that the program enabled some people to achieve greater economic mobility. However, families also said they worried about losing child care benefits due to slight changes in wages. Also, the review found that the Cliff Effect Pilot Program was not well understood, contributing to implementation challenges. Data analysis reducing worry about the cliff effect could spur positive action toward increasing income by working more hours, taking a new job, or accepting a promotion when the family understood the program. In addition to communication, the review found opportunities for refinement and improvement in counties' differing implementation approaches and timeline and requiring copays to increase during a two-year period regardless of whether the family income continue to grow.²⁹ Having learned from the pilot, the Colorado legislature and Department of Human Services are working on the next innovations to support families to increase their wages.

Maryland recognized that a family's economic success may be limited if their wages comes from an inflexible job lacking wage progression. As a response, in 2017, the governor created the Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission and Pilot Program through an executive order.³⁰ The benefits cliff was one of the identified barriers to family self-sufficiency. The commission recommended the alignment of community supports to create a network of transitional services and is currently working on next steps.

In Florida, there was growing recognition that systemic approaches were needed to simultaneously address the needs of both families and children in poverty. The Florida Children's Council became the convening body for this change, working with strategic leadership and partners to identify more effective policies to improve economic stability and strengthen outcomes for children and families in poverty. A partnership with the Florida Chamber of Commerce has been instrumental in educating business leaders and policymakers about the complex issues of poverty. In 2017, the Florida Chamber

RESOURCES

- Colorado Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Program legislation
- *A Look Past the Cliff: Understanding Colorado's Cliff Effect Program*
- *Less Poverty, More Prosperity: The Florida Fiscal Cliffs Report*
- *Two Generational Approach: Focused Policies for Improved Outcomes*

Foundation published the report *Less Poverty, More Prosperity: The Florida Fiscal Cliffs Report*,³¹ which outlines the impact of the “fiscal cliffs” that occur when a marginal increase in income results in a loss in public benefits, often leaving families with fewer resources. Prosperity is a core value of the business community, and poverty impacts businesses and families alike; therefore, the business community is invested in decreasing the cliff effect.

The Florida Children’s Council recently published the results of a social service analysis and offered aligned policy solutions in *Two Generational Approach: Focused Policies for Improved Outcomes*.³² Building on this report, along with the fiscal cliffs publication, the Florida Chamber Foundation has launched an initiative to engage leaders in developing system and policy improvements for children and families in poverty. This initiative includes a core advisory body of subject-matter experts, a series of state-level Prosperity Summits, a data portal to analyze root causes and system links between various co-occurring elements of poverty, targeted reports, and scorecards to assist leaders in designing more comprehensive policies that reflect the unique needs of families with young children in poverty. At the heart of the recommendations is how to provide families with a graduated phase-out of supports and incorporate workforce services to improve financial outcomes. The goal is to reduce the need for public supports while improving outcomes for the entire family.

With leadership from the Florida Children’s Council, CareerSource Florida, early learning coalitions in four counties, and philanthropic organizations, Florida is also now implementing a pilot program to better integrate child care and workforce services. The goals are to reduce the number of changes in quality child care, mitigate the cliff effect, and reduce toxic stress by positively impacting parents’ motivation and capacity to improve their economic position and parenting skills. Families eligible for child care assistance will participate in individual workforce plans that will include child care needs. Similar to Colorado, Florida established a decelerated payment plan for the phase-out of child care payments as family income increases.

The rationale for reducing the cliff or benefits effect is simple: It helps families become more self-sufficient. In times of low unemployment, there is an added benefit to employers who are better able to retain and promote talent. By working together, businesses and government are helping parents increase their financial resources through work.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Effective two-generation approaches are being designed, implemented and evaluated throughout the United States. In conjunction with families, nonprofits, business, and philanthropy, state leaders are designing behaviorally based supports with outcomes focused on children and their parents together. In the process of practitioners and policymakers working with families, social capital is developed, appropriate supports are designed, and stereotypes are replaced with understanding that leads to solutions. States across the country are replicating these solutions keeping in mind the unique needs of their communities.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute, our Network Partners, Fellows and state partners are working collaboratively with families to support their aspirations and goals for financial independence. As two-generation approaches are developed throughout the country, the vision of an America in which a legacy of economic security and education success passes from one generation to the next is becoming more attainable.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is honored to support this important work by partnering in the creation of practical solutions for families. Through convenings, publications, and technical support, the field is advancing and families are finding hope. The work is far from complete. Courageous leaders are needed at every level of government and in nonprofits, faith-based organizations, philanthropic organizations, and businesses. Further innovations are needed to scale this work, create federal and state policy momentum to move pilot efforts to full implementation, and ensure effective and efficient replication with continuous improvement.

We look forward to continuing this partnership and learning together.

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