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Two-Generation Strategy Yields Promising Results: The LIFT-AppleTree Partnership Pilot Project

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Committed to helping families create an intergenerational cycle of opportunity, LIFT, a national nonprofit that connects parents with trained coaches who help them achieve career and financial goals, implements a two-generation (2Gen) strategy. Their partnership with AppleTree, a recognized leader in evidence-based early childhood education, demonstrates LIFT's commitment to staying laser-focused on the needs of its members – the parents – while recognizing that the educational and financial well-being of parents affects their kids. The initial data from this strategic partnership has yielded promising results. [See box on page 6 for more on the 2Gen continuum.]

Two-generation approaches are based, in part, on research that establishes that when parents do better, so do their children. Likewise, when children do well, their parents are inspired to do better. Specifically, when parents are thriving financially and emotionally, they can better create stable home environments and serve as positive role models for their children. And when children's needs are being met, parents strive to do better in all aspects of their lives. Such is the concept of mutual motivation, as coined by Ascend Fellow Dr. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale. Each is motivated by the other, in a continuously reaffirming, upward-moving cycle, taking the whole family to heights beyond what might be achieved when focusing solely on either the parent or the child.¹

A Partnership that Yields A 2Gen Strategy: Driving More than the Sum of Individual Parts

Taking a 2Gen approach to its work, LIFT focuses on the parents while partnering with a dozen early childhood education providers, like AppleTree, who serve their children. AppleTree, a network of charter preschools, aims to close the achievement gap by helping young children develop the social, emotional, and academic skills they need to thrive before entering kindergarten. Likewise, AppleTree is also committed to taking a 2Gen approach to its work. It was out of a shared commitment to 2Gen approaches that this 2Gen pilot project emerged.

An 18-month partnership between the two organizations, LIFT coaches work with the parent members on-site at AppleTree's flagship location at THEARC, in Southeast Washington, DC, connecting with new parents at school drop-off and strengthening relationships at school and community events.

The first principle of the 2Gen approach is to articulate and track outcomes for children and the adults in their lives. LIFT members consent to data sharing with LIFT's partners as part of their onboarding process; and LIFT and AppleTree worked together to analyze de-identified data.

Together, they selected two critical early education indicators that have well-documented links to the experience of poverty in young children: 1) school attendance rates; and 2) social-emotional skills. Progress was assessed against these indicators for 18 students whose parents worked with a LIFT coach and these data were compared to data of students whose parents were not working with LIFT coaches.

AppleTree employed its proprietary tool called the Positive Behavior Rating Scale (PBRs); which is a ten-question survey that is administered to children by their teacher each quarter over the course of a school year. The PBRs measures a student's progress in developing behaviors such as regulating emotions, adapting to change, cooperating with peers, and celebrating success. It is designed to track the frequency with which students demonstrate these positive behaviors and reports them in a composite score. These composite scores, compared over time, paint a picture of the student's development.

Simultaneous to tracking the students' outcomes, LIFT tracked the parents' progress in three areas. Whether they:

- 1) maintain or increase household income;
- 2) increase their net savings or debt; and
- 3) persist in or complete an education program.

How LIFT Works

LIFT unlocks the potential of families living in poverty by placing parents (also known as members) in the driver's seat, moving away from "managing" issues to giving members the tools and resources they need to rise above and stay above the poverty line. However, envisioning a future not in poverty when poverty may be all one knows can be daunting. LIFT helps its members see what is possible for themselves in order to change the future for their families. Not only does poverty end at LIFT, but so does fear and feeling hopeless.

They show members how to dream big by planning small. Members acquire the skills to take action, meet goals, and track progress.

LIFT connects members with professionally trained coaches who help them problem-solve immediate issues, stabilize their families, and set small and large goals for the future. A one-on-one relationship between a member and a coach places the parent at the center and the coach in a supporting role.

Through a collaborative process, individual and family goals are set and achieved. Opportunities for building social capital, that is, the informal networks and relationships that offer additional support and help to buffer life's challenges, are also intentionally created at LIFT.

Progress toward these outcomes are checked at the third month milestone in the LIFT program; and all members in the pilot achieved one or more of these outcomes.

Impact of the LIFT-AppleTree Strategy

Results from the LIFT-AppleTree pilot project are promising, both in impact on children and impact on their parents.

