



ACCELERATING 2GEN APPROACHES AT EDUCARE

A BRIEF FROM ASCEND AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

To identify new opportunities to expand 2Gen, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund launched its Acceleration grants, an experiment designed to inspire innovation and promote connection across the Educare Learning Network. In 2015, the first Acceleration grant was awarded to Sheltering Arms in Atlanta, Georgia, to lead a three-year, collaborative effort at four Educare schools (in Arizona, Atlanta, Central Maine, and New Orleans).

by Sarah Haight and Marjorie Sims



Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that we release **Accelerating 2Gen Approaches at Educare**. This brief is the culmination of several years of work, collaboration, and coordination among key two-generation (2Gen) leaders, including Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Buffett Early Childhood Fund; Sheltering Arms; and the Aspen Community Strategies Group.

Two-generation approaches, which focus on creating opportunities for and meeting the needs of children and their parents together, move the whole family toward educational success, economic security, and health and well-being. Ascend is the national hub for 2Gen approaches. With the documented return on investment in early childhood, the opportunity to build on the early childhood platform – and the innovation within Educare sites in particular – to improve outcomes for families is clear. This brief provides lessons and guidance on one such partnership, the Buffet 2Gen Acceleration grant, which focused on four Educare sites advancing better outcomes for children and their parents through 2Gen approaches. The brief is intended to support practitioners, researchers, and funders in better understanding the opportunities and challenges when designing a 2Gen learning community for early childhood providers.

Our deepest appreciation to all those who contributed their time and expertise to the learning community and developing this brief, including the following:

- Portia Kennel and the team at the Buffett Early Childhood Fund;
- Cynthia D. Jackson, Ounce of Prevention, and the Educare Learning Network;
- Diane Bellem and Danielle Smith (Sheltering Arms);
- Janet Topolsky and Travis Green (Aspen Community Strategies Group)
- Mary Page Wilson-Lyons, Joyce Johnson, Gayle Perryman, and Karenne Berry, who served as coaches to the Educare sites;
- The site team leaders and staff at each Educare site: Danielle Smith, Keren Cadet and James Banks (Sheltering Arms); Lori Jablonsky (Educare Arizona); Kristen Holzinger (Educare Central Maine); Angie Belisle, Rafel Hart, and Lauren Dunaway (Educare New Orleans).

Each of their contributions made this work possible.

As the 2Gen field continues to advance, we offer this resource to enhance our collective learning and work on behalf of children and families.

Sincerely,



Anne B. Mosle
Vice President, Aspen Institute
Executive Director, Ascend at the Aspen Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early efforts to alleviate poverty by addressing the needs of families focused on building strong development programs for young children and advancing family support systems. In recent years, as an increasing number of practitioners, policymakers, communities, researchers, and funders have embraced the concept of serving the needs of children and their parents together — the two-generation (2Gen) approach — the field has gained a greater understanding of the need to engage families in service design and delivery, and intentionally integrate services that meet the needs of whole families. Today, organizations throughout the country are leveraging a 2Gen approach to moving families toward educational success and economic stability through multiple programs that promote better outcomes for children, parents, and families.

The track record of 2Gen success has created a drive to explore new ways to align services among different organizations and providers and expand programs and policies that support both children and adults simultaneously. As these efforts continue to produce promising outcomes, there is a need to capture lessons learned and share replicable best

practices throughout the field. Early childhood programs have proven to be strong platforms for 2Gen approaches. In 2015, the Buffet Early Childhood Fund awarded Sheltering Arms in Atlanta, Georgia an Acceleration Grant to learn how the Educare schools may bridge with other community-based programs and support parents in their role as caregivers and as breadwinners. The three-year effort launched a peer-learning network and led to the design and implementation of 2Gen strategies at Educare schools located in Atlanta, Arizona, Central Maine, and New Orleans. This brief details their journey and offers recommendations for other early childhood programs interested in the 2Gen approach. Educare schools draw on funding streams for Early Head Start and Head Start, a platform that has demonstrated powerful results for families when parents' educational and economic success is integrated into service design.

Sheltering Arms leveraged its experience in 2Gen work with the Educare Atlanta school and with the Center for Working Families to create a peer learning exchange among the four Educare schools aimed at establishing and strengthening a more comprehensive approach to supporting educational and economic success for and with

families. Through an action learning network with the four Educare schools, along with leaders in the 2Gen field, the project allowed each school to examine its current family engagement practices and identify opportunities to be more effective. The Buffett Early Learning Fund was particularly interested in creating an interactive project that encouraged the schools to learn from each other, work together to create a sustainable 2Gen approach, and formulate plans to influence policy to move toward inclusion of the 2Gen approach in early learning settings.



Courtesy of Sheltering Arms

Working with Ascend and the Community Strategies Group, both policy programs at the Aspen Institute, along with the Center for Working Families, a partner workforce site that was started by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Sheltering Arms led the **Educare 2G Acceleration Peer Learning Exchange Network**. This multi-phased effort brought the four Educare schools together for multiple convenings, where they benefited from peer learning as they developed action plans for their individual schools focused on 2Gen outcomes. Additionally, the schools received one-on-one coaching, technical assistance, and access to additional resources to help them finalize their action plans and move to implementation.

