



# BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

## WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

The demographics of families in poverty around the globe may be diverse, but parents' dreams for their children are similar everywhere: good health, a good education, economic stability, and a better future.

*"I think the biggest thing for me is trying to figure out how I am going to take care of myself and how I am going to set my children up for success."* ~ Low-income mother

*"If a community values its children, it must cherish their parents."*

~ John Bowlby, British psychologist and psychiatrist

# INTRODUCTION

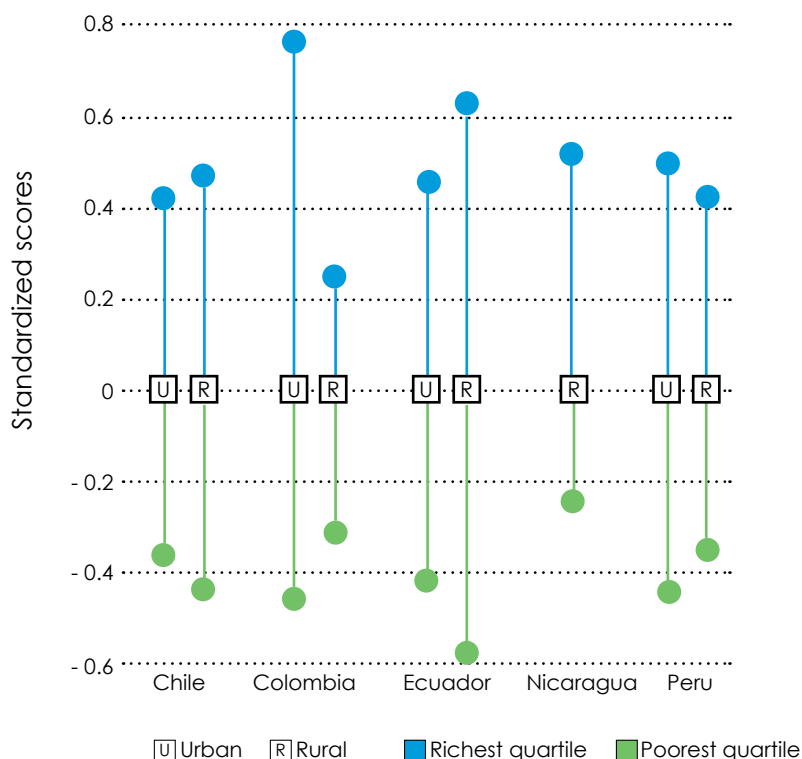
## BACKGROUND

Helping parents achieve their dreams for their children must begin from the time before the baby is born through her early years. It is during this crucial period that the foundations for life are laid – from good health and nutrition to creating a stimulating and

loving home environment and from high quality learning experiences to play and emotional growth. What young children learn from the adults who raise and care for them lays the foundation for future social, emotional, language, and cognitive growth. When children do not have these protective relationships and experience the deprivation and high stress levels that often come with poverty, their brains and bodies adapt in ways that can have long-term negative effects. Social and economic inequities within and between communities have profound implications for the health and well-being of children and families.

### Abilities in receptive language for three- to six-year-olds vary widely by wealth in five Latin American countries

Wealth gradients in receptive language among preschool children across five Latin American countries are substantial in both rural and urban areas. The analysis adds systematic evidence that gaps in child development outcomes appear early in the life cycle.



Child development is influenced by both access to early childhood services and by the overall conditions and well-being of the family. It is also influenced by the quality of the relationships children have with parents and in early childhood services. In addition, research shows that intergenerational education affects many areas of children's lives, and these effects persist over time. Parents' level of educational attainment is the best predictor of economic mobility for their children.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, boosting parents' income is likely to have positive effects on their children, primarily when this boost takes place during early childhood.<sup>2</sup> Because health, education, and overall well-being are interrelated in families' lives, providers of health, education, and social protection services must cooperate to address the risk factors associated with poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Following consultations with experts from around the world, we developed this concept note to engage the international development community, policymakers, and families around a whole family approach. Whole family approaches should help a country or community meet multiple

Source: *World Development Report 2015*, World Bank Group. Based on table 2 in Schady and others, forthcoming.

Note: The bars show the average age-standardized z-scores of receptive language for the richest and poorest quartiles of the distribution of wealth within each country, reported separately by urban and rural areas. An important caveat is that data are generally representative of rural areas for all countries but are not representative for urban areas. No urban data are available for Nicaragua.

development and sustainability goals. This concept note lays out the basic elements, principles, and concrete examples of the approach in action.

