MAKING ECONOMIC SECURITY A FAMILY TRADITION:

Two-Generation Solutions from the Aspen THiNK X *CHANGE*

PIONEERING LEADERS AND GROUNDBREAKING IDEAS

ASCEND

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OUR VISION

We envision an America in which a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next.

OUR MISSION

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is a hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success and economic security.

THANK YOU

Ascend at the Aspen Institute wishes to thank the 2012-2013 Ascend Fellows for their thoughtful input on the design of the inaugural Aspen ThinkXChange, as well as the Aspen ThinkXChange speakers and participants for their intellectual contributions and active engagement. In addition, Ascend at the Aspen Institute is grateful to the following institutions and individuals for their ongoing philanthropic support and partnership: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Patrice King Brickman, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Charlotte Perret, Open Society Foundations/Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation, Chambers Family Fund, The Kresge Foundation, Siobhan Davenport/Rocksprings Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ann B. and Thomas L. Friedman Family Foundation, and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters.

A LETTER FROM WALTER ISAACSON AND ANNE MOSLE

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

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

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

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

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INTRODUCTION

Creating a Cycle of Opportunity for American Families

"When you look over the domestic policy landscape, you see all these different people in different policy silos with different budgets: in health care, education, crime, poverty, social mobility and labor force issues," wrote *New York Times* columnist David Brooks in a September 27, 2012 op-ed called "The Psych Approach." "But, in their disjointed ways, they are all dealing with the same problem — that across vast stretches of America, economic, social and family breakdowns are producing enormous amounts of stress and unregulated behavior, which dulls motivation, undermines self-control and distorts lives.

"Maybe it's time," Brooks continued, "for people in all these different fields to get together in a room and make a concerted push against the psychological barriers to success."

Strengthening connections among and effectiveness of services for children and their parents together is at the heart of the two-generation approach. Working toward the goal of making economic security a family tradition, the leaders gathered at the Aspen ThinkXChange — along with their networks — began to share groundbreaking ideas, spur new solutions, and collaborate.

Nearly 45 percent of all children in the United States were low income in 2011. Next year, one million children will be born into poverty.[1] Twenty-two percent of them will not graduate from high school. These troubling economic and educational trends sparked Ascend at the Aspen Institute's exploration and elevation of two-generation approaches, which have the potential to create a new and lasting legacy of educational success and economic security for families.

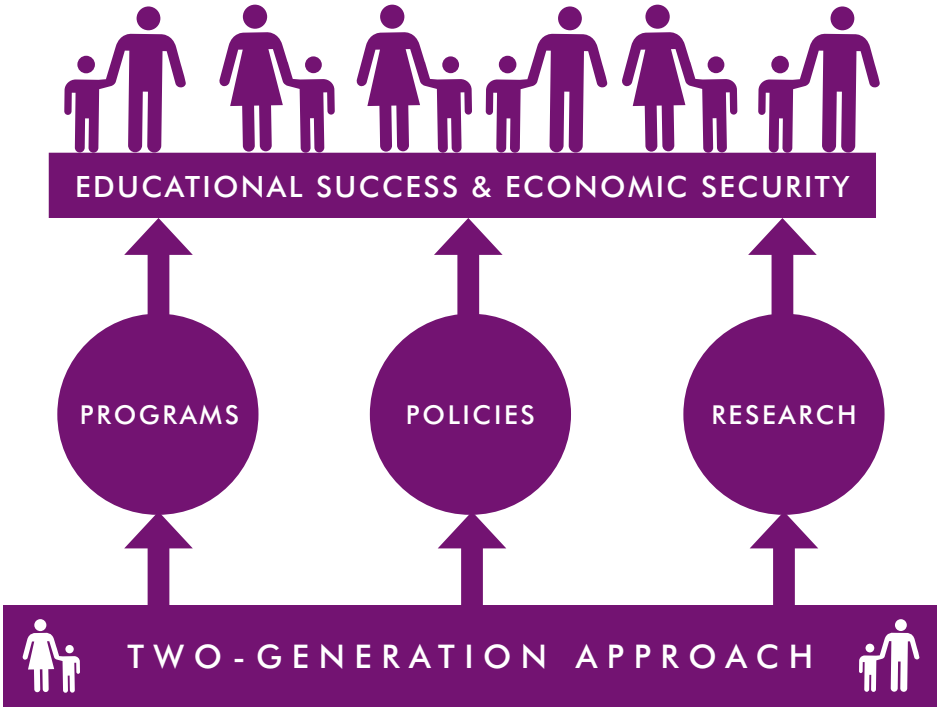
ASCEND AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE IS FOCUSED ON THREE CORE STRATEGIES

1 ELEVATING TWO-GENERATION POLICY AND COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

Ascend fosters and amplifies innovative partnerships across programs, policies, and systems that have traditionally focused separately on children and parents, tapping cutting-edge research and the Ascend network of leaders from communities across the nation. Through platforms such as the Aspen ThinkXChange and the Aspen Ideas Festival, and through tools and publications for the field, Ascend casts a spotlight on breakthrough strategies that impact children and their parents together. An emerging two-generation policy agenda will provide a blueprint for leaders to streamline and connect resources for more effective solutions. The Aspen Institute Ascend Fund will launch in 2013 and will provide flexible capital to catalyze cross-sector collaborations that increase the innovation, influence, and impact of two-generation approaches.

2 BUILDING A NETWORK OF LEADERS AND POLITICAL WILL

Ascend has created a vibrant and visible network of leaders to build political will for shifts in policies, practices, and resources to produce better outcomes for children and parents. The



Ascend Fellowship brings together pioneering leaders who are piloting, replicating, and scaling two-generation approaches, enabling them to share knowledge, coordinate their efforts, and translate groundbreaking ideas into action. Ascend has rapidly prototyped grants to Ascend Fellows to seed two-generation experimentation across research, practice, and policy.

3 SPARKING AND DEEPENING A CONVERSATION WITH LOW-INCOME FAMILIES AND THEIR CHAMPIONS

Ascend has sparked a new conversation around two-generation approaches that help children and their parents seize opportunities to move up the economic ladder. At Ascend, we elevate the voices of families through focus groups and media partnerships; convene national forums and roundtable conversations among diverse experts and leaders; and showcase promising programs and policies through a dynamic online hub: ascend.aspeninstitute.org.

OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS BEYOND POVERTY

What might the United States look like if every child was born into a cycle of opportunity? What if every child had access to high-quality and affordable early childhood education and every child's parents had access to postsecondary education and training linked to good jobs? This new landscape — of children and their parents pursuing educational success and economic security *simultaneously* — may seem elusive given today's budget constraints and rising levels of poverty. Yet this bold concept is showing real potential in communities around the country, and visionary leaders — from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors — are developing solutions that show a child's success has as much to do with her parents' access to opportunities as it does with her own. Given the call among many for austerity, we need to realize a strong return on both our public and our private investments in American families.

ENDNOTE

[1] The Brookings Institution. (2012, September 12). *Poverty and income in 2011: A look at the new census data and what the numbers mean*. Washington, DC.

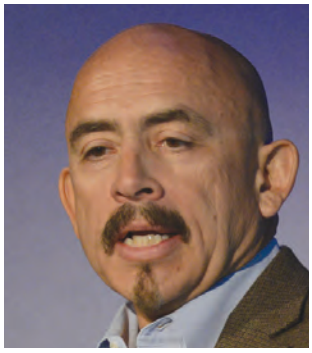
PUTTING ECONOMIC SECURITY IN REACH FOR MORE FAMILIES

Colorado and Beyond: Prioritizing Education for Two Generations

The following is adapted from remarks by Colorado Lieutenant Governor Joseph Garcia.

Over the course of my career, I have worked at what you might refer to as "access institutions," where kids with limited academic preparation and limited financial resources but unlimited hope and ambition came to our doors. I saw so many kids who wanted to change their lives dramatically, with hopes that they were going to change their lives not just for themselves but for their families and for their communities.

I also saw a lot of kids who weren't successful. Many students showed up needing remedial coursework, and as I thought about those kids, I also thought about the kids who didn't show up at all. We clearly weren't doing the job that we thought we should be doing. It became obvious that we needed to change the way we looked at education from the very start. By the time some students arrive at the schoolhouse door, there are already huge gaps in what we call "kindergarten readiness."



And so we need to be thinking not just about educational success but also about areas like economic security, housing security, language, nutrition, and health care. All of these areas are critically important if we want kids to be successful when they arrive at school. We need to address these by starting early. We ought to be talking about the education pipeline from *cradle to college*.

So how do we do it? We need to look at where government provides services and where nonprofit and social service agencies get involved and then try to support each other across these somewhat artificial boundaries.

I come from a family with deep roots in northern New Mexico. We had a family that was committed to books and literacy, but not all of my cousins had that same opportunity. They didn't graduate from high school, didn't even think about college. Now their kids are destined to have the same kind of lives — not because they're not capable, but because they are in an environment where literacy and education are not encouraged. We need to think about how we address these family patterns.

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> – LT GOV JOSEPH GARCIA

In Colorado, we started by asking how we could improve third grade literacy. Teachers told us that it's not about third grade or second [grade] or even kindergarten. It's about those critical first three years. We can't talk about early literacy without talking about adult and family literacy.

There's no one solution. There is no single law we can pass, no program we can create. We need to think in terms of igniting a social movement. We can't just say, "schools, this is your problem" or "government, this is your problem." It's a shared issue at the local, state, and national level.

When my kids started school, because of their last name and where we lived, they were labeled as "at risk," despite the fact that my wife had a Ph.D. and I had a law degree. It made me question what we mean by "at risk." We are focused on the wrong thing. We need to think about who's really at risk. It's not the kids, it's us. It's broader society. It is our very communities [that are at risk], if we cannot successfully help mothers and fathers and children get an education, find their way out of poverty, and get the nutrition and health care and housing security that they need so that they can help us build strong communities, a strong state, and a strong nation.

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A NEW AGENDA:
Values and Cultural Trends in America

The following is adapted from remarks by Michael Gerson and Celinda Lake with moderating by Dr. Eric Motley.

Americans have always relied on a set of core beliefs that fall under the umbrella of "The American Dream." Hard work. Optimism. Equal opportunity. Today these values are in jeopardy. Our feelings of frustration and disappointment and hardship outweigh our sense of hopefulness. Our very mythology seems tarnished. This shift is a blow to the heart of our national psyche, but even amidst the gloomy outlook, a spark of optimism remains.

According to a 2012 bipartisan national survey conducted by Lake Research Partners (LRP) and Chesapeake Beach Consulting (CBC), Americans' growing unease about the future transcends race, gender, economic status, and generation. For decades, "opportunity" was the number one economic value in the United States. Today what people want most is security, and the new buzz word is "stability." Fifty-eight percent of people under the age of 40 believe that their generation is worse off than their parents. Every age demographic in this country also believes that the next generation will be worse off than their own. While Americans still aspire to the idea that America is a land of opportunity, they also feel society is becoming stratified. Education continues to be seen as a pathway to success, but hard work, education, and training may no longer be enough to ensure economic mobility.

"We're increasingly in a circumstance where the most important decision we make is the choice of our parents," says Michael Gerson of *The Washington Post*. "That's very disturbing in the context of the American Dream."

Both Gerson and Celinda Lake see the federal government as a road block to change. Politicians are polarized and unable to agree on a core set of values that the rest of the country takes for granted. As a result, the federal government's programs and policies are stagnant and unable to reflect the staggering changes taking place in our society. In 1980, 18 percent of births in this country were to single mothers. Today that number has risen to 41 percent.[i]

"We don't have a single institution ready for half of all parents to be single parents in their workforce, their student body, or their community," says Lake. "It is a very profound change in our society and adds urgency and scale to this conversation about two generations."

Despite this sobering outlook, Americans are open to hearing about innovative approaches and solutions. According to the 2012 bipartisan survey, 63 percent of Americans believe

> "We have to remember that we have a common destiny and a common country, and that we need to care about the holes and not just be in it for ourselves and our children."
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> – MICHAEL GERSON

that programs with a two-generation approach make sense. Eighty-one percent of Americans would favor such a program as a means to raise families out of poverty. Even if their own taxes were increased in order to introduce such a program, 70 percent of Americans would support two-generation programs.