While all four of the participating Educare schools had some experience with and/or knowledge of the 2Gen framework developed by Ascend at the Aspen Institute,

each school brought a different level of 2Gen engagement. As the 2Gen Accelerator, as the project was known among the more than 800 family participants, comes to an end, the schools report an increase in their knowledge and effective use of new 2Gen approaches to address the needs of children and families. These approaches are reflected in their action plans, which will help them maintain the progress they made through the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project and continue to move forward. These four schools also captured valuable lessons for other Educare schools looking to replicate this approach, including the need to secure early buy-in and support from the top, put the right team in place, and set clear expectations from the start.

As more schools in the Educare network and in the broader early childhood education field embrace the 2Gen approach, these four Educare schools are

available to share lessons learned, offer promising, practical ideas for integrating 2Gen into systems and programs, and serve as learning partners for other Educare schools.

JUMPSTARTING 2GEN IN EDUCARE

The impact of a parent's education, economic stability, and overall health on a child's trajectory is well documented. For families with young children who have an annual income of \$25,000 or less, a \$3,000 increase during the early childhood years yields a 17 percent increase in adult earnings for those children. Young children have a greater likelihood of being prepared and ready for success in school if their parents or caregivers are thriving. As a result, programs focused on a child's success must simultaneously recognize the needs of parents in specific and intentional ways and support family engagement, health and wellness, economic supports, postsecondary education and employment pathway navigation, and high-quality early childhood

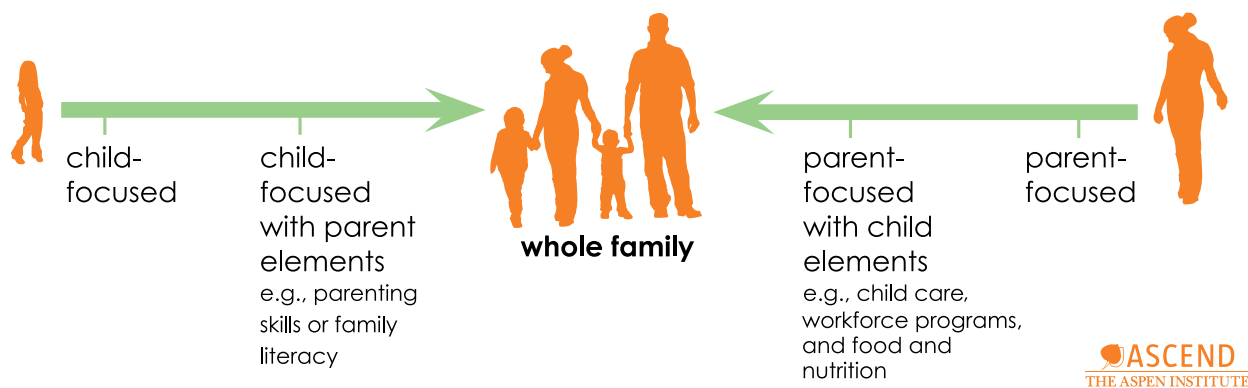
education. This is known as the 2Gen approach.

Three years ago, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund made its first round of Acceleration grants. These three-year grants funded projects that support one or more of the Educare Learning Network's top strategic priorities:

- Continuous innovation around teaching and learning;
- Using the Network as a platform for innovative, applied early childhood research and evaluation;
- Extending effective Educare approaches beyond the walls of Educare schools; and
- Partnering with parents to promote positive outcomes for themselves and their children.

The Buffett Early Childhood Fund tapped Sheltering Arms in Atlanta to lead the 2Gen Acceleration grant implementation for the Educare sites. Previously, through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Sheltering Arms and

TWO-GENERATION CONTINUUM



Educare Atlanta had been part of an Action Learning Network and both the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and Sheltering Arms recognized an opportunity to replicate the peer learning aspect of the project as a useful best practice for accelerating growth. Additionally, Educare was in the process of revamping its family support model at all 22 Educare schools to more closely align with 2Gen. The Buffett Early Childhood Fund assigned Sheltering Arms, which had already tapped its own Educare Atlanta for this effort, to Educare schools in Phoenix, Arizona; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Waterville in Central Maine. Leaning into its experience in 2Gen work through the Educare Atlanta school, in partnership with the Center for Working Families, Sheltering Arms set out to develop the Educare 2Gen Acceleration project.

Working with Ascend at the Aspen Institute and Community Strategies Group at the Aspen Institute, as well as its workforce partner, the Center for Working Families, Sheltering Arms designed a project aimed at helping the four Educare schools accomplish the following:

- Work together to improve their 2Gen approach by drawing on the deep expertise of Educare Learning Network members and other experts in the field;
- Share successes and challenges to help them successfully integrate 2Gen strategies into their programs;

“What I enjoyed about the last meeting was the balance between working as a team and then seeing what other teams were doing. Saying, ‘OK, this is where we are and what we can do with our resources.’ But then having brainstorm sessions to see what we learned from other teams.”

– Lauren Dunaway, Tulane University, evaluation partner for the Educare New Orleans team

- Measure progress toward project outcomes by documenting both successes and challenges; and;
- Craft a sustainable 2Gen approach at their schools and create plans to influence policy to integrate 2Gen in early learning settings across the country and/or replicate this approach within schools across the Educare network.

MAIN PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Each of the participating Educare schools created a team that consisted of Educare leadership, including but not limited to executive directors, family engagement and early childhood staff, and community partners, such as workforce organization staff and mental health organization staff.