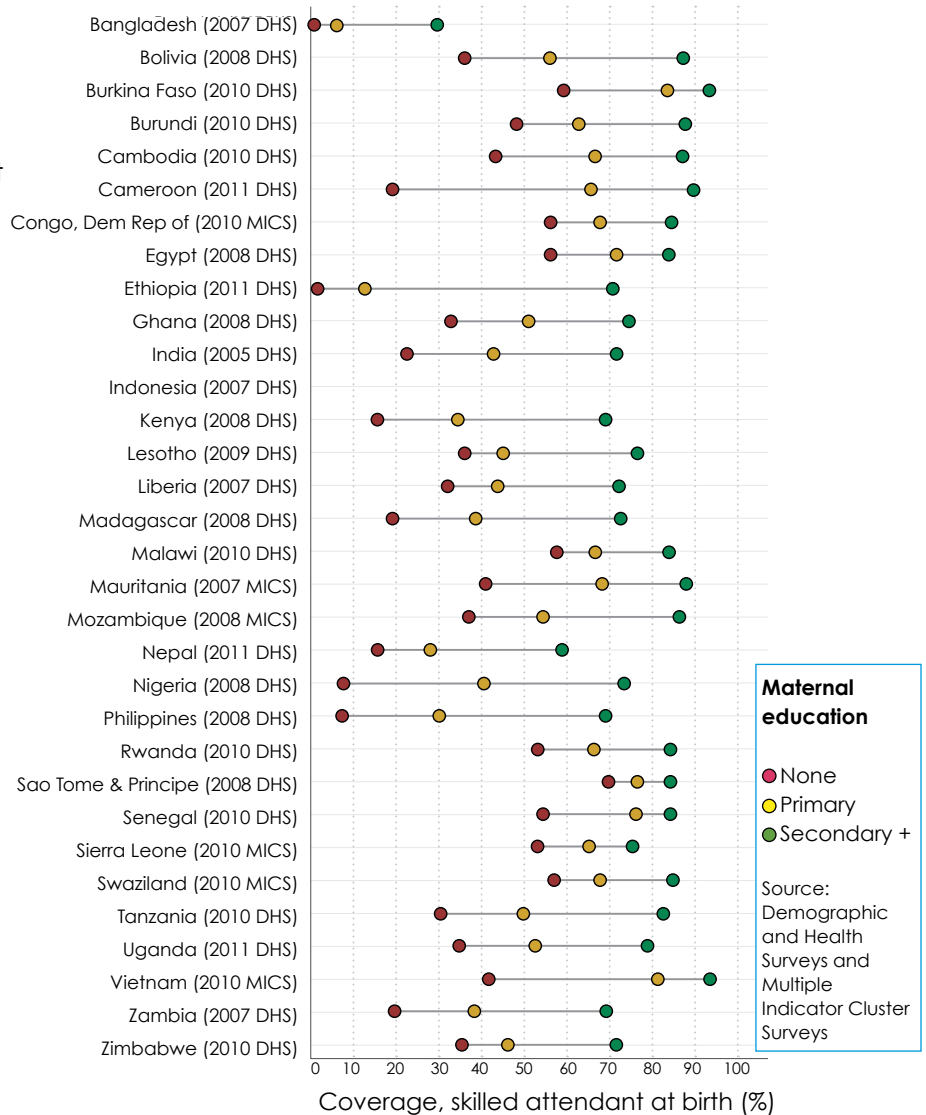
### WHAT IS A WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH?

A whole family approach is built on the premise that conditions that affect the family will have an impact on child development as will the direct experiences of the child. Cooperation between multiple sectors is necessary to break the cycle of poverty and increase the education, health and well-being, and economic stability of children and the adults in their lives. Whole family approaches provide a framework for looking at problems and strengths and creating more sustainable solutions – solutions that recognize that what is good for the child is good for the family and vice versa. Moreover, what is good for the family is good for society. They acknowledge that women and children's rights are human rights. Giving children a strong start in life and creating stability for the family require a focus on the whole, and in particular, on children's well-being and on parents (mothers, fathers, grandparents, and other caregivers) as agents of change. In societies where caste and gender discrimination may be deeply entrenched, whole family approaches, grounded in community values, can contribute to positive outcomes, including a focus on the contributions of women and girls.

Parent-child relationships are at the core of whole family approaches. Early childhood programs and partnerships offer a singularly important gateway to reaching families during the critical early years. As one teacher and parent said, "The opportunity is when a child walks through the door and the parent is right behind her." It is an opportunity

## Educated Women are More Likely to Give Birth with a Skilled Attendant

Skilled attendant at birth, by maternal education



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys  
Data source: World Health Organization and UNICEF  
*Accountability for Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival: The 2013 Update, 2013.*

not only to bolster the child's learning and development but also to work with parents on how they nurture the child socially, emotionally, mentally, and physically – and on the adults' own trajectories towards economic stability for the entire family.

It is the acknowledgement of the mutually reinforcing relationships between the factors referenced above and the importance of the early years that underpin the partnership between the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation and Ascend at the Aspen Institute would like to extend our thanks to the Advisory Group, who graciously gave their time and expertise in the preparatory phase of this work.