"We're all embedded in communities where people are working together in partnership," says Lake. "People are open to new ideas and better uses of money, and yet our political system is preventing us from taking it to scale. The language of community investment and strong institutions and intergenerational approaches and locally based communities is extraordinarily appealing to the American public right now, but change is not going to come from Washington."

According to Lake, the next big opportunity for political change may be the 2014 election cycle when 36 governors will be up for election. Lake foresees that both governors and mayors hold the key to future innovation and progress in the field.

Opportunity also exists in the near-universal impact of the recession. "You don't have to go to poor people to find someone in trouble," says Lake. "This is an equal opportunity recession, and it's an interesting time to have this conversation. Everyone is worried about the next generation and whether or not the economy is in jeopardy. Solutions sound good to everybody. These currents offer the opportunity to seize on a uniting energy that needs to be galvanized. The challenge is to use this time for reflection and have hopeful ideas and policies ready for when our political system is ready."

This process, according to Dr. Eric Motley of the Aspen Institute, will need to address questions such as how we think about the young leaders of our generation, how we challenge them to think about what we want a good society to look like, and how they can use their voices, their platforms, and their resources to step up in profound ways to effect change.

"We have to remember that we have a common destiny and a common country, and that we need to care about the holes and not just be in it for ourselves and our children," says Gerson. His greatest hope for the future lies in a final American value: "We all like change. America wants to try something new. Let's just get on the road. Let's get some forward momentum going. This is an enormous opportunity for creative new solutions."

> **"We don't have a single institution ready for half of all parents to be single parents in their workforce, their student body, or their community. It is a very profound change in our society and adds urgency and scale to this conversation about two generations."**
>
> – CELINDA LAKE

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE:

Demographic Shifts and Economic Mobility

The following is adapted from remarks by Dr. Rakesh Kochhar, Dr. Jim Larimore, Anne Mosle, and Ascend Fellow Dr. Mario Small, with moderating by Jim Tankersley.

The profound economic and demographic shifts occurring in the United States today mean that an increasing number of young parents with children face economic instability. The national demographic picture provides both a grounding mechanism for reflection and a data-driven means to refine efforts, programs, and policies to better incorporate a two-generation model.

According to Dr. Rakesh Kochhar of the Pew Hispanic Center, 34 percent of the U.S. population today is living either in poverty or in the low-income bracket. Forty-four percent of children live in lower-income families and more than half of African-Americans and Hispanics come from lower-income families.

The decline of marriage plays a significant role in this trend. The share of married African-Americans has dropped from 61 percent to 31 percent, while unmarried black-mother births have doubled from 38 percent to 73 percent. Nearly a quarter of all 19-year-old Hispanic and African-American women are mothers. Today, a quarter of all families with children are single-parent families. Sixty-two percent of one-income families are lower income. Thirty-five percent live in poverty.

Projecting ahead to 2050, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that Hispanics will become an overwhelming driver of the population. The Hispanic population will increase to nearly 30 percent of the total population by 2050, while the African-American population will remain

A TALE OF TWO GENERATIONS:

In the fall of 2012, Ascend at the Aspen Institute commissioned Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting to conduct a national bipartisan survey to explore values and solutions. The survey highlighted a yearning for economic stability, doubts about the

THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Americans are split by age on whether or not they are better off than their parents' generation. Age determines perception: Nearly 6 in 10 voters under the age of 40 believe they are worse off, compared to 62 percent of voters over the age of 65 who believe their generation is better off. Fifty-two percent of total adults, however, feel that the next generation will be worse off than their own. Non-college graduates are more pessimistic in this regard than their college-educated peers.

A NEW LANGUAGE

The current economy is giving rise to a new language. "Stability," as opposed to "opportunity," is the new watchword, with "stability" and "security" especially important to women (57 percent) and Hispanics (60 percent). Economic stability's salience tracks closely with the results of the 2011 focus groups as well.

steady at 13 percent and the white population will drop to 47 percent.[ii]

Ascend Fellow Dr. Mario Small of the University of Chicago cautions that when examining such national trends, a dual conversation is needed about the trends affecting everyone and the more specific trends that affect portions of a particular demographic more than others. A particularly dramatic example is taking place among African-American fathers.

"We are in real danger of losing an entire part of that generation," says Dr. Small. "We're looking at an entire generation of children born in single-parent households whose father is or has been in prison or jail."

The gender lens is equally important when disaggregating the data. "We need to think of two different lenses at once," Dr. Small says. "The big picture that affects us all and these specific sub-populations whose conditions also affect us all."

Demographic trends can be used to refine how we understand and promote economic mobility at an institutional level. Dr. Jim Larimore, formerly of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation suggests that higher education needs a fundamental overhaul. Issues of access, approach, the insular structure of today's institutions, standardized metrics across the field, and college affordability will all need to be addressed to meet the needs of the nation's changing population. Universities and colleges will need to move towards a more inclusive systems approach.

"Institutions are no longer neutral learning environments," Dr. Larimore says. "They have a

Highlights from Fall 2012 Bipartisan Survey Commissioned by Ascend

future, and a public appetite for two-generation approaches that meet the needs of parents and children together. The survey built on a series of 2012 Ascend Focus groups with low-income parents across across race and ethnicity, married and single, mothers and fathers.[iii]

THE TWO-GENERATION APPROACH

Voters strongly supported a two-generation approach to programs that help families rise out of poverty. Sixty-three percent believed a two-generation approach to be more effective than targeting parents and children separately. Eighty-one percent of voters would support a two-generation program, and this support extends across party lines: 95 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of Independents, and 65 percent of Republicans favor such a program.

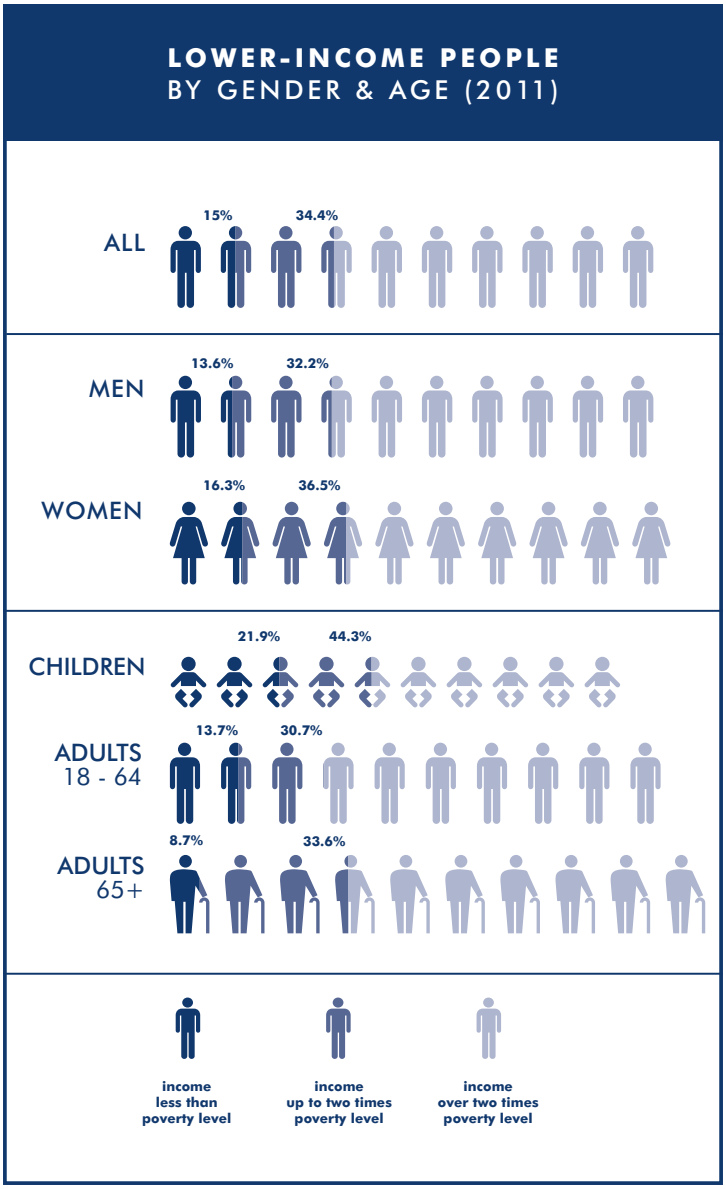
COST

Overall support for two-generation programs remained high at 70 percent even if taxes were increased as a result. Fifty-two percent remained strongly in favor of such a program. Eighty-nine percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Independents would continue to support such a program, while 51 percent of Republican women would still favor the program. Support among Republican men was 46 percent.

responsibility to decrease the amount of difficulties students face on the way from entry to completion."

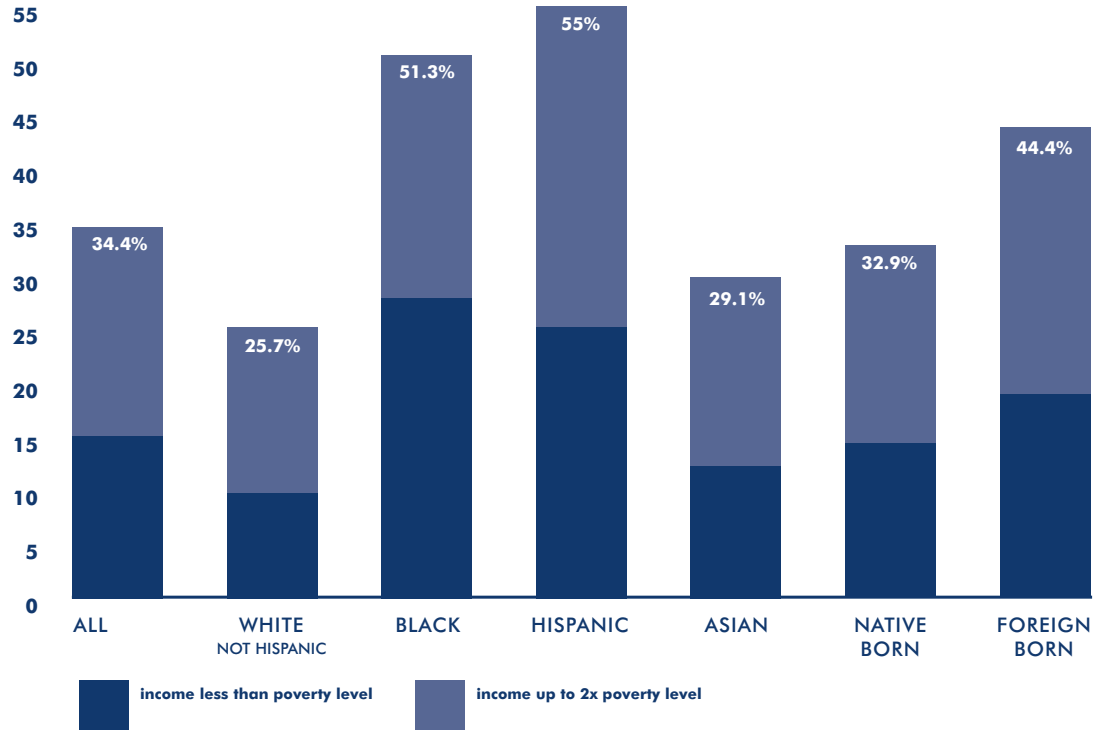
The demographics point to a greater need for social mechanisms to be strengthened as well. The untapped potential of social capital is enormous, as Dr. Small pointed out: Incorporating social capital more fully into two-generation programs from the lens of both bonding social capital (connections within the peer group) and bridging social capital (connections outside the peer group) is critical. Social capital can be used to link expertise, such as mentors and career coaches, and community resources, such as, clubs in an intentional way. Understanding how families transmit and receive information in the community is as important as connecting them to resources outside their sphere.