The teams benefited from in-person and virtual convenings, one-on-one coaching, and technical assistance as they created a **logic model** for advancing both

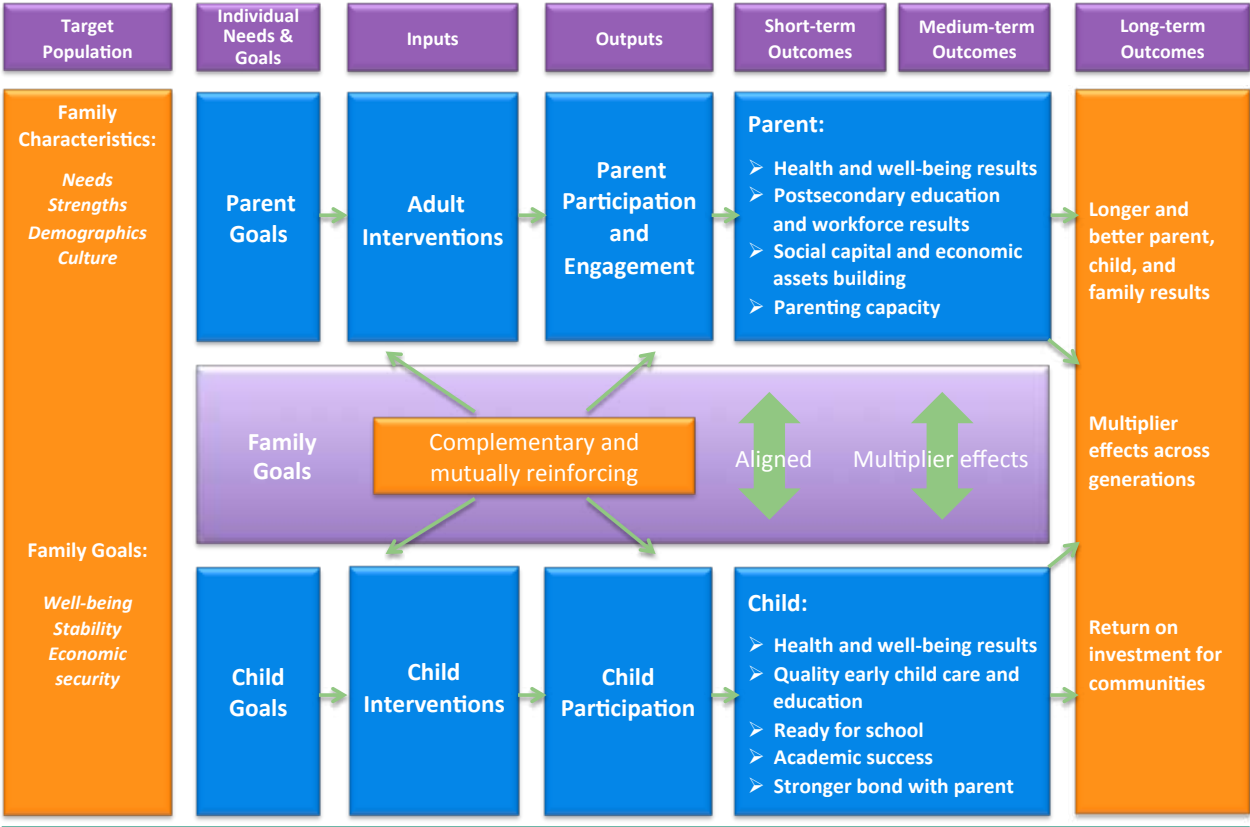
children and parents educationally and economically. The teams then developed **action plans** for better aligning programs and systems to truly embrace a 2Gen approach. Community Strategies Group, known for its **peer learning approach**, conducted regular interviews with the teams to ensure they stayed on track and were poised to succeed with the overall project.

- **Action Plans.** Throughout the project, the four Educare schools each created an action plan for improving

their ability to embed 2Gen core components into their programming. Teams had time to work on their action plans at the convenings and got additional input from their coaches.

As part of their action plans, the teams each developed a logic model linking specific 2Gen activities and services to anticipated short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes for children, parents, and families. The logic model helped teams visualize their action plans and ensure

SAMPLE 2GEN PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL



This sample logic model for two-generation programs shows how 2Gen programs give consideration to how parent and child inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes interact. Source: Urban Institute, 2016. Some elements adapted from Scott et. al., 2016.

their efforts support a 2Gen approach.

- **Peer Learning Exchange.** Throughout the three-year project, the teams participated in three in-person convenings and one virtual convening. These convenings were an opportunity for the teams to discover and share knowledge about 2Gen work and explore real examples of 2Gen in motion while learning from 2Gen experts like Ascend and members of the Ascend Network from throughout the country, such as EmPath and Garrett County Community Action Committee. The teams worked on their action plans, shared ideas and challenges with each other, and offered critical feedback to their peers. Each convening was carefully designed to build on the work to date and keep momentum moving forward. Teams completed assignments in advance of each session that informed their action plans and ensured all participants followed a similar process. At the start of each session, each team presented a project update that included progress and challenges. This accountability piece helped participants come prepared to make the most of their time together and fostered a learning environment by encouraging the teams to share insights with one another.

At each convening, a member of the resource team (see

RESOURCE AND PLANNING TEAM

Sheltering Arms provides high-quality early education, child care, and comprehensive family support services to more than 3,600 children and their families annually at 16 metropolitan Atlanta locations.