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and Ascend at the Aspen Institute. The Bernard van Leer Foundation has a long history of investing in early childhood development. More recently, it has worked to create an enabling environment within families to give parents the agency to provide the care needed to ensure better outcomes for their children. Ascend at the Aspen Institute was launched in 2010 to catalyze conversations, leadership, and solutions around a two-generation approach that focuses on children and parents together to build family economic security, educational success, and health and well-being. Recognizing the alignment in their work and values, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Ascend joined forces in 2015 to begin exploring what a whole family framework could mean in low- and middle-income countries.

## HOW IS THE APPROACH DIFFERENT?

Whole family approaches – also known as ‘two-generation’ or ‘+parent support’ – are a response to the research that has documented the impact of a parent’s education, economic stability, and overall health on a child’s development trajectory. Similarly the research shows that children’s education and healthy development are powerful catalysts for parents. Whole family approaches recognize that many services and policies aimed primarily at either children or parents are missing opportunities to increase their impact by not focusing on the whole family. Placing children and adults in silos ignores parents’ daily challenges and strengths although the challenges are even more pronounced for those living in poverty.

At the heart of a whole family approach is **identifying goals, providing services and support, and tracking progress for both children and the adults in their lives.** It attempts to

address both access to quality early childhood and family well-being, including health, education, income supports, and social networks. In practice, that means high quality early childhood services are provided simultaneously with services for adult and overall family stability and parenting support to promote development of the youngest children and improve overall family well-being.

What whole family approaches do not require is that a single program meet all the needs of a family. In fact, few single programs that try to do everything succeed. Most well-designed whole-family approaches link two or more programs with shared goals around a family or build off a strong existing platform to integrate additional services via a partnership or an alignment of efforts with another organization.

## WHAT DOES THE APPROACH LOOK LIKE IN ACTION?

In **Pakistan, 100,000 lady health workers** deliver basic health services to families door-to-door. Their priority is families with children ages 0-5 and couples for family planning. In addition to providing critical support to the government of Pakistan’s effort to increase vaccination coverage, these women, who are trusted members of the community, play a central role in expanding health education on pre- and post-natal care, nutrition, local health services, and family planning. In some countries, in addition to improving health and parenting practices that enable the baby to grow and thrive, home visiting programs also help parents access further education, financial supports, and employment. For example, mothers who participated in Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting programs in the US, which employ a whole family approach, were significantly more likely to be employed than their counterparts according to randomized control trials.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

**Table 1: The progression of thinking about parents in early childhood development**

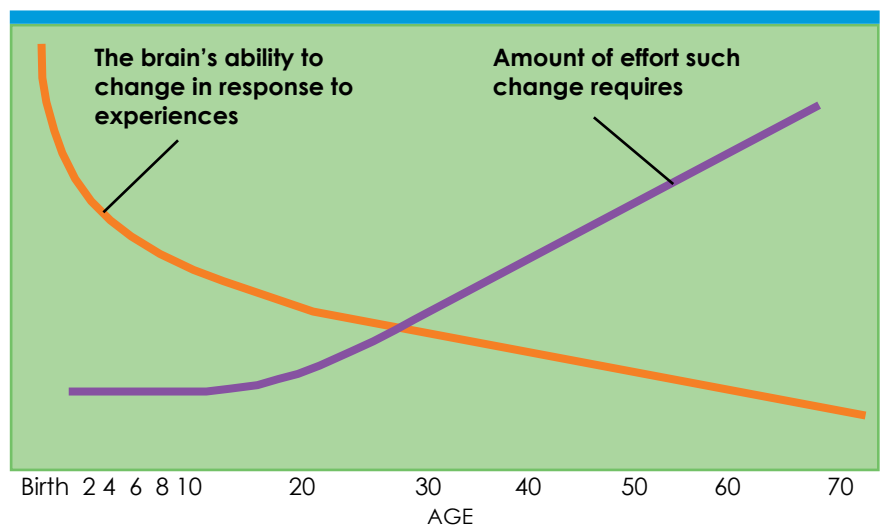
Old Think	New Think
Serve child or parent	Serve the whole family
Survive: Emphasize care	Thrive: Emphasize care <i>and</i> education
Provide information to parents	Promote responsible parenting, family life, self-efficacy, and leadership skills
Provide information on services	Partner with other organizations to provide access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary and tertiary education for parents</li> <li>• Health care, including mental health services</li> <li>• Income supports</li> <li>• Career development and vocational training</li> </ul>
Focus on the mother as the responsible party	Focus on both mothers and fathers as responsible parties.
Track outcomes for child or parent	Articulate and track outcomes for both children <i>and</i> parents

Adapted from Lombardi, Mosle, Patel, Schumacher, and Stedron. *Gateways to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together*, 2014.<sup>8</sup>