"We need to think about how to link solutions together more effectively for children and parents," says Ascend Executive Director Anne Mosle. "We need to ask how we can integrate better policy, program, and research perspectives to create greater access to education and economic supports and to strengthen connections and networks."



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

LOWER-INCOME PEOPLE BY RACE, ETHNICITY & NATIVITY (2011)



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

IN A NUTSHELL...

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- Incorporating social capital more fully into two-generation programs from the lens of both bonding social capital (connections within the peer group) and bridging social capital (connections outside the peer group) is critical.
- The next big opportunity for political change for low-income families may be the 2014 election cycle, when 36 governors will be up for election.

THE BIG IDEA:

The Development of Two-Generation Approaches

The following is adapted from remarks by Ascend Fellows Reggie Bicha, Dr. P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Steven Dow, and Dr. Christopher King, with moderating by Nisha Patel.

A simple working definition for two-generation approaches is as follows: Two-generation approaches focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both vulnerable children and their parents together. These approaches can be applied to programs, policies, and research. Yet these approaches can manifest in different ways at different levels, as evidenced by the responses two-generation pioneers offered when asked for their "60 seconds or less elevator speech" on this concept:

> "To be successful, we must invest in parents, but parents also need a safe environment for their children. A child with a good early environment will do better in life. It's in America's interest to make a new investment in jobs, have strong work supports, and take advantage of early learning."
>
> – REGGIE BICHA

Ascend Fellow Steven Dow, executive director of the Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAP Tulsa): "It's a family approach to poverty alleviation. We're prepping children for school and parents for work."

Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha, executive director of the Colorado Department of Human Services: "As we come out of the Great Recession, we're talking about jobs. To be successful, we must invest in parents, but parents also need a safe environment for their children. A child with a good early environment will do better in life. It's in America's interest to make a new investment in jobs, have strong work supports, and take advantage of early learning."

Dr. P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, professor of human development and social policy, Northwestern University: "The two-generation approach causally links education for the child and job training for adults. If the child is excelling and learning, the parent is excited. Parents often put more into kids than themselves. Simultaneously, if the parent has a backpack, the child is involved as well."

In practical terms, it is important to understand how each of these leaders approaches the two-generation framework. "It's a sector-based workforce effort," says Dow of Career*Advance*®, a two-generation program, connected to CAP Tulsa's Head Start and Early Head Start programs. "We ask, what kinds of jobs will exist that parents can qualify for and have an opportunity for advancement in over time? We build on a cohort model so that parents go through it together. It's incentive based to help parents work toward their goals." Dow adds that job coaches help parents navigate the complex

issues of work and school, while staff is committed to continuous improvement. "It's a deliberate approach to problem solving as issues come up," he says.

For researchers, Dr. Christopher King says, "Our funders asked, 'How can we protect our investment in kids?' We knew that if the workforce [strategies] worked, child progress [improved]. If you put them together, did you get just as good results? The early results suggest yes, we're headed in the right direction."

Within this framework, the child cannot be — Dr. Chase-Lansdale says *should not be* — the only agent of change in the family. "Current child models are from the 1970s, and we're in the 21st century. But we do not have systematic data yet. We're asking both long-term and short-term questions," she says.

For a policy leader, the first step to approaching a two-generation framework is ensuring all members of a team understand its principles — to streamline and connect opportunities for parents and their children together. "At the state level, we already were doing the two-generation work, but we weren't thinking of it from a two-generation lens," says Reggie Bicha. "We weren't connecting state agencies with different levels of support to help families be more independent. So now we're asking, how can we better realign and connect supports and services and eliminate the silo approach?"

There are, however, significant challenges to juggling school, work, and parenting for many families, and programs and policies are increasingly hindered by limited budgets. As the proponents of two-generation approaches develop their work, each acknowledges that building a case for the framework with data and metrics is a priority.

"We're in the early phases. The excitement has challenges. We're building a new movement, but having proof of whether or not it works is hard," says Dr. Chase-Lansdale. "We hope to get other programs up and running, but we have to be realistic and put small programs in place first."

Yet challenges also invite breakthroughs, notes Dr. King: "The Chinese symbol for crisis is also the sign for opportunity. There's a lot of buzz right now, but carrying through is different. We need to make sure the networks are there and the pieces stay together with parts that work."

Dow notes that he and his team have been humbled by the drive of parents who participate in his program, parents who are also juggling a number of other responsibilities. "We underestimate the sacrifices of what parents cut back on: time with kids in order to work. It's counterintuitive," he says. "The challenge of going back to school adds a level of stress to a family, and we don't know that impact. We also underestimate the length of time it takes parents to get into jobs. The wins aren't as compressed as we'd hoped."

While acknowledging the trials to advancing the two-generation approach, Bicha encourages policy leaders to inspire innovation and imagination while building on what works: "In Colorado, we want to be more focused on outcomes, reduce obligation to rules and process requirements, be transparent, engage in new ways to address academia, create an environment of entrepreneurial approaches to business, and create an environment that seeks innovation and a quicker shift to programs that work from those that don't," Bicha says. "We also need to look at asking, are those we serve better off? How can we hear the voices of those we serve?"

Dow agrees, noting that "we're at the earliest stage of what innovation looks like. It's a rapid process of building on what works and discarding what doesn't." Getting better at discarding what does *not* work is an important step for leaders, as is establishing consensus on which levers need to change in a system — not simply that the whole system needs to change.

"In the Ascend Fellowship program, we're in the research and development phase but that's what it will take to move to the bigger stratosphere," says Dr. Chase-Lansdale. "Solutions are to build on family strength. We haven't unleashed this enough yet. Families have hope for the future amidst the challenges and crises that face us today."

START-UP TO SCALE:

Two-Generation Programs, from Pilot to Replication

The following descriptions are adapted from remarks by leading practitioners from on-the-ground established and emerging two-generation programs.

Across the country, successful two-generation programs are emerging to simultaneously meet the needs of parents and children in college, urban, and housing development settings. These pioneers are now beginning to replicate and bring programs to scale with tangible returns on investment. Successful strategies include concentrating a program's efforts on its strengths, building strong partnerships in the communities the programs serve, and carefully crafting financial replication strategies that can serve as models for others in the field.

JEREMIAH PROGRAM

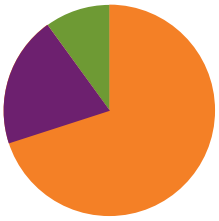
Jeremiah Program was founded by Father Michael O'Connell and other partners in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with the mission of transforming families from poverty to prosperity through education and employment. This comprehensive, integrated model combines housing, coaching/mentoring, life skills, and empowerment training and creates an environment where children engage in high-quality early education while mothers pursue postsecondary credentials and learn about parenting and child development. The ultimate goal for parents is to attain a livable-wage job and give back to the community.

"I stress *livable* wage," says Ascend Fellow and Jeremiah Program President and CEO Gloria Perez, "so that when they leave our program, they can integrate into society in a way that helps their family prosper."

From the start, Jeremiah Program has focused on building community collaboration and targeting buy-in from such diverse local partners as college presidents, businesses, governments, philanthropy, and other religious organizations. The program has expanded to a site in St. Paul, Minnesota, and is in the process of expanding to sites in Fargo, North Dakota, and Austin, Texas.

"We can't operate in isolation," Perez says. "We need to think about multiplying the effects and resources through collaboration. That's our strategy, but it takes time and money and a need to be flexible about what's working and what's not. You need to be open to new strategies and ideas to achieve the goal."

Jeremiah's impetus for expansion was fostered by other communities interested in replicating the model. When a community invites Jeremiah to town, a three-step process explores whether there's a synergy with partners in the new community and a sufficient local philanthropy base to support the model. Seventy percent of funding comes from private sources; 20 percent comes from child care fees that counties reimburse. The rest comes from government funding and rent contributions that the women pay to reside on campus.



"Everybody's got to have skin in the game," Perez says.

New Jeremiah programs also must raise a critical operating reserve before start-up. Leadership is equally important. "As we've grown, we've hired leaders who were consistent with our values and the goals of the organization," Perez says. "If you don't have that on the front end, it creates problems down the road."

The Jeremiah Program has been able to demonstrate a return on investment based on reductions in the costs of out-of-home placement or cash or early childhood assistance. The Twin Cities community receives nearly $160,000 in net benefits per participant in Jeremiah, with a return of $2.40 per dollar invested. Taxpayers recover the full amount invested in the program (a return of $1.60 per dollar invested).[iv]

KEYS TO DEGREES SINGLE-PARENT PROGRAM, ENDICOTT COLLEGE

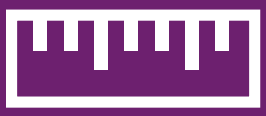
The Keys to Degrees program, which was developed at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts, is designed for academically qualified single parents with one child. Choosing from among the college's programs of study, a young parent has the opportunity to complete an undergraduate degree in an environment that supports both the student's needs and the needs of the child.

"Students participate as would a traditional college student," says the program's founder, Ascend Fellow, and Endicott College President Dr. Richard Wylie, "but they keep their family intact."

Program benefits include campus housing and the support services offered by the college, and participants have access to year-round housing and full-time child care and are fully integrated into student life on campus. The results are powerful: At Endicott College, the Keys to Degrees students' graduation and retention rates equal that of all students. The program has spawned two new sites and nine colleges that are part of an alliance to connect residential programs for single mothers. The alliance (known as the Higher Education Alliance for Residential Single Parent Programs) shares common research and databases, but each institution designs its own programming.

The program is costly, but Dr. Wylie says, "some things have to be costly. There are a lot of programs that cost money on campus, but where is the school's priority? There are 3,000 colleges

MEASURING TWO-GENERATION SUCCESS



Building a field around two-generation strategies requires exploring metrics for those strategies — both benefit-cost analysis and outcomes for parents and children. The following text is adapted from an item originally published on the Urban Institute's Metrotrends blog by Dr. Sue Popkin, who participated in a session on metrics at ThinkXChange. This piece refers specifically to two-generation strategies in the context of housing programs.

How do you evaluate two-generation programs? It's not an easy question given the complexity and multifaceted nature of these interventions. Policymakers and scholars often describe the randomized controlled trial as the "gold standard" for evaluation. They insist on seeing results from this type of study before they consider a program or intervention model to be "evidence-based." I would argue that this standard makes no sense for evaluating place-based two-generation strategies.

First, these approaches do not lend themselves to "cookie-cutter" models that can be replicated. Specific programs need to be tailored to meet the needs of very different types of populations. Second, many of these interventions are place-based; randomly assigning whole neighborhoods

across the country. If 10 percent graduated 10 or 20 students a year, that's a multiplier effect that we just can't ignore."

Endicott sees a clear cost benefit in the long run. One hundred percent of Keys to Degrees graduates are employed, and 60 percent are making more than $40,000 per year. Seventy-one percent feel they are now economically self-sufficient, and Dr. Wylie says that 100 percent do not receive any support from federal and state governments.[v]

"When I went to college, this kind of program would have shocked people," says Dr. Wylie. "Today, it's about changing the culture within an organization and building internal momentum. That has been the hardest part but also what kept us going. I couldn't close the program down now. I would be run out of town."

ATLANTA CIVIC SITE

The Atlanta Civic Site supports local programs, including Sheltering Arms and Center for Working Families, Inc., that are collaborating on two-generation initiatives by focusing on three fronts: school, work, and housing/community.

In 2010, in partnership with the Atlanta Public Schools and Sheltering Arms, the civic site created an early childhood center than now serves 206 children, 196 of whom are on a child care subsidy through the Department of Human Services. The center arose out of a focus group with parents.

"The people in the community said, 'This job training is lovely and the job you've presented me with sounds good, but I don't have child care,' " explains Deputy Director Leah Austin. "They were saying, not just 'I want child care,' but 'I want *good* child care.' "

to different conditions requires both enormous resources and a leap of faith that the communities do not differ in important ways that could undermine the experimental design. Finally, the field of two-generation approaches is still young; most models are not refined enough to justify the kind of investment that a randomized control trial would require.