A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the **Center for Working Families** provides a coordinated set of services to help individuals and families with low incomes get jobs, strengthen their finances, and move up the economic ladder.

Aimed at connecting, motivating and equipping local leaders to build more prosperous regions and advance those living on the economic margins, The Aspen Institute's **Community Strategies Group** designs and facilitates peer learning among organizations, leaders, and policymakers.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and the adults in their lives to educational success, economic security, and health and well-being. Through a 2Gen approach, Ascend focuses on children and the adults in their lives together, and brings a gender and racial equity lens to its analysis. In everything it does, Ascend draws on the expertise and experience of families.

sidebar) sat with each Educare team to prompt new ways of thinking, share lessons from other 2Gen efforts, and help keep the conversation and planning on track.

- **Coaching.** As the 2Gen approach is taking hold across the country, coaching can help ensure that pilot projects and new initiatives have the resources and support

“If you revisit [the 2Gen logic model] regularly, create action plans, and are held accountable, it starts to resonate and the importance of it sinks in. But it’s hard work and something that definitely takes time.”

– Danielle Smith, Sheltering Arms

needed to fully understand 2Gen and integrate it into their programs. Each Educare team had an assigned coach who participated in the convenings and also led monthly check-in calls. The coaches helped the teams reflect on opportunities and challenges, offered advice, and provided counsel as the teams completed their action plans. The coaches were identified through the Ascend Network and have “day jobs” at organizations where 2Gen has become a strategic focus. Coaches received honorariums for their participation.

- **Technical Assistance.** Ascend at the Aspen Institute offers technical assistance to its national Ascend Network (e.g., nonprofit community-based programs, state human services departments, and community and women’s funds, among others) to help them maximize and grow resources, programs, and systems; innovate for better outcomes; and advance policies to improve outcomes for children and families. Ascend worked with Sheltering Arms, Community Strategies Group, and the Educare teams to:

- Explore opportunities and challenges for 2Gen efforts in the Educare system;
- Identify resources, share knowledge, and support adaptation of 2Gen efforts among the Educare schools; and
- Support development of measures and tools to advance each school’s 2Gen efforts.

This included offering input into the convening agendas on how best to maintain a 2Gen focus and tapping its national action network for case studies, speakers, and other lessons to share throughout the project.

Each team also had the opportunity to apply for technical assistance funds to support their efforts. These funds were made available to the Educare teams in two phases. The first phase of technical assistance funding was released just after the first convening and aimed to help the teams deepen their understanding of the 2Gen approach. One site used the funds to conduct focus groups to learn more about the needs of their families, while another team visited a similarly structured program to get a firsthand look at potential of the project to support the Educare teams as they worked to implement their action plans and continue to advance their 2Gen understanding. One Educare team used the technical assistance funds from phase two to cover costs associated with a multi-day

strategic planning session aimed at building understanding, buy-in, and commitment to whole-family approaches and aligning services among all staff and partners.

Another team used these funds to lead a staff training focused on integrating a 2Gen approach into mental health services and male engagement.

EDUCARE: STATE SNAPSHOTS

EDUCARE ARIZONA (OPERATED BY SOUTHWEST HUMAN DEVELOPMENT)

As the only Educare school in the Southwest, Educare Arizona, located in Phoenix, is a model for the region when it comes to demonstrating the positive impact of high-quality early childhood education. The school is located in the Balsz District of Phoenix, which is classified by the Department of Education as one of the most distressed districts in the country. The district has a primarily Hispanic population (60 percent) with a growing number of Somali families (40 percent). The full-day, year-round program serves a culturally and linguistically diverse population and features programming provided by Southwest Human Development, one of the country's premier providers of early childhood services. The school's on-site health clinic, the Balsz Educare Arizona Center for Health, offers quality medical, dental, and behavioral health services to Educare Arizona children and their

families as well as the surrounding community.

Initially run through a partnership with the Live and Learn Career Training Program, Educare Arizona supports families while also meeting its staffing and teaching needs by training professionals to enter the early care and education workforce and helping them earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. Lead in partnership with Southwest Human Development, the Live and Learn CDA Career Training Program is a year-long commitment of 20 hours per week and is equivalent to a two-year program at a community college.

As Educare Arizona has become more invested in the 2Gen approach, it has explored opportunities to strengthen this program by encouraging parents to continue their education and earn their associate or bachelor's degree, which will in turn improve their earning potential. Through the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project, Educare Arizona created an action plan aimed at streamlining and integrating data collection of its 2Gen efforts and strengthening the CDA to AA or BA pathway. The team secured pathway dollars and collaborated with the University of Phoenix, which agreed to teach courses at the Educare school. As Educare Arizona implemented its action plan, it expanded its approach to include helping parents create a timeline to track and envision their progress. They also added online classes as well as classes at



Courtesy of Sheltering Arms

other sites to make the program more accessible. And they built in messaging and activities to help parents understand how a higher degree would help them secure a steady, well-paying job.

“The Acceleration project introduced us to peers who were trying to do something similar and gave us access to outside programs that offered us new perspectives on how to do this,” explains Lori Jablonsky, the Educare Arizona team lead. “We would have gotten there eventually, but this program really pushed us forward and helped us get there in a more efficient manner by mapping out the direction we wanted to go.”

Educare Arizona is now running the project in-house, which has enabled it to fully pursue the effort through a 2Gen lens. It is exploring opportunities to replicate the program in other career pathways to help families move forward in whatever career they choose.