A follow-up study of a low-cost home visiting program conducted in **Jamaica** from 1986 through 1988 demonstrated the effectiveness of home visiting programs, parent-child interactions and cognitive and social stimulation for infants and toddlers in closing the achievement gap and producing long-term economic gains. Extremely disadvantaged children treated in the Jamaican Study earned 25 percent more as adults than disadvantaged children who received no treatment—and they earned as much as their more advantaged peers.<sup>7</sup>

In Oklahoma in the US, **CAP Tulsa**, which serves more than 2,000 families a year, has long run high quality early education programs for low-income children. Recognizing the need to serve the family, not just the children, to ensure long-term family success, CAP Tulsa developed a pathway for the parents of the children in their programs to earn credentials or degrees in Tulsa’s growing healthcare field. They partner with local technology and community colleges, where parents attend classes as a cohort with guidance from career coaches. Tuition, fees, and all school-

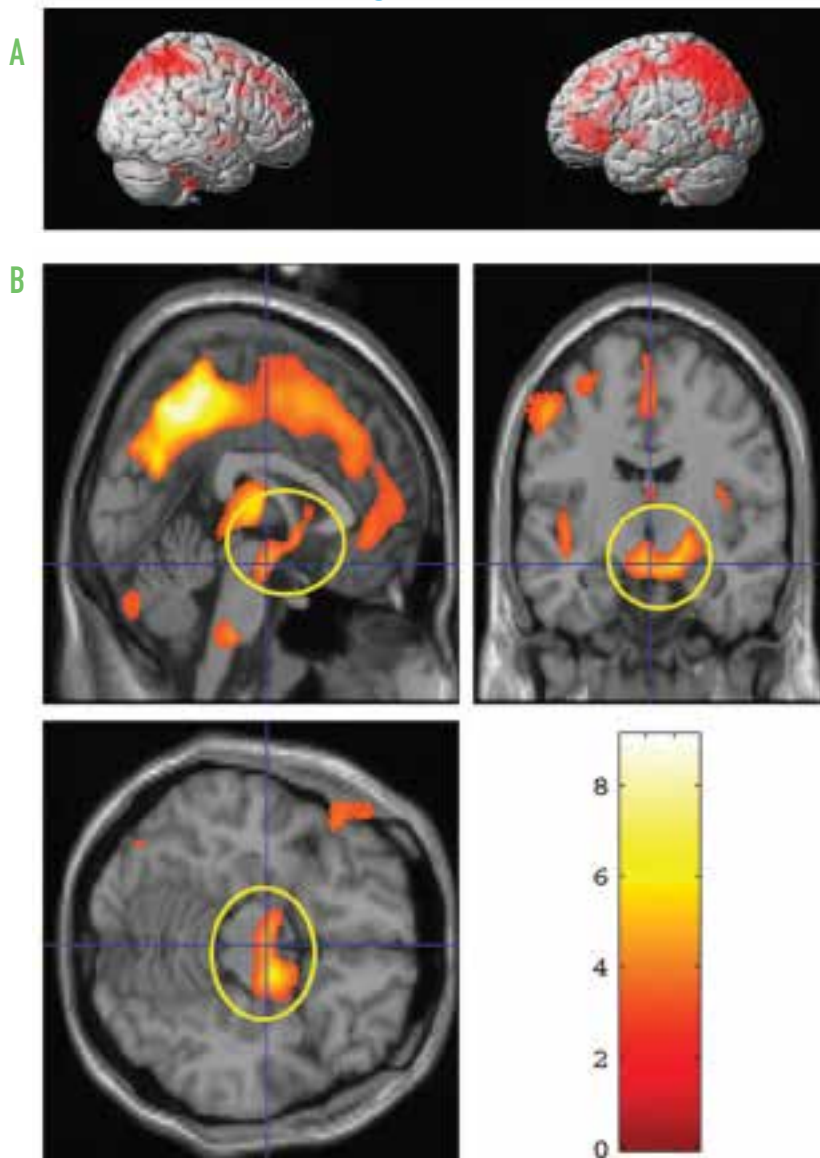
related expenses are covered, and parents can receive additional support for transportation and child care. Over the past two years, in partnership with a local school district, CAP Tulsa has developed new programming for parents who are English language learners, a growing and marginalized population within the spectrum of low-income families in the US. In working to meet the needs of these families, CAP Tulsa and its partners help ensure participants are gaining stability and



It is easier and less costly to form strong brain circuits during the early years than it is to intervene or ‘fix’ them later.

Adapted from Harvard Center on the Developing Child. Graph source: Pat Levitt (2009)

## Brains of New Parents Undergo Major Structural and Functional Changes



**A:** Anatomical (gray matter) increase from 2-4 weeks to 3-4 months postpartum among new mothers. Regions showing the increase are highlighted in red. **B:** A cluster of the reward and motivation (midbrain) regions are circled in yellow. The anatomical increase 2-4 weeks and 3-4 months postpartum was predicted by mothers' positive perception of their own baby at 2-4 weeks postpartum.