Acknowledging these challenges does not imply that we cannot conduct rigorous research about what works. It just means we need to consciously choose evaluation designs that take the complexity of the interventions into account. For example, the Urban Institute's Housing Opportunities and Services Together (HOST) evaluation combines administrative interviews, focus groups, and rigorous collection of program data from participating sites. We use this information to monitor progress and provide regular feedback to the HOST sites so they can continue to refine their efforts. We track outcomes over time through surveys and program data and are collecting as much administrative data as possible to help create benchmarks for participating families.

We are not rejecting the "gold standard." As HOST progresses, we hope to add a matched comparison group at one site, but in the meantime, we are learning an enormous amount of valuable information on public housing as a platform for implementing two-generation strategies. This information is timely, policy-relevant, and can inform this growing and important field.

While children attend the early childhood center, parents are enrolled in the Center for Working Families. The civic site is based on a co-investment model in which The Annie E. Casey Foundation provides specific grants to partner organizations that have their own additional funding streams. Replication of the civic site model involves scaling positions, such as a preschool director, versus copying an entire model; partnership plays a significant role in the civic site's process.

"We're built around realizing who has the expertise to get the work done," says Austin. "We choose to work with partners who are willing to take risks and work differently, who bring expertise to the table, and who have a deep-seated respect for the community they work in. We're heavily community led and reactive to what the community tells us they want and need." In assessing impact, the civic site evaluates child development and parent employment. In each of the site's child cohorts, the number of students who performed above the Head Start average on independent assessment tools increased significantly over an 18-month period in the program. Concurrently, employment increased from 50 percent to 85 percent for parents receiving child care assistance through the civic site.

THE EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE

The Educational Alliance is a 124-year-old social service agency in Manhattan that was originally founded as a settlement house and later served as the first Head Start provider in the city.

In 2010, the Educational Alliance formally launched a two-generation pilot program that includes 500 children in Head Start programs. Parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start programs are eligible to enroll in literacy/GED courses at City University of New York (CUNY) with the hope of ultimately transitioning to college-level courses. The Educational Alliance also provides case management support to parents via referrals and peer support.

"In the past six to seven years, we've tried to get away from the idea of being all things to all people," says Executive Director Robin Bernstein. "We realized we'd have greater impact if we got clearer on what we do well. In

some ways, it was connecting the dots. It's not even that expensive of a model, because we're simply redeploying what we're already doing in a more rational way."

The Educational Alliance collaborates with the City University of New York, which has a large immigrant population, and the New York University Steinhardt School of Education, which operates as a research partner and encouraged the Educational Alliance to do a formative evaluation before an impact evaluation. The bulk of funding comes from federal sources and the city Head Start program in addition to grants (JP Morgan Chase is the founding funder).

"As a start-up rather than a scale-up, what we discovered in the first year was that who we thought the program was aimed for was not who signed up," says Bernstein. "We had to take a close look at whom we thought we were reaching out to."

In addition to early education, family assistance, and parent education, the program also incorporates a college preparation program that extends down to middle school grades.

"When we started the college prep program, kids began wearing blue t-shirts saying, 'I'm going to college,' " says Bernstein. "I've never seen a culture change that fast. It was generated by the kids and their sense of opportunity and optimism. You have to do something different; you have to be bold and wear it on your shirt in order to change the conversation."

IN A NUTSHELL...

- Two-generation strategies are a family approach to educational success and economic security: preparing children for school and parents for careers.
- Successful strategies for two-generation pilot programs include concentrating a program's efforts on its strengths, building strong partnerships in the communities the programs serve, and carefully crafting financial replication strategies that can serve as models for others in the field.
- We must be adaptable when measuring two-generation strategies: Researchers need to consciously choose evaluation designs that take the complexity of the interventions into account.

ASCENDING FROM INFANCY

The following text is adapted from remarks by David Lawrence, Ascend Fellow Dr. Meera Mani, and Ascend Fellow Henry Wilde, with moderating by Letty Bass.

Since Head Start was created in 1964, significant strides have been made in the field of early childhood education. Letty Bass of the Denver-based Chambers Family Fund points out that Sesame Street was introduced in the 1970s. The 1980s were about the creation of children's advocacy organizations. The 1990s brought a renewed awareness of the importance of quality child care and early brain development. In the past decade, Bass explains, the roles of play, professional development, kindergarten readiness, and literacy have been a priority. As early childhood education moves into its next phase, two-generation strategies have emerged as touchstones for a new movement.

David Lawrence of the Children's Movement of Florida has tackled early care and education reform. "It's never about those children," he says. "It's always about *our* children. I don't know a single parent who doesn't want a high-quality kindergarten experience for his or her child."

Lawrence was instrumental in passing a Florida constitutional amendment to provide pre-kindergarten for all four-year-olds, a result of savvy political campaigning and outreach to constituents across political lines.

"This could not have happened," he says, "if it wasn't about all children with the realization that certain children need more."

Ascend Fellow Henry Wilde of Acelero Learning points to new recompetition standards for Head Start as a sign of change. In 2001, 1 percent of Head Start programs were defunded. Today, 10 to 30 percent are recompeted at any given time.[vi] The process forces them to consider innovation and think about what they could do differently.

> "It's never about those children. It's always about *our* children. I don't know a single parent who doesn't want a high-quality kindergarten experience for his or her child."
>
> – DAVID LAWRENCE

Room for improvement exists, however. Both Wilde and Bass point out that professional development must be extended to families and caregivers and the wage structure between K-12 and early childhood educators needs to be adjusted to provide a more consistent and seamless learning experience.

"We live in a place between subsistence child care wages and K-12 wages," says Wilde. "[Acelero Learning] pays better than some programs, but we can't compete with K-12 programs. For us, it's even more complicated: How do we find those great teachers who fit between the two labor markets?"

Lawrence would like to see the rise of ubiquitous parent awareness messaging and programs and a greater understanding of the science behind early childhood learning.

"We say everybody knows about the brain research, but it is my opinion that actually very few people know about it, most particularly the business community," says Lawrence. "There are 160 members of the legislature, and they all pat me on the head and say I'm doing great

work, but I want them to understand this as practical work. I see my own children look for child care, and they don't know what to look for. They look at cost, at how close it is to work, and will my child be safe? We need to do much better about reaching people. We have an awful lot more people to convince."

Ascend Fellow Dr. Meera Mani of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation sees more potential in partnering with health care professionals at the local level. And while a stronger convergence exists among the science, economics, community development, education and policy debates than a decade ago, what is missing is a national movement that weaves these ideas into a common narrative around early childhood development as a two-generation strategy.

"We've got to stop thinking in the short term," says Dr. Mani. "It's important to have a roadmap and understand clearly what your North Star is, who your audience is, and the sectors that you need to develop and then have those be a priority."

"We've got to stop thinking in the short term. It's important to have a roadmap and understand clearly what your North Star is, who your audience is, and the sectors that you need to develop and then have those be a priority."

– DR MEENA MANI

THE BUZZ ON BRAINS AND BABIES:

Two-Generation Interventions

The following text is adapted from remarks by Ascend Fellow Katie Albright, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Dr. Patricia Kuhl, and Dr. Jack Shonkoff, with moderating by Ascend Fellow Dr. Meera Mani.

Powerful emerging research indicates that the adverse experiences of young children have long-term consequences for their development and success.[vii] This research has directly influenced the work of pioneering leaders in the fields of poverty, pediatric health, and trauma care and underscores the need for a two-generation approach that supports parents as well as children to lessen the devastating symptoms of adversity.

The conceptual framework that has guided early childhood work in the past 50 years holds that some combination of parenting, sound nutrition, rich experiences, and a healthy environment produces a healthy trajectory for readiness to succeed in school.

"The problem," says Dr. Jack Shonkoff of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "is that the most vulnerable part of the population isn't achieving readiness for school. Significant adversity overwhelms these families."

> "A lot of funding is going to intervention programs. We need to be educating all parents in how to be the best parent, whether there are adverse circumstances or not."
>
> – KATIE ALBRIGHT

Modern neuroscience has shown how experience, such as an exposure to multiple languages, impacts early childhood development. In the past two years, scientists and providers have begun to use the data to better help families living in crisis and poverty as well. Stress has been shown to have a physiological effect on the body, and adversity can keep the body on alert and overload the system, causing lifelong consequences for the child.[viii]

"Brains don't wait for things to get better," says Dr. Patricia Kuhl of the University of Washington. "They're absorbing all the details, including the emotional toll, whether we want them to or not. We need to get that message out and design ways to make this knowledge change what parents do."

Dr. Shonkoff has culled two propositions from this science that are key to shifting the paradigm to better incorporate a two-generation approach. First, adverse early experiences affect lifelong health as much as they affect learning.

"If it's bad for the brain, it's bad for the heart and the other developing biological systems," says Dr. Shonkoff. "This is not just about education, then, it's about overall health."

Second, healthy development requires more than enrichment for the part of the population that experiences significant adversity. This population needs a combination of enrichment and protection, and the definition of protection needs to expand to include capacity building for life skills such as executive function, self-regulation,[ix] and resiliency.[x] These critical skills help both children and parents

build the adaptive mechanisms they need to face adversity.

In San Francisco, pediatrician Dr. Nadine Burke Harris is putting this science to work. After a retrospective chart review revealed that many of her patients had a high level of adversity bordering on trauma, she created the Center for Youth Wellness, a multidisciplinary facility that offers universal screenings at well-child checks and trauma-informed medical care through a Sutter Health pediatric clinic, psychiatric and psychological services, case management, educational advocacy, and evidence-based supplemental therapies all under one roof. The center is now a pioneering one-stop shop for children exposed to adversity.

A key component of the center handles childhood exposure to violence. As Katie Albright, an Ascend Fellow and leader of the San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center, shared, child abuse costs the nation $124 billion each year.[xi] The San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center provides proactive education and trauma-informed intervention. Social capital is critical to these efforts and needs to be neighborhood-based, culturally appropriate, and linking systems together on both the prevention and acute care/trauma end.

"The challenge is to think about funding on the prevention side," says Albright. "A lot of funding is going to intervention programs. We need to be educating all parents in how to be the best parent, whether there are adverse circumstances or not."

While current funding streams have not caught up to practice innovations, the case for incorporating the science into this critical work is clear. Currently the U.S. spends 17 percent of its GDP on health care, most of which treats chronic and expensive diseases like heart disease.[xii]

"When someone has an ACE score of 7 or higher, their risk of heart disease goes up 360 percent," says Dr. Burke Harris, referring to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, which is one of the largest investigations to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being.[xiii] "I don't care who you are. If you're interested in keeping America competitive, reducing Medicaid, Medicare … we need to invest in something that will address that 360 percent increase."

CAMPUS CAPITAL:

Paving Educational Paths for Two Generations

The following text is adapted from remarks by former Ascend Advisory Board Member Dr. Jim Larimore, Elisabeth Mason, Ascend Fellow Dr. Eduardo Padrón, with moderating by Ascend Fellow Margaret McKenna.

In the United States today, many higher education institutions are operating on an outdated understanding of who their students are and how best to support them economically, socially, and educationally. As Ascend Fellow Margaret McKenna points out, innovative institutions and programs are guiding the way to change the culture of higher education and redefine how low-income students and single parents are served.

The college student today is quite different than most people imagine, says McKenna. Parents with dependent children now make up almost one in four students.[xiv] As many as 75 percent of students may be part-time, supporting themselves, working, or single parents.[xv] Eighty percent of low-income students attend community colleges or open enrollment four-year institutions,[xvi] but these institutions are desperately underfunded. In Florida, Miami Dade College's revenue from the state has dropped from 75 percent to 42 percent;[xvii] while Miami Dade receives $2,600 per student, the University of Florida averages over $14,000 per student.

"The funding is not equivalent to the challenge of educating students who may have significant academic, financial, and social needs," says Miami Dade College President and Ascend Fellow Dr. Eduardo Padrón. "It takes a great deal of time to defy the notion that quality only happens in the select institutions. We have tried to convince people for many years that open access and exodus go hand in hand."

