

MEETING YOUNG PARENTS WHERE THEY DREAM

A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR A 2GEN APPROACH IN LA COUNTY

ascend
aspen institute



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ascend at the Aspen Institute wishes to thank Araceli Sandoval-Gonzalez, Founder/CEO of ASG Strategy Consulting Inc; Mary Gray, Managing Director, and Alison Miller, Senior Consultant of Engage R&D; Namrata Patel, Executive Director of Research for Social Impact; Parker Blackman, Executive Director of the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment; Paul Ong, Socioeconomic Consultant at Ong & Associates; the LA County 2Gen Planning Committee and Parent Advisors (listed in Appendix A) for their partnership. Ascend wishes to thank the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for their support of this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Dear Colleague Letter | 4 |
| Executive Summary..... | 6 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| Collaborative Framework | 13 |
| Young Families in LA County Profile | 18 |
| Opportunities and Resources | 20 |
| Challenges and Barriers to Success | 25 |
| Plan of Action | 39 |
| Template for Assessing Plan of Action | 46 |
| Table of Recommendations by Sector..... | 49 |
| Appendix A: List of Parent Advisors and Planning Committee | 55 |

DEAR COLLEAGUES:

Ascend at the Aspen Institute strives to build intergenerational family prosperity and well-being for children and the adults in their lives; we utilize a two-generation (2Gen) approach to innovate and develop solutions to challenges impacting families across sectors. There is a long road ahead to implement 2Gen approaches systematically at the local, state, and federal levels. Partnerships are the cornerstone of this work. Ascend engages with a multitude of organizations, public officials, and, of course, parents, to inform and advance policies and services to better support families.

In 2021, Ascend received funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to deepen understanding about the experiences of young adult parents (18-24) in LA County – the most populous county in the nation and with one of the most dynamic economies in the world – including how they navigate public systems to meet their needs. We also wanted to understand the aspirations they have for themselves and their children. Of the approximated 10 million residents who live in LA County, nearly 49,000 are young parents between the ages of 18-24, which care for about 67,000 children across 39,000 households. A disproportionate number of young parents and their children in LA County live below the poverty line – 30% and 35% respectively, compared to 14% of all LA County residents.

To better understand the experiences and needs of young families, the Ascend Parent Advisors (composed of 13 parents) offered insight and feedback on this work and shared their lived experiences as parents of young children with low incomes in LA County. Additionally, the 2Gen LA County Planning Committee – a cohort of Ascend Network leaders representing direct service organizations serving young families – helped Ascend connect to other organizations and hosted two focus groups with young Black mothers who have low incomes in LA County. A field scan and landscape analysis were developed to explore policies and practices that currently exist to serve young families and children in LA County, as well as identify gaps in resources. Finally, two county-wide convenings took place with more than 150 participants exploring opportunities and challenges, identifying policy and practice priorities, and identifying areas of collaboration and partnership all to serve young families in LA County.

"A Vision for the Future of Young Children and Families In LA County" convening (Credit: Chris Williams for Ascend at the Aspen Institute)



Drawing upon the expertise of Parent Advisors and stakeholders from nonprofit, private, and public organizations in LA County, this Collaborative Framework and Plan of Action distills key learnings and findings to inform and strengthen support for young parents and their children in LA County. The goals of this report are to better understand families' needs, highlight practices and policies that utilize a 2Gen approach, showcase opportunities to forge connections between organizations to streamline work, and offer recommendations across sectors and at all levels.

The findings and recommendations outlined in this report would not exist without the investment of many community members and partners, however, the work does not stop here. Our hope is that this document sparks imagination of what a 2Gen approach could look like in LA County, encourages collaboration between organizations and families, and fuels action to better serve young parents and their children across services.

Thank you for your continued support, time, and commitment to serving families.

Sincerely,



Marjorie Sims
Managing Director,
Ascend at the Aspen Institute



Sarah Haight
Director, 2Gen Practice
Ascend at the Aspen Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are approximately 10 million residents in LA County of which nearly **49,000 are young parents between the ages of 18-24**. This population cares for about 67,000 children across 39,000 households. A **disproportionate number of young parents and their children in LA County live below the poverty line – 30% and 35% respectively**, compared to 14% of all LA County residents. With a population and economy larger than many states and even some countries, it is critical to explore the experiences of young parents in LA County, including how they navigate public systems, identify workforce and post-secondary education opportunities, and contend with other barriers that prevent systems and policies from meeting their unique needs.

In order to understand the needs of young families in LA County and highlight which practices and policy opportunities are most ripe for action, **a range of approaches were used to gather information and recommendations including:** (1) meeting regularly with a Parent Advisors (13 parents who live in LA County) and a Planning Committee (a cohort of leaders representing direct service organizations serving young families in LA County); (2) a landscape scan, more than 40 key informant interviews, and demographic analysis using customized tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files; and (3) two county-wide convenings with more than 150 participants, including parents and stakeholders from nonprofit, private, and public organizations.

This **Collaborative Framework** and accompanying **Plan of Action** draws upon input from Parent Advisors and aligns with the various initiatives underway in LA County to recommend a set of practices and policies to better support 18-24 year-old-led families.

Collaborative Framework

Collaborations and Opportunities

The Collaborative Framework presented in the full report highlights some of the many organizations and agencies integral to supporting young parents and their children in LA County. Although a multitude of impactful partnerships are underway, there are opportunities to forge new, more effective connections between organizations, departments, and agencies to address the multi-dimensional intersectionality of issues facing young parents in LA County.



Poverty Alleviation Initiative. One particularly notable model for collaboration is exemplified by the work that has been done in relation to the LA County Chief Executive Office’s [Poverty Alleviation Initiative \(PAI\)](#) which aims to address how to prevent, mitigate, and avoid re-entry into poverty. The initiative is taking an intentional, collaborative, and coordinated approach to engaging a range of stakeholders including community residents, advocates, educators, researchers, policy experts, County commissioners, representatives of community-based providers, philanthropy, cities, businesses, the State of California, and former federal administrations.



Partners for Children South LA. Another noteworthy example is [Partners for Children South LA](#) which is a holistic and cross-disciplinary collaborative of thirty-eight health and human services organizations that partner to provide streamlined connections to services and cross-agency care

coordination for children (age birth to 5) and their families. The *PCSLA Early Childhood System of Care* includes more than 45 Care Coordinators, who are primarily working to coordinate services and access to resources for children and families in South LA.



