

STATE HUMAN SERVICES MODEL

COLORADO AS A CASE STUDY FOR POLICYMAKERS



WE ENVISION **AN AMERICA** IN WHICH A LEGACY OF **ECONOMIC** **SECURITY** AND **EDUCATIONAL** **SUCCESS** PASSES FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ascend at the Aspen Institute extends sincere thanks to our many partners in Colorado for their commitment to implementing two-generation approaches to improve the economic status of families in Colorado. The Colorado Department of Human Services, under the leadership of Executive Director and Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha, has led the nation in two-generation innovations within the human services sector. We are indebted to Mr. Bicha and his entire team for their work and the many hours they dedicated to sharing the details of their 2Gen work and reviewing a draft of the case study. We thank Keri Batchelder, Julie Krow, Nikki Hatch, Levetta Love, Mary Anne Snyder, and Devon Reichart, in particular.

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Please note you may download a copy of this document along with additional 2Gen resources developed by the Colorado Department of Human Services (e.g. a 2Gen Manager job description and a family assessment tool) by visiting the Ascend website at <http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, a growing number of policymakers, community leaders, and other key stakeholders have raised concerns about the systemic issues of income inequality and the lack of social mobility millions of Americans face. This vigorous debate has elicited a diverse array of opinions but has failed to produce consensus about a path forward.

For more than 50 years, the Aspen Institute has been bringing together leaders for dialogue and to catalyze new thinking and approaches to pressing societal issues. In 2010, the Institute launched Aspen Ascend, a team within Aspen committed to advancing a powerful approach to the issues of poverty, inequality of opportunity, and lack of social mobility.

Ascend's **two-generation (2Gen) approach** is both common sense and rooted in evidence: changing the odds for families experiencing poverty by working with both children and their parents *together*. There are quality programs, services, and supports for children across the United States, from Head Start to many others. Likewise, there are proven programs — such as community colleges, home visiting, and job training — through which adults can seek to move toward prosperity. But most of even the best programs treat those they serve as single entities, not as members of a family. Narrowly focused programs tend to produce limited and less synergistic results.

The bottom line: policies and programs that work with parents and their children together have the potential to achieve better and more lasting outcomes for both. Community colleges that do nothing

to support their students as parents see a higher dropout rate; child care and development providers who do not engage parents are not able to maximize the benefits children derive from their time in care.

After more than five years refining and strengthening the 2Gen approach by convening leaders, creating tools and resources, and elevating the awareness of policymakers and practitioners, we at Ascend seek to find leverage points — systems of care and family support where leaders have the reach, resources, and readiness to embrace and drive a 2Gen approach. We have found just such a leverage point in the nation's human services systems.

This case study offers readers an in-depth look at how the work has been accomplished in Colorado, a state that has seen early successes with innovative, strong 2Gen efforts. Along with offering an array of practical tools and resources that can be customized for use in other settings, the case study will take you deep into the experiences, insights, and lessons learned. To begin, we point to the following ingredients for a successful macro-level 2Gen approach that are evidenced in Colorado's work:

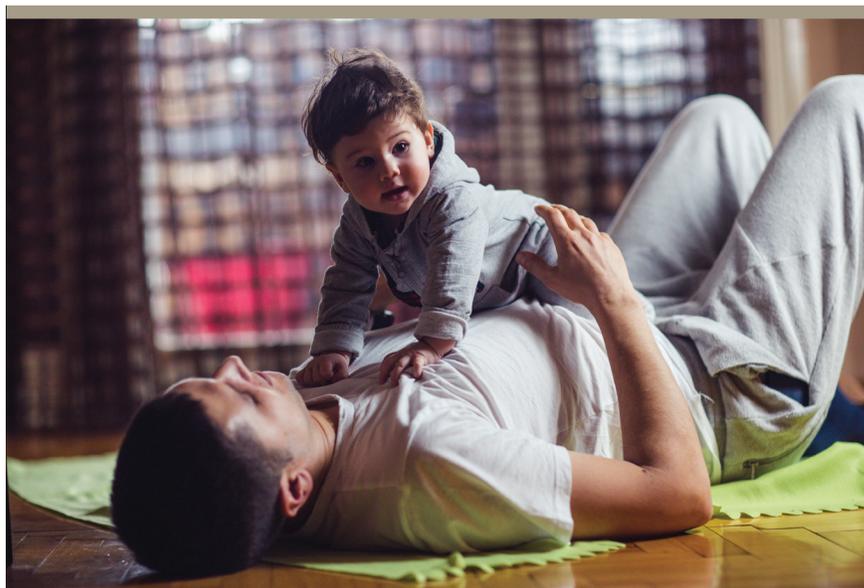
- Skillful leadership of organizational culture change that enables the embrace of more holistic practice models and policies;
- Broad and well-managed partnerships across state government and with counties, nonprofits, and the philanthropic sector;
- Inclusive and smart planning, coupled with persistent and resilient execution;

- A bias toward action and learning, utilizing testing, course adjustments, and sensitivity to the changing political and social landscape; and
- Discipline to embed the 2Gen approach in existing efforts instead of creating “one-off” programs.

We are grateful to our partners in Colorado and hope that their pioneering work will provide guidance and inspiration to you in exploring the use of this transformational approach to changing the odds for children and parents in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Today there is powerful momentum for 2Gen policies in states across the country as policymakers seek innovative, effective strategies for alleviating poverty. Many want to see families thrive but are often disappointed by the results of efforts to make that a reality. Traditional approaches that address the needs of children and their parents separately often inadvertently leave either the child or the parent behind. This dims the family's chances for economic security and success. The 2Gen approach calls for a rigorous focus on whole family outcomes. This focus requires a shift from the current fragmented policy paradigm that forces families to contort themselves to fit into a system that undercuts the ultimate goal of family success. When programs that work with parents and children function in separate silos, the resulting disconnected method of assessing needs and delivering services obscures the ways in which life challenges impact both generations. 2Gen approaches