EDUCARE ATLANTA (OPERATED BY SHELTERING ARMS)

Housed on the first floor of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Elementary School, Educare Atlanta connects children and families to a quality education from birth through fifth grade. The school serves young children and families with low incomes in Atlanta's Mechanicsville neighborhood, less than a mile from city hall and the state capitol. This southwestern area of Atlanta once flourished in terms of jobs and people, but when the state ran an interstate highway through the center of town, poor development pushed people and jobs to other areas. The families that remain face insufficient services and limited transportation options, making it hard to access good jobs.

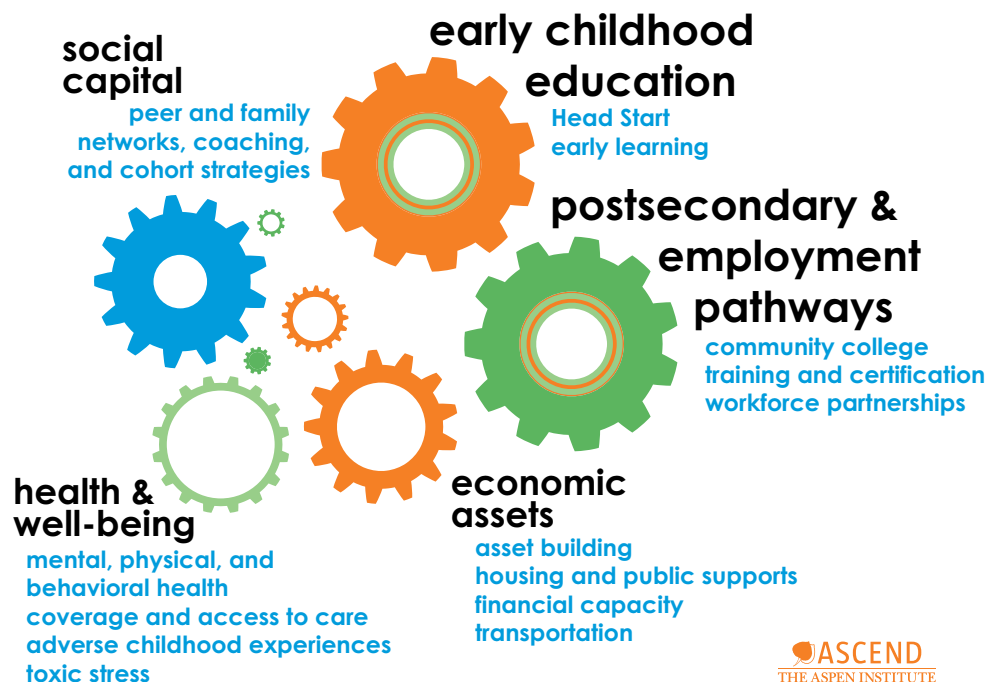
Through strong community partnerships already in place, including relationships with Sheltering Arms, the Center for Working Families, United Way of Greater Atlanta, Fulton County, and Georgia State University, Educare Atlanta offers programs and services that build the skills and confidence of parents. For example, the school partners with the Center for Working Families to offer Educare parents an

employment and job training program. The school also works with partners to address high health disparities in the area by linking families to health services like primary care and health insurance, and it ensures parents have the support and skills they need to be strong advocates for their children's mental and physical development. Although the school came into this project with a solid 2Gen framework in place, Educare Atlanta aimed to strengthen its partnerships and expand its 2Gen approach by being more intentional about addressing the challenges parents face when it comes to securing and maintaining good jobs, including physical and

mental health and transportation needs. The Atlanta team also sought to identify new opportunities to engage with parents and make the school's child development trainings more accessible.

To ensure the entire organization and its partners fully understood and embraced the 2Gen approach, Educare Atlanta developed an action plan aimed at strengthening its 2Gen vision and messaging. Other goals included developing new partnerships to increase educational attainment and job opportunities for parents by addressing mental health challenges, and improving its data system to better serve families.

CORE COMPONENTS OF A 2GEN APPROACH



The core components that make up the two-generation approach include:

1) Postsecondary education and employment pathways; 2) Early childhood education and development; 3) Economic assets; 4) Health and well-being; and 5) Social capital.

Source: Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2014.

Educare Atlanta applied for and used its technical assistance funds to hire a communications consultant to craft messaging aimed at communicating the value of a 2Gen approach to families, funders, and staff. It also connected with other 2Gen projects and used additional technical assistance dollars to conduct a site visit of CAP Tulsa, which is recognized nationally as a leading 2Gen organization, where staff explored new opportunities to integrate mental health services into all aspects of their programming.

“One of the most exciting parts of this process has been the flexibility and looking at priorities as a group,” notes Susan Bertonaschi of United Way Atlanta, explaining that the group ultimately chose to focus on mental health. “It was a need we really wanted to address. Having the right people at the table allowed us to have those conversations.”

That flexibility and open-mindedness led the team to focus on a strategy around mental health and self-care. To streamline services for parents, and further embed 2Gen into its programming, Educare Atlanta also merged its family support team to align with Sheltering Arms’ family support model. The five Family Support Coaches on the Educare Atlanta team each have a focused specialty area that is aligned with the core 2Gen components.

