

REIMAGINING **2GEN** PATHWAYS:

BOLD IDEAS FOR 2015





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TRANSFORMING LIVES & LIVING OUR VALUES, TWO GENERATIONS AT A TIME

America today stands on the precipice of both unprecedented challenge and opportunity. Nearly half of all children in the United States live in low-income families. According to a 2012 survey, more than two-thirds of Americans believe that American values have declined, citing political corruption, increased materialism, declining family values, and a celebrity obsessed culture as causes.¹ A disconnect has arisen between community and institutional values and between what we believe is true for ourselves and what we believe is true for our country.

Sweeping demographic shifts are beginning to change the face of America and are already playing out in kindergarten classrooms across the nation. Income segregation has risen in our communities. These changes are creating new paradigms and challenges for systems that were built to address 20th century notions of family.

At the same time, there is room for hope. High school graduation rates are on the rise. More Latino children are being enrolled in early education. Emerging national shifts such as the inclusion of two-generation strategies in the strategic plan of the Administration for Children and Families offer great potential to help families work toward a brighter future. Health care coverage took a monumental step forward with the Affordable Care Act, and new Head Start performance standards will be out soon.

Today, Americans are more open than ever before to finding new ways of approaching old problems, and this desire is especially apparent in two-generation efforts, which meet the needs of and provide opportunities for children, parents, and the adults in their lives together. A recent survey by Lake Research Partners shows that Americans overwhelmingly support programs designed to help people emerge from poverty by applying a two-generation lens.² Indeed, at the 2014 Aspen

ThinkXChange, pollster Celinda Lake called two-generation approaches an emerging "core value."

But public support alone is not enough to move the needle forward on intergenerational poverty. Poll numbers can lay the foundation to advance two-generation programs and policies, but the work to rebuild and realign our systems, to innovate, to blend funding streams and practices, must occur on a much broader plane. Any such effort must include local, state, and federal agencies, foundations, educational and financial institutions, and the families themselves.

Moving forward, two-generation approaches will require a renewed commitment to eliminating silos while examining our values, as a field and as individuals. Values like resilience, generosity, determination, and the power of connectedness intertwine and impact two-generation work in vital ways.

"What you bring to the work really matters, because it's what allows you to stay committed," says Ascend Fellow Rev. Vivian Nixon, executive director of College and Community Fellowship. "Your personal values matter just as much as public values, because that is what's going to keep you in a protracted fight that may go on for years, decades and outlive your ability to do the work."

Today the Aspen Institute Ascend Network represents 24 states, the District of Columbia, and tribal nations from Alaska. This diversity brings together incredible potential to create powerful solutions and strategies for change. By purposefully connecting key players, Ascend hopes to foster mutual motivation that can amplify, innovate, and drive bigger and better outcomes than each organization could do on its own.

While building connections and bridges among partners, we must also incorporate more of the



Source: Paula Sammons, Family Economic Security, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

voices of the families we serve. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping outcomes for their families, and they can offer a powerful voice in the advocacy for two-generation policies as well. They must be treated as leaders in this journey.

"It's important for the two-generation approach to see the potential and talent that is everywhere and have an authentic understanding of the funds of knowledge that exist in all these communities," says Sandra Gutierrez of Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors. Ascend Fellow Aisha Nyandoro of Springboard to Opportunities believes that authenticity starts with compassion. "Real change requires deeper relationships," she says. "Mutual relationships require trust. Trust requires compassion."

We must ask hard questions, such as how do we grow an innovation pipeline while still being mindful of the need for evidence? How can we blend and braid programs and funding in new ways? What could we do differently today with what we have, and where do we have discretionary resources for tomorrow? We must also consider the question of whether evidence alone has ever swayed anyone. Paula Sammons of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation believes that the answer lies in this simple formula: "Evidence with a story plus relationships leads to powerful change for parents and kids. We must reach in and grab people's souls with our stories, and through a mutual exchange of storytelling, connect to other people's personal experiences. Once we do that, they will begin to hear the data."

At the 2014 Aspen ThinkXChange, Ascend released *Top 10 for 2Gen*, a policy agenda that offers a set of principles to guide impact

and change the dialogue around poverty and families in America. It also provides a policy framework to advance two-generation ideas at the local, state, and federal levels.

Throughout 2015 and beyond, Ascend will advance a portfolio of two-generation solutions that are purposely concrete and specific but also adaptable. From Head Start to postsecondary education, workforce to health care, economic security to cross-collaboration among agencies and organizations, each idea reflects a best-practice strategy that is informed by the voices and experiences of families, practitioners, and policy makers.

Families have shifted significantly since the War on Poverty began 50 years ago. They look different. They act different. They have different needs. "The tools we have in our toolbox for policies must shift for us to meet the needs of families in the 21st century," says Ascend Fellow and Colorado Department of Human Services Executive Director Reggie Bicha. "The 'Top 10 for 2-Gen' gives us a call to action about what we can do at all levels to make it happen. What this document does in so many ways is give us a blueprint about what we can do for change."

Such a mandate may seem overwhelming at times. It's easy to feel alone in this challenging, value-laden, and emotionally driven work. But we cannot forget that a grove of aspens begins as one seed. Like the aspens, Ascend, in partnership with the Aspen Institute Ascend Network, is sending out roots of collaboration, inspiration, and strength. These roots will continue to deepen, expand, and grow.

**THE SHORTEST
DISTANCE BETWEEN
TWO PEOPLE IS A
STORY.**



Kyle Wark
Policy Analyst, First Alaskans Institute

STORYTELLING BRINGS THE 2GEN APPROACH TO LIFE

As pundits and politicians are beginning to more openly address income inequality and struggling families, the piece that is often left out of these arguments is the complexity of the human stories: real, diverse narratives of joy and sorrow, strength and weakness, love and powerful dreams.

Storytelling, after all, has the power to move hearts and minds toward action. “So often poor people and those who partner with them are spoken about in abstract, dehumanizing ways,” says Courtney Martin of Valenti Martin Media. “So often we’re subjected to the danger of the single story. In the real work of the world, a lot of important responses are being architected. A lot of important solutions are happening. Unfortunately, the media isn’t covering them well.”

Equally absent are portrayals of strength that showcase the assets that people who have struggled through dire times can leverage to change their own situations. At the 2014 Aspen ThinkXChange, five inspiring leaders from two-generation organizations shared brave glimpses into their lives. Each represents an under-told narrative that illustrates the urgent need to transcend a one-dimensional portrait of poverty in America.

While none of the speakers had met prior to the Aspen ThinkXChange, their poignant stories reflect common themes, such as the generational impacts of poverty, individualism versus collective responsibility, and the power of resilience, love, and relationships. Some of these leaders have broken the cycle of intergenerational poverty in their own lives and use their experiences to bring an intentional lens not only to their work, but also to how to best share these stories with the next generation. They build on the best of the Aspen Institute’s initiatives that strive for fresh narratives, from Aspen Ideas Festival to AspenX.

Martin and her partner, Vanessa Valenti, encourage social justice leaders to consider the framework created by Marshall Ganz when preparing to tell their own stories to advance change. “Public narrative is a leadership art through which we translate values into action, engaging heart, head, and hands,” Ganz says. This means telling one’s story through three distinct but equally important lenses: the



(from left to right) Ascend Fellow Aisha Nyandoro, Springboard To Opportunities; C. Benzel Jimmerson, Diversity Dynamics Consulting, LLC ; Autumn Green, Keys to Degrees Program, Endicott College

The thing is, what happened to me is something that happens to all of us at some point in our lives — challenges and problems that we're just simply not prepared for.

— Autumn Green, Keys to Degrees

story of “you,” which allows others to experience the values that move us to lead; the story of “us,” making common cause with a broader community whose values we share; and the story of “now,” which calls us to act, so we can shape the future in ways consistent with our values. Martin and Valenti used these three tenets when guiding five ThinkXChange speakers through their own narratives. The impact — both in-person at the forum and as an ongoing lesson for participants — is that structured, authentic storytelling can move and inspire leaders toward action, while encouraging a greater sense of connectivity and empathy among policy makers, practitioners, the public, and families themselves.

KYLE WARK. *Tlingit Kyle Wark is an indigenous researcher and policy analyst with the First Alaskans Institute. He grew up in Hoonah, Alaska, where he was exposed to alcoholism and trauma, which he attributes to a dark history of colonial oppression of native peoples. These abuses fractured the rich culture of his people and broke the story-driven chain of Tlingit knowledge that extends back thousands of years. He lives in Alaska.*

I know what despair means. I know what no hope looks like. I don't know what all hopeless situations feel like. I haven't been the lowest of the low, but I toured the depths. I lived in darkness, fought against darkness, and am now slowly emerging from the darkness. But I could not have done it alone. My grandpa, who struggled so hard with alcohol when I was a little boy did finally shake it off. He would sit me by his knee and tell me stories when I was 2, 3, 4 years old. He was my first teacher. He got angry at my brother and me once for not listening closely enough. He said, “It's

important for you boys to hear these stories so you know who you are and where you come from.” He saved my life because he shared his stories with us, because he cared if we listened.

We [often] say the shortest distance between two people is a story. You can dismiss the data, you can disbelieve an institutional or systemic racism because it's too hard to see, but you can't dismiss someone's story. That story is what they lived. It's their truth. Sharing a story can open people's eyes to a world they never knew existed. When I do our work, when I share our story with members of our community, I know what my ancestors felt like, standing at the head of the assembled families, the clans, the koo.éex' a funeral potlatch, because my Tlingit people knew that words have power. Power to heal, power to protect, and power to harm if used unwisely. Because my Tlingit people knew that our ancestors laid down the path that we who follow walk down. That path is paved with stories. These things I've lived through I inherited from my ancestors, the good and the bad. What I make of them is my own, though. My own story to compose and tell as I choose. May I choose wisely, and may you do the same.

KATIE BECKER. *When Katie Becker was 18 months old, her parents moved to a cabin with no running water or electricity in the mountains of North Carolina. They had no support system and did not believe in government assistance. Today, Katie Becker is a recent law school graduate and the proud mother of “the Becker Boys,” her three sons, who watched her transition from food stamps and subsidized housing to financial stability and abundance. She is based in Charlotte, North Carolina.*

Growing up in this environment shaped that lens through which I saw both the world and myself. The way I saw myself was “less than,” “not good enough.” But here's the good news. Dirt creates

determination. Being in that environment, being exposed to that chaos gave me the driving desire, the impetus, to lift myself away from that situation and out of poverty. I had a case worker once ask me when I was going to stop getting pregnant. And another one who told me I should just go get a job at Walmart and stop spending all this time on school. But I also had folks who met me where I was, who understood that I was coming from a wounded place, and who recognized that grit and steely determination that I had to lift myself and my sons out of poverty.

Here's the charge for all of us. This work that we do can be deeply, emotionally impactful. There can be a tendency to disconnect from that emotion because it gets to be overwhelming, but the truth is that when we disconnect from the emotion, the emotional connection to why we do this work, we lose that passion and the connection to the people we're serving. We must meet people where they are. We must dig in and get beyond that single story, and we can't do that if we use programming as a shield. Rather, what we need to do is come down from the mountain, so to speak, and be humble and curious about the people we are serving. I am a living testament that poverty can be eradicated in one generation — when people are willing to meet grit and determination with humble, open, and curious minds.

AUTUMN GREEN. *Autumn Green is an award-winning sociologist and the director of the Keys to Degrees National Replication Program, based in Boston, Massachusetts. At age 15, she met a street youth with "piercing green eyes and the most vexing high cheekbones." By age 16, she was married and pregnant. As she struggled to complete her college degrees, her husband sank into drug abuse and her life spiraled into a dazed mix of anger, confusion, and depression.*

"I know that it is absolutely crazy, but sometimes you do crazy things when you're in love."



Katie Becker
The National Crittenton Foundation

My name is Autumn Green, and I am a formerly low-income mother who has benefitted from many of the programs and services that represent the shared, collective work of the people in this room.