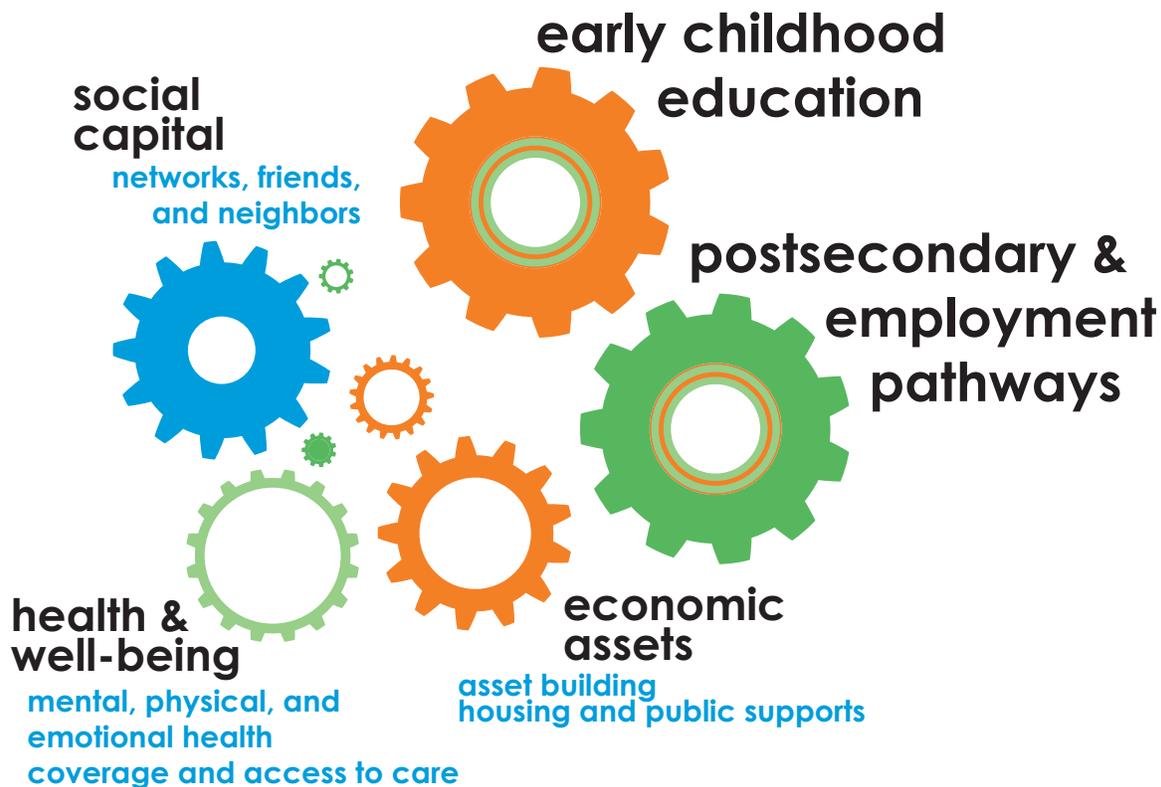


work with children and their parents simultaneously to harness the family's full potential and put the whole family on a path to permanent economic security.

The core components of 2Gen strategies — strategies that create an intergenerational cycle of opportunity — are early care and education, postsecondary and employment pathways, economic assets, health and well-being, and social capital.¹ In *Top Ten for 2Gen*, Ascend identified — with significant input from the field — a set of principles and policies that weave these core components together and support effective 2Gen policies.

Because state-level human services agencies most often hold the primary responsibility and resources for engaging and supporting struggling families, there is tremendous opportunity for them to play a key leadership role in advancing 2Gen approaches in their states and nationwide. Human services agencies across the United States control more than a trillion dollars in assets and have the capacity to assist millions of low-income American families in moving toward educational success

CORE COMPONENTS OF A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH



and economic security. By leveraging these resources and growing a network of state human services leaders committed to applying a 2Gen lens to their work, we can invest in solutions for meaningful systems change in human services agencies at the state as well as local and federal levels.

Advancing a more holistic, family-centered human services approach at the state level includes adopting some of the following 2Gen strategies:

- Integration of human services delivery between state and local systems;
- Cross-agency collaborations that promote 2Gen partnerships and systems change at the state level;
- Data systems that capture child, adult, and whole family outcomes;
- Agency budgets that reflect 2Gen priorities and allow for braided funding streams;
- Agency-wide staff training models that promote a 2Gen approach and help human services staff at all levels of the organization serve families more effectively and efficiently;
- Utilization of strength-based and dynamic family engagement, which starts with a shared goal-setting process and family feedback loops; and
- Ensuring system accountability to families.

As an initial step in offering policymakers a model for human services agencies seeking to drive 2Gen systems change at the state level, Ascend presents a case study on Colorado, a state with significant 2Gen momentum and one in which Ascend has invested deeply since 2012.

The Colorado story involves the hard work of a variety of innovative leaders hailing from a range of sectors. While the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) currently serves as the central hub for 2Gen systems change in the state, progress would not be possible without the commitment of key partners across the public, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors. Understanding the steps that CDHS and partners have taken to better serve children and families helps shed light on the important mix of leadership, legislation, governance, philanthropy, direct service, and advocacy involved in this kind of collaborative cross-sector effort.

This case study is designed to explore what has gone into Colorado's investment in a 2Gen approach. It will offer insights into the Colorado story and the circumstances that allowed state leaders to put 2Gen policies and principles into action. This study offers local, state, and federal policymakers insights, specific lessons learned, and practical information on approaches they can use to strengthen their own strategies for providing families with paths out of poverty and ensuring that all children and the adults in their lives meet their full potential.

As you read the Colorado story, you will get an in-depth understanding of the 2Gen work taking hold in the state. We offer these top-line lessons, each of which will be explored further in the body of this document. When it

comes to successfully launching and embedding 2Gen work:

- **Leadership matters.** Implementing 2Gen policies — whether at the community, executive, or legislative level — requires strong, committed leaders who can guide the cultural shifts necessary for successful 2Gen approaches. Ascend has invested in expanding 2Gen leadership through two cohorts of Ascend Fellows, many of whom are directing meaningful 2Gen change within their sectors and communities.
- **Public support matters.** In late 2014, Ascend commissioned a national bipartisan poll to capture public support for 2Gen policies. The results were overwhelming, showing that a distinct majority of voters across partisan lines strongly support implementing a 2Gen approach to move families toward stability and opportunity.
- **Context matters.** Our work in Colorado and elsewhere has shown us that 2Gen policies advance most effectively where there is a community commitment to improved, integrated services for families. This holds true regardless of the local, state, or national political climate.
- **Messaging matters.** Successful advancement of 2Gen policies relies upon clear, cohesive messaging that speaks directly to the interests of policymakers. Focusing on the resilience of families, for example, or creating cycles of opportunity, is more effective than highlighting negative statistics or stories of failed programs. Using data that show the return on 2Gen investments and incorporating the



This case study includes a wealth of resources intended to help you with:

- Holistic integration of a 2Gen approach;
- Identification and leverage of flexible and/or blended funding streams from county, state, and federal resources;
- Development of an integrated service delivery model built on cross-sector or cross-agency partnerships; and
- Design of a customizable toolkit consisting of training models and resources for staff at all levels on how to incorporate a 2Gen lens into service delivery, partner management, communications, legislative efforts, and budget planning strategies.

voices of families are both strong messaging methods.

- **Institutions matter.** Although Ascend has seen growing interest in 2Gen policies from legislators at the county, state, and national level, the greatest sources of 2Gen policy momentum are concentrated in executive agencies. Leaders at state and federal agencies are uniquely positioned to leverage existing financial and human resources and to capitalize on any flexibility in their departments to advance 2Gen strategies that in turn impact systems change.
- **Partnership matters.** While effective leadership is a crucial element of 2Gen policy change, successful 2Gen initiatives have at their core a network of cross-sector partnerships. Just as very few programs can house the entire scope of a successful 2Gen approach, neither can a single policymaker advance 2Gen policies without the buy-in and commitment of other community leaders, including those from both public and private sectors.

COLORADO: DIVERSE, PRAGMATIC, AND INDEPENDENT

Colorado is one of the fastest growing states in the country, known for a culture that prizes independence. Long a leader among Western states, Colorado has a history of entrepreneurialism and of leadership on issues of social change. For example, Coloradans approved a statewide referendum in 1893 allowing women the right to vote, nearly a quarter century before the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution establishing this right across the United States.

The state's population is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. In 2013, the Hispanic population made up 21 percent of the state's populace, up from 17 percent in 2000. The state's urban centers, Denver in particular, have sizable African-American, Asian, and Native American communities. Colorado is home to two federally recognized tribes: the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Ute Mountain Tribe.

Colorado's geography is as diverse as its residents, ranging from the fields of the Eastern Plains to the 14,000-foot peaks along the Continental Divide to the red rock canyons of the Western Slope. Its cities and towns are just as varied, ranging from Denver — the Mile High City — to rural towns like Alamosa in Southern Colorado, and Colorado Springs, home to the U.S. Air Force Academy and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The Denver-Aurora-Boulder corridor is home to 62 percent of the state's population. Colorado's 64 counties are primarily rural; only 17 of the counties are considered urban.