Source: Kim, Leckman, Mayes, Feldman, et al., 2010. Adapted from Watamura, et al. *Two Open Windows: Infant and Parent Neurobiologic Change*, 2015.

tools to support their families and enable their children to thrive. Data from a quasi-experimental study of CAP Tulsa's two-generation model will be available in 2016-2017.

### BUILDING ON EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH

Decades of research have demonstrated how quickly babies'

brains grow and respond to their environments, highlighting the importance of early care and education.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Recent evidence shows that the brains of new parents also undergo major structural and functional changes and that these changes support good parenting. The early months are a shared period of tremendous change for both babies and their parents, a period of great opportunity but also one of great vulnerability. During this transition, parents with risk factors like postpartum depression or a history of insensitive parenting experience less responsive brain development. This brings them to their role as new parents with less supportive biology, making the challenge of parenting even tougher. All new parents, regardless of their histories, can create a healthy start for their children and families. Understanding how experiences and environment affect parents' brains can help parents, service providers, and policymakers design coping strategies and approaches that mitigate risks, maximize strengths, and give families a healthy, positive start.<sup>11</sup>

## WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

### WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF FOCUS OF A WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH?

These core components of a whole family approach are high-quality early childhood development; secondary and tertiary education and employment pathways; health and well-being; and economic assets. They are outlined in further detail with examples below. Few, if any, organizations can offer all these components. Strong partnerships with shared goals and mutual accountability are critical to providing holistic services for a family.

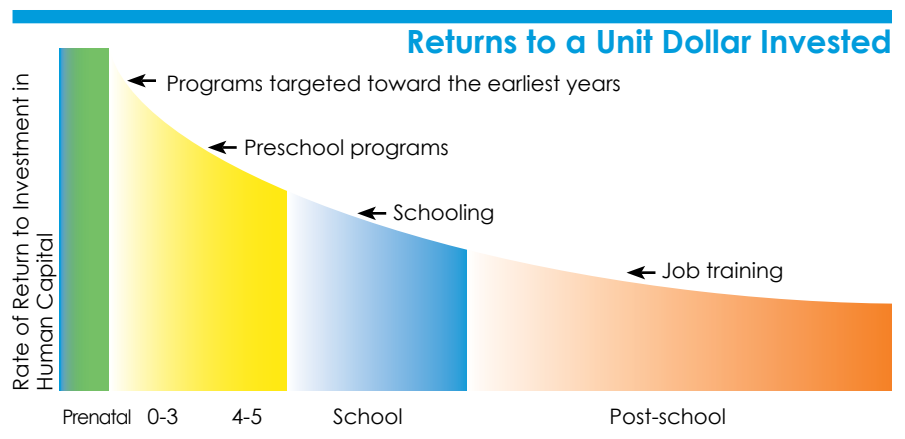
## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

A significant body of research shows quality early education has documented effects on later educational attainment and economic outcomes. Increasing preschool enrollment to 50 percent of all children in low- and middle-income countries could result in lifetime earnings gains of \$14-\$34 billion.<sup>12</sup> In the follow-up study of the Jamaica home visiting program, children treated through the program were earning 25 percent more at age 22 than the control group. At age 22, 98 percent were employed, with 94 percent in full-time jobs.<sup>13</sup> Ensuring healthy child development is an investment in a country's future workforce and in a thriving society.

High-quality early childhood development programs offer an important gateway to whole family approaches. They provide more than care and education for children; they partner with parents and serve as a trusted resource. The emphasis on learning and development can provide an opening for parents to explore their own hopes for the future and increase their parenting skills and confidence, which can contribute to success in employment or continued education. Research shows that children can serve as a motivator for adults, particularly mothers. This mutual motivation suggests that the benefits of whole family programs that build on the platform of investments in early childhood may be greater than the sum of their separate programmatic parts.<sup>14</sup>

### Program Spotlights:

In **Chile**, **Crece Contigo** is an innovative approach that articulates, organizes, and integrates health, education, welfare, and protection services based on the needs of young children



Early childhood education is an efficient and effective investment for economic and workforce development. The earlier the investment, the greater the return on investment.

Graph source: Heckman, James J. "Schools, Skills and Synapses," *Economic Inquiry*, 46(3): 289-324, 2008.

and their families. It recognizes the importance of the prenatal period for child development. Part of the success of the system relates to the very large coverage and utilization of the public health network throughout the country. It is in the clinic that each family is assessed, not only on its health, but also on a number of areas of socioeconomic vulnerability. Through this evaluation, families can be referred to specific services provided in their municipalities (anything from a poverty alleviation program to a childcare service, home visits, housing improvements, or screenings for developmental delays).

In **Israel**, the municipality of Uhm-el-Fahm, with other partners, introduced a reading program to address the lack of reading culture in both preschools and the home environment. Working through daycares and the preschools, parents learned how to better interact with their child and lead reading activities. The results of the program improved the quality of reading activities between parent and child and showed increases in the interest of children and mothers in reading at home.