OK, I'm going start over. My name is Autumn Green, and I'm an award-winning sociologist and policy expert and national director developing cutting-edge work on postsecondary strategies for two-generation mobility. To the world, these two different introductions represent two very different people. Some might even think that one can't be both one and the other. But what I think is that it's very important to be both one and the other and to recognize that we don't have to be either/or. In my life, and in all our lives, we are both/and. I am both the low-income mother working her way through community college that I was as a teenage mom, and I'm the policy expert that I am today. But what's funny is that these tropes and these false narratives, and people telling me that I had to be either/or, have actually helped me to find my life's path.

The thing is, what happened to me is something that happens to all of us at some point in our lives — challenges and problems that we're just simply not prepared for. But it's funny how the more challenges you're faced with, the more pushback and judgment you get from other people. When I first applied for assistance in Boston, my case worker demanded to my face, "Why should I give some white girl from Oregon some food stamps when there are other people who really need the help? Go back to Oregon." I was bombarded for years with the message that whatever I did, I was bound to end up in a trailer park chasing around five kids while making ends meet through a combination of low-wage jobs and state public assistance. What's problematic here is the trope. Because I am in fact a white girl from Oregon, my trope happened to be the trailer park. But if I was from a more urban place, or if I was African-American or Latina, the trope

might be a little different, but the message would be the same: that we are bound for nothing because of the decisions we made early in life.

When my daughter was about 9 or 10, I was sitting on my bed typing out my testimony to Congress about expansion of higher education opportunities within TANF reauthorization. She came in and asked me what I was doing. So I told her, "I'm writing a letter to Congress about why moms should get to go to school," and she told me, "I want to write one too." Her letter read, "If my mom hadn't gone to school, I wouldn't have the nice things that I have. We wouldn't have our nice house or very many nice clothes. We probably wouldn't even have as much food." She ended with a declaration about how all parents should be able to go to school in order to provide a better life for their children. And then she colored the whole thing with carefully crayoned rainbow stripes. We can't forget that children are part of the journey. And that they're also beginning their own journeys. When we look into the face of a child, we don't see tropes or stereotypes other than innocence and potential. We must begin to see their parents as just as full of that potential. We must not see their lives through the tropes and force them into the either/or boxes.

C. BENZEL JIMMERSON. *C. Benzel Jimmerson was one of nine siblings with the same largely absentee father, whose children had six different mothers. At age 18, he'd been arrested four times and kicked out of school, losing seven athletic scholarships and two-and-a-half years to the streets as a result. Today Jimmerson is a father to two boys and a girl, an entrepreneur, and program coordinator for the Colorado State University Denver Extension Office's CYFAR-Family Leadership Training Institute.*

In my first memories of my father, he's not even there. My mother would be talking on the phone in the other room, and I

would hear her joyous laughter. Then I would hear angry arguing, then I would hear the phone slam, and then I would hear painful crying. She was too strong and proud to ever come out of that room before she had stopped. I remember the helplessness that I felt. I could not defend my mother, who gave us unconditional love and modeled all things right. She tried so hard to raise me right, but there were just too many things she couldn't teach me about men because she just simply didn't understand them.

Today I have three children – DeJave, 12; Najave, 11; and Benzel Amir, 8 months. I am committed to doing everything in my power to stay in their lives, to being engaged in their growth, to ensure that every step on the way they can depend on me to validate them, respect them, tell them that they can do anything that they put their minds, their hands, and their hearts to doing. And just to love them unconditionally. It is my joy and my duty to guide, guard, and govern my children and my home. These are things that are my duty as a father, despite my relationship with the mom, despite my financial position, and despite any other obstacle or circumstance that life might throw at me. I have succeeded at breaking the cycle. My babies know themselves and me wholly. And even when a program or system might fail them, their mothers and I co-parent to ensure they can't. It is critical for every child to have a caring male and a caring female to understand the balance and be whole.

I made many mistakes along the way, but society is equally responsible. Our family court system puts more emphasis on punitive measures and financial responsibility than the most important elements of fathering: time and engagement. As a result of this, many children growing up in one of the most complex ages in history are bombarded with negative media, tremendous social pressures, profit-driven agendas, and a celebrity culture in which one song by a musician or statement by an athlete

can impact more children in our country than hundreds of programs that are available to them. I believe that there are two kinds of children: those guided by the streets, the media, popular culture, money, and power, or those guided by two nurturing parents. We must make our primary focus the awakening of the American people and the creation of a collective conscience and culture that drowns out the perpetuation of our current individualistic society. We all need help sometimes no matter how tough we are.

When I was preparing for my first appearance here at the Aspen Institute, and I was getting ready to be on a panel, I went outside and called my kids and said, "What can I possibly do to be a better father?" My son, who is a thoughtful introvert, said, "Well dad, really, nothing. I love you. And you love me. And I couldn't possibly ask for more." I wanted to cry in that moment. As many mistakes as I've made and the places I've been, that is how they internalize our relationship.

AISHA NYANDORO. *Granddaughter of famed civil rights activist L.C. Dorsey, Aisha Nyandoro learned about the delicacies of community engagement and constituent voice while listening to her family discuss racial, political, social, and educational issues around the dinner table. Today she is the executive director of Springboard to Opportunities in Jackson, Mississippi.*

As a child, I saw and heard firsthand the anger and frustration that occurs when individuals feel as if their thoughts, ideas, and opinions are not figured into the equation of change. These early lessons have allowed me to develop my greatest asset. My secret weapon when working in vulnerable communities is compassion. Compassion is important when working in communities with limited financial resources, because in many instances it is so rare. Most poor people have limited access to individuals in power, and when these interactions do occur, they're typically

around rules and regulations. You can't do this or you'll lose your housing. You must do that in order to maintain your SNAP benefits. Who wants to be treated like this? Who wants to be handled, but more importantly, who are we to make people feel like this simply because of an economic divide? Rarely do interactions occur that are built on mutual respect. Real change requires deeper relationships. Mutual relationships require trust. Trust requires compassion. My role as founding executive director of Springboard to Opportunities is built on this magical progression. Compassion leads to trust, trust leads to relationship, relationship leads to change.

Developing relationships does not occur overnight. It takes time and accountability. For me, this involves showing up at PTA meetings so that parents know I care about their kids; providing my cell number with instructions to call or text me any time, day or night; and having a system in place that does not recognize hierarchies — no titles, first names only. We are all on the same team working toward the same goal. I am so passionate about that last point that I have two sets of business cards. One that shows my credentials and the other without.

When you have an authentic relationship with someone, they trust you not only with their challenges, but also with their dreams. I urge all of us to understand that just because someone lives in poverty does not mean that their dreams need to be impoverished. My granny was the embodiment of this reality. Born into poverty, a sharecropper, she was a high school dropout, teenage mother, married with a kid by the time she was 17. She had six kids by the time she was 26. Her story could have ended here, but it didn't. Not only did she complete her education, she received a doctorate in social work, and she went on to use her advocacy in civil rights work to improve conditions for others. When she died, there were governors at her funeral. I don't know how she did it. But I am so grateful that her bloodline flows through me.

TAKE ZGEN ACTION

- **Listen in:** What are the tropes you use to interpret the lives of parents and children that are part of your community? Consider if the lenses you see through put limits on these families.
- **Listen out:** Turn to the families you work with and ask them to share their stories of strength and triumph. Create feedback loops — such as surveys, focus groups, and visuals like comment posters — to encourage those stories.
- **Consider using reading tools to shift individual and organizational culture:** Texts such as “The Danger of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are powerful resources to catalyze discussion about the importance of stories. Both pieces are a core part of the Aspen Institute's Seminar Readings.

RESOURCES TO TAP

- “Voices for Two-Generation Success: Seeking Stable Futures,” Ascend at the Aspen Institute, Lake Research Partners, and Chesapeake Beach Consulting (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/voices-for-two-generation-success-seeking-stable-futures)
- “Authoring Ourselves: Creating Transformational Narratives,” Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/media/entry/authoring-ourselves)
- “Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, Now,” Marshall Ganz (www.wholecommunities.org/pdf/Public%20Story%20Worksheet07Ganz.pdf)
- “Patchwork: Poor Women's Stories of Resewing the Shredded Safety Net,” Autumn R. Green, PhD (aff.sagepub.com/content/28/1/51)

**THE ASCEND NETWORK
IS NOT JUST ABOUT
A POWERFUL GROUP
OF LEADERS AND
ORGANIZATIONS WORKING
DIFFERENTLY TOGETHER. IT
IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHIFT
MINDSETS AND ACCELERATE
SOLUTIONS FOR FAMILIES
IN BOLDER, MORE EFFICIENT
WAYS.**



Anne Mosle
Vice President, the Aspen Institute

NETWORKS ARE THE NEW INNOVATION DRIVERS

The 2014 Aspen ThinkXChange was the first national convening of leaders working on cross-sector solutions to break the cycle of poverty for two generations. The Ascend Network, consisting of 58 organizations from 24 states and the District of Columbia, including tribal nations in Alaska, crosses disciplines and platforms, fostering collaboration in the interest of achieving better outcomes for children, parents, and families.

These partners were intentionally chosen from more than 250 applicants for their results-focused, innovative, and collaborative drive to do two-generation work. The principal goal of the Ascend Network is to mobilize and empower two-generation organizations and leaders to influence policy and practice in order to build opportunity for children and the adults in their lives. The Ascend Network is also a network of networks — designed to incorporate cross-sector communities focused on improving opportunities for low-income families in housing, mental health, education, and other areas.

THE ASCEND NETWORK OPPORTUNITY

Ascend Network partners are participating in opportunities to deepen connections, accelerate learning, and leverage the Aspen Institute platform. During the next two years, Network members will identify, design, scale, and share:

- New two-generation models that integrate early childhood education,

postsecondary education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being;

- Best and next practices to build family resilience and new mindsets among practitioners and policy experts;
- Two-generation efforts with a racial-equity and gender lens;
- Technology and storytelling as tools to expand impact; and
- Effective approaches to leveraging and aligning resources.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute raises the visibility of key partners to policy, program, media, and philanthropic circles. Network partners are important contributors to and participants in a strategic and generous learning network — building and refining ideas, strategies, and tools to have as great an impact as possible, collectively and individually. Benefits include:

- Invitations to participate in Aspen Institute leadership convenings, roundtables, and policy briefings;
- Online and media platforms for leaders and organizations to showcase solutions, challenges, outcomes, and voices of families;
- Virtual convenings, such as webinars and conference calls;
- Peer training and technical assistance events;
- Support through check-in calls and meetings with Ascend at the Aspen Institute staff and consultants; and

- Opportunities to share learning and impact with policy, program, media, and philanthropic leaders.

WHY NETWORKS MATTER

Peter Plastrik, author of *Connecting to Change the World*, defines a network, at the most basic level, as a system of nodes and links. In Ascend's case, the people and organizations are the nodes, and the ways they connect and build trust are the links. A network has several key characteristics, according to Plastrik:

- A decentralized structure;
- Shared purpose and learning opportunity;
- Collective impact; and
- Opportunities for greater influence in innovation, fundraising, and system performance.



(from left to right) Sarah Haight, Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Jorge Blandon, Family Independence Initiative; Margaret DiZerega, Vera Institute of Justice

Networks also can create critical mass for change and public policy advocacy. Christine Robinson, senior program officer for human services at the Kresge Foundation, notes that a network functions most effectively when members bring a willingness to focus on the joint mission rather than on organizational goals. "The network mindset is about advancing a specific mission and area as opposed to a more traditional focus of advancing an organization or perspective," she says. Members must learn to trust in the network, their colleagues, and their colleagues' values and embrace that they are part of a larger web of activity and creativity that is directed toward a cause.

According to Marci Young, the vice president of education, income, and health at the United Way, the complexities of the issues surrounding poverty and two-generation issues today are "so deep and so severe and so opportunistic that we can't afford to do this on our own. No one organization or sector could accomplish these challenges on its own. We have to think about how to layer on the networks to deal with the layers that exist and get to this ultimate goal of opportunity for all. Networking is the only way we can do that."