2Gen Approach. When thinking about what it will take to address the needs of young parents and their children in LA County, there is a robust body of evidence that demonstrates that **two-generation approaches** (2Gen) can accelerate a families' journey on the path to permanent economic security and economic mobility. The [2Gen](#) approach addresses the needs of children and their parents *together* and seeks to harness a family's full potential.

illuminating Key Challenges to Success Faced Among Young Parents

Decades of research supports moving from providing services and information solely to the parent or the child to empowering families by combining child and adult-focused services and prioritizing two-way communication and partnerships. Many programs in LA have begun to make significant strides in integrating 2Gen approaches into their current work; however, more can still be done.



Early Childhood Care and Education. [Research](#) shows that investments in high-quality early education yield a 13% return on investment based on increased school and career achievement, as well as reduced social costs. Yet, for young families in LA County, 42% of their children are enrolled in preschool. Parent Advisors and other stakeholders rooted in the community discussed the following issues and challenges: (1) unstable ECE supports due to COVID-19 and a lack of availability, (2) lack of flexible scheduling, (3) barriers in the enrollment process, and (4) distrust of providers.



Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways. Helping parents achieve educational milestones through postsecondary education and workforce development programs leads to higher wages and jobs with greater benefits and opportunities for growth. Parent Advisors note the following challenges in relation to postsecondary education and employment pathways: (1) need for greater awareness and access to resources and (2) financial constraints.



Economic Assets. A \$3,000 annual increase in parents' income when their child is young is associated with a [17% increase](#) in the child's future earnings. From our analysis of ACS data, approximately one-third of young parents (36%) live in a household as a couple and approximately one-third (35%) are single females who live in a three-generation household. The biggest barriers to economic asset building that the Parent Advisors are grappling with include: (1) lack of affordable housing, (2) high cost of living, (3) lack of connected and aligned opportunities to access public benefits, and (4) benefit cliffs are destabilizing and detrimental.



Health and Mental Health. To ensure families' ability to flourish, children and the adults in their lives must have healthy environments, [sound nutrition](#), and access to high-quality care for physical and mental health. The top issues that Parent Advisors raised in relation to health and mental health in LA County are: (1) timely access to mental health services is vital, (2) services must be culturally appropriate and asset-based, and (3) there is a fear of losing children if parents share their mental health struggles.



Social Capital. To thrive and move ahead in life, both adults and children need connections to people and information, along with opportunities to both give and receive support. Evidence suggests that developing social capital contributes to a range of benefits for families, from [improving parents' well-being](#) to [increasing children's regular school attendance](#). Challenges Parent Advisors have

experienced include: (1) feeling socially isolated and often deeply alone and (2) engaging fathers in programs is key but it can be hard to find those that want to participate.

Plan of Action Recommendations

Driven by Parent Advisors and validated by learnings from the input of community-rooted partners, the county-wide convenings, and the landscape analysis, a set of principles and recommendations for **programs, partnerships, policies, and systems** which requires state and federal support in LA County are outlined in the Plan of Action.

- ❁ **Create a no-wrong door approach to accessing benefits.** The creation of a clear, cohesive, and digitally accessible platform that can identify all social services families qualify for would ensure young parents and their children have access to benefits.
- ❁ **Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems.** This includes increasing access to information in spaces where young parents are most likely to be, strengthening public-private partnerships and connection to trusted community partners, and the creation of Parent Councils.
- ❁ **Address the profound issues of childcare and housing.** There are a range of policy solutions needed including increasing the standard reimbursement rate for early childhood care and education, increasing Housing Choice Vouchers, and expanding eligibility of free tuition to income-eligible young parents returning to school (which the Poverty Alleviation Initiative currently addresses).

INTRODUCTION

Decades of research have shown that early life and childhood is a critical time for brain and body development. Burgeoning [evidence](#) suggests that the transition to parenting is another distinct and important period when major changes are happening in the brain. Since the transition new parents are experiencing is typically occurring in parallel with their child's first and most vital sensitive period, two-generation approaches that focus supports on the needs of both children and parents can promote health and well-being and lay a foundation for them to thrive.

"Don't meet parents where they are. Meet parents where they dream."

- Ascend Parent Advisor

[3.4 million children across America live with parents ages 18-24](#). As young parents enter into adulthood and parenthood, not only are their brains changing, but they often face unique systemic obstacles such as disruption in education and/or employment, lack of quality childcare, inadequate or unstable housing, limited access to comprehensive healthcare and mental health services, and a lack of parenting support. Offering an integrated, intentional, and holistic approach to supporting young families is pivotal to leveraging their strengths and creating an intergenerational cycle of opportunity.

Spanning over 4,600 square miles, Los Angeles – the most populous county in the nation and one of the most dynamic economies in the world– is often viewed as a bellwether for progressive policies and practices, but the region is grappling with siloed systems and disjointed programs, a lack of coordinated early childhood and postsecondary education, high living costs and stagnant wages, and social isolation, fueled by transportation and housing that is expensive and limited. There are approximately 10 million residents in LA County of which nearly **49,000 are young parents between the ages of 18-24**. This population cares for about 67,000 children across 39,000 households. **A disproportionate number of young parents and their children in LA County live below the poverty line – 30% and 35% respectively**, compared to 14% of all LA County residents. With a population and economy larger than many states and even some countries, it is critical to understand the experiences of young parents in LA County, including how they navigate public systems, identify workforce and post-secondary education opportunities, and contend with other barriers that prevent systems and policies from meeting their unique needs.

[Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) (Ascend) serves as the backbone for advancing solutions and innovations grounded in two-generation (2Gen) approaches that create pathways to educational success, economic mobility, and well-being from one generation to the next. Ascend does this by: (1) investing in leadership to advance systems, policy, and narrative change, (2) elevating and scaling ideas and innovations from communities, and (3) leveraging the power of convening and fostering connection and collaboration. 2Gen approaches recognize whole family units, as families define themselves, in order to understand the multiple dimensions of family life and consider a variety of pathways for promoting positive, pragmatic, and effective outcomes for everyone. Ascend works with families as experts and meaningfully engages parents and caregivers in designing policies and programs that affect them in order to develop holistic, integrated, and equity-focused solutions which maximizes long-term impact for families and communities. Since 2011, Ascend has also partnered with Ascend Network Partners and Ascend Fellows to deepen and strengthen

2Gen approaches in key places – cities, counties, states, and regions – recognizing that 2Gen approaches are contextual, require leadership and political will, and need to be culturally and linguistically-informed.