**Mobile Creches**, in **India**, ensures childcare, including health, nutrition,

early learning, and care, for children from birth through age 12 who are living at construction sites in Delhi. Mobile Creches works in partnership with real estate developer, contractors, other NGO service providers, and the government on setting up the creches and on advocacy for children's rights.

**AJEEC-NISPED, the Arab-Jewish Center for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation**, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening active citizenship through education and economic empowerment, including through the formation of cooperatives and social enterprises, volunteerism, quality early childhood education, health promotion, and Jewish-Arab partnership. **Israel's Bedouin** population in the Negev's transition from a traditional Bedouin lifestyle to a Western, urban lifestyle poses new challenges in the field of early childhood education. Convinced that the parent is the child's first and most important teacher, AJEEC-NISPED's early childhood educational programs are based on the local identity and values of the Arab Bedouin society.

## SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

A good education is the key to a better life and a stronger economy. Individual earnings increase by 10 percent with each year of school a person completes. For a country, increasing the average level of higher education by one year can add half a percentage point of growth to GDP.<sup>15</sup>

Low levels of educational attainment and poverty are strongly correlated. OECD data shows that the benefits of a tertiary education continue to exceed the costs. In the US, completing a 4-year tertiary degree doubles a person's income. Only 10 percent of those with a bachelor's degree are poor while

more than 30 percent of those with a high school diploma or less are poor.<sup>16</sup> Returns in many other countries show similar benefits. And, as the World Bank notes, higher levels of tertiary education in a country expand its capacity for development.

Parents' level of educational attainment is also a strong predictor of children's educational and economic outcomes. Maternal education in particular strongly predicts children's early developmental outcomes.<sup>17</sup> For example, the language skills of three-year-old children have been shown to increase as their mothers further their education. In another example, women with higher levels of education also have healthier children. Babies born to mothers with low education (incomplete primary school or less) in the Dominican Republic are four times as likely to die as those born to mothers with higher education (secondary or more). In Colombia and Bolivia, babies born to mothers with low education are twice as likely to die as those born to mothers with higher education.<sup>18</sup> Supporting higher education levels for parents is key to a whole family approach because of the dual benefits to parents and to their young children.

### Program spotlights:

Quality center-based care for young children not only supports children's development and school readiness but also contributes to their caregivers' and siblings' ability to stay in work and school. A randomized study of community-based preschools in rural parts of **Mozambique** found that caregivers of participating children were 26 percent more likely to have worked in the previous month and that older siblings were 6 percent more likely to be enrolled in school. This may be especially relevant for teenage mothers, who often struggle to stay in school or work.<sup>19</sup>



**Jeremiah Program** offers one of the most successful US strategies for transforming families from poverty to prosperity, two generations at a time. Through close partnerships with community colleges and an intensive preparatory empowerment program, Jeremiah prepares determined single mothers to excel in the workforce and reduce generational dependence on public assistance. Meanwhile their children participate in high quality onsite early childhood development programs to prepare them to succeed in school. A study of the program showed that for every 100 program graduates, society receives net benefits of US\$ 16 million over the course of the graduates' lifetimes.<sup>20</sup>

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Physical and mental health have a major impact on a family's ability to thrive. There is a well-documented correlation between poor health and poor family finances – with the causation believed to go in both directions.<sup>21</sup>

Access to health care and health insurance that covers basic services positively affects the health and nutritional status of children.<sup>22</sup> Those without such access are less likely to receive recommended preventive care and more likely to be diagnosed at later stages of disease. Parents in poor health experience difficulty securing and maintaining full-time employment and may struggle to provide financial and psychosocial support for their children. Financial strain due to poor health or large health-related expenses can be a barrier to families building the assets they need to succeed.

Parental depression negatively affects caregiving, material support, and nurturance, and is associated with poor health and developmental outcomes for children of all ages, including



prenatally. Some preliminary research points to treatment of maternal depression, increasing parental sensitivity, and formal child care as potential strategies to mitigate negative outcomes for children.<sup>23</sup>

Childhood trauma also has lasting health and social consequences. The number of adverse childhood experiences is strongly associated with adulthood high-risk health behaviors such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, promiscuity, and severe obesity, and correlated with ill-health, including depression, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease and shortened lifespan.<sup>24</sup> In summary, parents' mental and physical health are closely intertwined with their children's mental and physical health — some of which is the result of genetics, but much of which can be traced to environment and behavior.

### Program spotlights:

**Thinking Healthy** is an evidence-based approach used by the **World Health Organization** in which community health workers help reduce prenatal depression through evidence-based cognitive-behavioural techniques. They provide an assessment and

management of mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders by non-specialist providers, such as general physicians, clinical officers and nurses. The Thinking Healthy approach offers instructions for empathic, clear and sensitive communication with women and their families. In addition, it mobilizes and provides social support. In this approach, community health workers attend to the physical as well as psychological health of the mother, in addition to emphasizing the importance of the mother-infant relationship in this period.