Colorado voters also are remarkably diverse in their political affiliations, with one third of the state's voters affiliating with the Republican Party, one third with the Democratic Party, and one third registering as unaffiliated with a political party. Colorado's growing number of unaffiliated voters only underscores its electoral independence and emergence as a swing state.

Colorado is, in essence, a “local control” state where a great deal of authority resides with local levels of government. The state's human services programs operate under a different structure than all but 11 other states: a state-supervised, county-administered system under which the state human services agency, CDHS, provides general guidance and funding for services and oversees county programming, but county departments of human services are the primary providers of services to citizens and families. This allows for more localized decision-

Key Data on Colorado

- Fifteen percent of Colorado children live in poverty — lower than the rate for the United States (22 percent) overall.*
- Twelve percent of all Coloradans — one in eight — lived at or below the poverty level in 2015.**
- Twenty-nine percent of Colorado children live in single parent families, and nearly three quarters of these children are low income, compared with just under one third of children living in married couple families.***
- Low levels of educational attainment and poverty are strongly correlated: while over 30 percent of Coloradans with a high school diploma or less are poor, only 10 percent of Coloradans with a bachelor's degree are poor.

*2016 Kids Count Report

**2012 U.S. Census estimate

***2015 Colorado Kids Count Report. Report, citing 2013 Colorado statistics

making and better representation of the needs of individual communities. A state-supervised, county-administered system also provides opportunities for state policymakers to collaborate closely with county leaders across the state to ensure programs are implemented effectively and efficiently.

Colorado's political profile is fiscally conservative, socially liberal, and fiercely independent, and can at times produce unexpected and perhaps unintended outcomes. A striking example of the independent streak in Colorado politics came in 1992, when voters passed the strictest tax code amendment in the nation. Under this constitutional amendment, named the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) by its sponsor, voters must approve all tax increases and government bodies are restricted in how much tax revenue they can retain and spend for public purposes. This amendment has limited the growth of taxation at the local and state level; it also has posed challenges for government officials as they confront budget constraints, including a constitutional provision, Amendment 23, that requires specific spending in K-12 education.

But Coloradans also reflect an independent mindset in pursuing new policy ideas. In addition to pioneering women's suffrage, Colorado was an early investor in the importance of early childhood with strong interest from the philanthropic, policy, and social sectors. The state also has charted its own course on the liberalization of marijuana laws. In 2012, Colorado voters became the first in the nation to legalize recreational use of marijuana. Advocates for legalization saw many advantages to this action, with one of the most significant positive outcomes projected to be a significant

increase in state revenue through taxation of marijuana sales, funds that advocates hoped would be used to increase funding for public school capital construction. While in 2015 marijuana taxes themselves produced less tax revenue than originally projected, the state generated more tax revenue overall than projected. As a result voters were required to decide whether to keep the tax revenue or refund it because of TABOR requirements. In this case, they voted to keep the tax revenue, but TABOR restrictions in Colorado deeply impact all state agencies' ability to raise revenue without voter consent. State leaders often argue that they operate without sufficient resources to effectively promote innovative strategies, including 2Gen approaches that create cycles of opportunity for families.

FAMILIES IN COLORADO

While Forbes ranked Colorado as the U.S. state with the number one labor prospects in 2014, pointing to the presence of a highly educated population and an influx of new residents attracted by the quality of life, the economy, and job opportunities, at the same time many Coloradans continue to struggle economically. The 2010 Census showed that more than one in eight Colorado residents live below the federal poverty level.² When it comes to children, the figures are troubling and have gotten worse since the 2008 economic downturn. The most recent Colorado Kids Count statistics show that in 2014 nearly 38 percent of Colorado's children under age 17 were low income, meaning they lived below 200 percent of the federal poverty level — a percentage that has increased since 2000. In 2014, 15 percent of Colorado's young children under the age of six lived in poverty,

down from 19 percent in 2013 but still significantly higher than 10 percent in 2000. Colorado's high poverty rates have not been confined to the state's urban areas. In fact, in 2013 the poverty rate in its rural counties was 23 percent, higher than the rate in the urban areas of the state.³ Also troubling is the fact that, since 2000, the number of Colorado children living in areas of concentrated poverty (where the poverty rate is higher than 30 percent) has more than quadrupled (increased 400 percent), much faster than the 64 percent increase nationwide.⁴

BUILDING A 2GEN FOUNDATION IN COLORADO: COLORADO 2GEN 1.0

Colorado has long been viewed as a source of new, common-sense public policy solutions, particularly around public policy and legislation that seek to address challenges faced by families. From the start, Colorado's consideration of a 2Gen approach to policy and practice has been a collaborative effort, sparked by interest from the philanthropic and public sectors. A strong foundation for Colorado's 2Gen efforts requires the engagement of leaders from philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, and especially state agencies, all of which had historically supported such efforts.

Early Nonprofit and County 2Gen Innovation. Colorado's pioneering work in taking a 2Gen approach actually dates back to long before the most recent economic downturn. In fact, as early as 1975, a Denver-based nonprofit called Warren Village adopted a 2Gen model, including its College-to-Career program, which provides early care and education, access to postsecondary pathways, and mental health and life skills support to low-income single mothers and their children. Warren Village

The Aspen Institute

Since 1949, the Aspen Institute, which was founded in Aspen, Colorado, as a hub for the creative exchange of ideas and values-based leadership, has drawn thousands of world-class thinkers to the state. From this vantage point, Aspen has had a front row seat to the unique problem-solving approaches that have emerged in Colorado as early ways of working more holistically with families.

was a successful early nonprofit 2Gen innovator in Colorado.⁵

In 1993 Colorado instituted a statute to establish a statewide system of Family Resource Centers — another example of early 2Gen innovation. Family Resource Centers use comprehensive, coordinated case management of entire families' needs to make sure both generations become more successful and self-reliant at the same time.

More recent 2Gen efforts in the state began in 2009, when two Boulder County departments — the department of housing and the department of social services — merged into a fully integrated human services agency, Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services (BCDHHS). The merger represents a comprehensive system redesign, an outcome that had the support of Boulder area nonprofits and philanthropy as well as local and state policymakers.

Post-merger, BCDHHS began offering holistic family support services, improving access to housing and social services for low-income Coloradans. The result was a range of improved family outcomes, including a 60 percent reduction in out-of-home child welfare placements from 2007 to 2012.⁶ This type of 2Gen approach is an early example of

systems change in Colorado, change driven by collaboration between state and county agencies.

ROLE OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

Elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014, Governor John Hickenlooper took a nontraditional path to state government. With experience as a geologist, business owner, and the former mayor of Denver, Hickenlooper brought that background to his vision for Colorado, making a strong commitment early in his administration to a statewide agenda for innovation.

Taking office in the early years of a national recession, Hickenlooper prioritized strengthening the state's recession-weary economy and challenged his staff to address issues facing Colorado's lowest income families. In 2014, Hickenlooper was named chairman of the National Governors Association (NGA) and brought his emphasis on innovative solutions to that national leadership role. During his tenure leading NGA, Hickenlooper promoted his "Delivering Results" initiative, which he described as being "about

transforming state government to make it work efficiently and effectively in delivering services." Hickenlooper has been a strong supporter of building economic and educational pathways for children and families and most recently called out the 2Gen approach in the 2016 State of the State Address. He has been an innovation leader at the state level along with others, such as Governor Gary Herbert (R-UT), who have focused on the 2Gen approach as a poverty disrupting strategy.