The rise in merit scholarships and an outdated system of government funding measures exacerbate the issue. Equally challenging is the way traditional institutions function with little coordination either internally or with outside services and agencies.

"The only industry that hasn't changed is higher education," says Dr. Padrón. "We're still doing the same thing we did in the 20th century. In a 21st century knowledge economy, higher education is the most important industry. There is a lot that institutions can do to serve students, not just provide access and be a revolving door."

Today that effort starts well before college. As Dr. Jim Larimore highlights, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supports efforts that help low-income families understand the gateways and trajectories to college readiness, including what coursework is necessary, what college options are available, how they might size up the best college, and how much it might cost to attend.

Miami Dade College, which serves 175,000 students, also works to create more equitable access to higher education. Miami Dade works closely with the Miami community to ensure that the idea of college reaches everyone. Even so, 70 percent of the students enter behind on at least one basic skill. The institution provides the necessary tutoring and classes to catch students up to the college level while also being equally committed to not raising tuition.

"Even if it's five dollars, for many students five dollars is the difference between putting food on the table or going to school," says Dr. Padrón. The faculty and staff are equally committed to the school's mission. Unlike many universities, they teach when students most need the classes.

"The students know they're not getting shortchanged," says Dr. Padrón. "They're getting a good education. When they transfer to other four-year universities, they perform at a higher level than students already there in retention, evaluation, and GPA."

A component of Miami Dade's success is a pilot program called Single Stop, which serves 500,000 families nationwide and strives to connect community, government, and higher education resources and systems to stabilize families and move students out of poverty. At Miami Dade, all Single Stop benefits, access, social services, financial services, and legal counseling are run together on campus and integrated with Miami Dade staff.

"Single Stop expands the way we think about financial aid and helps people aim for college," says CEO Elisabeth Mason. "This may be the only way that people can make their whole lives work. It's the difference between a student moderating the number of hours they work so they can be a student and are not exhausted or having a very different experience."

Goals for the future at both organizations include making the Single Stop model inclusive of the entire student system and changing the admissions application to better understand if a student has a child or works.

"These are the things the institution should know. Knowing this changes the whole dynamic of how you approach the student and how the two-generation approach comes into play," says Mason.

Miami Dade is one example of a diverse institution examining multiple opportunities for integrating a two-generation lens. "We need to reframe how we think about college education and pull the spotlight away from elite institutions that are always in the public eye," says Padrón. "We need to focus on those doing the most important and consequential work for elevating the status of low-income students and families. There's no way to do this if we don't push for fundamental change and shift."

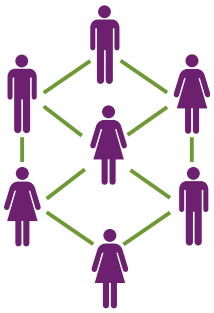
> "The only industry that hasn't changed is higher education. We're still doing the same thing we did in the 20th century. In a 21st century knowledge economy, higher education is the most important industry. There is a lot that institutions can do to serve students, not just provide access and be a revolving door."
>
> – DR. EDUARDO PADRÓN

CONNECTIONS AS CURRENCY

The following text is adapted from remarks by Ascend Fellow Mia Birdsong, Ascend Fellow Dr. Mario Small, and Dr. Sandra Smith, with moderating by Karen Yacos.

Social capital is a critical component of the two-generation approach, and new research has begun to identify both the pathways and barriers to using social capital as a means of achieving economic mobility.[xviii] Enterprising on-the-ground programs as well as leading researchers are paving the way in using social capital to build relationships, mobility, and trust in low-income families and communities.

According to Ascend Fellow Dr. Mario Small of the University of Chicago, social capital can



be split into two distinct types: social capital on the broader level of American society and social capital at the level of the individual. Two-generation work focuses on the latter, a large part of which revolves around the resources one gains by being in a social network. Information, social supports, and reinforcement of common norms are three critical areas where social capital can impact the individual.

"If I'm a low-income parent and I'm trying to figure out how to get my kid into college, finding those networks that have that information is a valuable kind of social capital," says Dr. Small. "It's very different from the support found in social networks or the desire to attain the goals that you have set for yourself in light of the norms of those around you with similar desires."

Each of these three areas can include bridging and bonding social capital mechanisms. According to Dr. Small, bonding social capital provides social support and norms reinforcement, or the connections to people who are like us. Bridging social capital provides access to information and resources from sources who are not part of our circle. While bonding social capital is considered good for maintenance of one's current life, bridging social capital helps people move up the income ladder.

Dr. Sandra Smith of the University of California, Berkeley, has identified several barriers to social capital in her research on persistent joblessness among low-income African-Americans. A key issue, according to Dr. Smith, may be less one of community isolation and lack of access to information than a pervasive distrust of a person's social networks.

"Over 80 percent expressed distrust with their social networks," says Dr. Smith of her research findings. "While there probably is a relative lack of access, this is a side of social capital mobilization that we have not been addressing. We have to take into consideration that in the context of access to social capital, people are not always able to mobilize those resources for reasons related to trust."

While people are willing to provide each other with assistance such as child care or bus fare, adults are more protective of their workplace resources and job information if it could mean tarnishing their own reputation.[xix]

"There are two things going on," notes Dr. Small. "One is that the economy isn't producing the jobs. If the economy is structurally not producing the jobs, there is no amount of networking that's going to make a difference whether people share information or not. The structural conditions have to be in place; otherwise, the accommodation is a little meaningless. But the other part is that while we often talk of the benefits of social capital, there are also costs. It's

a useful check to keep in mind, that when we are talking about social capital, we ought to be thinking both in terms of cost and in terms of benefits continuously."

Family Independence Initiative (FII) is one of several organizations leading the way in testing strategies to strengthen social networks while respecting low-income families' ability to lead their own lives. The organization relies on three underlying assumptions. First, families have tremendous initiative and strength. Second, families want to have control over their lives and take action to move their lives forward. Third, families want to help each other and see peers move ahead. FII builds its work around the premise of a cohort model of families who know each other and will hold each other accountable.

"Our job is to create opportunities for that bonding social capital to be strengthened," says Ascend Fellow FII Vice President Mia Birdsong. "We also create opportunities for people to access bridging social capital, which is also critical."

The first step is helping families reframe how they view others in their community and determine not just to whom they would go if their house burned down, but to whom they would turn to move themselves forward. FII offers a sustainable incentive-based experimental model that encourages family self-advocacy and is based more on responding to a cohort's self-determined needs than on telling them what to do. FII provides no case management, meeting facilitation, or direct services.

"Some people have described it as creating a vacuum of leadership, and in that vacuum what it does is allow the families to step up and start talking about what it is that they would like to do to move themselves forward," says Birdsong.

A change of expectation among the cohorts often first occurs because one breakthrough leader tries something different and becomes a role model that other families follow. "Then all of a sudden, everybody is starting to try different things, and you get this momentum-building going," says Birdsong.

A limitation of the model is that it may miss socially isolated parents such as single parents, but Dr. Small points out that this social capital incentive structure can be used in other existing programs as well. At one Acelero Learning Head Start center where parents are required either to pay or fundraise $300 per year, isolated parents join forces. These relationships lead to more traditional bonding social capital such as shared babysitting, which in turn spreads out some of the burden of childrearing, such as having to read to a child every night.

"Our idea is that if we leverage the networks in the centers effectively, the impact on the children's learning is going to be multiplied," says Dr. Small, referring to a research partnership with Acelero Learning funded by the Aspen Institute Ascend Fund. "And so with the same resources, same parents, we are going to get a bigger bang for the buck."

Other ideas for experimental uses of social capital include lending programs and lending circles based on character references and trust and creating better connections between organizations such as a church and an employer.

Understanding how social capital both positively and negatively impacts communities is key. "If we want to change, if we actually want to create economic mobility in this country, we need to be investing in what's moving forward in communities," says Birdsong. "Then we can leverage those areas better."

BREADWINNERS AND INNOVATORS: Lifting Up Solutions for Mothers

The following text is adapted from remarks by Wendi Copeland, Ascend Fellow Karla Davis, and Anne Ladky, with moderating by Catherine Rampell.

Mothers are now the sole or primary income provider in a record 40 percent of households with children. [xxi] However, gender differences in earnings continue both because women are sometimes paid less than men for similar work [xxii] and also because a high proportion of women work in low-wage occupations.

"Women are bearing the brunt of caring for their families, given that they're in jobs that pay less, and it's harder for them to get into industries that pay more," says Catherine Rampell, who reports on economics for *The New York Times*.

Like so much of the two-generation approach, lens and perspective are key. In order to support mothers who are seeking a job or a higher income, programs, providers, and employers need to view both the whole family unit as well as the individual needs of the women they serve.

"If we try just to do one intervention with one individual, we miss out," says Wendi Copeland, vice president of Goodwill Industries International. "When we start looking more holistically at a household, the neighborhood, the network, we can almost always go further."

Understanding the individual experiences of women is equally important. In Chicago, Anne Ladky, executive director of Women Employed, found that low-income women had such limited knowledge of their options that they couldn't see the payoff of participating in classes that might help them get ahead.

"Women are very knowledgeable about what they want for their kids," says Ladky, "but these women have grown up in environments where no one ever asked them what *they* wanted to do. There's a tremendous lack of knowledge of labor market options."

"When we start looking more holistically at a household, a neighborhood, the network, we can almost always go further."

– WENDI COPELAND

As Rampell points out, tools that have helped bridge that information gap include websites that offer career information and cash and tuition assistance programs.

"Supportive services are a great doorway to the conversation about two-generation strategies," says Ladky. "Cash incentives and grants are critical because of the volatility of the jobs in which these women work. Anything that smooths out the economic picture can be a doorway to talk about the importance of training."

Reaching out to create better partner networks is also critical.

"Many of the challenges that families face have nothing to do with the services we provide," says Ascend Fellow Karla Davis, former commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. "We need to do

a better job of reaching out to partners so that there can be smoother warm hand-offs."

Ladky sees another path to upward mobility in the role of "starter jobs," where a woman interested in health care might start out as a receptionist in a hospital to get better access to information and advancement opportunities.

"Otherwise women are cycling from low-wage job to low-wage job. There are a lot of women who cannot make a big investment in school right off the bat, so this is one way we can help them," she says "It's a combination of helping women learn their interests and also giving them more practical information about the kinds of jobs that don't require a four-year degree."

Copeland calls this a navigation skill: "It's multigenerational. Once someone in that household knows how to navigate a career, how to access resources, how to make the connections, everybody in that household learns, and then you start hearing from the neighbors and the people down the street and the people in their faith community. It is viral when someone learns the secret rules of how to get a job and how to move up."

Within the labor industry itself, standards need to change, suggests Rampell. Managers in low-paying sectors such as food service and retail have little incentive to treat their employees well, and volatile scheduling continues to hamper women's abilities to get a second job or work a set schedule with a reliable number of hours. Equally important to improving the situations and access for women breadwinners is the networking and social capital component. Social supports such as cohort models (in which students go through classes as a group and can support one another), tuition advancement and reimbursement, and better connections with community partners such as community colleges are key.

Davis notes that how we measure success needs to change as well. In Tennessee, measures are performance-based and outcome-based. "For the individuals we serve, the goal is not only just get a job, but to get a job that's going to be useful and sustainable for them."

Copeland also would like to see a dynamic shift from "fixing" people to "engaging people in dreaming, daring to dream, and seeing how they might find a path toward achieving that dream," she says. "It's the multigenerational lens of asking, how do we make sure that every one of our policies, every one of our practices, is available and is family friendly?"

DESIGNING ABOVE THE LINE

The following text is adapted from remarks by Jackie Bezos, Ascend Fellow Steven Dow, and Jocelyn Wyatt, with moderating by Ascend Fellow Mia Birdsong.