Network Advantages	
What are They?	How Are They Produced?
Novel and flexible combinations of human talent (organizations and/or Individuals)	Decentralized structure magnifies the value of member interactions
'Small world' reach: connecting efficiently with many	Social capital creates a 'gift economy' among members: trust and reciprocity, shared identity
Rapid growth (law of increasing return)	Enabling infrastructure supports members, and anticipates opportunities and needs
Rapid diffusion and collection of information	
Critical mass of power	



Marci Young, United Way Worldwide

CREATING COHESIVE NETWORKS

Building a cohesive network of partners working to expand opportunity to all, with a strong commitment to gender and racial equity, has always been a key component of Ascend's work. Together, Ascend Network partners can amplify the power of their work, accelerate learning and messaging, and connect the dots more quickly to create systems change. Shared purpose is the primary driver to setting up a successful network. Antonia Lopez,

director of early childhood education at National Council of La Raza (NCLR), an Ascend Network partner, sees a mission-driven approach as critical to building a strong network for long-term success because "it's easier to continue to find that next step and projects that will lead to long-term goals."

Lopez points to her work within and across NCLR networks to highlight the power of networks to formulate targeted, cross-sector solutions that address broader two-generation goals. "Our staff is spread all over the country," says Lopez. Through their Ascend Network project, Lopez and Surabhi Jain, the associate director of NCLR's workforce network, began a new professional relationship, collaborating directly on their work. "What do our NCLR affiliates do to support children, how are they already engaging families, especially our Head Start families, how do the migrant Head Start programs provide service differently for shorter periods?" Lopez asks. To answer these questions, Lopez, Jain, and their respective teams surveyed 109 NCLR affiliates, asking both early childhood education and workforce development affiliates to share what they are doing currently to support families and children.

"We are learning to talk across networks," says Lopez. Through their collaboration, Lopez's and Jain's networks have produced a draft of core qualities for Latino immigrant-focused support organizations that will guide those organizations in designing two-generation services.

The complexities of the issues surrounding poverty are so deep and so severe and so opportunistic that we can't afford to do this on our own... Networking is the only way we can do that.

- Marci Young, United Way

According to Plastrik, best practice for networks "starts with understanding what the members of the network want to get out of the network, what their value propositions are. All too often, I walk into networks that don't really know what they're after and what matters the most. That's what's going to keep them coming back." As a network collectively clarifies and refines its goals, members are freed up to see their role in advancing those goals and to take steps toward their accomplishment. Networks can also work in partnership with other networks – a key hallmark of the Ascend Network, which intersects with networks focused on a range of issues, from asset-building to opportunity youth to mental health and toxic stress.

Understanding that a network requires give and take is another principal component. "There are many things you can get out of a network, but you also have to put into a network," says Plastrik. "It's the give-and-get balance that is key in building any kind of network, from the start and over the long haul, to deal with complex problems." While networks often have a backbone organization like Ascend, each partner within a network must be willing to contribute. Some will step up to the challenge of maintaining the network and being a steward of the network. This work can be done at several levels: at a logistical level; at the level of weaving of connections between the members; and at the strategic management level, helping the network find its direction. Many Network partners are already creating opportunities for future innovation and collaboration within the Network: Following ThinkXChange, 28 partners recommended nearly 70 new organizations for inclusion in the

Network. These organizations span early childhood and postsecondary education providers, research institutions, federal policy makers, human services departments, and community-based organizations.

BUILDING SHARED NARRATIVES FOR NETWORK OUTCOMES

As partners begin to take ownership of the Network, Ascend will continue to elevate two-generation solutions and facilitate connectivity and learning among Network partners. Ascend Fellow Andrea Levere of CFED, which operates several networks, cites honing communication and messaging as one of the primary roles of the backbone organization. "You have to be consistently on top of not just the hot trends, but also what are the things that actually make a difference, and then make sure it's broadly shared with the network."

With public support for two-generation strategies increasingly widespread, there has never been a better time to move the field forward. The potential impact of the Ascend Network members is significant. The first convening of the Ascend Network at the 2014 ThinkXChange is neither a cliff nor the end of the story. Ascend seeks to build collaboration, innovation, and messaging among members. This include fostering content clusters, so that members with similar interests and goals can work



(left to right) Richard Noriega, AVANCE, Inc.; Marci Young, United Way Worldwide, Pete Plastric, Innovation Network for Communities; Ascend Fellow Andrea Levere, CFED



Ascend Fellow Steven Dow, CAP Tulsa

collectively to achieve greater impact, and forming geographic clusters and regional forums to connect work across geographical areas. Several cities present the opportunity for this kind of geographic collaboration, with multiple Network partners in metro areas such as Boston, New York, and the San Francisco Bay Area working in close proximity.

Ascend Executive Director Anne Mosle encourages members to ask questions about their individual roles in the network, such as how do we effectively organize? Where are the critical conversations? What are members going to commit to? "All of it has to help you have better outcomes where you live or where you work, or else it won't bring value in the end," she notes.

From these answers, Ascend Network partners will move forward both collectively and individually to create a relevant network framework for all two-generation work.

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Steward the network:** A network requires give and take. What is your contribution to the networks you are a part of? What can you bring to the

conversation, and in what areas could your expertise add momentum to the work that is already being done?

- **Connect the dots:** Reach out to organizations with which you see potential for powerful collaborations and partnerships.
- **Integrate networks:** Create formal and informal connections between the various networks you are part of to maximize impact on America's families.
- **Assess the vibrancy of the network:** How do you know a network is a network? Create opportunities for members to provide feedback — what benefits can network members articulate, and what value-add are they providing?

RESOURCES TO TAP

- Aspen Institute Ascend Network Brochure, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/aspen-institute-ascend-network-brochure)
- Connecting to Change the World Authors' Site, Pete Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland (connectingtochangetheworld.net)

FOR US, IT'S FUNDAMENTAL THAT
IF THE GOAL IS TO GET GOOD
OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, YOU
HAVE TO WORK WITH THEIR
PARENTS. AND, IF YOU WANT GOOD
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PARENTS AND BUILD IN ATTENTION
AND RECOGNITION FOR THE
ROLE OF CHILDREN.

Mark Greenberg

Acting Assistant Secretary,
Administration for Children and
Families, U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CAN LAUNCH 2GEN SOLUTIONS

Early childhood development programs are an ideal launch pad for two-generation policy and programming. While early childhood programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start, cannot be expected to address all the needs of low-income children and their families, they can serve as central points of contact for available community services and facilitate social connections among adults as well as children. Such centers can create intentional linkages between child and adult services and build a responsive infrastructure to support low-income families.

"The old argument about child care being either a work support or an early learning strategy needs to be behind us," says Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha, executive director of the Colorado Department of Human Services. "It must be both."

According to a recent survey by Lake Research Partners,³ the American public understands the potential of two-generation early childhood partnerships. Seventy-one percent of the American public believes that if you are going to help a low-income child be successful in the early years, you need to invest in parents. Eighty-nine percent said that a two-generation approach is an effective way to break the cycle of poverty, while 84 percent felt that Head Start and Early Head Start should partner with organizations that help parents of low-income children further

their education and receive job training. New opportunities are emerging across a growing spectrum of the public and private sectors to create a more holistic approach to raising whole families out of poverty.

"For us, it's fundamental that if the goal is to get good outcomes for children, you have to work with their parents," says Mark Greenberg, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "And, if you want good outcomes for parents, you have to recognize that they are parents and build in attention and recognition for the role of children."

Greenberg encourages organizations to reach out to federal and state agencies with two-generation ideas because "in the proposals we've heard to date, it's almost never the case that federal law prohibits what someone wants to do." Greenberg and his colleagues at the Administration for Children and Families are committed to helping people untangle the complexities of rules and regulations around federal law, but he also notes that the key to reaching out to an agency is being mindful about what an agency's mandates and goals are. "Structuring an initiative as a two-gen effort is not about asking them to take on a new role," he notes, "but instead about helping them see how they can more effectively accomplish the goals they've got."

The administration is deeply committed to using Head Start and Early Head Start as a platform for two-generation strategies and pairing these organizations with adult-

focused initiatives through universities and workforce programs. Greenberg also notes that the new proposed Head Start performance standards — scheduled for release in 2015 — provide an opportunity to consider how to combine attention to parental employment and economic security along with comprehensive services for children. The reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant, now with a much stronger attention to child care quality, also holds promise for implementing more two-generation strategies.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act provides another opportunity to build partnerships with early childhood organizations. The act increases the percentage of youth workforce funds that should be spent on out-of-school youth from 30 to 75 percent.⁴ Elyse Rosenblum of the Employment Pathways Project recommends increased outreach to employers to make them allies in both the local and state policy arenas as these funded programs begin to roll out. "There's a wide opening to think about how you serve young parents and at the same time make sure their children are getting good, quality child care and early childhood education," she says.

Organizations can also work with state and local leaders to ensure two-generation strategies are infused into new workforce programs by highlighting the critical connection between what happens with a young person in a training program and what happens with their children. "Help the department understand that if a parent's children are well cared for, those young people will be able to show up at the workforce training program and get the skills they need," says Rosenblum.

Greenberg agrees, noting, "We think it's crucial that human service agencies around the country be actively involved in WIOA implementation." To that end, the Administration of Children and Families is doing outreach to highlight

these opportunities and help bridge the gaps between the workforce system and human services.

Foundations have a role to play in connecting early education and adult programs as well. "Philanthropy's sole purpose is gap filling," says Jim Bildner of the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation. Foundations can fund innovation in ways that government agencies simply cannot. "We're not looking to fund proven models. We're in the business of looking for system change. What we're all about now is trying to face these issues square on to use our money collaboratively."

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is also interested in collaboration and was recently involved in several projects to bring early education and adult programs together. The Foundation's investment in the National Skills Coalition helped advance many recommendations that made it into both the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Administration's Job Training Investments plan. The latter will be sending out \$2.4 billion to communities.

"This is an opportunity and example of how economic security partners can access funds from a totally different funding strategy and come together with partners," says Kellogg Foundation Program Officer Paula Sammons. These funds are flexible and can be used for job training purposes but also for child care, books, supplies, and transportation. "As a foundation, we can help work with prospector partners to have a coordinated two-gen strategy and response around many of these funding streams, including Head Start."

Ascend has identified key

The old argument about child care being either a work support or an early learning strategy needs to be behind us. It must be both.

– Reggie Bicha, Ascend Fellow,
Colorado Department of
Human Services

policy opportunities in a group of states across the country where early childhood is a ready springboard for two-generation partnerships. In Washington state, Ascend and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation have helped foster partnerships between the Department of Social and Human Services, the Department of Commerce, community and tech colleges, Head Start and Early Head Start associations, employers, and nonprofits to build a project that uses early education as a platform and includes comprehensive wraparound and bundled services, access to job strategies, education and job training, asset development, and financial coaching. "Parents and kids don't exist in silos, and neither should our solutions," says Sammons. Anne Mosle of Ascend adds, "We need all sectors at the table to support early childhood organizations in advancing outcomes for families, and states have the flexibility and momentum to spur those partnerships."

Other states have stepped up their efforts to embrace early childhood as a viable platform to assist parents as well in partnership with Ascend. The first state law to reference two-generation approaches was enacted in Colorado in 2014. Child Care Reform Bill HB 1317 increases access to the state child care assistance program by allowing parent-focused initiatives like postsecondary education and workforce training to be eligible for funds. The law also provides new resources

to invest in child care programs that serve low-income families through tiered reimbursement systems tied to quality of care received and holiday and vacation pay for child care workers.

"These types of policies need to be implemented by all of us if we truly believe in a two-gen approach," says Bicha. "If we really advance our social policies to the needs of 21st century families, we'll be best prepared to make sure that families of the 22nd century are the strongest they've ever been."

Ultimately, some of the most important partners using the early education platform — particularly Head Start and Early Head Start — to connect two-generation strategies are the parents who are impacted by these programs. Parent and Educational Advocate Tameka Henry of Acelero Learning summed up the value that collaboration between early childhood and adult programs can have for low-income families: "It gives me hope. I have made strides since 2012 with the programs that you all are pushing. I keep saying 'you all,' but now it's 'we all.' Thank you for pushing in your work and bringing all these minds together. I look forward to moving this work forward and sharing it with other parents to let them know that although it may feel like they're at the bottom, there's hope, and there are people out there working for us."