Lieutenant Governor Joe Garcia has been another important executive leader in Colorado's 2Gen work. During his service in the Hickenlooper administration as lieutenant governor and executive director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education from 2010 to 2016, Garcia demonstrated a strong commitment to an agenda that advances opportunities for families from early childhood to postsecondary schooling. Garcia made advancing educational opportunity for all Coloradans his top priority. The lieutenant governor's efforts included increasing scholarship opportunities for low-income students, improving access to dual enrollment programs that allow students to earn postsecondary credits and complete degrees in less time, and strengthening support services for struggling students. In addition, Garcia played a critical role in the creation of Colorado's Office of Early Childhood (OEC), which organized and aligned Colorado's child development policies and programs in one office and is now under the leadership of Mary Anne Snyder in CDHS.

Many other leaders in Colorado — including members of Hickenlooper's cabinet, county executives,



and leaders from nonprofit and philanthropic organizations — have also taken vigorous action to support Hickenlooper and Garcia's commitments to families. For example, a key strategy for creating a cycle of opportunity for Colorado families has been to strengthen CDHS. CDHS is led by Reggie Bicha, a former cabinet secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. A social worker by training, Bicha favors a whole family approach.

In 2012, Ascend named Bicha to the inaugural class of Ascend Fellows. Through the Ascend Fellowship, Bicha has worked with Ascend, other 2Gen leaders from across the nation, and his own executive team — including child welfare, early childhood education, and workforce development leaders — to design a 2Gen approach that would be applied across CDHS' work. This “21st-century approach” to CDHS includes a multi-year tiered strategy for shifting the culture of CDHS toward viewing families holistically and providing the services they need to achieve educational success and economic security.

As mentioned earlier, the 2013 creation of Colorado's OEC extended CDHS's programmatic span to include those addressing children's early years. The OEC is also now home to the Family Resource Center (FRC) program at the state level. Because the program is positioned within the OEC, the FRC program has been able to collaborate with other partners within the OEC. By better integrating programs that serve parents and children together, such as home visiting, the state sought to increase its ability to ensure all children are thriving and school-ready, while at the same time strengthening services for parents, especially services that promote economic security.

In 2012, nearly one in five kids in Colorado was living in poverty. It's a number we've worked hard to reduce: today it's one in six, and we want to drive those numbers down even more. One of the approaches we're taking is called Two Generation, or Two-Gen, a comprehensive effort that moves families out of poverty and toward self-reliance.

- Governor John Hickenlooper, 2016 State of the State Address

Under the Hickenlooper administration, CDHS has focused on streamlining services for families in need. To do this, CDHS agencies have worked to reduce duplication of efforts, to break down silos that impede whole family interventions, to streamline budgets, and to find efficient ways to provide services more effectively. The 2Gen work at CDHS has been led from the outset by Bicha.

In 2010, members of the Hickenlooper administration, led by CDHS, responded to a change in party leadership in the state House of Representatives, not by stepping back, but rather by accelerating the 2Gen momentum started in Boulder County and adding a 2Gen focus to its own agency mission. As these efforts progressed, CDHS emerged as a leading player in statewide attempts to reverse Colorado's child welfare and poverty statistics and to support families during the tough economic times faced by Coloradans in the midst of recession. CDHS was well positioned to take on this role, as Colorado's human services agency covers many programs and services, including those often spread across multiple agencies in other states, such as early care and education and juvenile justice. Because CDHS is a relatively large state agency — with a \$2 billion annual budget, more than

2Gen Legislative Action in Colorado

To bolster state agency efforts, a host of advocacy organizations, public and private partners, and members of the philanthropic community have worked both within and outside government to draft and advance legislation that supports 2Gen programs and policies. In addition to legislation that created a single OEC, called the "Governance of Early Childhood Programs Bill," the Colorado legislature approved several landmark measures during recent legislative sessions, all aimed squarely at changing policies and procedures so programs can support both healthy child development and the economic well-being of the family.

Convened by the Colorado legislature in 2013, the Colorado Economic Opportunity Poverty Reduction Task Force issued a report with recommendations for increased funding and support for poverty reduction activities, including addressing the "cliff effect" faced by low-income parents using subsidized child care and expanding support for assisted housing programs.

With a 2Gen focus, HB14-1317 broadens access to the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and makes the application process easier. The law:

- Requires that all counties allow those enrolled in postsecondary education or workforce training to be eligible for CCCAP;
- Removes application barriers by presuming eligibility and aligning income verification with other programs;
- Adjusts copayment requirements and tiered copay increases to mitigate the cliff effect; and
- Enables children to receive consistent, regular care by allowing outside care beyond a parent's exact hours of work and for the full length of the parent's period of eligibility.

A new state child care tax credit, HB14-1072, ensures that those earning less than \$25,000 are able to claim a credit, which includes the CCCAP parent copayment.

SB12-022 authorized CDHS to develop and oversee the Cliff Effect Pilot Program to address the cliff effect that occurs when working parents receive a minor increase in income that makes them ineligible for CCCAP but still unable to cover the full cost of child care. SB14-003 outlined the parameters of the pilot program and appropriated \$1.2 million per state fiscal year (as approved by the Joint Budget Committee) to the pilot program. At the time, the legislation limited pilot participation to 10 counties, giving counties flexibility in designing the pilot to suit county needs. Most recently, SB16-022 allows, subject to available money, counties to be "selected" for participation (with no limit of how many), which essentially opens the opportunity up to all 64 counties.

SB15-012 will, when it goes into effect in January 2017, protect the advances in child support enforcement made by the Colorado Parent Employment Program by ensuring that 100 percent of child support payments made to custodial parents participating in the Colorado Works (state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]) program pass through directly to the parent for the purpose of supporting the family. (Previously, Colorado Works withheld a percentage of child support payments received by participants to reimburse the state for the costs of the program.)

In 2015, after a 15-year absence, advocates were successful in obtaining the inclusion of a line item in the budget for 2Gen family support efforts at Family Resource Centers.

5,000 employees, and a range of diverse ways it connects to Colorado children and adults — the agency is a powerful lever for change in the state.

Pioneering Leaders Fed the 2Gen Innovation Pipeline. Because Colorado's human services system is state supervised and county administered, the decision of CDHS executives to pursue 2Gen strategies in close collaboration with county partners was critical. The executive branch wanted to pursue aligned services and stronger outcomes for children and their parents together and was willing to dedicate time and resources to support this shift in policy across the state. CDHS sought to engage partners at all levels — state, county, and local — in implementing comprehensive 2Gen strategies effectively and broadly. The county-administered structure allows local communities in each of the state's 64 counties to act according to community needs and interests while also working in partnership with the state. This way of operationalizing the work fostered innovation and fresh thinking about how to best serve families in a specific geographic region. Under this kind of structure, all levels of government retain some significant authority and ability to shift programs, policies, and resources to better serve the needs of children and families together.

Jefferson County is one of the true leaders in 2Gen approaches. The Jefferson County Prosperity Project (JPP) is an innovative collaboration of community, school, business, and county human services partners working together to help Jefferson County families break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. In early 2015, JPP received a grant of nearly \$1.6 million from the Daniels Fund,

a Colorado-based philanthropic foundation, to advance its 2Gen efforts, which include regular family meetings with Education and Family Support coaches who help parents and children reach their educational goals together. The Jefferson County model involves a strong social capital element, providing parents the opportunity to connect with other adults in similar circumstances and build a network of support within the program.

Arapahoe County has also led the way in incorporating 2Gen approaches into its programmatic and administrative work. Arapahoe's Bridge Housing Project, described below, represents true 2Gen programmatic innovation. The county's development of a data system, called Human Services Connects, to enable data sharing and integration of enrollment systems stands out as a strong example of changing less visible but critical systems in order to facilitate a family-centered 2Gen approach.