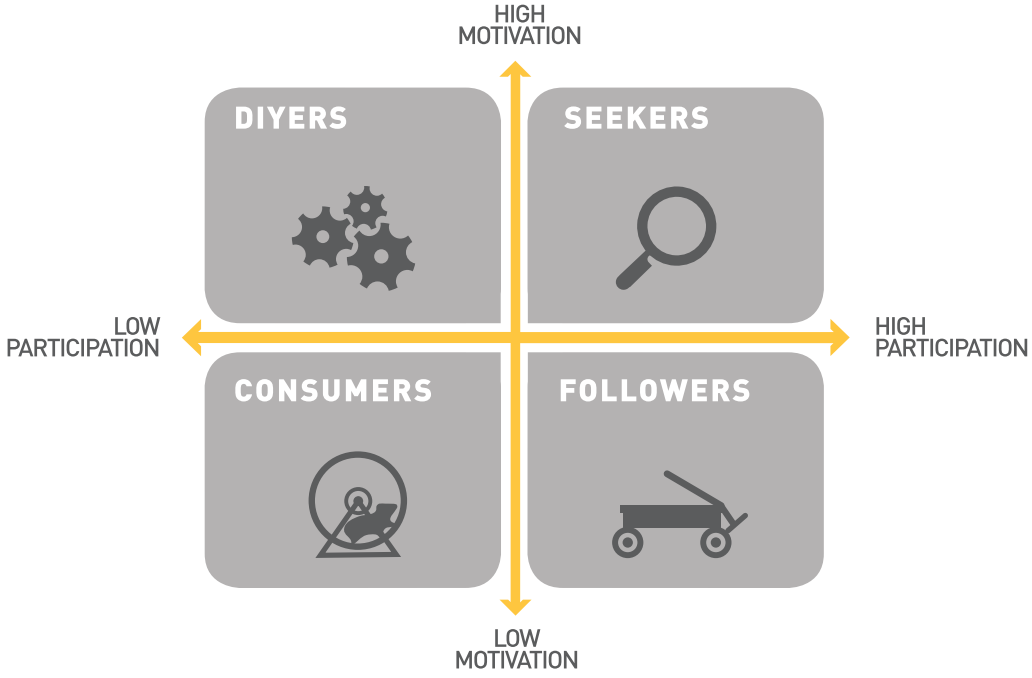
From philanthropy to early childhood programs, two-generation leaders are exploring a process called "human-centered design" to impact social change and help organizations more effectively connect with the people they serve.

"Design can help get to solutions faster to address the challenges," says Jocelyn Wyatt, the co-lead and executive director of IDEO.org, which partners with nonprofit and social enterprises to design inventive solutions to poverty and social issues. "While the social sector tends to be abstract, design is tangible and focuses on individuals and specific solutions."

Human-centered design pinpoints innovation and new solutions at the intersection of three lenses: desirability, viability, and feasibility. While the design process involves constant prototyping and refining of offerings, the approach can also reframe problems or situations, which appealed to the leadership of Community Action Project (CAP Tulsa) of Tulsa County, Oklahoma.

"There's a huge number of things that we would like to see differently in parents' lives that we think would produce better outcomes for their kids," says CAP Tulsa Executive Director Steven Dow. "But how do we increase participation rates and persistence through completion? It has been a source of huge frustration. And so

4 behavior segments emerge



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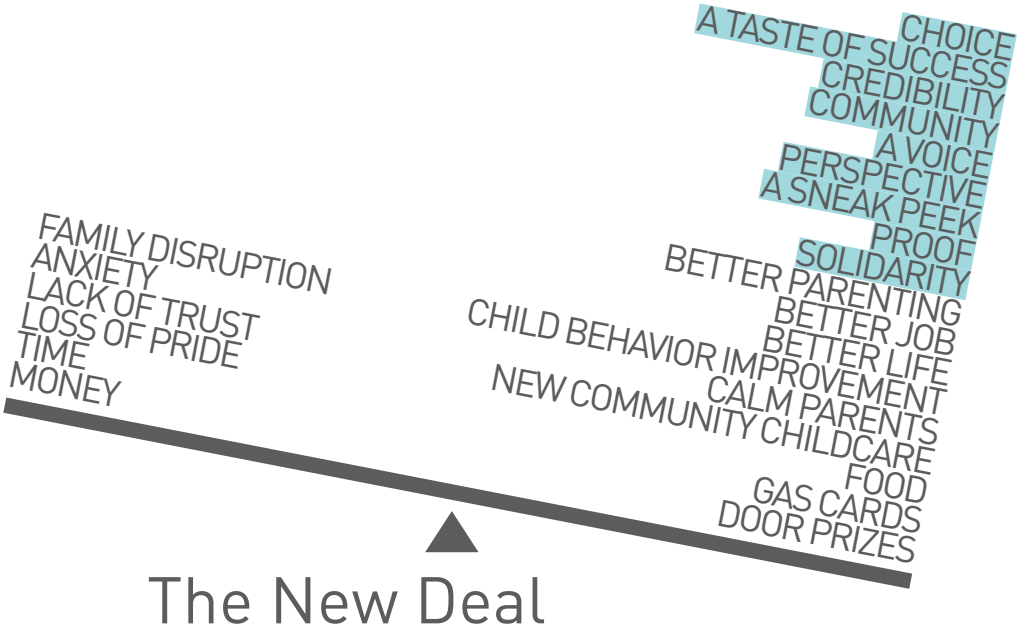


IDEO.ORG

the question was, are parent aspirations aligned with what we'd like to see, and where's the disconnect?"

After 10 intense weeks with 12 families, IDEO.org's work led first to a better understanding of CAP Tulsa parents as fitting into four distinct but fluid categories ranging from "seekers" to "consumers." The next stage was to understand how parents viewed CAP Tulsa's offerings.

"We learned that they're doing their own cost-benefit analysis all of the time," says Dow. "Whereas, from our perspective as an agency, it often looks crystal clear that the benefits are great and the costs are low, from their perspective, the benefits don't look nearly as great and the costs are far greater than we estimate. So their perspective of whether or not to participate looks very different from ours."

Currently CAP Tulsa is prototyping different IDEO.org ideas that will later be analyzed and incorporated into pilot programs. Some of the ideas that have met with initial success include a reorganization of parenting circles to allow families to choose a time and place to meet that is convenient for them. For participation in classes, CAP Tulsa has also introduced incentive points for parents that are redeemable for gift certificates and are marketed through a centrally located kiosk in the CAP Tulsa entryway for greater visibility.

"That interplay of understanding what the parents' perspective is but also trying to array the choices around them in a way that draws on the emotional side has been an important part of the lessons that we've gotten as we've heard the way that designers think about it," says Dow.

The Bezos Family Foundation approached IDEO.org less out of a desire to solve a problem than a desire to share broadly the critical science and messages behind the importance of early childhood education.

"We are looking for ubiquity of knowledge when it comes to learning," says foundation president and co-founder Jackie Bezos. "We want an early learning nation that takes advantage of the rich science that's being discovered daily. We want it to shape policy, but we also want it to shape lives. It was something that everyone

should be privy to and have the opportunity to act upon, but knowing that 60 percent of our young people are not in any [child care center] at all — how do you reach that population?"

With support from the Bezos Family Foundation, IDEO.org went into three different communities over a three-month period to answer this question. They found that while all parents want to be good parents, low-income parents faced a profound sense of isolation. Good role models are scarce, untrustworthy relationships have undermined support networks, and feelings of isolation and the need for self-sufficiency are rampant.

"Just meeting basic needs is a constant struggle, sapping them of time and energy," says Wyatt. "When these parents are told, 'Read an hour a day to your kid,' it feels irrelevant and judgmental. That advice is out of touch with their reality. Our job is to reframe good parenting in a way that respects their realities and amplifies their strengths. Early learning can happen anytime, anywhere, but it's all about engagement, and it all counts."

The end result was the development of community-based campaigns with visuals and stories interspersed with the science. The campaigns emphasized messaging around engagement in any way with children, whether that meant singing or reading the grocery list or reading signs at the bus stop.

Human-centered design begins with gaining a

> "People in the philanthropy business more and more are looking for some sort of hard science, but we're not always emotionally moved by evaluations. We are moved by stories and by how those stories lead to change."
>
> – JACKIE BEZOS

deep understanding and empathy for people's needs, hopes, and aspirations, and Wyatt has found that philanthropists are hungry for this type of thinking.

"People in the philanthropy business more and more are looking for some sort of hard science," Bezos says, "but we're not always emotionally moved by evaluations. We are moved by stories and by how those stories lead to change. And IDEO.org is amazing at bringing the stories to life."

While not every organization can afford to hire a firm like IDEO.org, options still exist to take advantage of the design thinking. Wyatt recommends reaching out to young designers directly through universities or graduate programs. IDEO.org also offers a Human-Centered Design Toolkit,[xxiii] which helps organizations working with communities undertake that process themselves. An online platform called HCD Connect, or Human-Centered Design Connect, also offers stories of how other nonprofits have applied a human-centered design approach to solving social issues.

IN A NUTSHELL...

- We are missing a national movement that weaves science, economics, community development, education, and policy debates into a common narrative around early childhood development as a two-generation strategy.
- Powerful emerging research indicates that the adverse experiences of young children have long-term consequences for their development and success..
- The idea of college education needs to expand beyond elite institutions to skills training and community colleges, and economic supports and social capital for parents and their children need to be integrated into these programs.
- Human-centered design is an exciting lever to develop new solutions at the intersection of three lenses: desirability, viability, and feasibility.

DYNAMIC VOICES: The Power of Expectations

The following text reflects condensed remarks by Ascend Fellow Wes Moore, who moderated a session at ThinkXChange featuring six parents in two-generation programs from around the country.

There's something so inspiring about people who wake up every day with a sole mission: "By the end of my day, the world will be a better place." This mission is right. The two-generation approach works. We don't need to see any more reports to understand that the best way to help our children is to raise them in a strong and supportive environment. The best way to create those environments is to have not only strong and supportive communities but also figure out ways to support parents as parents. We know this works. We don't need any more statistics. I know this works not only because we know the numbers but because I know my own story.

When people ask what I'm most proud of on my resume, I say it's the one thing I had nothing to do with. I was given birth to by my mother. My mother was a victim of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. She was going to raise three children on her own. In no way was this the life she had prepared for. My mother sacrificed everything to make sure her kids would have a shot. She worked three jobs just so she could classify herself as working poor. One day, she got a phone call from the Annie E. Casey Foundation offering her a job. After she hung up, she had the biggest smile I'd ever seen in my life. That one phone call didn't just change her life. It changed all our lives. It gave us the chance to see how social mobility works firsthand. It's important that we don't forget the stories behind our efforts here, and the stories of who we're fighting for and why this is worth fighting for. The importance of college isn't just about a piece of paper or a degree. It's about moving up. Networks will change, friends will change, connections are going to change.

In my book [*The Other Wes Moore*], I wanted people to understand why this single mother moved her family up to New York, worked three different jobs, and was still classified as working poor. Why do we care about these two kids who had an easier time getting their hands on firearms than they did a curriculum that prepared them for college or a career? Why do we care that this young man ended up in the juvenile justice system, came out of Job Corps with a GED and reading at a sophomore level in college, but when he returned to his community, he couldn't find a job because no one's in a quick rush to hire a felon?

We care about these stories not just because they're about two kids, but because they're about all of us and the society we are and the society we hope to be. That's why every single one of these parents is important. They'll likely say, "Without the program I was in, I could never be here." The truth is that without them, our programs could never be. Statistics can provide context and baseline, but stories promote action.

Their stories remind us of what strength looks like and also remind us that not one of us can do this on our own. None of us have. Sometimes I hear the argument of nature versus nurture. What these parents remind us of is that it's a very intricate, beautiful marriage of both. It takes a personal will to make this happen, but no one can do it on his or her own.

DYNAMIC VOICES: The Power of Experience

Six diverse parents who are graduates of, or are currently enrolled in, two-generation programs led by Ascend Fellows served as keynote speakers at the Aspen ThinkXChange. Their stories — adapted from their own words — are included on the pages that follow.