(from left to right) Marjorie Sims, Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Catherine Rampell, *Washington Post*; Ascend Advisory Board Member Siobhan Davenport, The Rocksprings Foundation; Ascend Fellow Henry Wilde, Acelero Learning

- **Look across sectors for partnership opportunities:** What support services are available to parents and children in your community? How can you merge the strengths of Head Start programs and government agencies with adult-focused initiatives in your community to provide opportunities for parents and their children together?
 - **Influence policy at local, state, and federal levels:** A parent's level of educational attainment is one of the best predictors of success for his or her child.⁵ Make the case to incorporate parent education and training components into child care assistance programs.
 - **Invite elected officials for site visits:** Showcasing a strong model or practice for policy leaders can advance their understanding of how policy impacts families.
 - **Create intentional partnerships, not just referrals:** Identify opportunities to intentionally partner with organizations that offer complimentary services, rather than simply providing a phone number for that organization to a family or client.
- *Gateways to Two Generations: The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support Children and Parents Together*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/gateways-to-two-generations)
 - *Two-Generation Playbook*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/two-generation-playbook)
 - *Two Generations Together: Case Studies from Head Start*, National Head Start Association (www.nhsa.org/two-generations-together)
 - Vroom (www.joinvroom.org)



(from left to right) Anne Mosle, Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Elyse Rosenblum, Employment Pathways Project; Paula Sammons, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; Jim Bildner, Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation; Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha, Colorado Department of Human Services

**A DIGITAL TOOL IS
INFORMATION IN ANOTHER
FORM. THE BIG THING IS
HOW TO TRANSLATE THAT
INFORMATION INTO ACTION.**



Dr. Ariel Khalil
Professor and Director of the Center for Human
Potential and Public Policy, University of Chicago

DIGITAL TOOLS AND DATA SYSTEMS STIMULATE PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND FAMILY SUCCESS

Today's digital technologies can be powerful accelerators in family educational success, economic security, and health and well-being. Across the nation, digital tools are being used in a variety of ways to help foster change individually, in communities, and organizationally. They are increasingly important both for working with families and for working behind the scenes to streamline and manage complex information. From phone apps that track reading to iPad response surveys that improve adult services to early childhood education data management systems, technological tools show great potential to assist with two-generation outcomes. Ascend Network partners are pioneers ways to build innovative digital tools and data systems that can be used as levers for real and lasting change.

At the same time, technology and digital tools can be disruptors to systems that have served families over many years. Issues of transparency, access, and language can present challenges when identifying ways to adapt digital tools for educational and economic success for low-income families.

In communications, technology has the power to amplify and scale messages at a speed that was previously unimagined. Two-generation organizations can better

communicate policy ideas, measure impact, and provide timely feedback that informs, deepens, and accelerates the work. Social media can be used as communication vehicles for everything from connecting parents to learning communities to imparting and then reinforcing individualized or specific audience messages.

THE POTENTIAL FOR DIGITAL TOOLS

Because low-income families use mobile devices as the primary gateway to online life,⁶ apps hold tremendous potential for directly engaging and educating families. Apps can provide parents critical information, reminders, and feedback that they might not otherwise receive. Vroom, for instance, is steeped in the child neurobiological research that shows that every time a parent or caregiver connects with a young child, half a million neurons fire as the child takes in everything he or she does. Vroom strives to empower parents to take advantage of such moments of shared connection with the message that relatively simple interactions with adults provide a huge payoff for children. Vroom highlights what parents are doing well and helps them turn everyday moments into brain-building moments; fun, interactive layers build on a parent's routine. "This is not a program, intervention, or campaign," says Megan Wyatt of the Bezos Family Foundation, which helped fund Vroom's development. "We see this app as a conversation starter and conversation deepener."

In the long run, people only hit what they aim for, so they better aim high," notes Wilde. "We think that we're going to hit what we measure, so we better aim high.

– Henry Wilde, Ascend Fellow, Chief Operating Officer, Acelero Learning

Henry Wilde, chief operating officer at Acelero Learning, sees even greater potential for Vroom to connect home and school. "We have a dream of linking home activities that are actually linked to our curriculum so that mom isn't talking to the child about something disconnected. So if we're talking about farms at school, the home activities that mom is getting prompted on somehow link to farms so there's that constant connection going on. The notion of what Vroom is doing is extremely exciting."

GARRETT COUNTY: PATHWAY PLANNING

The Garrett County Community Action Committee is also using an app, "Pathway Planning," to help families understand two-generation strategies and case management. Families take a simple electronic assessment and then develop and track their action plan. The assessment provides 15 quantifiable dimensions that produce a visual representation of where a family stands. From that assessment, families can then develop an action plan and goals. The app is a nonintrusive way to help families get through their Pathway Plan and helps track and keep the plan current. The program also calls for building social capital around a Facebook page. Future enhancements will include an electronic game, and founder Duane Yoder notes that the system currently offers an excellent source for data tracking.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO: IT ALL ADDS UP

"It All Adds Up" is another app for low-income parents and their preschool-aged children. Developed by professors at the University of Chicago, it focuses on building financial capabilities in families. "Technology can both deliver information

and be a catalyst that turns information into action," says Ariel Kalil, Ph.D., from the University of Chicago. Based on a six-week curriculum that includes content in financial areas like banking, budgeting, and saving, It All Adds Up was designed to translate information into behavioral change. The program uses technology on a variety of fronts, including as an app for learning financial content and for peer-to-peer support through social media. "Ultimately what we hope to do is create a tech-based virtual product suite that can be content-neutral and be deployed to any content area for engaging with parents and families."

LIFT AND FAMILY FEEDBACK LOOPS

Beyond apps and social media, Ascend Network partners are using technology to fine-tune programming, be responsive to family needs, and create more holistic ways of mining data to drive outcomes. LIFT, which serves over 10,000 people a year in eight communities, instituted a constituent voice evaluation methodology and feedback system based on the corporate practice of customer surveys. Each time participants come into a center, they take a short micro-survey in which they are asked to rate a rotating set of value statements about LIFT in categories such as relationship, service quality, and social and personal factors. Via iPads in real time, the results are entered into a database that can then be sorted in countless ways, including by demographic, region, center, or question. The purpose of the program is to measure LIFT's impact in less traditional measures than "did they get the job" or "did they get housing."

"Through our program design now, we're trying to shift everything to focus on what members want for themselves and ask them directly as opposed to extrapolating from the work we do together," says LIFT's Chief Program Officer Maria Peña. "This whole set of work focuses in on what are we actually good at, what adds values to our members, what do they want us to do so we can pare back the rest." Peña hopes that by

implementing a feedback system proven to work in the corporate world, LIFT will also gain reliably predictive information on members' economic progress.

ACELERO LEARNING AND SHINE EARLY LEARNING

Perhaps one of the most transformational uses of technology is the potential it offers to eliminate what is a constant thorn in the side of two-generational work: the silo. The Head Start programs run by Acelero Learning are striving to break down barriers within their own organization by implementing a custom-designed data management system.

"Head Start programs are drowning in data," notes Wilde. "We have to track over 125 items per child. We collect 32 health event items alone for every child. We're capturing a lot of data. Family services has become as much about data capture as about serving families." In the early years, Acelero tried to cobble together a variety of different programs, which resulted in unwieldy lists and databases that ultimately made it challenging to pull together a meaningful picture of where a family stood.

Instead, Acelero designed Shine Early Learning, a data management system that other Head Start organizations can now purchase. Shine strives to combine the performance standards that Head Start compliance requires with outcomes, like bridging the achievement gap, in a fully responsive, family-centric model. "Shine is a systematic approach to tracking data across all program areas," he says. "We have tools that comply, so we're not ignoring the fact that Head Start has 1,700 regulations. We understand that's the base from which you build, but we also have outcomes-driven monitoring tools that allow us to use data to drive outcomes. Shine also helps our staff focus on key areas and highlight what folks need to do."

This web-based, role-based dashboard can prioritize caseloads; create alerts and reports on items like progress

attendance; align strength assessments; create scaffolded options for next steps; and provide robust reporting and multi-functionality for staff at different levels and in different departments. Family service tools are built into the software, and child and family outcomes are now in the same place and linked together. Future versions will add more monitoring tools and predictive analytics, a parent portal, and a full paperless application.

"In the long run, people only hit what they aim for, so they better aim high," notes Wilde. "We think that we're going to hit what we measure, so we better aim high."

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Connect:** Reach out to likeminded groups using or developing apps, including Ascend Network partners.
- **Research:** Identify available apps that support your work, using mobile technology and word searches. Review consumer reviews, and test apps with focus groups of families and the teams that work with them. What needs are the apps meeting? How can the app be improved? What professional development is needed to make the app effective?
- **Plan and evaluate the method:** Create a plan for integrating apps and new data systems together. What infrastructure is needed to support the execution of the integration? Does the app make capturing data easier or more difficult? Is it cost-effective to sustain?

RESOURCES TO TAP

- Vroom (www.joinvroom.org)
- Shine Early Learning (www.shineearly.com)
- LIFT (<https://liftcommunities.org>)
- Games for Change (www.gamesforchange.org)



ANYTHING THAT IS AN
INTERGENERATIONAL
TRANSMISSION
OF RISK CAN BE
TRANSFORMED INTO AN
INTERGENERATIONAL
TRANSMISSION OF
OPPORTUNITY.

Dr. Sarah Watamura
Ascend Fellow and
Associate Professor,
University of Denver

EMERGING BRAIN SCIENCE INFORMS NEW INTERVENTIONS — AND EMPOWERS PARENTS

Over the last decade, research has emerged on the powerful connections among adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), toxic stress, and long-term health outcomes for children. Adverse childhood experiences, which include exposure to trauma and toxic stress, are not income-dependent conditions — they occur in the lives of families across the economic spectrum.

But we know that children who are exposed early to violence, homelessness, food insecurity, and neglect are at a high risk for developing physical, emotional, and behavioral problems later in life. Toxic stress can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support.⁷ Without early intervention, exposure to ACEs and toxic stress can lead to an intergenerational cycle of instability and poor outcomes in core areas such as education, health and well-being, and economic security.

EDUCATING TWO GENERATIONS

Caring, responsive adults play a crucial role in protecting young children from the damaging effects of toxic stress. Too often, however, parents themselves have been exposed to ACEs and experience resulting

educational and economic struggles that make it challenging to manage the stresses of parenting, working, and building stability for his or her family. Understanding the impact of ACEs in their own lives is an important starting point for these mothers and fathers.

“The ACE survey and tool is so concrete that it has dramatically helped us to communicate that we work with young women who find themselves in circumstances over which they have no control and have made the best choices they could,” says Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, president of The National Crittenton Foundation (TNCF), which leads a group of agencies supporting marginalized girls, mothers, and their families through supportive care, education, and housing. The ACE Survey, which was piloted in the mid-1990s by Kaiser Permanente, “is a quick yes-or-no instrument that asks you about your exposure to 10 forms of childhood adversity. ACE does not cover every experience that could be trauma-producing for a child, but it is a place to start and is valuable because of the amount of data available,” explains Pai-Espinosa.

The ACE survey uses a scoring system of 0 to 10. With scores of 4 or greater, there is an exponential increase in one’s likelihood for a range of potential challenges, from being diagnosed with a chronic disease to serious problems at work (absenteeism) to early onset of sexual activity, which puts young women at risk of unintended pregnancy.⁸ Since the survey covers things that happen at work, it has significant

impact on two-generation approaches to move families beyond poverty, says Pai-Espinosa. “A parent’s ACE score doesn’t have to be passed onto the child, but it most often does without some form of intervention.”

ACE SURVEY: EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS

TNCF has found the ACE survey, developed by Dr. Vincent Felitti, to be an empowering tool to help women understand the cause of their current mental state and economic circumstances, giving them a place of clarity from which to start moving forward. Through the Ascend Network partnership, Pai-Espinosa has led the development of a toolkit that will be released in 2015 and will highlight intervention opportunities based on ACE scores, such as intensive mental health treatment. Elsewhere, Ascend Fellow Katie Albright, executive director of the San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center (SFCAPC), has led an effort to integrate the Strengthening Families Framework, which identifies five protective factors for promoting two-generation health and well-being, into SFCAPC’s interventions.