In 2021, Ascend received funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to explore what it would take to produce a roadmap for implementing and scaling practices and policies in LA County that focus on 18-24 year-old-led families. Drawing upon the expertise of Parent Advisors and stakeholders from nonprofit, private, and public organizations in LA County, this Collaborative Framework and Plan of Action seek to distill key learnings and findings to inform and strengthen support for young parents and their children in LA County.

How to Use the Collaborative Framework and Plan of Action

This **Collaborative Framework** and the accompanying **Plan of Action** draws upon input from Parent Advisors and aligns with the various initiatives underway in LA County to recommend a set of practices and policies to better support the empowerment, dreams, and prosperity of 18-24 year-old-led families.

This report distills key learning and findings from the information gathered from the variety of sources outlined below. It offers a Collaborative Framework and accompanying Plan of Action that policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropy can use as a roadmap and reference when supporting young parents and their children in LA County. The Collaborative Framework is organized as follows:

- 1) **Collaborative Framework.** An overview that captures some of the many organizations and agencies integral to supporting young parents and their children in LA County.
- 2) **Young Families Profile.** Key characteristics and demographic data of LA County’s young parents and their families.
- 3) **Opportunities and Resources.** The resources that exist to support young families from a multi-generational perspective and evidence of progress being made at the county level.
- 4) **Challenges and Barriers to Success.** The most pressing issues and challenges young families are facing in LA County.
- 5) **Plan of Action.** Opportunities and recommendations for strengthening a multi-generational approach across programs, partnerships, policies, and systems in LA County.
- 6) **Template for Assessing Plan of Action.** Building off insights from the Collaborative Framework, the Plan of Action template provides a blueprint of key actions to achieve better outcomes for families in LA County.

Background and Approach

In order to understand the needs of young families in LA County and explore which practices and policy opportunities are most ripe for action, **three main strategies for learning and community engagement have been employed:**

1. Parent Advisors and Planning Committee

Centering parents' voices and lived experiences is the guiding principle in this work and of two-generation (2Gen) approaches. The [2Gen approach](#) is rooted in the belief that parents are the experts on both their own lives and the strategies that aim to improve them. To do this, Ascend worked with community-based partners to recruit 13 Parent Advisors with young children who live in LA County and have low incomes (see Appendix A). All Parent Advisors resided in LA County at the time of their selection and throughout their eight-month tenure as Advisors; all are mothers; approximately half identified as Latinx (see note on page 8 regarding the inclusion of Black mothers and fathers in listening sessions). Ten of the Parent Advisors were 18-24 years old at the time they participated, two were 25. All members of the Parent Advisors received \$3,500 stipends to provide insight and feedback on the work and share about their experiences as young parents navigating complex public and nonprofit systems to acquire services and support. Through multiple calls and listening sessions over a span of eight months, the Parent Advisors group ensures the voices of parents stay at the heart of the work and deepen the practice of honoring and compensating the sharing of their expertise. The Parent Advisors' insights elevate critical issues impacting their daily lives and informed both the focus of this analysis and the range of opportunities and recommendations that follow.

In addition to the Parent Advisors, Ascend established the 2Gen LA County Planning Committee, a cohort of leaders from the Ascend Network representing direct service organizations serving young families in LA County. These leaders regularly shared insights and helped Ascend connect with other organizations and individuals in LA County. Separate to the Parent Advisors, Ascend worked with the Planning Committee to host two focus group sessions in August and September 2022 with young Black mothers in LA County living with low incomes to learn more about their experience including barriers and facilitators to achieving their dreams and goals. No Black fathers participated.

2. Landscape Analysis, Key Informant Interviews, and Data Review

A field scan and landscape analysis were developed to explore the policies and practices that are currently in place to support young families and children in LA County, as well as the gaps and roadblocks that exist for young families in need of resources. To achieve this, online research was conducted through a scan of multiple county departments and community-based organizations that serve young parents. More than 40 key informant interviews were also conducted to map and establish a baseline of program, philanthropic, systems, and policy opportunities impacting young families.

Customized tabulations of the 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files, which contains data at the individual person and household level, was analyzed to create a demographic profile of young families between the ages of 18-24 in LA County.¹ The ACS is a continuous survey designed to collect detailed demographic, social, economic,

¹ Limitations to the ACS data include: 1) Data Source - Because the profiles are based on a survey, they are statistical estimates subject to sampling errors. All estimates should be interpreted carefully given the data limitations. In order to have a sufficient number of observations, the project uses the 2011-15 and 2016-20 PUMS, and harmonizes the available data to account for changes in the data between the two files. 2) Sampling - The sample is based primarily on young mothers living with their own

and housing information about the nation's population. It is considered the gold standard for such information, which is widely used by government agencies, private companies, and researchers for analysis, planning, programs, and resource allocations.

3. County-Wide Convenings

Ascend worked with the Parent Advisors and community leaders to plan two regional summits in March 2022 (virtual) and June 2022 (in-person) with more than 150 participants, including parents and stakeholders from nonprofit, private, and public organizations in LA County that are invested in supporting children and the adults in their lives. The goals for these convenings were to: (1) Explore and surface key opportunities and challenges to approaches that support, center, and serve young parents 18-24 and their families in LA County; (2) Identify strategic practice and policy priorities to align around a framework for young parents 18-24 and their families to achieve educational success, economic security, and health and wellbeing; and (3) Identify areas of collaboration and partnership for improved strategies for young parents 18-24 and their families in LA County. It is worth noting that the representation of young fathers at these convenings was limited. This is attributed to both a lack of programming and services for young fathers as well as data indicating the majority of young custodial parents in LA County are mothers.

children between the ages of 18 to 24. Own children include biological sons and daughters, stepchildren and adopted children. The project includes young mothers living in either their own households or in their parents' household (three generation households). The project also includes households with single fathers who are living with their own children, are the reference person, and are between the ages of 18 to 24. While the sample for analysis is incomplete (e.g., the difficulties to identify young fathers in three-generation households, thus not included), it is likely that the sample includes a large majority of young parents and their children living together, perhaps up to nine-tenth of the population.

COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK

Although there are a constellation of organizations, agencies, and partnerships that are making strides to move the needle, there are opportunities to collaborate more effectively for young families in LA County. Below is an overview that captures **some of the many** organizations integral to supporting young parents and their children in LA County.

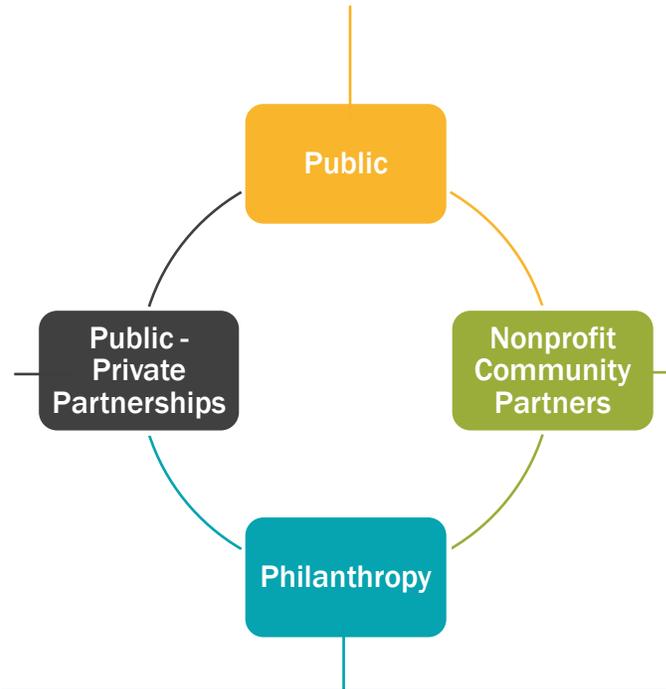
See “Key Groups in LA County Supporting Families” figure on next page.

Key Groups in LA County Supporting Families

-
- LA County Board of Supervisors
 - LA County Chief Executive Office
 - LA County Department of Children and Family Services
 - LA County Department of Public Health
 - LA County Department of Mental Health
 - LA County Department of Public Social Services
 - LA County Department of Economic Opportunity
 - LA County Development Authority
-

-
- LA County Affordable Housing Solutions Agency
 - LA County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs
 - LA City's Community Investment for Families Department
 - Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Adult Education
 - California Department of Education
 - California Community College system
 - California State University system
 - University of California system
-

-
- LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment
 - Center for Strategic Partnerships
 - LA County Food Equity Roundtable
 - Los Angeles College Promise
 - Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles
 - Early Care and Education Coalition (ECE4ALL)
 - Los Angeles County Perinatal and Early Childhood Home Visitation Consortium
 - The Village Fund



-
- Partners for Children South LA
 - Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors
 - Children's Institute, Inc.
 - LIFT LA
 - A New Way of Life
 - Educare LA at Long Beach
 - Maternal Mental Health Now
 - Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy
 - Friends of the Children-Los Angeles
 - Generation Her
 - National Crittenton
 - New Economics for Women
 - Para Los Niños
 - Imagine LA
 - Children Now
 - Crystal Stairs
 - Connections for Children
 - Strength Based Community Change
-

-
- First 5 LA
 - Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
 - Ballmer Group
 - The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
 - Sobrato Philanthropies
 - Heising-Simons Foundation
 - California Community Foundation
 - Casey Family Programs
 - The Atlas Family Foundation
 - Carl and Roberta Deutsch Family Foundation
-

Current Collaborations and Opportunities to Partner

There are multiple permutations of collaborative connections and partnerships occurring within the groups listed on page 9, including the range of public-private partnerships that are spotlighted above. One particularly notable model for collaboration is exemplified by the work that has been done in relation to the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office's [Poverty Alleviation Initiative \(PAI\)](#). The PAI team facilitated a variety of listening sessions in LA County between October 2021 and March 2022 to gather input on what should be included in the PAI strategic framework. A total of 1,024 people participated in the listening sessions, including 643 residents and individuals with lived expertise, representatives from 148 community-based organizations and stakeholder entities across the County (including some state and national partners) and employees from 23 County departments. The stakeholder voices include advocates, educators, researchers, policy experts, County commissioners, and representatives of community-based providers, philanthropy, cities, businesses, the State of California, and former federal administrations. The PAI team is also working collaboratively with other initiatives - including the Chief Executive Office's new Countywide strategic plan, and the Anti-racism, Diversity, and Inclusion unit's anti-racism strategic plan using a Life Course Model - as well other partners across sectors to meet the objectives of the plan (see the [strategic plan](#) for more information and additional detail is included in the subsequent section). The engagement that occurred in the development of the plan with interested parties has carried forward into the execution of this plan. The PAI team is in the early stages of implementing priority actions from the plan and is collaborating with multiple partners who expressed interest in those particular priority areas. The team is applying an open approach to developing these partnerships and is continually pursuing opportunities with entities that are interested. The belief that these efforts would only be successful if all parties work together is highlighted in the plan and the PAI is exercising that belief model through their continued engagement with other partners.

Another noteworthy example is [Partners for Children South LA](#) which is a holistic and cross-disciplinary collaborative of thirty-eight health and human services organizations that partner to provide connections to services and cross-agency care coordination for children (age birth to 5) and their families in Service Planning Area (SPA) 6 with concentration in the Vermont Corridor, Watts and Compton communities. The *System of Care* includes intake, triage, assessment, referral, care plans, case management, tracking, and evaluation. It acts as a personalized, integrated hub for families delivering a full spectrum of educational, health, logistical and other support services to address each family's needs. Two key features of the *System of Care* (in which staff are trained) include "a warm handoff" and "cultural competence" (more detail available in the [Impact Report](#)). These efforts are depicted in the spotlight below.

Although a multitude of impactful partnerships are underway in LA County, there are opportunities to forge new, more effective connections between organizations, departments, and agencies to address the multi-dimensional intersectionality of issues facing young parents and their families. To better serve young parents and their families, it is critical for organizations to invest in data collection that holistically captures the context and demographics of those they serve. Organizations and agencies should seek opportunities to partner and compare data collection and analysis processes in order to make them more inclusive and accessible. Organizations will also benefit from collaboration by streamlining services and filling information gaps.