EDUCARE CENTRAL MAINE (OPERATED BY KVPAC)

Educare Central Maine, the first rural Educare school in the country, serves young children and their families from Waterville, the fifth largest city in Maine, and the surrounding community. The LEED-certified school also serves as a high-quality early care and education demonstration site for the state of Maine. Waterville was once a strong manufacturing community, but over time, jobs have shifted to primarily service-oriented positions that come with lower wages and fewer to no benefits.

This shift has contributed to increasing poverty rates. Waterville is a walkable community, but a lack of transportation options outside the city limits makes it challenging for people to access higher paying jobs in other areas.

A majority of the families at Educare Central Maine are either working or going to school and need a child care subsidy. Some of the families get some child care support through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), but Educare Central Maine is exploring other models to ensure access to quality child care is not a barrier as families strive to get ahead.

Going into this project, Educare Central Maine understood the basic premise of the 2Gen approach and had some experience implementing 2Gen

work through Head Start family engagement, but it did not have a systematic approach to intentionally integrating 2Gen into its programs.

Although the school partners with the Maine Department of Labor Career Center and the Maine Adult Education Network to offer parents a Work Ready program (a 60-hour soft-skill program), parents struggle to find time to use the resource.

They note that their current jobs are too demanding to pursue the training and education needed to secure a better position.

Through the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project, Educare Central Maine explored partnerships to help create support services for parents and address the myriad challenges parents face as they strive to secure better jobs and create a better support system for their families. These challenges included access to continuing education and training, quality health services, child care, and affordable transportation. Educare Central Maine's action plan focused on designating a cohort of families with whom the school would more intentionally engage through 2Gen and creating an intake and assessment tool to learn more about what these families need to succeed.

The team also aimed to expand its capacity to offer stronger services by adopting a better family coaching model and communicating the value of

2Gen with more partners in the community.

Throughout the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project, Educare Central Maine worked to secure widespread buy-in for its approach within the community. This included a presentation to approximately 25 community partners to explain the 2Gen approach and encourage these varied interests to work together to identify opportunities for streamlining family services, starting with the benefits application process. Participants included the Waterville Public Library, the Maine State Department of Housing, and Educare Central Maine's own Parent Ambassador program, which helps parents become better advocates for themselves and their children through training in topics such as conflict resolution, negotiation, team building, presentation skills, and public policy—all with a strong racial-equity lens.

Through the project, an important partnership evolved with the State of Maine Department of Labor, which is now exploring opportunities to bring the needs of families to employers in the state. The school also revised its Pathways Tool, the assessment tool it uses when families enter its system, to include more specific questions about parents' needs.

"We now work with our career center workforce partner to think about the people coming in as parents, not just potential employees," explains Kristen

Holzinger, the family services manager at Educare Central Maine. "Changing the conversation and being more responsive to learning about the unique needs of parents is helping us have conversations with employers about how to get good workers by addressing those needs, such as breaking a 12-hour shift into two separate shifts."

By focusing on adult-centered goals, including educational and financial goals, while providing resources to fill gaps for parents, such as access to transportation, Educare Central Maine is aligning its services around holistic family needs with the hope and expectation that outcomes for both enrolled children and their parents will improve.

EDUCARE NEW ORLEANS (OPERATED BY KINGSLEY HOUSE)

The first school in the Educare network to be located in the southern Gulf, Educare New Orleans is part of a broad community redevelopment effort led by the Bayou District Foundation that aims to revitalize an area of the city devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The school serves a mix of families, including some two-parent families who are making ends meet, but also many who are below the poverty line. This often includes families with very young parents.

Going into the project, Educare New Orleans, which often works with multigenerational

families (i.e., families that include grandparents raising grandchildren or grandparents raising their children and their grandchildren), sought opportunities to engage more deliberately in the 2Gen framework. The team developed an action plan focused on securing specific 2Gen outcomes and communicating and engaging staff in a 2Gen approach. The team initially focused on grandparents and single parents who were part of the early Head Start classes, but as the project progressed, Educare New Orleans opted to serve a greater number of families by opening the project to everyone who receives Educare services. A highlight of the New Orleans effort was an entrepreneurship class that offered lessons in business planning, financial fitness, and business management. Several parents who completed the program have launched their own businesses in services ranging from car detailing to architecture to graphic design, among others. For parents who are still working to get their businesses off the ground, the program offers wraparound services with ongoing counseling on topics such as how to secure start-up funds. Now finishing its third year of the entrepreneurship class, Educare New Orleans has developed a program template to help replicate this approach in specific career fields, such as financing and homebuilding.

"We've always done programs and activities for the families, but it wasn't until we started with 2Gen that we realized it's not one-and-

done,” shares Angie Shorty-Belisle, director of Educare New Orleans. “It’s all about the follow-up and sticking with the families to make sure they are following through with the lessons they learn and telling us what they are doing to move forward.”

Through the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project, Educare New Orleans also launched a new health-focused multidisciplinary program modeled after Educare Atlanta’s Healthy Beginnings program. Educare New Orleans used its technical assistance funds to visit Educare Atlanta, see its program in action, and determine how best to replicate it. Through a partnership with local health care provider Daughters of Charity, which employs the school’s health navigator, Educare New Orleans is now helping 168 families access Medicaid, private insurance, primary care, mental health supports, and more.

“When 2Gen first started here, we saw it as a program for parents,” says Shorty-Belisle. “But as we got more engaged and understood the rationale behind it and the purpose of 2Gen, it took a different shift, and we now realize it is all about supporting the entire family.”