Positive Behavior Rating Scale data for the 18 children whose parents participated in the LIFT program indicate compelling early results.

Impact on the Children

Increase in Children's Social-Emotional Skills:

Children whose parents were highly engaged with a LIFT coach had 50 percent greater increases in their social-emotional skills from the beginning to the middle of the year compared to their peers.

Higher Attendance Rates of Children: Overall, students whose parents were highly engaged with a LIFT coach had above-average attendance rates of 92.2 percent compared to the network average of 89.6 percent. This translates to an extra week of school attendance over the course of a full year.

Simultaneous to tracking students' progress, LIFT also tracked the parents' progress. Likewise, the progress made by parents whose children were engaged with AppleTree is also encouraging.

Impact on the Parents

Increase in Household Income and Savings, and Educational Persistence of Parents: All of the LIFT parents reaching the three-month milestone demonstrated significant progress toward their longer-term goals in the areas of maintaining or increasing household income, increasing their net savings and reducing debt, and persisting in or completing an education program.

About LIFT

Headquartered in Washington, DC, LIFT connects with families in four cities with high rates of concentrated poverty: Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC. Since LIFT's founding in 1998 by Aspen Institute Ascend Fellow Kirsten Lodal, over 12,000 volunteers have served nearly 100,000 individuals and families.

Foundational to LIFT's work is the philosophy that supporting parents in the areas of finances and career development generates benefits of social-emotional and academic achievement for their children and yields outsized earnings potential and educational attainment for the parents that transform the whole family, lifting two generations at once.

Embracing a 2Gen approach and understanding that the goal of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty cannot be achieved by one organization focused only on the adults of a household, LIFT supports the parents it serves via partnerships with a wide range of local, regional and national partners to ensure other members of the household – the whole family – receive all of the resources and support they need.

Lessons and Next Steps

These initial data are promising; and the following lessons from this pilot project have also been identified.

Partnerships are key: As is well documented in the research, early childhood interventions are critical for children's future performance. But early childhood supports are not consistent with LIFT's core competencies.

LIFT and AppleTree's partnership, based on a commitment to enabling families to achieve their full potential and the recognition that each organization brings complementary core competency and expertise, one in support of parents and the other in support of children, has yielded results for each generation and the whole family that could not have been achieved by either organization alone.

Practice enhancements: Strong parent engagement teams, both at LIFT and AppleTree, are critical to the success of the partnership and to improving service delivery.

In this model, AppleTree employs a two-person family engagement team that works closely with the LIFT program team, making targeted referrals to LIFT based on their deep understanding of the families' needs that are a product of strong, trusting relationships with families. AppleTree also ensures that parents have a dedicated space to meet with their LIFT coach and creates many opportunities for the LIFT team to meet new parents. The result is that LIFT is able to reach more parents and identify more families that are ready for engagement, as compared to the lower yield in the absence of an informed, trusted relationship.

Likewise, LIFT's program director is key in managing the relationship with AppleTree and is supported by a program manager who provides both service delivery and coach development, and a parent engagement coordinator, who does outreach and recruitment.

More on the AppleTree Instructional Model

AppleTree serves 34 percent of the charter preschool market in the District of Columbia, operating 11 high-quality early learning campuses. In tandem, AppleTree's research and development team, AppleTree Institute, has developed a comprehensive instructional model for three- and four-year-olds, called Every Child Ready (ECR). ECR is focused on providing teachers the resources they need to help all children thrive.

The model is rooted in developmentally appropriate early learning standards and aims to create a fun and interesting learning environment for all children.

Every Child Ready includes three integrated components:

1) What to Teach: A curriculum with 10 engaging thematic units and a two year scope and sequence to support three- and four-year-olds;

2) How to Teach: A personalized, ongoing educator professional learning program to engage teachers and instructional leaders with a range of competencies; and

3) How to Measure Success: A multi-tiered measurement approach to social-emotional development, student achievement, and classroom quality.

A Foundation on Which to Build

These early data with 18 families establish a 2Gen proof of concept for LIFT parents and their children educated by AppleTree and lay important groundwork for more rigorous explorations in the future. Having demonstrated both impact and the ability to track and share data, LIFT and AppleTree will expand and build on the pilot to include more families and increasingly intentional data sharing practices in the 2019-2020 school year, recruiting 60 new families while maintaining application of the 2Gen strategy with the 18 families that have been part of this pilot.