Given the concrete evidence it provides, the ACE survey can serve as a rallying point for cross-sector players to come together to create innovative interventions for young children and their parents. Staff at the Children’s Home Society of Washington State (CHSW), which provides center-based early childhood services, home visiting, mental health services, and policy work, among other things, use the survey, along with an

understanding of the mechanics behind ACE trauma, to activate a broad new partnership for families.

“Toxic stress and early brain development gave us a mechanism for why a score of 5 predicted what it did: over-activation of the developing nervous system in the absence of buffering relationships with responsive, caring adults. This gave us something to really think about,” says Jason Gortney, director, Catalyst for Kids at CHSW. Gortney and his colleagues gathered experts from across disciplines — implementation science, intervention science, neuroscience, and psychology — to develop a series of “cheap, rapidly prototyped” pilots that increase the buffering, or supportive relationships, in the lives of low-income children. Two examples include:

- FIND (Filming Interactions to Nurture Development): This video coaching model is designed to build on the innate responsiveness that is in every parent-child relationship. In the video, the parent and child engage in a “serve and return” exchange, in which the young child sends out a cue and the adult returns the serve with an appropriate, supportive, encouraging, meaning-giving response. Afterward, providers create a highlight reel for the parent, demonstrating what worked and what could be improved upon in the parents’ supportive reactions to the child’s needs.
- Partnering early learning and child welfare experts: Gortney and his team have brought early learning providers, including infant mental health providers and the early intervention system, together with child welfare to create a case planning process for children coming into the child welfare system, while determining which services best meet the needs of these children and how partnerships between organizations could improve the services provided.

A parent’s ACE score doesn’t have to be passed onto the child, but it most often does without some form of intervention.

– Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, president,
The National Crittenton Foundation



(from left to right) Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, The National Crittenton Foundation; Ascend Fellow Katie Albright, San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center

UNDERSTANDING STRESS AS A RISK FACTOR

The ACE Study advances understanding of and provides evidence for new policies around early life stresses and long-term outcomes. Emerging science that builds on this and other research is also an important resource. As Sarah Enos Watamura, PhD, associate professor of psychology at the University of Denver and Ascend Fellow points out, “there is 40 years of literature connecting ‘early-life stress’ to all kinds of outcomes.” Through this literature and her own work, Watamura has identified a range of stressor impacts:

- Stress influences the risk of metabolic syndrome, risk of obesity, immune system function (better able to handle wounds, less able to fight off sickness).

- Stress changes cognitive priorities — focuses attention on determining danger and focuses memory on keeping track of where you are not safe.
- Long-term, elevated stress increases anxiety, accelerates aging.

Stress systems are designed to protect us in the event of danger — but over-activation of stress systems can be damaging to health. This is why, says Dr. Watamura, managing stress at the earliest moments has significant implications for a child's long-term outcomes.

“Babies’ brains are not predefined: They are ready for new experiences that will shape development. Open, plastic, underdeveloped brains are also very open to negative experiences,” Dr. Watamura notes. “Babies who had higher stress

indicators during pregnancy take longer to recover from potent stressors — babies learned to be vigilant and watch for danger during pregnancy.”

This relates, too, to “epigenetic transmission,” which in this context means that the way people are parented influences the way their brain responds when they are a parent. Dr. Watamura’s research has found that “mothers who report better parenting when they were children have brains that are more responsive to their children’s cries — this indicates the quality of care they will provide that child.”

For organizations working with families struggling with the effects of poverty, homelessness, violence, and trauma, these findings reinforce ongoing work and also underscore opportunities to innovate in areas such as pre-screening for enrollment in mental health services, policy advocacy for home visiting resources, and increased support for student parents. “Knowing how something functions allows for more potential intervention and for the possibility of assessment,” says Dr. Watamura. “Knowing where someone starts gives you better information to work with.”

website. Direct-service providers may want to consider testing the survey through their mental health services.

- **Examine existing levers to intervene with parents and children, and consider how emerging brain science may bolster evidence to support increased funding:** In Washington state, home-visiting services are being used to increase mental health support for parents. With the emerging evidence around brain science and the efficacy of home-visiting interventions, the Children’s Home Society was able to augment its budget for this program.
- **Educate parents and providers on what toxic stress and ACEs mean to them:** Understanding the long-term impact of events and stressors that were beyond a parent’s control as a child can be clarifying and therapeutic, and set him or her on a better path to parenthood. Provide literature and tools for families on the impact of trauma and issues like food insecurity, and then provide opportunities for those families to access resources like housing, food assistance, and mental health services.

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Learn more about brain science:** Identify key resources to equip you and your team with an understanding of the correlations among brain science, toxic stress, and poverty. Consider partnering with local experts or researchers to increase professional development and learning about why strengthening understanding of ACEs can improve service delivery or policy development in your work.
- **Adapt and implement the ACE Survey:** The ACE Survey is available for adaption and implementation through an open-source website at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

RESOURCES TO TAP

- Mind in the Making, Ellen Galinsky (www.mindinthemaking.org)
- Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University (developingchild.harvard.edu)
- Child Health and Development Lab, University of Denver (www.du.edu/psychology/child_health_and_development/Home.htm)
- “Innovation in Washington State,” Frontiers of Innovation (developingchild.harvard.edu/activities/frontiers_of_innovation/foi_activities/innovation_in_washington_state)

IN AN ERA WHERE
THERE'S MORE DEMAND
ON FEWER DOLLARS,
THERE'S A GREATER
NEED FOR RESEARCHED
HEALTH REFORM. WHERE
ARE THOSE SWEET
SPOTS? WHERE CAN
WE MAKE OUR BEST
INVESTMENTS?



Dr. Lina Guzman
Senior Research Scientist and Director,
Child Trends' Hispanic Institute

LEVERAGE THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT FOR BETTER FAMILY OUTCOMES

In 2012, one in five American adults under the age of 65 was living without health insurance.² Conversely, the nation cut the number of uninsured children in half with the enactment of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in 1997, but 7 million remain uninsured as of 2014.¹⁰ For adults with incomes below twice the federal poverty level, the uninsured rate was an astonishing 35 percent.¹¹ Today, we have new opportunities to improve health and well-being for children and families through the Affordable Care Act, Office of Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) dual enrollment, and emerging options such as home visiting programs.

CREATING COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH APPROACHES

In two critical research studies, Nobel laureate researcher James Heckman, PhD, has demonstrated the importance of a comprehensive approach to health and education that takes a two-generation approach. In the first study, Heckman analyzed the extensive medical data gathered from the Abecedarian early child care study in North Carolina.¹² He discovered that when an early childhood program combined a nutrition component with the same comprehensive health services (such as staff nurses at schools, child screenings, parent counseling, and support on child

development) that the Affordable Care Act is now striving to put in place, the results included major reductions in the medical issues that plague low-income communities. The combination of early childhood development programs with health and nutrition services led to better outcomes. Rates of hypertension, obesity, blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, and heart disease fell. Other outcomes included delayed onset of alcohol and marijuana use, more physical activity, and greater concern about nutrition.

"The bottom line was that they found that early childhood education combined with nutrition and early health had tremendous preventative consequences on adult crime and disease, especially at age 30," says Rich Neimand, president and creative director of the Neimand Collaborative.

In the second, the recently completed Jamaican Study, Heckman found that subjects in a home visiting program that addressed child development, maternal and parental interaction, educational development, and nutrition and health counseling wildly outperformed the control group in metrics of overall life attainment.¹³

"They were able to get jobs and persevere in school longer. They were able to earn 25 percent more than the control," says Neimand. "In addition, the families and parents started investing more in the child's education. They knew how to do it. They could see the results, and they also invested in their own economic upward mobility."

These preventative health care measures clearly point out the benefits of dovetailing early childhood education supports with early health supports. "It's the ultimate two-gen approach," Neimand says, "because those patterns will be taught to their own families and children."

HEALTH IMPACTS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The implications of this research are particularly important when considering the Latino population, which is especially vulnerable when it comes to health care and well-being. According to Lina Guzman, PhD, director of the Hispanic Institute and co-director of Reproductive Health and Family Formation at Child Trends, 41 percent of Hispanic adults go without health insurance and thus miss out on well visits, where the majority of preventative care takes place.

Guzman notes that by 2060, one in three children in the U.S. will be Latino, so how those children fare will have profound implications for our country.¹⁴ Currently, a third of Latino children live under the poverty line and two-thirds live in low-income households. Guzman notes that the silver lining, as well as an opportunity for change, lies in the fact that in the past

five years, Latinos have been enrolling in early education and child care programs in increasing numbers.

TAPPING THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

One of the most powerful means for improving health outcomes in both parents and children comes through the Affordable Care Act, which was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010 and represents the largest transformation of American health policy in more than a generation. The act creates tremendous new opportunities for reaching vulnerable children and their parents through Medicaid expansion, CHIP dual-enrollment changes, and the expansion of home health visiting programs.

Although CHIP cut the number of uninsured children in the nation in half, 7 million more children remain uninsured.¹⁵ The Affordable Care Act aims to provide insurance for both these children and their parents through Medicaid expansion and dual-enrollment opportunities.

"Children have always been eligible for Medicaid, but in some places the income cutoff is so low that by and large



(from left to right) Catherine Rampell, *Washington Post*; Richard Neimand, Neimand Collaborative; Donna Cohen Ross, Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services; Lina Guzman, Child Trends' Hispanic Institute; Ascend Fellow Darius Tandon, PhD, Northwestern University

most parents are not eligible. That's a disconnect. Now we have more families where parents can also be eligible for coverage," says Donna Cohen Ross, senior policy advisor and director of enrollment initiatives at the Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services.

As of the end of August 2014, more than half the states had implemented the Medicaid expansion, allowing parents to have coverage and care for their own health needs as well as for their children's. Ross is seeing firsthand the two-generation impact of this change. In West Virginia, a mother who was able to access health care to control her diabetes could both return to work and spend time in her child's kindergarten class. A father in California was able to play soccer with his daughter after he addressed debilitating knee problems. Entire families can benefit from other services like smoke cessation, which improve overall health and reduce issues like asthma for the whole family.

"The opportunities for parents to be more engaged with their children when they're healthy and not as worried about the family financial situation is tremendous. There's now more opportunity to address those pieces together," she says. The Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services has promoted creative new strategies for implementing these changes, such as allowing states to use information from other public benefit programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to identify large numbers of people who are now eligible for Medicaid.

Since October 2013, six states have enrolled over 660,000 new people through this process. The agency is now trying to link other state officials with counterparts

in those original six states to explain the process and expand enrollment.

The Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services has also developed robust outreach campaigns that are focused on communicating two key points: that enrollment is open year-round and that parents are eligible too. Ross acknowledges that there's still plenty of work to do. "We know not everyone is eligible, but we now have many more people eligible for coverage, and that's your ticket to begin accessing those benefits. The Medicaid expansion is a huge opportunity. We need to get not only children, but parents involved."

STARTING IN THE HOME

The home itself is another important place to engage both parents and children. Traditionally, home visiting programs have targeted specific areas, like prenatal care, but programs are now branching out to include psychosocial wellness, education, and employment. According to Ascend Fellow Darius Tandon, PhD, of Northwestern University, home visiting clients in a recent study in Baltimore cited education and employment as two key areas on which they would especially like to focus. Home visiting programs also hold potential for two-generation work because rigorous studies have demonstrated that they are effective in achieving outcomes in multiple areas, such as child development, family economics, self-sufficiency, and maternal health.

The Affordable Care Act includes supporting a large initiative called the "Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting" project (MIECHV), which expands home visiting programs that already exist. States receiving funds must use 75 percent of the funds on evidenced-based home visiting models, but the remaining 25 percent of funds can go toward enhancements, augmentations, and innovative work.