Philanthropy Helped Fuel the Momentum. As Colorado's public sector was identifying ways to strengthen its support for families, in 2010 Ascend convened leaders from the state's strong philanthropic sector and held conversations among colleagues and with advocates. These meetings, known as “think tank” discussions, were hosted and led by the Chambers Family Fund, a private foundation and lead funder of Ascend. Participants included representatives from Denver-based policy groups; nonprofit organizations from Jefferson, Boulder, and Pitkin counties; and leaders from state agencies, including CDHS, the Department of Labor and Employment, the Department of Public Health, and the Department

Valley Settlement Project: A 2Gen Approach for Immigrant Families in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley

Located in the mountains of western Colorado, the Manus Fund's Valley Settlement Project works to break the cycle of poverty for rural Coloradans by cultivating children's school readiness and elementary school achievement and by increasing parent economic stability through education, skill building, and improved social capital. The Manus Fund's success relies heavily on a well-organized parent mentor program, through which participating parents gain education, English language proficiency, marketable skills, and greater confidence, and meet their needs for connection or social capital while giving back to other program participants.

The Valley Settlement Project offers 2Gen programming to all children and the adults in their lives regardless of immigration status or English language proficiency. The Project's early childhood programs are aimed at kindergarten readiness and are based in the philosophy that parents are a child's first and best teachers. The Project's adult-facing programs are based heavily around a parent mentoring component. Adult educational programming is community-based and features English and Spanish language literacy courses, as well as GED and computer classes.

creating a cycle of opportunity for low-income families in Colorado, among them the development of a college savings account program for Colorado families. In early 2015, Gary Community Investments and Ascend cohosted a gathering of philanthropic leaders in Colorado to heighten awareness of and gain traction around new 2Gen opportunities in the state.

In addition to these leading Colorado-based philanthropies, the Michigan-based W.K. Kellogg Foundation has also supported 2Gen efforts in Colorado, providing key grants to the Manus Fund's Valley Settlement Project, a 2Gen program in the Roaring Fork Valley (greater Aspen) region of the state, and core operating funds to Ascend to support 2Gen efforts across the state. The Valley Settlement Project has also benefited from investments made by county governments, the Stranahan Foundation of Ohio, and numerous Colorado-based foundations, among them Catto Shaw Foundation, Hemera Foundation, the Colorado Health Foundation, Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, Sidney E. Frank Foundation, and Gates Family Foundation.

of Health Care Policy and Financing. The goal of these discussions was to identify opportunities to support and partner with emerging 2Gen approaches in Colorado, as well as to put into use a 2Gen lens in each organization's work.

One example of a long-standing philanthropic institution adopting a 2Gen approach is the work of Gary Community Investments. Made up of the Piton Foundation and the Gary Community Investment Company, this long-established institution has been investing in Colorado's most at-risk children for more than 40 years. In recent years, Gary Community Investments has explored adopting a 2Gen lens in its work and has committed to a number of philanthropic strategies aimed at

The simultaneous efforts taking place in Colorado during the early part of the 2010s created momentum for 2Gen across the state. Many of the organizations involved — including JPP, the Family Resource Center Association, and Bell Policy Center — are part of the Aspen Institute Ascend Network, which was formally launched in spring 2014. The Ascend Network includes more than 100 partners from 36 states and the District of Columbia that work to influence 2Gen policy and practice changes in their communities. Ascend works closely with each Network partner to build 2Gen capacity and advance 2Gen policy change in the state and across the

country. Drawn from the 21 letters of inquiry Ascend originally received from the state when establishing the Ascend Fund in 2013, the Colorado cohort of the Ascend Network includes seven Network Partners and Fellows.

The depth and breadth of support for 2Gen models in Colorado clearly points to the critical role of pioneering leaders, especially those working to advance change at the community level. The executives and staff of JPP, the Valley Settlement Project, and the Family Resource Center Association are all examples of community-driven 2Gen innovators in Colorado. These programs provide intensive support to low-income families through early childhood development, parent engagement with schools, family coaches, social capital development, health and well-being services, and workforce development programming in addition to a range of other human services.

Collaborations Were Built Intentionally. Colorado's 2Gen efforts grew out of intentional collaborations between partners across sectors. Feeding off of growing public will and the potential of 2Gen work experienced by early adopters among policymakers, philanthropists, and nonprofit leaders, these community-level collaborations gained momentum and intensity and broadened into a multisector statewide approach. The participation and support of leaders from across the state, paired with the growing chorus of voices of families and their children, spurred adoption of the 2Gen approach in Colorado. With Ascend serving as a key resource, catalyst, and connector, collaborative efforts between state agencies, county leaders, nonprofits, advocates, and philanthropists coalesced into a strong movement to improve outcomes for

children and their families and set the stage for Colorado's pioneering 2Gen activities.

2GEN APPROACH IN ACTION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In pursuing implementation of 2Gen strategies in Colorado, the state faced administrative and policy

Collaborative 2Gen Problem Solving at the State, County, and Local Levels

- Within CDHS, the Division of Youth Corrections has created interdisciplinary teams to discuss the path forward for young people in the system through multiple lenses, involving many and varied family members and community partners.
- CDHS also holds regularly scheduled 2Gen cross-office meetings. These meetings were established beginning in September 2015 with a primary aim of providing CDHS staff the space/time to come together and collaborate on their 2Gen work. They also provide an opportunity for highlighting the department's 2Gen accomplishments, trends, lessons learned/insights, opportunities, and challenges and to better understand 2Gen implementation at the national, state, and local levels.
- In Jefferson County, a committee has been structured to address and create shared accountability for different programs within the human services department — as well as within other county-level services, such as elementary schools and housing authorities. The committee meets weekly.
- The Arapahoe County Department of Human Services is developing a 2Gen Bridge Housing Project in partnership with local community leaders and service providers to provide housing and supportive services to move families from poverty and homelessness to self-sufficiency and stable permanent housing.
- In 2015, the Denver Public Schools adopted a five-year strategic plan entitled the Denver Plan 2020, which sets forth five specific goals designed to close achievement gaps and prepare all Denver students for success in college and careers. One of the five goals the school system deems imperative to student success is supporting the whole child by supporting the child's family through a range of 2Gen services.

Building Social Capital Among Colorado Families

Throughout all of their efforts, CDHS leaders have paid close attention to social capital, or formal and informal networks of family, friends, neighbors, and institutions. Knowing that improving a client's social capital is a critical way to build meaningful connections that can lead to economic security, staffers have worked to give parents and families opportunities to build it. By Integrating peer mentors who support social networks and help families navigate services, state and local programs have enhanced the success of 2Gen strategy implementation.

In the Denver area, JPP uses 2Gen funding made available through Ascend to provide families enrolled in the program with an education and family support coach who helps parents and children reach their educational goals together. JPP also includes a robust social capital model that encourages parents in the program to build relationships with and support each other.

The Colorado Parent Employment Program (CO-PEP) is an initiative of the Child Support Services Division within CDHS that assists eligible noncustodial parents in gaining employment. They receive "enhanced services" including:

- Intensive case management;
- Enhanced child support services (arrear forgiveness, modification of orders, lifting of enforcement activities);
- A 16-hour Nurturing Parent and peer support curriculum; and
- Intensive employment services, including referrals to the state-funded transitional jobs program, ReHire Colorado.