It is also important to interrogate the processes that exist to invest in programs that want to innovate and evaluate in the immediate. To do so, philanthropies can support flexible, rapid-cycle evaluations appropriate for direct service organizations. By removing the requirement for a costly long-term evaluation upfront, there is an incentive for partners to work together more effectively.

Exemplary Collaboration: From Crisis to Stability

Over the course of finalizing this Collaborative Framework, an Ascend parent advisor, Lucy*, reached out to Ascend to apologize for not attending the most recent Parent Advisor meeting. Her absence, she explained, was due to losing her housing six weeks prior, when her landlord provided Lucy, her partner, and their baby, 8 months, and toddler, 2 ½, just 36 hours' notice to vacate the room they were renting. Lucy, who was previously justice-involved, moved into her car, a preowned vehicle she had purchased with her Ascend Parent Advisor stipend, with her family. She and her partner worked for UberEats and Doordash at night while their children slept, earning enough money for meals the next day. They were unable to find temporary housing at shelters, which were either full or not accepting families, and Lucy's partner lost his job due to the stress and lack of sleep resulting from being unhoused.

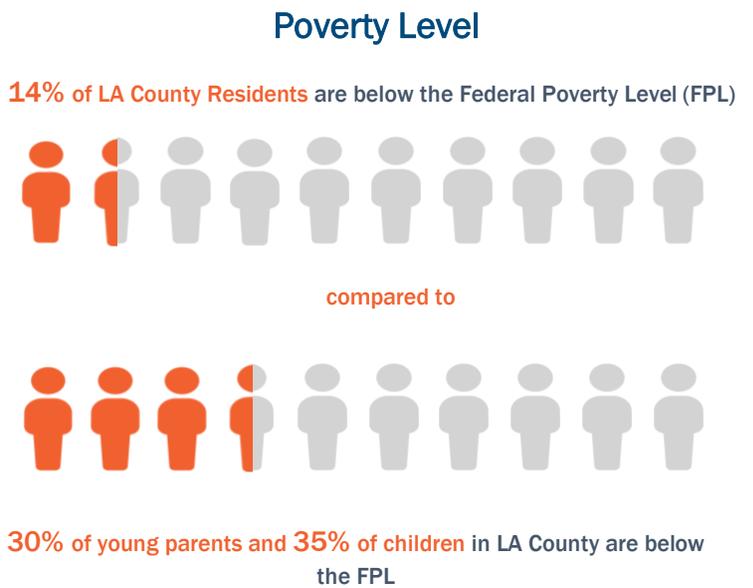
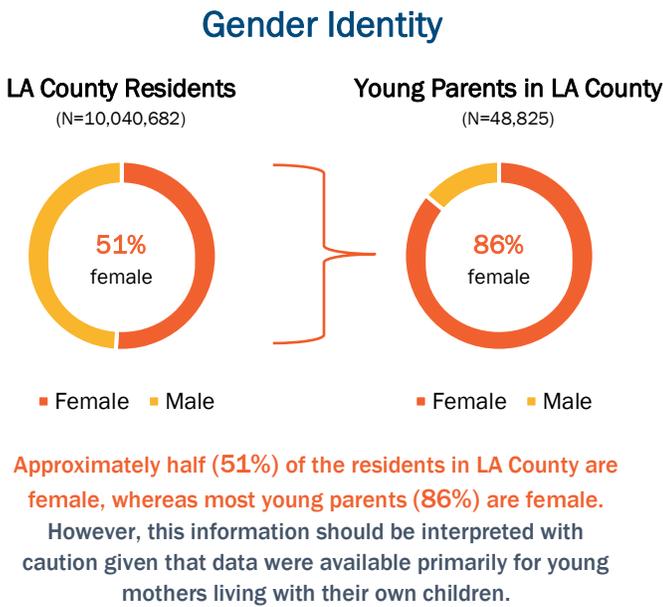
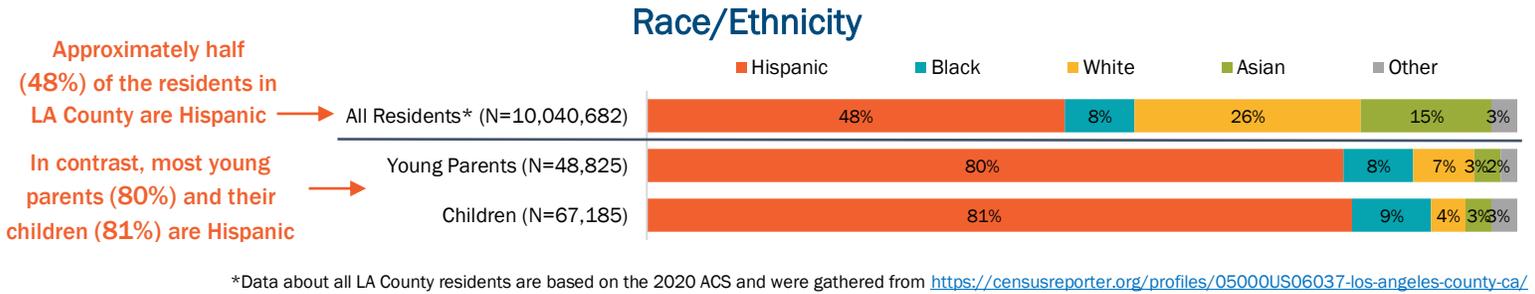
Upon learning of Lucy's situation, Ascend staff, working 2600 miles away, reached out to several social service agencies in LA County, including the Angeles Homeless Services Authority Homeless Outreach Portal. Multiple referrals were requested of Lucy and her family by the West Covina Housing Authority; Lucy's nominating organization never responded to outreach; and three separate organizations noted that there were lengthy waitlists for housing. Lucy was tired and frustrated, she worried about her own mental health and her children's safety. A planning committee member, Liza Bray, stepped in. Liza is Executive Director of Partners for Children South LA (PCSLA), which serves children from birth to 5 years and their families, with emphasis on children in kinship care and pregnant and parenting teens. PCSLA's mission is to improve access to high-quality healthcare, early education and family supports for the youngest and most vulnerable children in South Los Angeles.

