

TWO GENERATIONS. ONE FUTURE. ASCEND AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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WHO WE ARE

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and the adults in their lives to educational success, economic security, and health and well-being. We take a two-generation approach to our work – focusing on children and their parents together – and we bring a gender and racial equity lens to our analysis. In all our work, we draw on the expertise and experience of families.

WHAT WE DO

Elevate and invest in solutions:

- Roll-out a two-generation policy agenda;
- Share lessons from the national Aspen Institute Ascend Network;
- Convene practice and policy leaders across sectors and issues;
- Contribute thought leadership to build the two-generation field;
- Develop products and tools to support adoption and adaptation of two-generation approaches.

Build leaders and a national network:

- Invest in entrepreneurial leaders with breakthrough ideas to move families to opportunity through the Ascend Fellowship;

- Strengthen the Ascend Network and its leaders.

Leverage resources:

- Expand and leverage funding and support for two-generation efforts in the public and private arenas as well as provide flexible resources.

WHY A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH?

In the United States today, nearly 45 percent of all children — more than 32 million — live in low-income families. Almost three-fourths of women-headed families are low income. About 65 percent of African-American, American Indian, and Hispanic children live in low-income families, as do 32 percent of white and Asian-American children.

I think the biggest thing for me is trying to figure out how I am going to take care of myself and how am I going to set my children up for success.

— Low-income, Latina mother

The demographics of families in poverty may be diverse, but parents' dreams for their children are similar everywhere: a good education, economic stability, and a better future. A mom from Detroit describes what she wants for her children: "A secure life, like for my children to have

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something that they can start with, but I think a lot of times we don't have anything to start with."

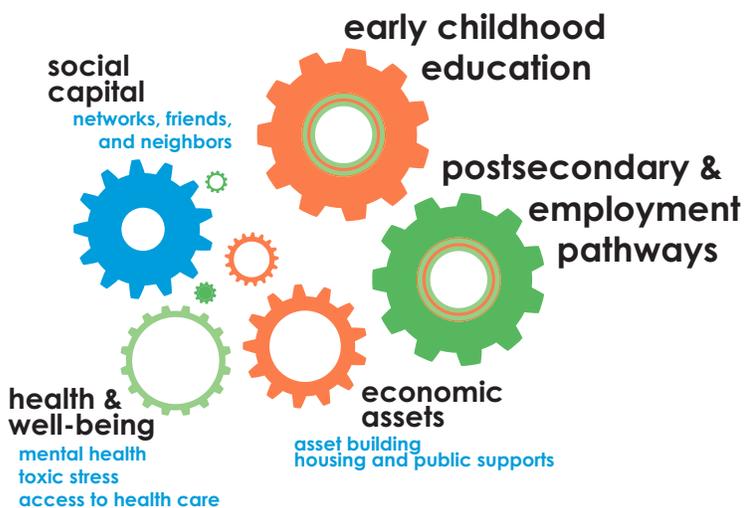
Achieving those dreams is the promise of what we call two-generation approaches (2Gen), which address two generations (children and the adults in their lives) at the same time. Another mother, who participates in a program run by an Ascend Network partner, said "I grew up in poverty because my mom and grandmother did. The two-generation approach has helped me dig in and learn more." Research has documented the impact of a parent's education, economic stability, and overall health on a child's trajectory. Similarly children's education and healthy development are powerful catalysts for parents.

THE POLITICAL WILL IS THERE

Eighty-nine percent of Americans across all demographics and party lines favor two-generation approaches as a means to raise families out of poverty, according to a bi-partisan public opinion survey and exit poll Ascend commissioned from Lake Research in late 2014. Moreover, 70 percent favor the approach even if it means an increase in their own taxes.

CORE COMPONENTS OF A 2GEN APPROACH

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



PRINCIPLES OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

- 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;
- Prioritize intentional implementation.

2GEN IN ACTION

In its work, Ascend focuses on the networks and systems most able to influence the lives of families. These include the trillion dollars in public human services resources, community colleges, Head Start, United Ways, and community action agencies, among others. Two examples of 2Gen in action follow:

The Jeremiah Program provides housing, early childhood education, and life skills, and partners with local community colleges for postsecondary education. It began in 1998, in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, and is designed to help single mothers complete postsecondary education while their children are successfully prepared for kindergarten. Under the dynamic leadership of Ascend Fellow Gloria Perez, Jeremiah has expanded to North Dakota and Texas. Jeremiah has also partnered with Endicott College, led by Ascend Fellow Richard Wylie, on another 2Gen pilot for student parents in the Boston area.

The Colorado, Tennessee, and Utah Departments of Human Services, led by Ascend Fellows Reggie Bicha, Raquel Hatter, and Ann Silverberg Williamson respectively, have embraced two-generation strategies for their Departments, which control billions in public services and have thousands of employees serving families in their states. They are focusing on families holistically, bringing offices and data systems together and strengthening a culture of service and an appetite for change within their teams. Similar shifts are developing in Connecticut and Hawaii.