With 25 percent [of more flexible home visiting funds in ACA], can we be more intentional in thinking about promoting education and GED and the economic self-sufficiency of clients?

- Darius Tandon, associate professor, Northwestern University

"There's a nice opportunity to leverage funds here," says Tandon. "With 25 percent, can we be more intentional in thinking about promoting education and GED and the economic self-sufficiency of clients? Clients want that. I'm suggesting they can be built within the models."

Looking forward, there are many additional avenues to pursue in promoting better two-generation health outcomes for families. Neimand thinks that increasing advocacy and research and leveraging the private marketplace offer potential. Guzman sees room for improvement in outreach efforts from the federal to the local level.

"What you want is continuity of investment," says Neimand. "When we put these pieces together — early learning, early health, home visitation — and we have that continuity, that's important. Those essential family foundations that middle-class people have are what everybody needs. What we really need to do is have a variety of investments in education, health, and nutrition, and then we have to look at what works."

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Realize the potential of home visiting:** Take advantage of the available MIECHV funding and incorporate workforce and education access opportunities into home visiting programs.
- **Speak the same data language:** Partner with health and early childhood education organizations in your community to develop shared metrics and common language for measuring outcomes.
- **Explore opportunities to expand Medicaid:** Leverage Medicaid expansion at the state level to secure health coverage for more low-income families, including mental health

coverage for children and their families.

- **Promote Medicaid/CHIP dual enrollment:** Reduce the uninsured rate among parents and children by recommending the new dual-enrollment option to policymakers and practice leaders.

RESOURCES TO TAP

- *The Affordable Care Act: Affording Two-Generation Approaches to Health*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/the-affordable-care-act-affording-two-generation-approaches-to-health)
- *Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas & Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/top-ten-for-2gen)
- *A Two-Generation Strategy: Healthy Parents and Healthy Kids*, Voices for Utah Children (www.utahchildren.org/images/pdfs/2014/HealthIssueBrief.pdf)
- "Abecedarian & Health: Improve adult health outcomes with quality early childhood programs that include health and nutrition," The Heckman Equation (www.heckmanequation.org/content/resource/research-summary-abecedarian-health)



(from left to right) Tameka Henry, Acelero Learning; Diane Bellem, Sheltering Arms

IF PEOPLE HAVE
STRONGER PERSONAL,
SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL
FOUNDATIONS, THEY'RE
MORE LIKELY TO LIFT
THEMSELVES OUT OF
POVERTY FOR GOOD.



Maria Peña
Chief Program Officer,
LIFT

SOCIAL CAPITAL IS AN ACCELERATOR FOR FAMILY STABILITY AND STRENGTH

Education, economic assets, and health and well-being are all critical elements of the two-generation approach, but social capital can be a catalytic force in driving change for low-income families. Social capital is the network of people and institutions upon which a family relies.

Ascend Fellows and Network partners across the country are emphasizing different forms of social capital to help families achieve their dreams: bonding social capital, which provides peer support and positive peer pressure (or reinforcement of social expectations), and linking social capital, which connects people to information and resources beyond their immediate circle. Bridging social capital, which refers to social networks between groups representing diverse interests, is also important. While research has shown that social capital effectively provides support and expands opportunities for low-income families, there is much room to imagine, implement, and test approaches that create supportive networks within a two-generation framework.¹⁶

Acelero Learning Chief Operating Officer and Ascend Fellow Henry Wilde relays a story about the economic benefits, often multigenerational, that can come from social connections: “When I went to business school, on the first day, the dean said, ‘Look to your left, look to your right.’ You expected that he’s going to say one of these people won’t be here next year,

but instead he says, ‘You’re going to hire the child of one of these people.’”

INSTITUTIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILDING

Similarly, Jorge Blandón, vice president at the Family Independence Initiative (FII), explains how institutional support opened up possibilities for his future. “I joined ABC, A Better Chance program, an organization that takes inner-city kids and puts them in high-performing high schools where they have a better chance of going to college,” Blandón says. “So here’s this kid from the Bronx that ends up in this small town of Western Massachusetts called Amherst. I start to get a glance into what middle class households could look like. I get folks to rally around me to apply to this small liberal arts school called Amherst College, and I end up getting in and all of a sudden I’m exposed to a whole different world — it’s a whole different network.” After having grown up in a supportive, working class family, Blandón, who now works on social capital building at FII, graduated from college with the help of an exceptional financial aid program: “They said, ‘Pay us whenever, zero interest. We don’t care, pay us if you want.’ It was a moral loan. I end up graduating from Amherst and got my first job because of those networks.”

Leveraging the resources supplied by relationships and institutions can help families take a significant leap toward economic stability. However, programmatically, helping families develop trusting, supportive ties is a delicate and complicated endeavor.

Ultimately that leads to ... the sense of dignity: I'm in control of my community. I'm taking care of my home, my children, my neighbor's children.

- Jorge Blandón, vice president, Family Independence Initiative

Creating meaningful connections between people's stories, life experiences, and demanding schedules presents a challenge to providers who seek to implement social capital-building initiatives.

BUILDING TRUST TO BUILD MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

In some communities, people hesitate to trust people they do not know. Findings from Ascend-commissioned focus groups with low- and moderate-income mothers and their teenage children found that the mothers "show strong desire for self-reliance and independence...and aspire to resolve their issues on their own."¹⁷ However, mothers also spoke about the need for stronger connections to a greater range of supports that would help both their children and themselves achieve educational success.

Programs can create warm introductory environments to break through barriers. Sandra Gutierrez, national director of Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors, an evidence-based training program for Latino parents of young children, says: "One of the things that inspires me is that parents who go through any of these [Ascend Network] programs form a network community amongst themselves when you create a welcoming environment in your program where people can talk about what's really going on in their lives. People are hungry for that opportunity."

The Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) recognizes this desire for a supportive community among low-income families. CITC is both made up of and serves Alaska Native People in urban Anchorage, where more than 22 percent live. They are often disconnected from the life and

culture on Alaskan tribal lands, and from each other, due to transportation issues and cultural shifts. CITC very intentionally incorporates the cultures and values of the people they serve into its programming. A major facet of this work is building culturally appropriate social capital into its classroom programming, including fatherhood training and postsecondary health care courses. Using a cohort style, CITC provides wraparound services and aims to conduct all teaching in a single classroom, which allows for the sharing of social support, knowledge, and resources between peers and multiple generations. CITC focuses on both supporting and respecting the cultures and families within its programs.

TESTING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Ascend Network is testing the impact of social capital in two-generation programs and refining approaches to building it. Acelero Learning — with the help of Ascend Fellows Mario Small, PhD, professor at Harvard University, and P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, PhD, at Northwestern University — is conducting a study to determine if facilitating social capital development among parents could help improve the early school success of their children. The research team has created an intervention that builds mutual support between parents in an early learning center in North Philadelphia, with the hope that the bonds formed and responsibilities shared between the involved parents (such as walking children to and from school) will improve their children's attendance and thus performance. This study is part of Acelero Learning's revamped efforts to prioritize social capital and make use of its momentum-building effects on Head Start families.

According to Wilde, Head Start programs have "historically had the model where the thought was that [the program] gave value to families." He explains, "A family was the recipient of the case worker, who sent you in the right direction to go find

the solution that you as a low-income family needed. As we think more about what it looks like to address poverty, for us it has to include that element of building social capital.”

In the Acelero Learning intervention, parents from one classroom were asked to select another parent from their child's class to be their “parent partner.” Partners lived in the same neighborhood and were expected to contact each other if their child would be absent from class, with the hope that the partner could assist in the case of a transportation or work emergency. Additionally, one of the partners would be responsible for attending a monthly center parent meeting. Two other classrooms were part of the intervention, with one classroom acting as the “control” (no intervention) and the other including a family advocate who facilitated parent relationships less formally.

Initial findings from the intervention include a vast improvement in parent engagement at the monthly parent meeting, at which parent attendance increased from 15 percent to 54 percent. Acelero is currently tracking the daily on-time attendance of the children in each of the classes and will use the information to inform the organization's future attempts to build community and parent support into its programs.

TAPPING THE RESILIENCE AND AUTONOMY OF PARENTS

A common thread throughout these initiatives could serve as a rule of practice for programs interested in social capital: while facilitating the development of social capital, organizations must allow for and protect the autonomy of parents, acknowledging the resilience and ingenuity present within families and communities.

FII fully embraces this principle. The organization created a platform for social and economic mobility, but families within communities decide what that looks like



Jorge Blandon
Family Independence Initiative

for themselves and define their own goals through data sharing and collection. FII provides opportunities for communities to gather together around common goals and supplies, bridging social capital through information and project funding. For example, through its digital platform UpTogether, FII offers a place for community members to ask each other for support and provide advice and solutions. Additionally, through the Torchlight Prize, FII lifts up and rewards the work of self-organized community members around the country who are designing innovative solutions to the problems their low-income communities face.

“There are some beautiful communities out there just waiting to be recognized and leveraged and invested in,” says Blandón. “Ultimately that leads to ... the sense of dignity: I'm in control of my community. I'm taking care of my home, my children, my neighbor's children. That's the lens through which we're approaching it.”

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Look to leaders:** Survey the field and take lessons from social capital leaders such as FII and Circles USA.
- **Conduct a network analysis:** how do you or your organization connect to other local and national leaders and programs? What are the relevant points of intersection and how might you connect – or connect others – to those groups?
- **Develop methods to listen to families:** Ask parents about the type of support they are seeking, and find ways to let their goals and dreams shape your programming.
- **Create spaces for relationship-building:** Weekly potlucks, guest speaker events, community meetings, and parent groups are all great opportunities to cultivate strong connections among families.

RESOURCES TO TAP

- “Personal Action, Collective Impact” from The Shriver Report, Anne Mosle (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/pages/giving-women-access-to-the-american-dream)
- “Neighborhood Institutions as Resource Brokers: Childcare Centers, Interorganizational Ties, and Resource Access among the Poor,” Ascend Fellow Mario Small, PhD (scholar.harvard.edu/files/mariosmall/files/small_sp_2006.pdf)
- FII's UpTogether (www.uptogether.org/)



Ascend Fellow Mia Birdsong, Family Independence Initiative



**YOU BUILD THE
CORPORATE
PARTNERSHIPS AND
PROVIDE THE SERVICES
FOR YOUR STUDENTS,
WHICH ARE AT THE CORE
OF YOUR MISSION, BUT
THEN YOU START TO
CHANGE THE SYSTEM.**

Kim Dabbs
Executive Director,
West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology

ENGAGE EMPLOYERS THROUGH CROSS-SECTOR STRATEGIES

America appears to be on its way toward an economic recovery: The nation's unemployment rate has reached its lowest point since the 2008 financial crisis.¹⁸ Fueled by recent economic progress and new opportunities created by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), families have the potential to achieve greater stability and security, with leaders around the country having realized the potential of the two-generation approach in making a difference in the lives of children and their parents.

As of early 2015, the United States had experienced 59 consecutive months of private-sector job creation.¹⁹ Frontline workforce intermediaries are securing employment opportunities for the families they work with, while meeting the market-driven needs of respected employers. At the same time, new opportunities to expand access to job training and employee supports are emerging through WIOA. The possibilities for two-generation impact continue to multiply as a growing network of workforce development organizations, employers, federal and state government agencies, and policy makers reevaluate their relationships and reimagine how Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Child Care Development Block Grant dollars should be allocated.

WORKFORCE AND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A new mindset and interest is developing to understand and meet the needs of working parents and their children in the 21st century. One clear finding arises from these collaborations: in order to ensure meaningful work opportunities for young parents, organizations must engage effectively with employers.

"We have evolved from a system that basically ignored employers," says Ascend Fellow Christopher King, PhD, senior research scientist at the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at the University of Texas-Austin. "If you looked into the '60s, early '70s, you didn't find employer references hardly at all in the national workforce policies or even in a lot of the vocational education stuff." Nonprofit organizations across the country are now beginning to see employers as essential to the work of helping often-ignored young parents gain stable, living-wage jobs.