Liza set in motion a 2Gen approach and system of care, which PCSLA has refined and implemented over the last decade – the “PCSLA Early Childhood System of Care” – which includes more than 40 PCSLA Care Coordinators, who are staff primarily working to coordinate services and access to resources for children and families in South LA. PCSLA does so by stepping out of silos, sharing resources, streamlining access to critical services, and removing red tape. After placing at least five phone calls to different resource leaders and organizations, Liza provided Lucy with a gas card and cash card to travel to PCSLA offices and secure a few nights' residency at a hotel. She connected directly with Upward Bound House, reducing wait times for referral processes, and partnering with the organization to identify housing for Lucy and her family within the week. PCSLA provided an emergency cash card so the family could buy food before their CalFresh payment arrived, and created a care package of diapers and toys for the children to have upon moving into their new space. This rapid-response, collaborative, relationship-based approach reflects deep cultural competency and trust building in the community, and is ripe for replication throughout LA County with Liza and her team's leadership.

*Name changed to protect privacy

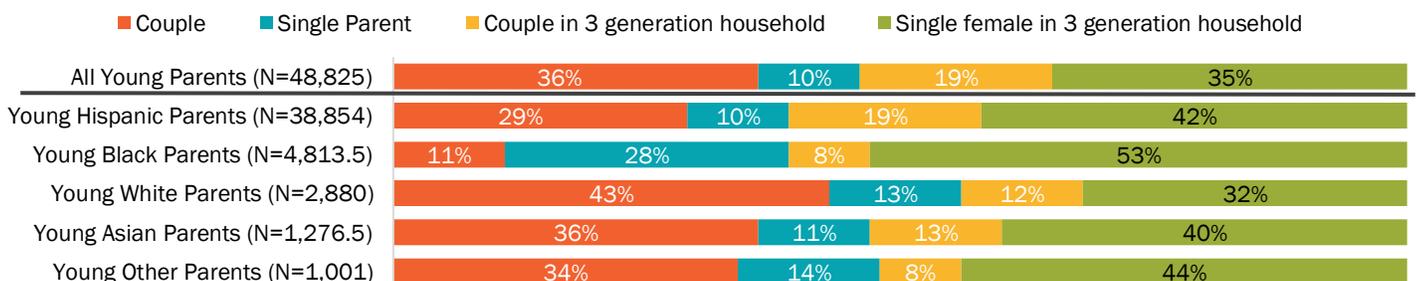
YOUNG FAMILIES IN LA COUNTY PROFILE

Key data trends from the of the American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) for **the approximately 49,000 18-24-year-old-led families in LA County** are presented below. The goal of this section is to provide context of the “who” programs and policies can support.



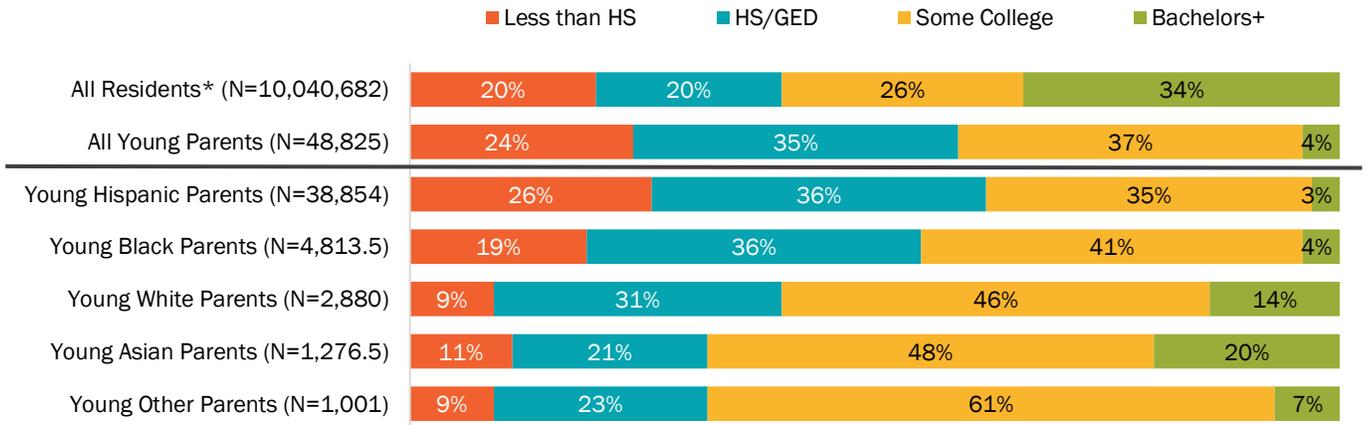
Household Type by Race of Young Parents

Approximately one-third of young parents live in a household as a couple (36%) and one-third are single females who live in a three-generation household (35%). There are, however, variations by race most notably for young Black parents.



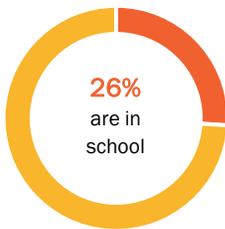
Educational Attainment by Race

The majority (76%) of young parents have a high school degree/GED. Educational attainment varies by race.



Young Parents Attending School

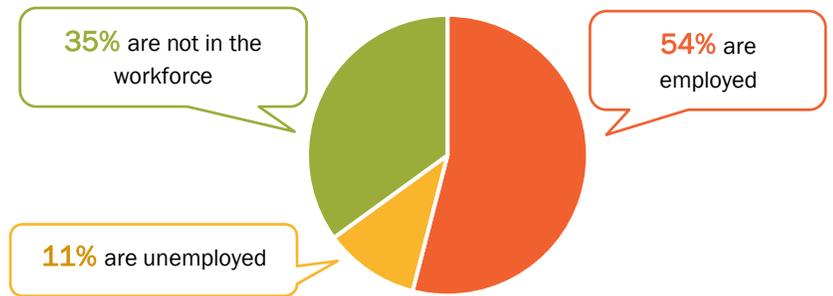
(N=48,825)



■ Attending School ■ Not in School

Employment Status of Young Parents

(N=48,825)



■ Employed ■ Unemployed ■ Not in Civilian Labor Force

Medical Insurance Aid

Young parents (N=48,825) and Children of Young Parents (N=67,185)