This demonstration project is being implemented in five Colorado counties (Arapahoe, Boulder, El Paso, Jefferson, and Prowers) and was implemented as part of a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) eight-state pilot program in 2012. The pilot provides states with resources to develop employment support programs for noncustodial parents.

CO-PEP outcomes have been dramatic. As of April 2016 (31 months into implementation), 687 individuals had been enrolled in the enhanced services group for at least six months. This group of individuals has demonstrated a 9 percent increase in child support payments (from 63 percent to 72 percent). At the end of six months, 62 percent of those enrolled were employed; after 12 months, 74 percent were employed. The success of the CO-PEP model has led to dramatic shifts at the federal level: HHS now supports child support services that provide more intensive, social capital-based supports to low-income noncustodial parents in all 50 states.

challenges that required strong leadership and new thinking.

Cultural challenges within state and county agencies included:

- A lack of shared understanding about the availability of flexible resources in the state to serve children and parents together; and
- Uneven knowledge across departments about eligibility requirements for services and benefits, such as TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and workforce support.

Policy challenges included:

- Restrictions, perceived and real, on the use of federal resources that limited ways in which programs could serve parents and children together;
- In-state programmatic funding limited by the state's TABOR restrictions;
- Limited mental health services for children and parents together (the Colorado mental health system is set up for treatment of either children or parents but not for all members of a family simultaneously); and
- Tensions around control and resource allocation between state and county agencies.

Despite these challenges, the commitment of leaders from across sectors to collaborate has led to successes and to new opportunities. In addition to the early work of Warren Village, the JPP, and the Valley Settlement Project, another early win was evidenced by the statewide

expansion of home visiting services through the Nurse-Family Partnership, an evidence-based model led by Roxane White, a 2015 Ascend Fellow.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR A CDHS 2GEN APPROACH

Since 2012, CDHS Executive Director Bicha, together with the agency's office and division directors and program staff and county partners, has worked to lead Colorado's system-wide integration of the 2Gen approach in order to better serve the state's families and produce measurably better outcomes for both parents and children. With CDHS, stakeholders developed a three-pronged strategy:

- Allow for many and varied pathways to successfully achieving the goals for and with children and parents;
- Build the culture and leadership within the CDHS executive team and individual agencies to work through a 2Gen lens; and
- Create a cross-system infrastructure within CDHS focused on achieving a defined set of outcomes.

Four strategic planning sessions were held between 2012 and 2015, some hosted and facilitated by Ascend, which brought together various offices and divisions, including county-level human services directors and external philanthropic and nonprofit partners. These convenings allowed CDHS to develop core principles for adopting a 2Gen lens across the agency. Many of these leaders — from the Division of Youth Corrections, the Division of Child Support Services, and the OEC, for example — had not typically strategized together in the past.

CDHS developed five key principles that the agency uses to guide work with public, philanthropic, and private sector leaders:

- Insist that families are to guide the plan of action;
- Maintain respect for and the dignity of family members;
- Focus on the whole family as defined by the consumer;
- Shift from a focus on compliance to a focus on results; and
- Start with the interests of the families.

A CULTURAL SHIFT

The first step of the strategy required a shift in culture within CDHS, which occurred under Bicha's leadership. Providers and agency leaders were unaccustomed to serving children and families together as a primary goal, or to focusing on improving a whole family's economic security. The focus had been on staying accountable to meeting the goals of individual program areas. Given that neither agency leaders and partners nor the public yet thought in terms of more holistic goals, CDHS did not push to frame the work publicly as a "2Gen initiative." Instead, CDHS sought to reframe the actions of multiple stakeholders within the 2Gen frame.

For example, at a May 2012 retreat at the Aspen Institute campus in Aspen, Colorado, CDHS department leaders identified shared goals and opportunities for 2Gen change. Office and division leaders then reviewed and distributed a set of talking points on the way 2Gen solutions could improve internal operations. They encouraged outreach and increased communication among program staff

and with providers currently serving children and parents separately, for the purpose of fostering a holistic family mindset within the agency and with partners.

In highlighting the 2Gen approach, the CDHS executive team worked to embed the frame into the agency culture, making it more likely to withstand future political or leadership changes. CDHS leaders have taken several actions to foster a new 2Gen culture:

- **Shared Learning and Ownership.** CDHS's 2Gen manager worked closely with offices and divisions within CDHS to develop and implement a shared 2Gen agenda that would create opportunities for cross-agency coordination. The group identified a number of areas where coordination could be particularly valuable, including communications and messaging, data collection and sharing, integration of services across offices, and collaboration to achieve a holistic approach to family engagement. For example, early in CDHS' efforts toward a cultural shift, leaders in the OEC and the Office of Economic Security (OES) met regularly with the 2Gen manager to discuss ways to ensure that both children and parents are served together in their respective program areas. Activities included:

- ◇ Cross-training program staff in each office, so all program staff have knowledge about early childhood and adult economic security programs;
- ◇ Ensuring that dual generations are represented programmatically on various CDHS initiatives (e.g., the

Work Support Strategies grant, rewriting of CCCAP rules); and

- ◇ Coordinating professional development strategies across offices.

More recently, these meetings have changed form, following the decision by OEC and OES to use the State's Policy Action Committee (PAC) structure, which includes counties, to continue discussing simultaneous service to all family members. Both OEC and OES have their own Sub-PAC Committees; on a monthly basis, each committee carves out time to meet together to address topics related to 2Gen work.

- **Shared Messaging.** As mentioned, CDHS developed talking points for the executive cabinet to use when discussing lifting families out of poverty. These messages were also shared with office and division leaders within the agency, providing them with a tool for talking about the link between parent success and desired results for young children. In 2015, CDHS made two significant investments toward creating an agency-wide communications strategy. First, the agency engaged its communications director in coordinating the agency's communications to 2Gen stakeholders across Colorado, including counties, other executive branch agencies, and the legislature. CDHS also held its first 2Gen-specific communications and messaging strategy session, starting with the OEC.

- **Stakeholder Buy-In.** State office and division program staff, as well as county partners and contracted service providers, engaged in the process of making

policy changes using the 2Gen frame. The executive leadership has built a culture and shared understanding of 2Gen strategies and has allowed every office and division director to determine ways to implement practices in each program area that support the values and principles of 2Gen strategies. In addition, CDHS invested in a 2Gen-specific role within the agency to enhance cross-office coordination and shared buy-in. CDHS' 2Gen manager is responsible for fostering 2Gen innovation and integration across offices/divisions.

- **Collaborative Problem Solving.** Various interdisciplinary teams and committees have been created within CDHS and at the county level in recognition of the reality that issues within families are often complex and are rarely isolated.
- **Outcome-Based Strategies.** Division and office leaders understand that the 2Gen approach is a platform for supporting efforts for children and parents together. Entry points for parents and children into programs are many and varied, and each office and division leader involved is accountable for specific goals that are relevant to achieving better 2Gen outcomes. These include:
 - ◇ Improving access to and quality of child care;
 - ◇ Reducing recidivism;
 - ◇ Increasing consumers' connection to employment;
 - ◇ Increasing child support payments;
 - ◇ Increasing the connection of children to noncustodial parents; and

Highlights of CDHS' 2Gen Approach

CDHS has:

- Begun the process of integrating a 2Gen lens across a department of more than 5,000 employees, in part by creating a position and hiring a 2Gen manager to coordinate efforts across the department;
- Taken advantage of opportunities for innovation that allow CDHS programs and services to support both parents, particularly those in joint custody and shared parenting arrangements, to achieve employment, because research indicates that children do best when both parents are supported to work and are involved in their lives;
- Established the OEC and made early childhood education a priority, because children achieve through early learning. Creating this infrastructure has allowed CDHS to pursue funding opportunities to assist the department in rebuilding the state's early childhood quality rating and improvement system and to establish a statewide early childhood professional development system. These efforts, along with changes to the state's child care subsidy program, CCCAP, are improving access to high-quality child care options for low-income families;
- Supported legislation that centers on both high-quality early education and work supports for parents in a way that is unique and focused on serving dual generations. HB14-1317, which made historic changes to CCCAP, is one of the nation's first state laws to recognize the value of 2Gen approaches. The law supports parents in finding and succeeding at work while simultaneously helping children to learn; and
- Led outreach efforts to other state agencies, including the Colorado Departments of Health Care Policy and Financing, Labor and Employment, and Education, to better integrate services for families.