LESSONS LEARNED: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOVING FORWARD

When the four Educare teams started this effort, they agreed to apply a 2Gen approach to their work, integrate 2Gen strategies into their programs, and collaborate as a team, requiring them to operate in a new way. As the teams wrap up the final phase of the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project, all four teams report having a stronger understanding of the need to take a more holistic approach to serving the parents of children at their schools, and they have action plans in place to ensure they will continue to move this work forward. The teams also report a deeper understanding of 2Gen and say they learned the value of making time to deliberately build 2Gen into their work.

As the program progressed, the teams not only developed a deeper understanding of 2Gen, but also improved their ability to work as a team and use the different resources available to them, such as coaching and technical assistance. Additionally, after three years together, the teams have coalesced as a cohort and believe the peer learning approach to identifying and implementing 2Gen approaches helped mitigate duplicative challenges, accelerate the leap from logic models to action planning, and provide fresh examples of how to serve families

more effectively in partnership with complex systems.

As more schools in the Educare network and the broader early childhood education field embark on learning journeys to improve family engagement as an integral component of school readiness, the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project offers several lessons learned and practical ideas for the field. Chief among those lessons is that authentic family engagement requires continuous feedback loops that are led, informed, and assessed by parents themselves in partnership with staff willing and ready to make programmatic adjustments based on that feedback. More lessons from the project are highlighted below.

LESSONS FROM 2GEN INTEGRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN EDUCARE SCHOOLS:

Apply an equity lens. Two-generation strategies should evaluate and fix structural problems that create gender and/or racial and ethnic disparities. Many current funding streams and policies do not reflect the demographic realities of 21st century American families, where one in four U.S. children is growing up in a single-parent family, many headed by women, and a disproportionate number of children and parents of color are low-income. Programs can catalyze and influence strong examples of equity-based strategies by creating continuous feedback loops for families; collecting data across race, ethnicity, gender, and other

areas that inform program design; and ensuring that staff are trained in cultural competency.

Identify and develop outcomes for children, parents, and families early on. Dual outcomes are at the heart of true 2Gen programs. Whether explicit or implicit, outcomes for children and their parents must be embedded in programs and practices that use 2Gen approaches to improve family economic security and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Assessing how well a program meets a family's needs should include indicators that measure the impact on both children and parents.

Be completely grounded in 2Gen. To successfully adopt a 2Gen culture, everyone involved must fully understand and commit to a 2Gen approach. Not all programs that are in service of children and parents are 2Gen. Educare schools often have pieces of 2Gen, but do not fully understand everything that is required to make change happen for whole families. Critical elements of a true 2Gen approach include deliberate integration and follow-through and a feedback loop to ensure new programs, services, and systems are meeting parents' needs and leading to strong outcomes for the entire family.

Assessing and examining the family engagement goals for parents, and building community partnerships for parents to receive job training, access to quality health care, and

connections to resources that will help them thrive as economic drivers of their families, not just as parents, will lead to fully integrated 2Gen programming. For this to happen, parents must be at the table and integral to the discussion.

Consider the economic infrastructure for 2Gen outcomes.

Different communities have different job markets. The 2Gen field has seen momentum in a sectoral approach aligned with stackable credential job training for health care, manufacturing, and hospitality career pathways. Workforce development program partnerships with early childhood sites require careful analysis of parents' aspirations, needs, and capacities. The Educare schools recognized that bringing employers and workforce providers to the table early on is critical to strengthening parents' understanding of available jobs and educating employers about the gaps parents face when pursuing postsecondary and workforce training.

LESSONS FROM 2GEN ACCELERATOR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION:

Get critical buy-in from leadership from the beginning. The leader of the organization is critical to the overall success of the project. If there is no commitment from the top, it will be impossible to make change happen on the ground. To make real progress, someone who is authorized to change the

“It’s really important to have your own house together and then bring other people in. Early on, we needed more buy-in from the top and from the people who would have to implement the work. And we needed a better idea of how time-consuming this would be. To really do this right takes a lot of time.”

– Kristen Holzinger, Educare Central Maine

way the organization goes about its work and able to make decisions about spending time and other resources needs to be at the table and engaged in addressing challenges from the beginning.

Additionally, the project lead, i.e., the person who is driving the project, must understand his or her role and be prepared to see the project through to success. Creating a detailed application process for a funded cohort approach may help teams think through what they are signing up for and ensure groups are ready to fully participate and have the right team in place. Fostering more opportunities for the teams to communicate and share ideas with each other between the in-person convenings (i.e., establishing regular conference calls, a Facebook page, or a listserve) may build connections and trust more quickly and lead to a greater exchange of ideas.

Be deliberate about putting a team in place. Adopting a 2Gen approach means changing

the culture of an organization. One person cannot make this happen single-handedly. A highly functioning team needs both leadership (people who can make decisions) and on-the-ground staff (people who have to carry out the decisions). As the teams gained a fuller understanding of the project, they realized the advantage of having a variety of players at the table and some teams brought on additional partners. Conversely, one team realized it may have had too many different partners and found it was limiting itself to activities that touched on all the different voices at the table. Ensuring participants have a clear understanding of the project going in will help them assemble teams that bring the right skills, resources, and connections. Offering teams guidelines on who to have on board may also be useful.