REBECCA, GRADUATE OF JEREMIAH PROGRAM

Rebecca [who prefers her last name not be used] was 18 and had just finished her first year of college when she found out she was pregnant. She moved back in with her parents when her son was born.

I appreciated my family's support, but I was broke and sharing a room with my son. I was torn between going to school and working to provide for my son. I was a young mother with a minimum wage job and child care expenses. The Jeremiah program provided stable and affordable housing, on-site child care, and career track skills training. I've taken life skills classes that focused on career development, economic independence, healthy relationships, physical and emotional health, and, most importantly, parent and child development. These classes gave me the confidence to achieve my goals. Today I'm married with three children. My son is now 12, he excels in school, and is a leader in his class. He sets a great example for his younger siblings. Jeremiah helped me stage that for him. Without Jeremiah, our life would not be the same.

We need help doing this, but we don't want to feel like a charity case. We came to these programs for a reason: to help our children and to become economically self-sufficient. I graduated from Jeremiah shortly after I graduated from college. I was on the dean's list and I see that my experience has rubbed off on my son. He's just as motivated and determined as I am. The program provided me with the tools to bring my son to where he is now.

My pivotal turning point was when I realized the people at Jeremiah were not here to judge me or tell me what to do. They wanted to be my friends. They wanted to help me and my kids. When I realized that, I was able to let go and be comfortable and tell them my personal story and have a trusted source that I could relay that to. It was inspiring and what I needed. It's what all the mothers in the programs need.

VANESSA MARES, GRADUATE OF COMMUNITY ACCESS PROJECT (CAP) TULSA

Right away I knew CAP was a good program. They were nice to me and my kids. They didn't expect anything of me. They knew I could do it, that I could become a nurse. Just having my kid in school, me going to school. They made sure my kids were in school at the same time I was in school so that I could pick them up on time. You worry about these things, that your kid is taken care of before you do anything. They were really supportive and encouraging and rooting for me and the other ladies in my cohort. Now my son is in CAP and my daughter just aged out. She's in kindergarten. After I had my kids, I wanted to be a nurse because of the way they treated me at CAP.

No one looked down on me. Being in a cohort with other ladies, they're going through the same thing. We have kids, we're trying to go to school. I can lean on them and they on me and just talk about kids, school, and how we are going to get through it. It's a good experience.

My coach encourages me. I was scared to call her at first. I thought she would judge me, but I took the chance, and it was a process, but she sits down with me and takes the time to walk through my goals with me: three years, five years, 10 years. She encourages me that I can make those goals and that I can do it.

My pivotal point was when I was sitting in class. I thought it was too good to be true. For my kids to go to Head Start was one thing. I thought they would ask me for money or something. Me going to school and Career*Advance*® and them not wanting anything from me except for my kids to be in school and me to be in school, that was it, and also knowing I could do it.

JESSICA ROCKOWITZ, GRADUATE OF ENDICOTT COLLEGE

Through the Endicott Keys to Degrees program, Jessica Rockowitz got her B.A. in biotechnology. She worked as a diabetes researcher at Harvard University and is now at the University of Pennsylvania in a master's program for nurse anesthesia.

My pivotal point was when I got pregnant. My mom was a teen mom. My sister is a teen mom who lives in poverty. My niece is 20 but she can't afford school. When I found out, I didn't tell my mom, I told my sister. She took me to Planned Parenthood. When we were sitting at the kitchen table, she started crying. She said, "This is not what you want. Haven't you seen me? Haven't you seen our mom and how much she struggles? What are you doing?" It hit me, no, this is not what I want. I wanted to conquer statistics, so to speak.

Everyone here talks about the importance of education for furthering anything you want to do. I couldn't agree more. My father instilled that in me. That's why I knew when I became pregnant at 16 that no matter what, I was going to make sure I made something of myself and set an example for my daughter.

My daughter will be eight on Christmas. I'm married to another Endicott graduate I met my freshman year. He's a great role model for my daughter. I'm grateful for every opportunity Endicott has given me, both academically and socially. I've met great friends from there who are now my family.

Today I would tell a roomful of single mothers to do the same thing. Because it really is a ripple effect. You're impacting our lives. You're impacting children. It's two generation, but it's continuous and goes beyond that. And if I can do it, anyone can because you just have to prioritize and tell yourself that it's worth fighting for. It's worth working for. Parents need to know they can be empowered to overcome anything.

TAMEKA HENRY, PARENT AT ACELERO LEARNING

When Tameka Henry lost her son when she was 21, her world fell apart. Today Henry's daughter is in fourth grade and reading at a sixth grade level. Henry is studying early childhood education and working as a child advocate on a national level.

It was difficult to go back to work after my son died. I battled depression. I felt guilty that I hadn't spent more time with him, but everything was work, work, work so you can provide and work so you can afford insurance. All the things a parent wants for her child, and then this child was no longer with me. It was difficult to pick myself up and start over again. I knew it was important [to get my other children] into a program, but it was always we're full, we're full. I went to Acelero and got the same response. Every day I went back and asked, "Is there a slot?" One day I went back and she said, "You know what? We're going to find you a slot."

At the time, I was just looking for a pre-k

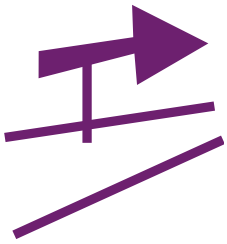
program for my daughter. I didn't know what Head Start was and what it offered me and my family. They helped me set goals, and it wasn't just about the child. They asked me, "What do you want to do?" I never thought about me after everything I'd been through, but they brought me back to the forefront. They said, "It's about you. You have to do in order for your family to do." I've learned to advocate for my children and others throughout the nation. I owe it to Acelero for not giving up on me and my family.

You don't know what a parent is going through, so respect each parent as an individual and let them tell their own story. Once they see you respect them, they'll open up. And don't be afraid, don't back down, don't give up on those families, because there will be families who are hard to reach, but you can reach them. And not only can, but you need to reach them. Because at the end of the day, the children are our future. They're our future leaders, our politicians, our teachers. You can't give up on the families of children. Approach them and respect them and please, please, don't give up on us.

LESLIE CAMPBELL, GRADUATE OF COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP (CCF)

In 1998, Leslie Campbell went to prison for two years after an abusive relationship with a person who was addicted to drugs. Prison separated her from her two-year-old daughter, but after release she decided to reclaim her lost hopes and dreams.

My intention was not to go to college, but a counselor saw something in me that I didn't myself. Going back to school after 17 years wasn't easy. It was a rough reunification with my daughter. One of the worst obstacles was when we became homeless. I was working full time; I was going to school full time, all the while living in a homeless shelter. I wanted to quit but I didn't. I stuck it out. A coworker introduced me to CCF. I just wanted a lifeline to cope with what to do with my daughter, but I found a community of women like myself who were doing some amazing things. When I walked in the door, they had a theater group. They had a writer's group. It just felt like I was home. Had it not been for the support and help and care from my friends at CCF, I don't know that I would have made it.



The day I received my associate degree was one of the greatest in my life. The looks on the faces of my mother and daughter were priceless. I was no longer a failure. I had finished something I'd set out to do. It made me feel anything was possible. Besides working at CCF now, I belong to a leadership group. I am the mother of a very bright and talented 16-year-old who attends a magnet charter school in New York. My story is proof of what CCF has known all along: that education works not just for individuals but for families and communities as well.

As a result of attaining my degree, I have grown from a young woman without a plan for the future to a confident, mature, wise person with increasingly clear career goals. I'm no longer satisfied with a job. I have a career. I have a purpose. I'm no longer seen by society as a victim or a problem. I'm part of the solution.

If not for people helping me, I wouldn't be where I am. It was a natural fit to give back. It resonates for me with my family, my community. My sister is going back to school now. I used to be the black sheep in the family and now I'm the go-to person.

For me, all this evidence-based teaching and rearing children, it's hard in the moment when you're living with them. If you remove the obstacles and not be judgmental when you're proposing these changes and assistance to people, that's important. The women I'm working with who have children, it seems to be helpful when you don't seem like the authorities or that

you'll turn them in. You have to build trust, be an ally, and don't come at it from a punitive point of view.

LUBENS ST. FLEUR, STUDENT, MIAMI DADE COLLEGE

My mom came over as an immigrant. Watching her work two jobs, crazy hours, underpaid, no benefits, was hard. My mom always said, "America is a place where a nobody can be a somebody if they try, if they put their heart into it," but it was tough for us. As immigrants, you don't have any say-so or benefits. You're more in the background.

I graduated high school in the top 10 percent of my class. I couldn't go to college, so I joined the workforce. Construction, manual labor. I had a son, and it was the happiest moment of my life. I had a little version of me. Before my mom died of cancer, she said, "Go to school; don't be like me. You can do it."

At the time, it was tough. I was an immigrant. Miami Dade [College] opened the door for me. They helped me with financial aid, with classes. I'd been out of school for a while and needed everything remedial, but they said, "OK, we'll work with you." I had a tutor, great professors. I've got a year left and I'm very excited about that. When I look at my son, he's eight now, I see my mom, and I think of what she said: America is a place where a nobody can be a somebody. I just want to show my son, don't give up on your dreams.

When my son was born, I made a promise to myself that I wasn't going to follow in my father's footsteps. When things got shaky with the mom, I said I wanted to be in my child's life, so I went to court because I made that promise that my son is going to know me. Typical dads leave the mom. The sons and daughters don't know their dads. I wanted to be here for my son. I wanted to try to do my best to teach him how to be a man.

My pivotal point was when I became a single dad. I thought, OK, I have custody of my son, now how am I going to juggle this? Work and take care of my son? My younger sister was great support. I was thinking, I can't keep doing this. I looked at him one day and said, you know what? I've got to try something new. Then I remembered what my mom said about education. Once you get it, no one can take it away. Thinking about her and looking at my son, I said, I'm going to try to do this. So far, it's been working.

BEYOND THE CHOIR:

Perspectives on Reframing the Struggles of Families

The following text is adapted from remarks by Vic Carter, Debra Chasnoff, and Ascend Fellow Steve Liss, with moderating by Ascend Advisory Board Member Dr. Ali Webb.

A strategic use of film and media may offer one of the best tools for creating a broader national discussion on economic mobility while building momentum for the two-generation approach. Whether stories are told by photojournalists, documentary filmmakers, or television crews, the media has the power to quickly influence and reframe the issues in a bold new way.

Sparking the conversation on a national level is the critical first step. "Public policy change is not going to happen until there is public engagement," says photojournalist and Ascend Fellow Steve Liss, who has 43 *TIME* magazine covers to his credit. "As long as there's no public pressure, we're doomed to incrementalism."

Liss, who is the director of AmericanPoverty.org, which uses visual media to raise awareness of poverty in the United States, suggests that in order to elevate solutions for the country's most vulnerable families, their stories must be at the center of messages.

"We have to use visual storytelling to create renewed awareness about those who struggle with poverty and have been invisible for decades now," says Liss. "By putting a human face on an issue you can communicate so much more than you can with statistics. Anecdote trumps statistics just about every time."

Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker Debra Chasnoff takes this idea a step further in her work, using film as an organizing tool for social justice campaigns. With this strategy, Chasnoff has successfully brought national attention to issues such as gender and sexuality in teens, nuclear weapons, and bias and bullying in school.

"We identify a social justice issue that we want to see a movement around, we create a dynamic documentary film, and then we build an education and advocacy campaign in partnership with organizations that are working on the issue to accelerate the speed of the movement," she says. "If we're going to change political will, we have to speak to a lot more people. We need to be able to engage multiple constituencies, and we need to be able to give voice to the families that our programs are addressing."

One of the quickest ways to access the masses is television news, but unlike documentary film, the news presents a much shorter time window for messaging and information. Award-winning WJZ-TV news anchor Vic Carter says, "It's all about the message. If you can control the message, you can control the mind." Finding compelling new ways to convince the media to cover a story starts with simplifying the language, approaching reporters who are invested in the

> "Instead of talking about individuals, you also talk about places, conditions, and systems. Instead of talking about fixing people, you talk about fixing things so that people can benefit."
>
> – DR ALI WEBB

community, and providing the bullet points that sell the story.