- ◇ Increasing community ownership and participation in solutions for families.

- **Broadened Focus.** County case workers, state agency leaders, program staff, contracted service providers, and other stakeholders have begun to shift their focus from helping individual family



members to making connections for the whole family — with family defined not by any traditional categories but rather by the members themselves. This has required increased understanding of the services provided among all program divisions, as well as alignment and integration of multiple offices within CDHS.

An example of improved alignment is the Colorado Program Eligibility and Application Kit (PEAK), a single online application for numerous benefit programs. Recently, PEAK was expanded from primarily adult-focused benefit programs, such as medical, food, and cash assistance, to include 12 new services supporting young children and their families, such as early intervention, Head Start, and home visiting programs. This expansion built on PEAK's existing 2Gen value of providing a single point of entry for families to find services that can benefit the whole family. Yet another example can be found in the decision to integrate the FRC program into the OEC; the FRC program brings

family support and prevention services to the early childhood network, making the work of network members more fully 2Gen.

- **Intentional Outreach and Implementation.** Beginning in 2011, CDHS leadership began a regular process of reaching out to stakeholders and community members across the state in order to understand their perspectives on Colorado's Human Services System. This outreach was led by CDHS' executive management team in the form of a Summer Planning Tour. Since 2011, CDHS leadership has visited over 40 counties, held four tribal consultations, and held employee town hall meetings.
- **Incorporating Practical Strategies.** Other specific strategies that CDHS and its many partners have implemented include:
 - ◇ Reviewing paperwork and other unnecessary regulatory requirements, which has resulted in less paperwork and more electronic matching of documents. In the first year of the Hickenlooper administration, CDHS reviewed all regulations, eliminated 20 percent of them, and rewrote an additional 60 percent.
 - ◇ Re-engineering business and funding processes in the OES, the Employment and Benefits Division, and the Food and Energy Assistance Division to focus on outcomes and not merely on programmatic compliance.
 - ◇ Working toward agency-wide data systems that are truly interoperable and that can track parent and child

outcomes together. CDHS is working to create a system of interoperability through which the databases of departmental programs will be linked and able to communicate. CDHS also initiated the creation of an agency-wide performance management system, C-Stat, that captures both child and adult outcomes. Ultimately the work on interoperability has the potential to enable the capture of whole family outcomes in C-Stat, which in turn means leaders can be held accountable for improving results — a critical dimension of a successful 2Gen approach.

- ◇ Pursuing new grants or funding opportunities to support the 2Gen approach, anchored in understanding the limits of current federal and state funding streams and barriers to serving children and families together. Examples include the Federal Demonstration Grant through the Division of Child Support Services, which created a new 2Gen fatherhood initiative, and the OEC's Race to the Top grant.
- ◇ Creating a self-assessment for county partners administering Colorado Works (TANF) to determine how well current practices move consumers toward employment.
- ◇ Developing new employment programs and modifying existing ones to consider the needs of parents and children together, such as in CO-PEP and ReHire Colorado.
- ◇ Gathering large segments of the CDHS team to explore how 2Gen efforts

can be fully integrated into the department's budget and evaluation design, foundational operations decisions, and review of legislative and regulatory materials.

DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES IN 2GEN WORK

CDHS made **employment** a priority because of the belief that families achieve through work. To that end, CDHS has created new employment programs and modified existing employment programs.

- **CO-PEP.** A pilot program through the Division of Child Support Services to assist noncustodial parents in gaining employment.
- **ReHire Colorado.** A transitional jobs program to help targeted groups — noncustodial parents, veterans, and individuals over 50 — to re-enter the workforce.
- **Colorado “ReWorks.”** A redesign of the TANF employment program to focus on work, pay, and retention outcomes by streamlining and simplifying the

Key Components for Systems Change Within State Human Services Agencies

Systems change in Colorado required:

- Empowered leaders;
- Executive buy-in;
- Well-planned and well-executed trainings for staff at all levels;
- A coordinated communications plan;
- Intensive support and technical assistance from 2Gen experts; and
- Plans for implementation at the local level.

Guiding Principles for 2Gen Policies

- 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; and
- Align and link systems and funding streams.

process for determining and recertifying eligibility.

CDHS made **early care and education** a priority because of its belief that investing in children supports the whole family.

- **OEC.** Lieutenant Governor Garcia successfully advocated for legislation that combined four separate early care and education offices into OEC, to be located within CDHS. This shift allowed CDHS to integrate all early childhood programs, improve access for young children and their families, and help more children be prepared for kindergarten. CDHS also brought the FRC program into the OEC. In so doing, it enabled greater integration of family support and prevention services into early childhood programs across the state.

SEVEN LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

The Colorado case study offers lessons on leadership, policy, practice, and philanthropic engagement that other policymakers and practitioners should consider incorporating into their own efforts.

Lesson 1: Pay attention to changing the organizational culture across levels and functions.

- Understand that executive leadership is essential but not sufficient for change. A carefully developed change management strategy is essential to effective integration of a 2Gen lens within a state human services agency. When considering a 2Gen approach, leaders should pay particular attention to stakeholder engagement and to communication of the change to internal and external partners, through information sharing and training of program stakeholders (i.e., state program staff, county partners, and contracted providers) on shifts in expectations and practice. Keep in mind that resistance is to be expected.
- Create cross-agency teams that include a range of program and content experts. Through many and varied cross-functional workgroups, leaders and program staff have participated in multiple task forces and committees, shaping strategy and learning about all the programs and services that touch families. This kind of cross-agency integration leads to both greater understanding and stronger, more collaborative agency efforts.
- Invest in staff development and training. CDHS has created opportunities for cross-training and for sharing of resources in order to increase the ability of staff to serve children and their parents simultaneously and also to offer them expanded access to other resources within the state that can support families' goals. Training delivered for agency staff should be expanded to include the leaders and staff of county agencies and contracted providers.

- Rethink systems of accountability to include a focus not only on processes that support a program or service but also on the achievement of the desired programmatic goals. When a program has been shown to produce some inadvertently counterproductive outcomes, consider whether there are ways the program can be re-engineered to maintain what works and remove what does not. CDHS' Child Support Services division provides an excellent example. The traditional model for child support enforcement focuses solely on a punitive cash transfer process that does successfully achieve the collection of child support payments but at the same time punishes noncustodial parents who lack the skills or supports necessary to maintain meaningful employment. Considering these outcomes from a whole family perspective, divisional leaders looked for solutions, developing new programs and practices to support noncustodial parents in gaining employment and increasing their involvement with their children.
- Review and, if necessary, revise definitions and regulations to ensure that children and families can be served together. For example, CDHS has begun to expand its definitions of "family" and "service unit" to include noncustodial parents and to consider the needs of anyone living in the household, even if those individuals are not able to work or are not biologically related to each other. For example, using interdisciplinary teams, the Division of Youth Corrections expanded its definition of families to allow visitation by any supportive individual the young person had identified as important to his or her rehabilitation.
- Create a holistic, comprehensive approach by building 2Gen strategies into the agency's budgeting process and the design of evaluations, into foundational operations decisions, and into a regular process of reviewing legislative and regulatory materials to identify 2Gen barriers and opportunities.