Elyse Rosenblum, director of the Employment Pathways Project, describes her work as "building a bridge between employers and young people." She continues: "The idea behind employment pathways is to create a whole range of things employers can do to get young adults ready for work, with the ultimate goal being hiring. To help employers figure out what it is they can do to move young people along a ladder of developing the skills and networks they need to be successful employees." In this model, nonprofit organizations serve

as intermediaries between employers and nontraditional potential employees, seeking to find the areas where the needs and strengths of both parties overlap and meet each other. “The most successful models embed a core set of professional and life skills into their model,” says Rosenblum. Effective models forge strong partnerships and incorporate high-touch mentoring support, wraparound services, and work-based experiential learning.

Organizations that effectively engage employers do not always fit the bill of traditional nonprofits; they intentionally adapt the approaches and mindsets of the corporate employers they partner with. “We have a strong partnership,” says Kim Dabbs, executive director of West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology, a community-based organization and Ascend Network partner that uses career training and arts engagement to help people make economic and social progress. “I never position our organization as a nonprofit organization. I never position our organization as a charity or in need of philanthropic dollars, but as a partner to the employer. They have a need; we have the solution, which makes for equal and even partnership.” By making themselves partners with the means to solve an employer’s problem, organizations like WMCAT set themselves up to influence decisions that will affect the quality of life for future employees and their families.

DEVELOPING A SHARED LANGUAGE

Learning the language of employers is a key strategy. “I have tried to get us into conversations where nonprofit organizations traditionally aren’t in the room,” says Dabbs, “hearing things that I don’t want to hear, but need to hear in order to be a good partner to these employers.” Dabbs urges interested parties to find their way into these conversations. “We have got to cross that bridge and really understand from the other side how [employers] are talking, what their needs are, and how we can be that partner.

It is about telling your story. I don’t like the term ‘nonprofit.’ We are all about economics. We are a social impact organization. We talk about what we do as a return on investment, using language that reinforces that.”

Kerin Hilker-Balkissoon, executive director of the Adult Career Pathways program at Northern Virginia Community College, agrees. “We are very careful when approaching employers. We read their mission and vision statements before going in to speak with them. Doing your homework can go a long way in being able to speak the employer’s language and address their priorities in your pitch.”

USING BUSINESS PRINCIPLES TO DRIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Businesses are indeed interested in partnering with workforce intermediaries who understand market-driven principles and respond to clear needs. Ascend Network partner The Source is a cost-shared collaborative employee-support organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan, designed to help employees keep their jobs, receive training to enhance their employment, and move into better positions within or across companies. The Source trains employees and supplies an on-site caseworker to connect employees with the resources they need to stay on the job, such as transportation and child care, and offer support with pregnancy, illness, and domestic violence, among other concerns.

“My employers do not want to give anyone a break,” says The Source’s Executive Director Randy Osmon. “They don’t want your problem in their facility. What they want is a resilient, dedicated, hardworking employee that comes to them without problems. So if I can help address the complexity that life has given these individuals, then I can guarantee the employers that what they in fact got was a good worker.”

Rosenblum elaborates on employers' interest in support from quality intermediaries: "There are a lot of benefits for employers. Employers will get the two-gen approach pretty intuitively. They understand and have seen data on the correlation between what is going on with kids and the productivity of the parent employee."

INFLUENCING EMPLOYER CULTURE

Furthermore, employer engagement can change the way employers see the low-income parents they work with and thus expand opportunity to many more. "The employment pathways process can be transformational on the employer side as well," claims Rosenblum. "It is a great way to get them to think differently and to create opportunities for other young adults." As nonprofits partner with businesses to help low-income parents become successful employees, they expand economic opportunity for more of America's families.

Hilker-Balkissoon further explains the nuances of building relationships with employers and creating cultural shifts within their businesses. "[It is important to] frame the discussion as training, coming in to be part of a panel — really developing exposure to this population — because that humanizes the situation for the employer. Instead of seeing them as statistics, they see them as people

with strengths." In this way, organizations can begin the transformational work of challenging employer mindsets around what the "right fit" looks like.

This type of cross-sector work can have concrete impact when employers recognize the value that intermediaries bring them. When WMCAT was negotiating with a large retail pharmacy chain, Dabbs made a bold demand to ensure the protection of her trainees. "You need to change your pay structure, hire full-time, and offer health benefits," she requested. "This is where the real social change starts to happen. Once we have our students in there earning a living wage, that is when we can start pushing for those broader conversations, not just for our pharm techs in the program, but for their entire workforce. But you need that bridge to be built."

USING WIOA AS A TWO-GENERATION LEVER

Building bridges is also a stand-out theme in the new WIOA statute. WIOA provides opportunities for advocates of the two-generation approach to support children and the adults in their lives by utilizing the new youth workforce funds to provide services for young parents; streamlining multi-agency plans into an integrated state job training strategy that is two-gen friendly; and increasing workforce training opportunities and support services for adults with children. "There is strong



(from left to right) Celinda Lake, Lake Research Partners; Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin, Women's Prison Association; Roxanne Jerde, Community Foundation of Sarasota County; Ed Center, United Way of the Bay Area

encouragement for sectoral programs, strongly engaging employers, responding to employers' needs, responding in their language, focusing on skills development in structured career pathways programs offered throughout various providers, especially community and technical colleges," says King.

WIOA holds much promise for supporting America's families, but cross-sector interests must work together to leverage the provisions in this law to see it truly lift up both parents and their children together. "There's tremendous potential for advancing the two-gen strategy in the new legislation," says Rosenblum. "It's great to have this new bill, a long time coming, and now there's a ton of work to do around getting it right and ensuring the details meet the aspirations of all of us who care that workforce training is done in a way that prepares all people — in my work that focuses on young people — for getting good jobs with family-sustaining wages."

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Immerse yourself in the market:** Learn the language and values of corporate employers.
- **Meet the demand:** Identify the employer's "pain point," and position your organization and the parents you serve as the solution.
- **Reach out for maximum impact:** Collaborate with experts and high-quality providers in early childhood education and human services to support parents and their children.
- **Turn employers into advocates:** Identify employers as assets in communicating the need for a two-generation approach in state and local workforce development initiatives.
- **Expand reach via WIOA and TANF:** Create more career pathways and job

training programs through WIOA, and expand TANF eligibility by counting workforce training as a work activity.

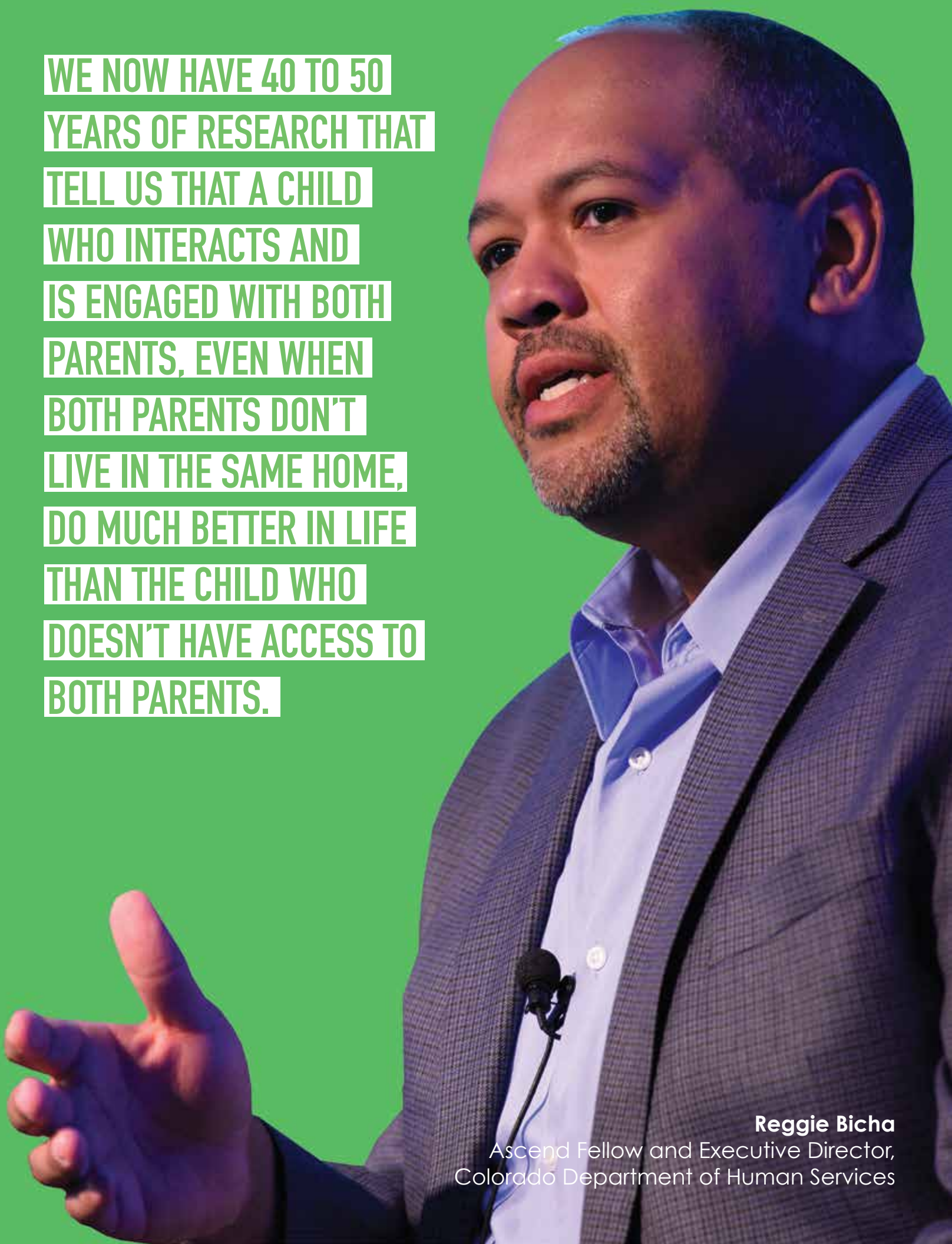
RESOURCES TO TAP

- *Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas & Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/top-ten-for-2gen)
- *Connecting People to Work: Workforce Intermediaries and Sector Strategies* (http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/economic-opportunities/connecting-people-work?utm_source=as.pn&utm_medium=urlshortener)
- *Realizing Innovation and Opportunity in WIOA: A Playbook for Creating Effective State Plans*, National Skills Coalition (www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/2014-11-NSC-WIOA-state-report.pdf)
- *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Young Families*, National Human Services Assembly (www.nationalassembly.org/Knowledge/documents/NHSAFullReport2GenOSOWFamilies.pdf)
- *The Washington Post's Catherine Rampell on two-generation workforce programs* (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2015/02/09/eec847da-b0a3-11e4-854b-a38d13486ba1_story.html)

WE NOW HAVE 40 TO 50 YEARS OF RESEARCH THAT TELL US THAT A CHILD WHO INTERACTS AND IS ENGAGED WITH BOTH PARENTS, EVEN WHEN BOTH PARENTS DON'T LIVE IN THE SAME HOME, DO MUCH BETTER IN LIFE THAN THE CHILD WHO DOESN'T HAVE ACCESS TO BOTH PARENTS.

Reggie Bicha

Ascend Fellow and Executive Director,
Colorado Department of Human Services



FATHERS ARE CRITICAL TO FAMILIES' CLIMB UP THE ECONOMIC LADDER

Two-generation approaches address the needs of and provide opportunities for children and the adults in their lives together, including mothers and fathers. Currently, 17.5 million children under the age of 18 are being raised by a single mother in the United States, and 45 percent of those families live below the poverty line. For those living with a father only, 21 percent live in poverty. At the same time, low-income, noncustodial fathers are overlooked in parenthood contexts. Research has indicated a correlation between father-absent homes and higher rates of substance abuse, incarceration, and emotional and behavioral problems.

Growing research and practice lessons point toward the importance of more intentionally integrating fathers into solutions for low-income families.

The National Fatherhood Initiative, a study examining father involvement with 134 children of adolescent mothers over the first 10 years of life, found that father-child contact was associated with better socio-emotional and academic functioning. Children in the study with more involved fathers experienced fewer behavioral problems and scored higher on reading achievement.