**Saúde Criança in Brazil** improves the home environment and promotes the self-sufficiency of Brazilian families with children suffering from chronic disease and poverty. They use a multidisciplinary and integrated approach by focusing on five factors crucial for the family's well-being: health, housing, citizenship, income and education. Saúde Criança fights for social inclusion by promoting human development. Every family is assisted individually, according to their needs and potential, during a period of

approximately two years. The family's progress is tracked in regular meetings with the Saúde Criança team with the objective of helping the family achieve dignity and autonomy.

In two South Bronx schools in New York City, **Harvard's Dr. Stephanie M. Jones** and her team have developed, implemented, and evaluated a whole family program that supports low-income children's academic and social-emotional development while simultaneously building skills and social capital among their parents. The project extends an intervention that targets self-regulation and executive function skills in PreK-3rd grade classrooms (SECURE: Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Understanding and Regulation in education), and launched an aligned set of parent-focused strategies that build knowledge, skills, and social support among parents.

## ECONOMIC ASSETS

Increased family income during early childhood can have a profound and lasting impact on children's lives. Research in the US shows that a \$3,000 difference in income for low-income parents when their child is young is associated with a 17 percent increase in the child's future earnings.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond monthly incomes, savings and other financial assets are critical to help manage unexpected setbacks and build economic security. According to the World Bank, three-quarters of the world's poor lack a bank account because of poverty, costs, travel distances and the often burdensome requirements involved in opening an account. Being "unbanked" is linked to income inequality: The richest 20 percent of adults in developing countries are more than twice as likely to have a formal account.<sup>26</sup>



Other research shows that children with as little as \$1 to \$499 in an account designated for higher education are more likely to enroll and graduate.<sup>27</sup> Even small dollar amounts help children see themselves as bound for higher education, highlighting the important psychological aspects of goal setting and expectations.

Affordable and safe transportation, housing, and food assistance are also critical wrap-around supports to help build stability for families as they pursue educational success and economic security. Community-specific approaches recognize that housing is also a critical avenue for working with families. Combined, the impact of these supports that help lead to economic stability for families, have lasting and far-reaching effects on children.

### Program spotlights:

**Familias en Accion** is a conditional cash transfer program run by the Government of **Colombia** that provides grants of between US\$5 and US\$17 per month to poor households with children, on the condition that children aged less than 7 attend regular medical check-ups, and that children aged between 7 and 18 attend no less than 80 percent of school classes during the school year. Using the infrastructure of the Familias en Accion national welfare program, the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) introduced psychosocial stimulation and micronutrient supplementation to participating families. The results showed that psychosocial stimulation did improve children's cognitive development. However, the micronutrient supplementation had no developmental or health outcomes, nor was there any interaction between the supplementation and the stimulation. The results from the stimulation model and its delivery method suggest it may serve as a promising blueprint

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*As one mother said to a group of policymakers and practitioners, “You don’t know what a parent is going through. So respect each parent as an individual and let them tell their own story.”*

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for future policy on early childhood development.<sup>28</sup>

**United Way of the Bay Area** in San Francisco, California, operates almost a dozen SparkPoint Centers, which help low-income residents create step-by-step plans to tackle their financial needs and connect to related services, such as credit counseling, tax preparation, and home ownership support. Building on the strength of the model, United Way partnered with Community Schools to offer SparkPoint services in elementary schools. This whole family approach specifically links the financial footing and knowledge of parents to the academic outcomes of their children. On average, clients who have been with SparkPoint consistently for two or more years increased their monthly income by \$807, improved their credit score by 39 points, and decreased their debt by \$10,586.<sup>29</sup>

In **Africa**, **ICS** combines skillful parenting and agribusiness training to improve the well-being of children, youth, and their parents in rural Africa. Their social enterprises, Agrics and Alizetics, are the backbone economic strengthening activities. Agrics provides agricultural inputs on credit as well as training. Alizetics provides a transparent marketplace for their products. Together they improve yields and income. Families also participate in a 12-week, group parenting program to improve children's development.

In **Brazil**, **Gastromotiva** combines job training for work in a professional



kitchen for parents with workshops focused around child nutrition and parenting. The main objective is to contribute to a healthier diet in childhood and good parenting. The pilot focuses on children living in economically disadvantaged communities in the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador.

Including a parenting education component within village savings and loan associations is an emerging model within the economic asset category. Association members save money by purchasing shares in the VSLA that are then pooled into a loan fund for members to borrow. In their **New Generation project in Burundi**, the International Rescue Committee introduced their Healing Families and Communities discussions during the village savings and loan association meetings and provided financial literacy education as well. Results from

an evaluation of the program pointed to reductions in poverty, increases in household assets for the family, increases in spending on education, reductions in the use of harsh discipline practices and the belief that physical punishment is needed as part of a good education. Child surveys reported improvements in family problems, children's well-being, children's distress and parent-child communication. Impacts on child well-being and discipline were not seen for groups that only participated in the village saving and loan associations.<sup>30</sup> Similar programs are supported by the Private Sector Foundation **Uganda** and the Inter-American Development bank in **Peru**.