"Think about public relations all the time," Carter advises. "The easier you make it for reporters who may not speak your language, the easier you can make it for them to understand your message, the more likely you are to get coverage and stay with them."

Ascend Advisory Board Member Dr. Ali Webb of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation suggests some ways to reframe economic mobility and two-generation stories for the media: "Instead of talking about individuals, you also talk about places, conditions, and systems. Instead of talking about fixing people, you talk about fixing things so that people can benefit. Instead of images that evoke laziness, you talk about rewarding or incentivizing work. Instead of talking about getting people to work, you talk about getting work to pay people."

Perhaps the most potent way to use visual media is to deepen the understanding of who may be affected by an issue. "It's not just the single mother who is trying to put food on the table," says Chasnoff. "We need to hear from everyone's perspective about why it's in all of our best interests to change the paradigm. I think that's a very hard thing to do."

Another mechanism to publicize the two-generation approach is, as Carter suggests, to "put aside the organizational ego."

Chasnoff calls it a tantalizing idea. "Is there a way to jumpstart this movement? Can we create and craft some core two-generation messages that every single organization that's involved in this work can agree to and can say, yes, and that we're all sharing that message and that message becomes the message of the movement and not the message of my organization?"

With appropriate planning, targeted public relations, and a unified message, the two-generation approach can better enter national discourse.

> "It's all about the message. If you can control the message, you can control the mind."
>
> – VIC CARTER

KEY LESSONS FROM POLICY LEADERS:

Advancements Across Local, State, and Federal Levels

The following text is adapted from remarks by Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha, Lynn Johnson, Dr. Sherri Killins, Ascend Fellow Andrea Levere, and Sheri Steisel, with moderating by Ascend Advisory Board Member Mimi Corcoran.

Integration of and innovation with the two-generation approach is happening at the local and state levels. Among others, Colorado and Massachusetts are leading the way as hubs of innovation by streamlining bureaucracy, connecting partners, and creating inclusive new programming for both parents and children. The time is ripe to reach out to legislators and financial institutions as well as to spark policy change at a federal level and introduce promising new programs like children's savings accounts nationwide.

In Colorado, the Department of Human Services (CDHS) and the Jefferson County Department of Human Services have led the effort to streamline siloed agencies and better connect resources.

"The Colorado Department of Human Services aims to become the most effective 21st century human services system in America," says Ascend Fellow and CDHS Executive Director Reggie Bicha.

Bicha began instituting change by acknowledging that families today are much different than those served in the 20th century. Low-income parents need help finding not only a job but a job that pays well, provides advancement, and provides stability for families. Changing the focus from work participation rates to outcomes has been critical, as has delving into untraditional areas of support like assisting, rather than penalizing, noncustodial parents.

"If we realign our policies to bring agencies [together for collaboration] and have a relentless commitment, we can help parents help their children be ready for kindergarten," says Bicha. "We want to shift this from a work support to an early learning strategy."

Bicha has streamlined services through better technology, simplified application processes, and the elimination of over 800 rules that hamper the process of aiding families.

"If you're a parent and you come through my door, you should not have to fill out 50 different forms to seek help," says Bicha's Jefferson County, Colorado, colleague Lynn Johnson, who has been instrumental in changing how families are served in her county. "The culture of yes says that in spite of this rule and regulation, I'm going to figure it out. My staff has heard me say, do what it takes, just don't let me go to Medicaid jail. So if you say I can't help this person, we need to ask next, who can, and did you make that call yourself or did you just say no? We have to cut through it and our staff have to know they're allowed to do it."

Johnson is making changes at all levels. In education, she sought approval all the way up to the White House to "wrap" family services around her Head Start program. In doing so, Johnson sought ways to connect Head Start services to other programs with federal funding streams. Next she took on the school superintendent about truancy and drop-out rates.

"She asked why I was getting into her business," says Johnson. "I said because your failures are

in my lobby. What we've now said is that from age three years old to diploma, we are a team."

Johnson's team in Jefferson County now tracks children from age three to diploma and tracks the parents on their path to independence. They have doubled up the safety net after grade three with services like Big Brothers/Big Sisters, faith-based organizations, and other nonprofits.

Building partnerships throughout the county has been a priority. "We cannot tell the community to own and solve their problems if everyone isn't at the table," she says. "I went from being told by 60 nonprofits that I was a collaborative dictator to now being real partners with them. Forty faith-based groups now meet once a month to see how they can help the population I serve. Businesses are on-board, and the families themselves. I don't do anything without going back to the customers we serve and asking, does this matter?"

At the heart of Johnson's work is a single guiding principal: "We have to serve faces not cases, and we cannot afford not to."

The Massachusetts Office of Early Education takes a similar approach, and its commissioner, Dr. Sherri Killins, expects agencies at the ground level to think about multiple levels of need and the adverse child development factors that affect family lives. Relationship building has been a key strategy in Massachusetts as well, and Dr. Killins recently shared her Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant with 12 other agencies.

"We wanted those staff to be trained because all those agencies serve families," says Dr. Killins. "Getting them to think about screening and child development as they do their work and then to collect data they can use at the local level to help parents understand child development and understand opportunities to intervene is important."

Like Johnson, Dr. Killins has also pushed districts to take a broader approach to their work.

"Superintendents are now interested in what's going on in community-based child care, because those children are their products and they'll be held accountable for that at some later point," she says. "It's a policy frame that helps things happen at the community level that may not have been there before."

WHERE IS THE PRIVATE SECTOR?

The following text is adapted from remarks by former Ascend Advisory Board Member Michael Dupee.

The Aspen ThinkXChange has highlighted both the urgency of the problem and the size of the opportunity. Dr. [Rakesh] Kochhar confirmed the [demographics]. Celinda Lake's data tells us we are also in a crisis of [public support]. Taken together, this tells me that some of the core myths of our country — that you can work hard and get ahead, that your kids will have a better life than you did — these myths are cracking, if not already broken. They need tending.

We need new stories, not more stories about how horrible poverty can be. We need stories about strength and courage, about what works, and stories that help us see the potential we have as families, communities, and a nation. We need stories on how we can come together in service of one another to establish the conditions under which we can all achieve stability and ultimately create more and better opportunities.

On a national level, the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) takes a two-generation policy approach to savings.

"Our perspective always begins with the idea that it's not just what you earn but what you own," says CFED President Andrea Levere. "The power of savings helps families withstand shocks at any level."

CFED works to build assets for low-income families to take them from living on the edge to financial security and ultimately into wealth creation. CFED pioneered new wealth metrics to better measure household financial security. One, "Liquid Asset Poverty," found that 43 percent of American households live in Liquid Asset Poverty.[xxiv]

"The power of that data, which is the power of this conversation, is that it's not just about poor people now," Levere says. "It's about half of us. When we think about strategies, we need to think about, how do we make this inclusive and about all of us? Everyone is concerned about building financial security over time."

CFED is working on a state and national level to introduce children's savings accounts, which can not only change the financial

This is an opportunity for collaboration. I can't think of a more compelling case for collaboration than what I've heard here. We've got a variety of innovating actors at the table and this two-generation approach that's ready to be put into play. It's time to build on these successes and move toward the future. We've got opportunity, solution, critical mass, and what's left is for us to learn how to play together effectively in this enormous sandbox.

There is a business case to be made for being part of the solution. Business people need smart and committed employees, strong communities, and people to buy what we sell. They have an interest in the effective use of tax dollars and want to unleash the entrepreneurial energy that's withering because we've failed to cultivate it.

As I leave, I offer three intentions. I pledge to prioritize driving innovative solutions, enabling effective collaboration, and supporting this two-generation approach. Secondly, I'll help spread the word. Corporate marketers are the new mythmakers in society. As troubling as that may seem, we've got a responsibility around the stories we tell. We'll share the stories we heard of strength and dignity, of solutions and collaboration, and of what works and doesn't. Finally, as part of the Ascend Advisory Board, I'm going to work to bring more business voices into the conversation in the future.

situation of a household but also change parents' perceptions about building their own financial capability.[xxv]

"Parents will do for their children what they won't do for themselves," says Levere. "Suddenly a parent who could never afford college, sees the child can, and the child has aspirations as well. A child with an account with as little as $500 in it is six times as likely to go to college."

Levere still sees room for progress, especially in engaging government institutions to cut the red tape and in getting financial and philanthropic partners to sign on for matching grants. Policy reform is critical to resolving archaic and counterintuitive rules that stop innovation and savings.

"We have to fix the plumbing so that it's not an act of God to make a children's savings account work," she says.

The plumbing often starts at the legislative level. Sheri Steisel, senior federal affairs counsel at the National Conference of State Legislatures, suggests that there has never been a better time to reach out to legislators and introduce the two-generation approach.

"The no-wrong-door aspect of this discussion is fabulous because the different messages will work differently on different elected officials," she says. "There's a bipartisan hunger out there to improve outcomes for children."

In a time of little budget flexibility, new ideas and solutions for a better use of money will be received more positively. Legislators need concise summaries of the science, what worked, what did not, and what bullet points they can use to convince colleagues. They need to know the family stories but also be given experiential learning opportunities. Empowering the legislators by seeding them with the right questions to ask can help spark the conversation as well.

"Legislators are community leaders and conveners," Steisel says. "They dislike the silos. They can see across programs and a lot of it doesn't make sense. They're willing to go to Washington and say this barrier doesn't make sense. This gives us great opportunity in a two-generation approach."

Incoming legislators offer a special opportunity. They may need more education on the issues, but they also have open minds and fewer preconceived notions. Steisel recommends starting at the county level to experiment and introduce two-generation strategies and building up from there.

"Language matters and policy matters. For state legislators, who communicates the information and who is involved in education and explaining the problem is critical," says Steisel. "It's really important to form partnerships, and they're not easy, and you have to expect some push-back and lots of questions. The people whom we're serving are some of the best advocates for these kinds of programs and the institutions that serve them."

"Parents will do for their children what they won't do for themselves. Suddenly a parent who could never afford college, sees the child can, and the child has aspirations as well. A child with an account with as little as $500 in it is six times as likely to go to college."

– ANDREA LEVERE

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY?

The following text is adapted from remarks by Letty Bass and Dr. Alandra Washington.

LETTY BASS, CHAMBERS FAMILY FUND

This conference has been important to Chambers Family Fund because we've learned how to move forward with the two-generation model. Colorado can be an innovation lab with clusters of action and policy change. So what will Chambers Family Fund do next?

First, we want to convene a working group that brings together public, private, and nonprofit sectors to support the reforms being implemented in the Colorado Department of Health and Human Services. Second, we want to support our grant recipients to develop and model two-generation strategies in their organizations. We want to apply the theories and take risks, show what works and doesn't, and share it. In other words, we want a movement.

DR. ALANDRA WASHINGTON, W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Our next moves involve an inside-out strategy to connect our economic security work to our education and learning work. On the inside, we must make the two-generation lens stick. We are evangelizing to colleagues and also helping them to see the two-generation work they're already doing.

On the outside, we'll focus on three areas. Communications will be the emphasis to policy change. We need to ask, how do we actually support strategic communications and the glue that brings together cross-collaborations? Second, we want to lead the way in cross-sector collaboration, support, and integration. And finally, we'll be out in the field more, working and supporting all of you.

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Reggie Bicha	Executive Director, Colorado Department of Human Services, Denver, CO
Mia Birdsong	Vice President, Family Independence Initiative, Oakland, CA
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Henry Wilde	Co-Founder and Senior Vice President of Operations, Acelero Learning, Madison, WI
Dr. Richard Wylie	President, Endicott College, Boston, MA

Recognizing that breakthrough ideas come from different sectors and communities, the Ascend Fellowship targets diverse pioneers paving new pathways that break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The 2012–2013 Ascend Fellows are a network of leaders from across the country who share knowledge, develop and test ideas, and coordinate their efforts. Ascend supports the Fellows with resources and a platform to accelerate the creation, amplification, and expansion of proven and promising two-generation strategies.

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