A LETTER FROM WALTER ISAACSON AND ANNE MOSLE

Making Economic Security a Family Tradition: Two-Generation Solutions from the 2012 Aspen ThinkXChange

Albert Einstein once said, “The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.” Imagination and the translation of ideas into action reigned at the inaugural Aspen ThinkXChange in October 2012. With 45 percent of all American children growing up in low-income families, we need creative problem-solving among our leaders now more than ever. At the Aspen Institute, we believe that increasing inequality in the U.S. is a fundamental challenge to our democracy. However, we also believe that periods of crisis can spur powerful innovation. The Aspen ThinkXChange gathered 150 dynamic leaders from across sectors — from cutting-edge community-based programs, policy, academia, philanthropy, business, and media — to discuss and debate opportunities and solutions for moving children and their parents toward economic mobility and opportunity.

At the Aspen ThinkXChange, we focused on the power and potential of two-generation approaches, which create opportunities for and address the needs of both children and their parents together. The Aspen Institute has for more than 60 years served as a nonpartisan convener of powerful ideas and bold voices, and this event spotlighted the Institute’s 2012-2013 Ascend Fellows – 20 trailblazers from around the country – who introduced the strategies they are pursuing to increase families’ educational and economic opportunities. The title of our convening — Think times (x) Change — was an intentional directive to action. Through plenaries, breakout sessions, and design labs, diverse leaders pitched powerful solutions to one of the most pressing challenges of our time: creating an America in which a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next.

This publication offers an overview of solutions, principles, and recommendations for integrating two-generation approaches across the federal, state, and local levels. We invite leaders to integrate these principles and ideas into their work, and we look forward to the 2014 Aspen ThinkXChange, where we will convene to mark our progress and push to create economic opportunity for all.