Lesson 2: Align policies and practice models with the 2Gen approach.

- Review policies and procedures as a team, including representatives from across the agency and from multiple levels of seniority. Several CDHS offices and divisions have conducted reviews to determine whether they unintentionally or intentionally function in ways that prevent supporting or working with children and families together. This kind of review is not limited to government agencies.

Lesson 3: Support innovation and test program strategies using existing resources when possible.

- To test and build evidence around innovative strategies, sometimes programs and services need to be revamped; in other instances, new strategies can be deployed within an existing program infrastructure by reallocating some program resources. Colorado has implemented a leading-edge effort through the use of a federal demonstration grant to create CO-PEP, the program for noncustodial parents that provides employment services and support for their engagement with their children.

- Address the complexity of human services program eligibility:
 - ◇ To reduce the complexity of applying for various services, the state, in partnership with counties, established PEAK, a single online application for numerous benefit programs. While the PEAK system and universal application are still works-in-progress, these tools represent a significant step forward in increasing families' access to benefits. Recently, PEAK was expanded from primarily adult-focused benefit programs, such as medical, food, and cash assistance, to include 12 new services supporting young children and their families, such as early intervention, Head Start, and home visiting programs. This expansion built on PEAK's existing 2Gen value of providing a single point of entry for families to find services that can benefit the whole family.
 - ◇ Counties have merged services or business units to streamline functions. In Boulder County, Human Services and Housing were merged in 2009 to more effectively and efficiently serve families. In Jefferson County, many services are provided in a single location, and outreach workers provide services onsite at a number of other locations, including the Jefferson County Mental Health agency, Metro West Housing, and the Jefferson County Detention Center. TANF and Child Welfare services were both located within a Head Start building in order to make it easier for parents to access services.
- Create public-private partnerships and engage philanthropic leaders as allies and thinking partners. In Colorado, philanthropy has been a key part of the development of a children's savings account program. CDHS has considered opportunities for creating a three-year children's savings account pilot program with geographic representation from across the state, *Aspire to College Colorado*. This pilot program would teach parents how to save and improve their financial well-being while simultaneously providing their children with a start on college savings. In addition, financial education provided to the children would aim to raise their educational aspirations and to establish savings behavior and financial well-being early on, so that higher education is viewed as affordable and attainable. While this program would require no new state funding, it did not pass the state senate last session. While this is a reminder that even good plans can go astray, the partnership with philanthropic leaders remains an important strategy.

Lesson 4: Listen to families.

- Recognize that parents also share in the program goals of obtaining employment and education and helping their children to grow and thrive. Remember that parents often need early successes on which to build. The Valley Settlement Project began by listening to families and built services based on their interests.
- Support strategic shifts in practice, like moving from what has been characterized as a family assessment to a family stabilization plan that focuses on

finding solutions based on each family's desires. This shift has been central to efforts by the Division of Youth Corrections and by Boulder County to support families, with housing utilized as a foundational tool in providing a variety of human services.

- Make agency environments family-friendly. The Division of Youth Corrections invested in physical plant improvements to create an environment that would promote family engagement and involvement. The Arapahoe County Department of Human Services is housed in a light-filled, comfortable building that is welcoming to families and provides seating areas, a library, and easy access to a variety of services.

Lesson 5: Collect data linked to measurable outcomes.

- Collect data on program outcomes that measure progress toward longer-term goals, while continuing to monitor the impact of day-to-day actions. For instance, strengthening postsecondary and employment pathways for parents is a key dimension of successful 2Gen efforts. Consistent with this effective practice, CDHS made the decision that Colorado's TANF program, Colorado Works, would collect data on actual employment outcomes beyond the complex process measure the agency is required by federal law to monitor: the work participation rate. This direction — focusing on longer-term stable employment goals and on measuring those outcomes — has not been without controversy. CDHS along with 23 states and two territories did not meet the federally required



work participation rate standards. Lawmakers expressed concern that the federally required rate was not met. Lesson learned: proactively advocate at the state and federal level around suggested changes to federal measures that would make them more relevant in a 2Gen approach to self-sufficiency.

- Collect data on families as a unit, not just children or adults.
- Review data regularly to ensure that programs operate based on the most accurate, consistent, and timely outcome metrics available. CDHS has implemented a performance-based management strategy (C-Stat) that includes monthly meetings between the department's executive leaders and each program office's leaders. Each program office has a predetermined set of indicators that demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of its programs. Individual offices and divisions make real-time commitments to shift or alter strategies to support attainment of the outcome goals. C-Stat helps the department to achieve

measurable results and allows every program the opportunity to better focus on and improve its performance.

- Understand the power of data for exploring innovation. By taking a deep dive into the data collected on work participation rates for Colorado Works, analysts recognized that the state could maintain appropriate work participation rates while allowing innovative approaches in specific counties to focus on longer-term employment outcomes.

Lesson 6: Be flexible in implementation.

- Use existing resources such as those available through TANF and Medicaid to implement programs before seeking additional resources. For example,

Colorado's Department of Health Care Policy and Financing used Affordable Care Act resources to fund maternal depression screens, while CDHS has used existing TANF funds to implement 2Gen strategies related to employment. Work with leaders across agencies to understand where funding streams may be braided or combined to more efficiently meet shared goals.

- Provide incentives and take steps to allow for more innovation when individual programs are striving to meet program outcomes, such as employment, rather than simply monitoring process outcomes such as work participation rates.

Lesson 7: Think ahead.

- CDHS is constantly thinking about ways to extend its 2Gen efforts. At a 2Gen strategy meeting of CDHS leaders in April 2015, Bicha and his executive team prioritized increasing access to mental health screenings and treatment for parents and children together as the next stage of the department's 2Gen efforts. CDHS is also deeply involved in the 2015-2016 implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, seeking ways Colorado can expand adult education and workforce training programs to low-income parents.
- In 2015, members of the Colorado executive branch, including representatives from the governor's office, Bicha, and the head of the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, participated in Ascend's first 2Gen Policymakers Institute. Through the Institute, Ascend convened a select



group of local, state, and federal policymakers who are focused on 2Gen solutions to share successes and challenges related to 2Gen policy change.

As part of their participation in the 2Gen Policymakers Institute, the Colorado team developed a 2Gen Policy Action Plan that aimed to bundle services to families across agencies, providing for a centralized, holistic approach to creating opportunities for children and the adults in their lives.

CONCLUSION

The remarkable work to advance a 2Gen approach underway in Colorado clearly demonstrates that human services systems can serve as powerful levers in this work of changing the odds for millions of American families. We on the Aspen Ascend team hope that you will take this case study both as an inspiration and as a tool for undertaking this work

in your state, becoming a part of the national movement to use these powerful methods with parents and children together.

Every state and community is unique, and you know the climate, leaders, issues, and opportunities that are the context for your own efforts. As you consider taking action, we offer ourselves and your human services peers involved with Ascend as resources. Keeping in mind some key concepts — partnership; executive leadership; experimentation and innovation; engagement of stakeholders, including all levels of your workforce; the long view (strategic approach); and focus on organizational culture, policy, practice, and structure — and always remembering that families must be at the center of effective 2Gen work, you will forge innovative pathways and teach us all new lessons about how to turn the curve on intergenerational poverty and toward shared prosperity.

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