51% of young parents receive medical insurance aid

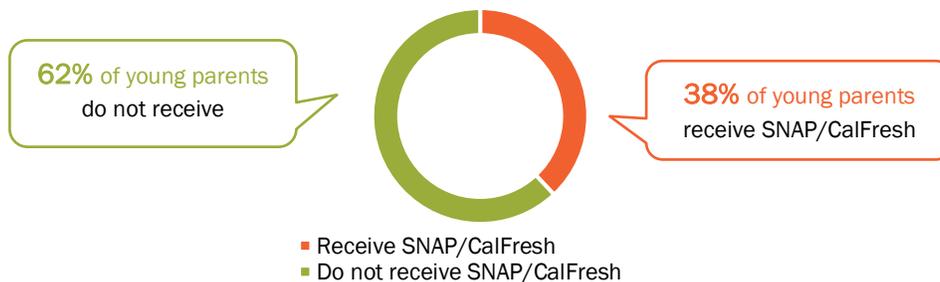


78% of children of young parents receive medical insurance aid



Use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/CalFresh

(N=48,825)



OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

This section explores a few notable initiatives and programs that exist in LA County that can serve as illustrative examples and models for supporting families moving forward. Details about specific programs are included in the subsequent section.

Key Initiatives and Motions Impacting Young Families in LA County

LA County is a hub of innovation that includes a history of collaboration across multiple sectors. Collaborative efforts have invested multiple resources and support families with young children whether it be via policy change or direct services. In May 2021, the LA County Board of Supervisors adopted a motion declaring poverty and economic opportunity to be matters of public health. The motion created a ninth Board-directed priority, the County Poverty Alleviation Initiative. Key recommendations included in this analysis of opportunities and challenges are also identified in the [Poverty Alleviation Initiative Strategic Framework](#) (PAI). This Collaborative Framework, along with the PAI framework, have real implications for strengthening the economic mobility of young families throughout the region. An immediate takeaway from the PAI is the critical influence state and federal policies have on LA County's ability to create (or end) pathways out of poverty. This analysis points to a critical opportunity to break intergenerational cycles of poverty by investing in racial equity-driven, parent-informed strategies that put young parents and their children together on a path to success. The following are the four strategies:

- Invest in Our Communities
- Strengthen Pathways to Opportunities
- Expand Access to Basic Supports
- Improve Our Service Delivery System

Several of the issues included in the PAI align with the needs and recommendations outlined in this report. Taken together, these efforts underscore the complexity of economic challenges facing young parents, which is exacerbated by state and county systems that do not effectively coordinate or communicate with one another or with the families they are designed to support. Opportunities to align and address economic challenges facing young parents include broadening access to child care, protecting guaranteed income payments from CalFresh benefit calculations, developing a human-centered service delivery system, streamlining access to services across departments, developing a centralized capability for resource sharing, reducing barriers to accessing eligible benefits, broadening affordable housing, and creating workforce development pathways that adequately compensate and end discriminatory policies and practices.

While challenges and barriers to success still very much exist for young parents, LA County is making strides as it seeks to support policies, practices, and programs that support young parents and their children holistically. Launched in 2009, in partnership with California Hospital Medical Center and Maternal Child Health Access, the [Welcome Baby pilot](#) home visiting program expanded to 14 LA-area hospitals. First 5 LA began funding the program in 2014, helping to increase enrollment to more than [22,000 as of January 2022](#). Another example is the [Babies Future Fund](#), created in 2011 by the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, which has invested over \$10 million in programs aimed at promoting equity and racial justice for LA County's youngest children. Fully implementing a vision for a

multi-generational approach across LA County will take time, but work is already underway that can inform efforts moving forward and can be seen as a guide for those looking to support young parents and their children in impactful ways.

The Two-Generation Approach

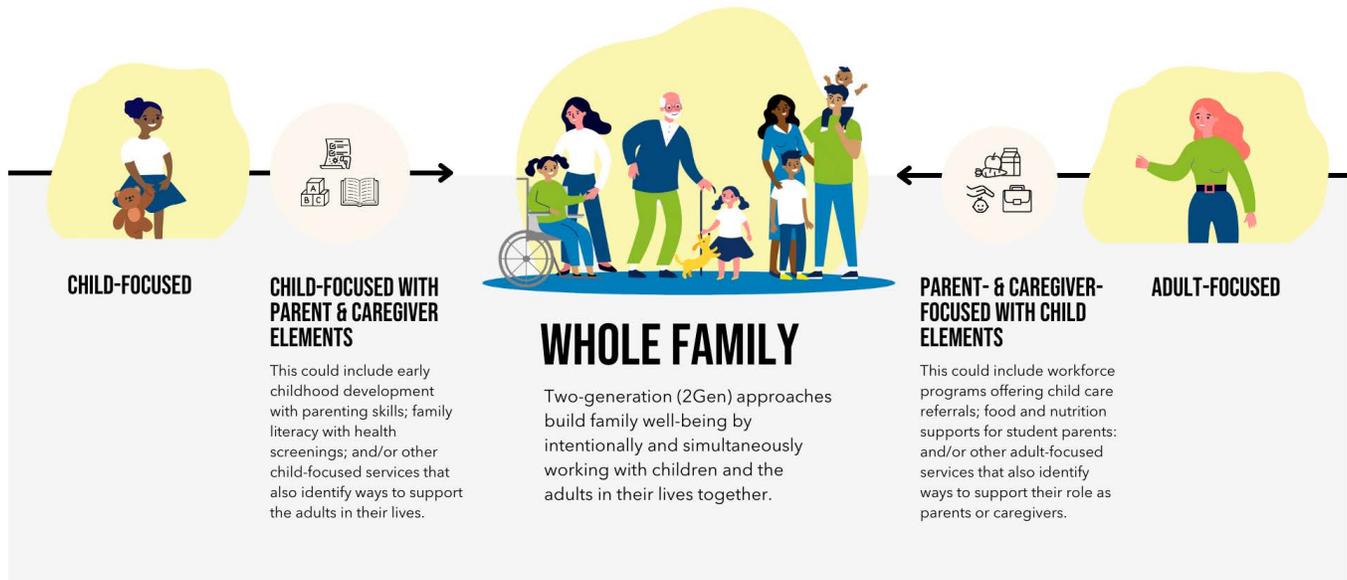
When thinking about what it will take to address the needs of young parents and their children in LA County, there is a robust body of evidence that demonstrates that **two-generation approaches** (2Gen) can accelerate a family's journey on the path to success. 2Gen approaches address the needs of children and their parents *together* and seek to harness a family's full potential and put each individual of the family on a path to permanent economic security and economic mobility. Given the tremendous need and the resounding demand for systems to better support children and young parents in LA County, advancing solutions and innovations grounded in 2Gen approaches and applying learnings from the national context is one way to help families thrive in LA County.