These early indicators are consistent with other research findings from Terri J. Sabol and Dr. Lindsay Chase-Landsdale from Northwestern University that highlight the great potential for Head Start and other early childhood programs to support parents' own educational opportunities through explicit 2Gen strategies that simultaneously seek to improve parent and child success.³

Conclusion

These data from this initial pilot project, a partnership between LIFT and AppleTree, demonstrate an effective 2Gen strategy that yields strong outcomes for parents and their children and positive impact on whole families. Partnerships that are intentional in their purpose and complementary in their approach, tracking outcomes for both parents and children, can support families' desires to achieve intergenerational opportunity.

AppleTree Model continued...

Every Child Ready is currently being used in 22 schools and partner organizations, serving more than 2,000 students across Washington, DC and New York City.²

2Gen Principles

In working with states, counties, tribes and other jurisdictions in their progression along the 2Gen Continuum, Ascend has found that adhering to a set of key principles increases both the quality of the implementation and efficacy of achieving outcomes as a 2Gen organization. These principles are:

- **Measure and account for outcomes for both children and parents**
- **Engage and listen to the voices of families**
- **Ensure equity**
- **Foster innovation and evidence together**
- **Align and link systems and funding streams**

The following **Resources for 2Gen implementation**, and many more, can be found on the Ascend website:

- *Accelerating 2Gen Approaches at Educare*, Sarah Haight and Marjorie Sims, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, July 2018
- *Community Leadership for 2Gen Approaches; A Case Study In Sarasota, Florida*, February, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2017
- *301: Community Guide to 2Gen Approaches*, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, October 2017
- *Using Research and Evaluation to Support Programs that Promote Parents' Economic Security and Children's Well-being*, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation, Christine Ross, Emily Sama-Miller, and Lily Roberts, January 2018.

2Gen Organization Continuum

The 2Gen Organization Continuum illustrates the progression of an organization, starting from a 2Gen approach, moving to a 2Gen strategy, and finally to becoming a 2Gen organization, and the organizational shifts required at each phase to ensure fidelity to a 2Gen model and to achieve outcomes for each family member being served. The partnership between LIFT and AppleTree demonstrates execution of a 2Gen Strategy, with the leadership of both organizations committed to whole family success for its clients.



* Throughout the continuum, cultural competency is a prerequisite.

Endnotes

¹ Lombardi, J., Mosle, A., Patel, N., Schumacher, R., and Stedron, J. (2014). *Gateways to Two Generations; The Potential for Early Childhood Programs and Partnerships to Support children and Parents Together*. Washington, DC: Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

² AppleTree Institute, 2011.

³ Sabol, T. and Chase-Lansdale, L. (2014). The Influence of Low-Income Children's Participation in Head Start on Their Parents' Education and Employment, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. v. 34, issue 1.

Acknowledgements

With gratitude to those who contributed to this brief:

The LIFT-AppleTree Families
Danny Friel, LIFT
Hina Musa, LIFT
Sophie Sahaf, LIFT
Abby Carlson, AppleTree
Rebecca Kimport, AppleTree
Juanita White, AppleTree
Lori Severens, Ascend at the Aspen Institute
Marjorie Sims, Ascend at the Aspen Institute



AppleTree

The AppleTree Organization consists of AppleTree Institute for Education Innovation and AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School which represent an intersection of research, policy, and practice. Our activities, projects, and programs all contribute to our mission of closing achievement gaps so young children can thrive in kindergarten and the primary grades.

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LIFT is a national nonprofit founded in 1998, and headquartered in Washington, DC with service locations in Chicago, DC, Los Angeles and New York. Since its founding, LIFT has empowered thousands of individuals and families to break the cycle of poverty and foster intergenerational mobility. What sets LIFT apart from other anti-poverty organizations is our investment in parents' dreams, goals and aspirations – such as going back to school, improving credit, eliminating debt, or securing a living wage job that supports the entire family – through one-on-one personalized coaching. Twenty years of supporting low-income parents has taught us that they want what all parents do – personal growth, a network of people that care for them, financial stability for themselves and a better, safer life for their children.

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