The Ascend Network recognizes the resilience and drive of single-mother-headed families. At the same time, the

Network is developing innovations to more effectively engage fathers in both direct-service settings and at the local and state policy levels.

"The child who is living in poverty, usually but not always with mom — mom has custody 51 to 55 percent of the time," says Reggie Bicha, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), which is spearheading a demonstration project aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of intensive job readiness development of non-custodial parents, namely fathers. "In most states, we assume joint custody, which is a good thing, but our social policies haven't caught up. That child spends 50 percent of the time with mom, 40-some percent of the time with dad. Mom in a poverty household can apply for TANF and get cash assistance. Mom might get child care assistance; if working, or searching for work, she might benefit from food assistance. ... That same child goes to the other parent's house, who is also living in poverty, [and] that parent doesn't get any of those benefits, with the exception now of medical assistance. Furthermore, because mom is benefitting from all those other public assistance programs, we have policies that require a child support referral be made. So not only does the other parent not get supports that he or she may need, they have an additional burden to pay child support to the government to compensate for benefits paid to the custodial parent. From the child's perspective, how does that make sense?"

Our focus is on providing a high-quality educational environment that also builds character, through modeling and connections with what we call 'visible men'.

- Shannon Rohrer-Phillips, co-founder,
Visible Men Academy

To address this challenge, Bicha and his team have launched the Colorado Parent Employment Project (CoPep), which supports fathers through a thorough assessment of individual barriers and development of customized strategies. The goal is to help fathers obtain self-sustaining employment that helps them contribute to the financial, emotional, and physical well-being of their children. "In [Colorado], we're trying to help noncustodial parents get many of the same benefits as a custodial parent: assistance finding a job, housing support, support navigating the family court system, support engaging with kids, and parenting advice that might help you be a better parent," explains Bicha. "If we can do these things that are relevant to a 21st century family, we can promote two-gen approaches and help kids and both parents be better off." This initiative includes Colorado House Bill 1317, which was enacted in 2014 and reforms the state's child care assistance programming to increase the number of parents eligible for work support while also strengthening child care provider practices.

Securing stable, well-paying jobs is essential for low-income, noncustodial fathers. Ascend Network partner United Way of Greater Cincinnati, in conjunction with Partners for a Competitive Workforce, is focusing on meeting employer demands in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana by increasing the skills of the current and future workforce in the region. Since its conception, the program has served more than 7,800 individuals, primarily men. The program has worked with more than 5,000 jobseekers, with 87 percent completing training and earning over 4,600 credentials, 80 percent obtaining employment, and 73 percent retaining employment after 12 months.

The organization hopes to replicate its success with men and fathers in its work with women and mothers in the coming months.

Programs are also examining how to start early in engaging not just fathers, but also young boys of color. In Bradenton, Florida, Visible Men Academy (VMA) has entered its second year as a county charter school, providing boys from low-income communities with outstanding academic, character, and social education in a nurturing school environment. The academy's goal is to deliver a high-quality educational experience that meets the specific needs of at-risk elementary and middle school-aged boys through the collaborative efforts of administrators, teachers, parents, the broader community, and the students themselves.

"Our focus is on providing a high-quality educational environment that also builds character, through modeling and connections with what we call 'visible men,'" says Shannon Rohrer-Phillips, the Academy's co-founder and director of student and family services, recruitment, and community partnerships, referring to mentors, who are men of color in the community. "We are building on charter school best practices, like an extended day and ensuring all our instruction is data driven — which can be challenging, as we are constantly trying to evaluate what is working and what needs to be tweaked in real time." Through the rigorous modeling experience of the Visible Men "Success Curriculum," VMA students are gaining exposure to future personal and career possibilities. The vision, as Rohrer-Phillips puts it, is to cultivate within VMA students an "unyielding sense of control over their futures" and a clear direction for long-term educational success and economic security. While nascent, a parent success program — engaging parents on their own educational needs and opportunities, particularly GED completion — is ongoing, and Rohrer-Phillips hopes to expand it by 2016.

While CDHS, United Way and VMA are addressing the issue of fatherhood at two ends of the generational cycle — CDHS with an emphasis on fathers who have been disconnected from their families and VMA with a focus on young boys of color on a trajectory to success — the Center for Institutional and Social Change (CISC) is targeting parents who have cycled through the criminal justice system. CISC, in collaboration with the New York Reentry Network, is building on previous work in this area with College and Community Fellowship, led by Ascend Fellow Vivian Nixon. The groups are developing a research-based program model, tool set, and a knowledge base that will enable the pilot of a collective impact, two-generation strategy by a network of organizations focused on educational access for formerly incarcerated adults (specifically parents and caregivers). “Fathers do have to be included,” says Nixon, who is partnering with CISC leader Susan Sturm on the project. “We’re trying to look at the ways these families really are constructed. What do two-generation [approaches] look like in families that don’t look like other families?”

Solutions that engage and tap the strengths of fathers are building at the federal level as well. Through the launch of My Brother’s Keeper and other initiatives through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Family Assistance, political will to help fathers is growing. An important component of these policy and practice advancements for engaging fathers, as ThinkXChange participants point out, is ensuring that mothers are also part of the conversation. As Rohrer-Phillips notes, mothers of young boys of color are a critical bridge to the community and part of the group’s recruitment strategy; for justice-involved families working with CISC, grandmothers, mothers, and other female family members may be important partners in a father’s pursuit of postsecondary credentials and economic stability.

A father’s presence in the lives of his children is just as important to their physical and emotional development as a mother’s. Ensuring that fathers, particularly low-income, noncustodial fathers, have the social and financial support they need is essential in fostering strong relationships between fathers and their children.

TAKE 2-GEN ACTION

- **Coordinate with other organizations:** When working with single-parent-headed families — mothers or fathers — consider doing an analysis of what partner organizations may be serving the noncustodial parent. Develop a collaboration plan or practice regular communications with those agencies, ensuring that services for both parents, even if they are not in the same home, are coordinated.
- **Develop incentives:** Consider conducting research into the challenges facing single fathers in your community, and develop programmatic incentives such as assistance with social services and workforce development as a way to engage fathers and forge an ongoing partnership.
- **Listen:** Engage fathers through the creation of programs that serve their specific needs. Consider developing a fathers group, created for and designed by fathers, that will educate fathers on policy issues impacting their lives, build confidence, and serve as an outlet for fathers to express their needs.
- **Elevate awareness:** Provide information to mothers and fathers about the positive benefits that involved fathers have in their children’s lives. Additionally, address social and organizational barriers when discussing father engagement.

Power is the ability not
just to tell the story of
another person, but to
make it the definitive
story of that person.

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



RESOURCES TO TAP

- *Policies That Strengthen Fatherhood and Family Relationships*, MDRC (www.mdrc.org/publication/policies-strengthen-fatherhood-and-family-relationships)
- *The Rise of Single Fathers*, Pew Research Center (www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/07/single-fathers-07-2013.pdf)
- *Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers: Final Impact Report for the Pilot Employment Programs*, Urban Institute (www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/412442-Strengthening-Families-Through-Stronger-Fathers.pdf)

**NO ONE EVER MARCHED
OVER A PIE CHART.**



Joel Ryan
Executive Director,
Washington State Association of
Head Start and ECEAP

THE MESSAGE BOX: A SHARED VISION WILL FUEL THE 2GEN MOVEMENT

[A shared agenda – including core principles and language – should be an organizing force for the two-generation movement, but we need the tools to move that agenda forward. Stories that convey shared values are one of the most compelling ways we have to break through stereotypes about low-income families. And paired with stories, data can help scale an idea and provide the evidence necessary to secure the final policy approval or funding stream. Stories open hearts, and data provides the rationale for action and scale.](#)

THE SHORTEST DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE IS A STORY

Public policy is often shaped and implemented in silos – focusing on one aspect of a problem without taking other related issues and opportunities into consideration. Families do not live in silos. And conveying the complexity of families' lives is not easy. Stereotypes about

presumed choices that lead to poverty abound. When policies are not integrated, families are left to piece together systems for themselves. Breaking through those artificial walls requires connecting to higher cultural values like opportunity and equality. Stories can help make those connections.

As Kyle Wark from First Alaskans Institute said at ThinkXChange, “the shortest distance between two people is a story.” It is one thing if an organization talks about silos, but someone bringing to life how those silos affect them personally is powerful.

But there are challenges in using stories well.

When people share their stories, they need to be prepared. They need to be seen as the people they are, as families and citizens. Telling a personal story can make the teller vulnerable, so anyone with the courage to do it needs to be prepared both to tell it in a way that will connect with their listeners and to handle any negative feedback or questions.

NO ONE EVER MARCHED OVER A PIE CHART BUT...

Stories are not the only tools we have. It is likely true that “no one ever marched over a pie chart,” as Joel Ryan, Executive Director of the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP, puts it. However, arming ourselves and our allies with the data about a population, the economic impact, and other issues of note is critical. Data can be expensive to obtain, but there are many organizations that are resources, from the U.S. Census

In Los Angeles, a coalition led by the Los Angeles Association for a New Economy successfully persuaded the Los Angeles City Council to raise the minimum wage for hotel workers to \$15.37. They combined grassroots organizing and a series of data-based economic arguments to get the Council votes they needed.

Bureau, to Child Trends, to Kids Count. Having that data and being able to share it in a way that is useful and accessible makes organizations valuable resources for policy makers. Being that resource – able to explain what is happening in a community or nationally – is an important role because it offers an entry point for shaping conversations, influencing policy, and moving programs forward.

AN AGENDA WE CAN ALL SUPPORT

The words we choose and the data we call upon resonate differently with different audiences. The good news is that there are issues that people from all backgrounds can get behind. Americans of all stripes — Democrats, Republicans, young, old, parents, and non-parents, married, and single — agree that two-generation policies can help move families toward opportunity. Public backing for two-generation policies is strong. Post-election analysis of 2014 voters, commissioned by Ascend, found that strong majorities (70 percent), across party lines, favor a two-generation approach, even if it raised their taxes. Sixty-nine percent believe investing in parents' economic well-being will help their children succeed.

The post-election survey builds upon an October 2014 survey from Lake Research Partners in which Americans overwhelmingly supported policies and programs with a two-generation approach – policies outlined in *Top Ten for 2Gen*. Eighty-nine percent favored such a program as a means to raise families out of poverty. Support for the specific policies that comprise a two-generation approach is both broad and deep:

- 84 percent support Head Start partnerships to help the parents of low-income children further their own education and job training;
- 88 percent want to include information on employment and job training in home visiting programs for pregnant women and their children;

In Washington, a broad group of organizations have created an early learning action alliance. Each year, they identify the two or three issues they are going to work on that session in partnership with their champions in the legislature. Other Washington-based coalitions have been successful moving policy with the same approach.

- 86 percent believe mental health screenings and services should be offered to both parents and their children at the same time;
- 73 percent favor making parents enrolled in college or workforce training programs eligible for state-funded childcare subsidies; and
- 84 percent support including childcare expenses in determining financial aid eligibility for the 25 percent of college students who are parents.

The principles and policy ideas in *Top Ten for 2Gen* are the result of three years of work in partnership with the field. They are purposely broad, combining policies and principles, to enable the alignment of a variety of organizations and agendas. And the ideas are echoed in work by the Aspen Institute Ascend Network partners and other leaders like the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

TAKE 2GEN ACTION

- **Take advantage of the bipartisan 2014 polling data** Ascend commissioned and supporting message tips for talking points and data to support your work.
- **Identify opportunities to align your work with the Aspen Institute Ascend Network** and others working towards a common vision of an intergenerational cycle of opportunity for families.
- **Leverage stories and data** to support your policy, program, and research goals.



Kokayi Kwa Jitahidi, LAANE

RESOURCES TO TAP

- *Voices for Two-Generation Success: Top 10 Polling & Messaging Tips*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute and Lake Research Partners (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/voices-for-two-generation-success-top-10-polling-messaging)
- *Top 10 for 2Gen: Policy Ideas & Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute (ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/top-ten-for-2gen)

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