Set clear expectations. To fully and successfully integrate 2Gen into their work, teams need to be committed to working together to change the culture of their organization and change the roles people play. The teams figured out how to make the most of the program and use all the available resources, but it took some of them until near the end of the project to fully understand how to use these resources to intentionally integrate the five key components of the 2Gen approach into their programs. Providing more guidance up front and a clear description of the process and expectations could spur more early progress and may lead to stronger results.

Anticipate staff changes. For any lengthy project, staff changes are hard to avoid. People get promoted, take leave, relocate, or change jobs. Anticipating changes, ensuring the entire organization is briefed on and bought into the project, and building a pipeline of individuals who can step into the project when needed will help keep things moving forward when transitions happen. The resource team can support this effort by providing the teams with talking points and materials to help explain the project to their colleagues. Making sure the entire organization owns the project, not just the people involved, will also help.

Take full advantage of in-person convenings. Every team reported the value of being away from the office and having dedicated, focused, facilitated time to work on their action plans and get feedback from their peers. Well-planned agendas informed by pre-meeting interviews kept the sessions focused and useful. Participants appreciated seeing another group with a similar situation—or even a more challenging one than their own. These aha moments were truly acceleration points.

The teams also valued having their entire team present, along with coaches and resource team members. While the virtual convening was a useful stopgap to keep the conversation moving between the in-person sessions, it proved less productive. By design, virtual convenings make it easier for people to tune the

conversation out, multi-task, and not fully participate. They also make it hard to ensure people use the dedicated planning time to work on their individual action plans.

Bringing participants together — in person — every six months gets people in the habit of blocking the time and keeps them moving forward. Dedicated one-on-one time for action planning is critical to any successful peer learning exchange.

Be prepared to fail fast and adapt to feedback. Participants valued the feedback they received from their peers and from 2Gen experts in the field and learned the advantages of going into discussions with an open mind and a willingness to try different approaches. Additionally, site visits proved to be an important opportunity for teams to see new approaches in action and truly envision a new path forward.

Multidiscipline, multi-sector teams are not just good but vital. Successful peer learning does not require all of the teams to come from the same starting point in terms of skills or knowledge. Deliberately selecting groups that have a different range of experiences, while ensuring each group in a cohort has some lessons to share, will foster deeper discussions and learning opportunities. Identifying one or two needs or challenges all the groups need to work on (e.g., defining and communicating about 2Gen, data collection, creating feedback

2GEN COACHING: A NEW FIELD STRATEGY

Across the country, as more and more organizations and communities explore and implement 2Gen approaches, the coaching concept is becoming an important tool for technical assistance and advancement for 2Gen pilots and initiatives. This tool is also at a reflection point. While some coaches for 2Gen initiatives are professional coaches who may not specialize in 2Gen training, others are steeped in 2Gen but have not been trained as professional coaches. To fully leverage this resource, the field needs a deeper bench of 2Gen coaches who have coaching skills, 2Gen expertise, and the capacity to “connect the dots” among different partnerships.

The coaching strategy for the 2Gen Educare Accelerator project included identifying 2Gen experts from the Ascend Network (Educational Alliance, the Women’s Fund of Greater Birmingham, and JeffCo Prosperity Project). These coaches brought specific content expertise to each team and participated in monthly calls with the teams. Coaches also participated in quarterly coaching calls, reviewing challenges, sharing updates, and tackling barriers in action plans. From this strategy, several useful lessons emerged for how other initiatives might develop and implement similar coaching approaches:

- Coaching needs to be packaged as a critical piece of the process and not an optional add-on.
- Participants must see the value of coaching and be prepared and open to taking full advantage of this support. This means providing guidance on how and why particular coaches are selected and an acknowledgement that coaches are learning alongside the teams.
- Coaches need to be committed to the project and regularly seek new opportunities to support successful adoption of 2Gen policies and programs.

loops) could give the conversation a common starting point. But encouraging groups to also bring different challenges to the table will spark new thinking and ideas.

the convenings to truly build one cohesive cohort that is leaning on and learning from one another.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

As the Buffett Early Childhood Fund continues to explore opportunities to support and advance 2Gen work, the 2Gen Educare Acceleration project offers a promising model for advancing 2Gen outcomes for whole families using an early childhood platform. The project also offers useful lessons in leveraging peer learning to more deeply support its goals. As the philanthropic leaders and conveners consider the impact of this model, they should consider several opportunities to strengthen it:

- Establish stronger criteria for participating Educare schools and ensure teams are clear about the process and expectations from the start;
- Ensure participating Educare schools understand 2Gen and have the tools they need to communicate with and secure buy-in among their colleagues;
- Build more in-person convenings into the project and promote coaching as a critical piece of the project, not an optional add-on; and
- Foster stronger communication among the teams outside of

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ascend at the Aspen Institute gratefully acknowledges the contributions and resources of the following leaders who supported the development, implementation, and lessons from the 2Gen Acceleration project: Portia Kennel (Buffett Early Childhood Fund); Cynthia D. Jackson (Ounce of Prevention); Diane Bellem and Danielle Smith (Sheltering Arms); Janet Topolsky and Travis Green (Community Strategies Group); Mary Page Wilson-Lyons, Gayle Perryman, and Karenne Berry, who served as coaches to the Educare sites; and the site team leaders noted in our opening letter and staff who made this work possible. Special thanks to the staff and families at Sheltering Arms for select photos. Thank you to consultant Gwyn Hicks for her support.



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