**SUUBI**, which means "hope" in **Lugandan** is an asset-building model begun in 2005, where children and their families are encouraged to start savings accounts with local financial institution, and their savings are matched through grant funding. After a savings account is opened for a child, his or her caregiver or family members are encouraged to deposit up to \$20 per month in that account. Each month it is matched by a ratio of 2-to-1, so for every \$20 deposited, those in the program will receive an additional \$40 each month. The account helps pay for the child to attend high school or start a small business. Families receive financial management training, and the children are matched with mentors who serve as role models.

## PRINCIPLES

### GUIDING WHOLE FAMILY APPROACHES

While the approach should be contextualized to meet the needs of diverse communities, there are seven principles that can guide the design and

planning of whole family approaches in the global context. These principles are intended to enable more effective and equitable use of resources in any effort to improve results for families.

### **Coordinate and align child and adult systems and funding streams.**

Resources must be used efficiently. Rarely will single funding streams fully address all the needs of children, parents, and families. Delivering whole family services requires the blending and coordinating of funds. Aligning and linking systems at the regional and community level — eligibility standards, performance benchmarks, and coordinated administrative structures — while simultaneously pursuing improved outcomes for both parents and children will lead to whole family success.

### **Prioritize intentional implementation.**

Evaluations and analyses of past initiatives that attempted to address the needs of both children and the adults in their lives yield an important lesson: Being intentional about implementation details is essential. Support for the direct-service workforce, careful consideration of program outcomes, attention to the level and intensity of services, and the use of data are all critical details that will ensure that child and parent outcomes match the intent.

### **Measure and account for outcomes for children and the adults in their lives.**

Dual outcomes are at the heart of true whole family approaches. Outcomes for children and their parents / adults in their lives must be embedded in programs and policies that use whole family approaches to improve family economic security and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Assessing how well programs and policies meet a family's needs should

include indicators that measure the impact on both children and parents.

### **Ensure equity.**

Whole family approaches should evaluate and fix structural problems that create gender and/or racial and ethnic disparities in the ways services and assistance are provided.

### **Ensure interventions are culturally appropriate.**

Design of whole family approaches must be based on the social and cultural context of the families they are designed to serve. Families' cultural beliefs and practices and those of the community around them need to be taken into account to ensure programs are culturally appropriate and effective. Underpinning whole family approaches must be a commitment to listen to families and ensure their perspectives and experience inform program and policy design.

### **Foster innovation and evidence together.**

A deliberate pipeline must be developed to ensure innovation and promising efforts can build evidence where appropriate. Organizations should tap insights from prior evidence-based research and work at both policy and program levels to build upon what has worked for families. Also, there is a need to recognize that programs that meet evidence-based thresholds serve only a fraction of children and parents, so we must innovate to develop better ways to meet families' needs. Policies should strongly encourage the integration of innovative approaches into emerging evidence, evaluations of effectiveness, and best practice.

### **Build social capital.**

Social capital, as defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, are

the networks together with shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups.<sup>31</sup> According to a recent survey, low-income mothers with children enrolled in child care centers were 40 percent less likely to be depressed than those whose children were not enrolled. The friendships mothers developed through the centers were also important sources of information and support.<sup>32</sup> In addition, many programs have found that building peer support groups for participants in higher education and workforce development efforts is an important factor in program completion.

## POLICY OPPORTUNITIES

Whole family approaches should help a country or community meet multiple sustainable development goals. In many places, there are existing resources and opportunities to serve families holistically. Employing a whole family approach to the policy infrastructure can help increase the impact of those resources. While we continue to identify and elevate promising whole family approaches in programs and research, it is important to explore the policy and other opportunities that offer the greatest openings to building the necessary support and infrastructure.

Sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels can help support accelerated investment in breaking the cycle of poverty. At the same time, using a whole family approach in achieving policy and other development goals will enhance their impact and effectiveness.

For example, work towards the Sustainable Development Goals would

be enhanced with a whole family approach. Consider that efforts to achieve the objectives under “Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere” and “Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” would be strengthened by considering the whole family environment, needs, and opportunities.

Similarly, a whole family approach can enhance work towards the UN Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent's Health 2016-2030 as well as national efforts such as Rwanda's early childhood development and family policy efforts.

When policymakers use the family lens to leverage networks and interventions in support of families, they recognize and build on the fact that the family is the core social unit of society. They also recognize the assets and strengths that families bring to the table. They acknowledge that what is good for the child is good for the family. And what is good for the family is good for society.

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