The 2Gen approach is referred to by **many names**, including "whole family," "intergenerational," "Ohana Nui," "multigenerational," and "multi-gen."

These terms all encompass the same fundamental belief: 2Gen approaches reflect and **embrace the diverse shapes, sizes, and structures of families** to ensure all family members can reach their full potential.

Many programs, systems, and policies focus solely on the child or the parent. The 2Gen approach does not focus exclusively on either children or adults because their well-being is interconnected. Instead, it takes stock of the family as a whole and uses a holistic, family-centered lens to understand the multiple dimensions of families and consider a variety of pathways for promoting positive outcomes (see Exhibit 1). By serving families as a whole, 2Gen approaches create opportunities for both young parents and their children to thrive by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together **This approach is especially important for young parents who face unique needs as they make the transition into adulthood and parenthood simultaneously.**

TWO-GENERATION (#2GEN) APPROACHES CENTER WHOLE FAMILIES



The 2Gen approach has a robust vision for family well-being and has identified the essential experiences, supports, and resources that are necessary for families to survive and thrive (see Exhibit 2). Programs and policies focused on early childhood and K-12 education, postsecondary and employment pathways, economic assets, and health and well-being are fundamental to a 2Gen approach. Joining these core components is social capital: the trusted networks of friends, family, and institutions upon which a family relies.

Exhibit 2. Core Components of 2Gen Approaches

#2GEN

THE SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

Two-generation approaches (2Gen) build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- Head Start
- Early Head Start
- child care partnerships
- preK
- home visiting
- Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFN)

HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH

- mental, physical, and behavioral health
- coverage and access to care
- adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress

SOCIAL CAPITAL

- peer and family networks
- coaching
- cohort strategies

ECONOMIC ASSETS

- asset building
- housing and public supports
- financial capacity
- transportation

POSTSECONDARY & EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

- community college
- training and credentials
- workforce partnerships
- employer partnerships

K-12

- kindergarten ready
- 3rd grade reading skills
- parent engagement
- graduation and postsecondary prep



Along with these six components are **five core principles** that underlie the 2Gen approach:

(1) Measure and account for outcomes for both children and their parents. Improving outcomes for both the adults and children in a family is at the heart of 2Gen strategies. 2Gen organizations should measure how well they meet the needs of children and adults. Organizations seeking to infuse the 2Gen approach into all aspects of their operations should measure their progress toward and achievement of desired changes in their structures and operations. Rigorous evaluation can then examine the degree to which improvements in organizational processes result in better outcomes for children, adults, and families as a whole.

(2) Engage and listen to the voices of families. Engage and listen to the voices of families. Families know best what they need and how current programs and services may be falling short. Listening to families and including their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations in the design and evaluation of 2Gen strategies is core to the 2Gen approach.

(3) Ensure equity. All families should have the same opportunity to reach their potential. Achieving organizational change requires incorporating principles of equity, including racial and gender equity, in all aspects of an organization’s work, from the programs and services it provides to its relationships with families and its day-to-day operations.

The highest level of 2Gen Approaches would be:

-  a system and culture that recognizes the holistic needs of families
-  to partner with families on service delivery decisions
-  to provide services to children and parents simultaneously, tracking outcomes for both

(4) Align and link systems and funding streams. Align and link systems and funding streams. Categorical funding results in an array of disparate funding streams aimed narrowly at particular needs of children, parents, and families. 2Gen programs and organizations need to braid and blend funding from multiple sources to provide whole-family services. Organizational change also requires the alignment of policies, practices, and systems – such as eligibility standards, intake protocols, and the secure collection and sharing of family data – across community organizations and among state- and local-level service delivery systems.

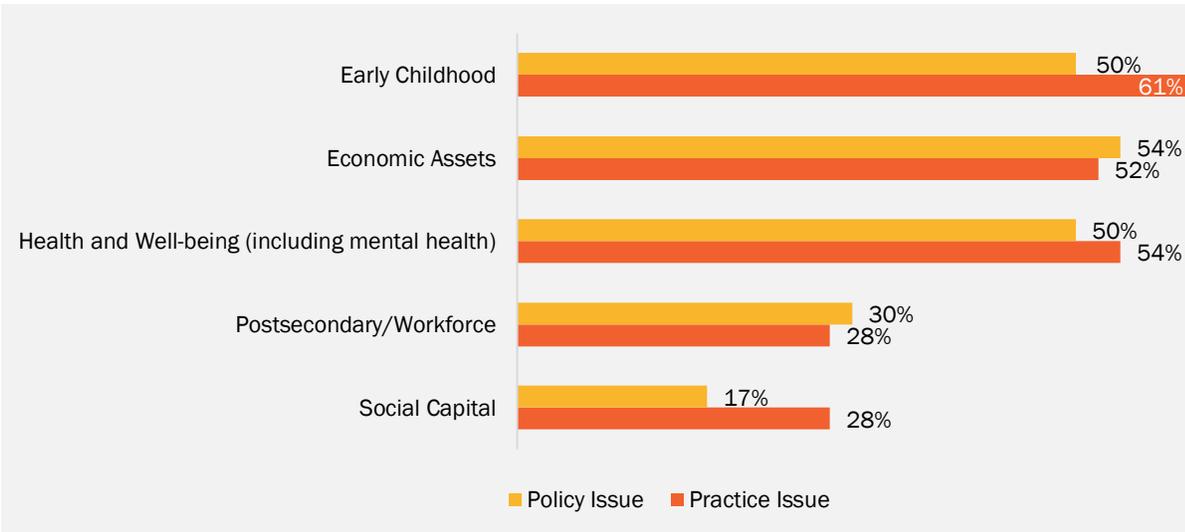
(5) Foster innovation and evidence together. Organizational change is hard. Tap into evidence-based practices and organizational innovations that hold promise for improved service delivery. Build organizational capacity that promotes the culture, leadership, knowledge, relationships, and infrastructure to produce policies, structures, and practices that integrate innovation and evidence.

Based on insights from parents and data specific to LA County, in order to achieve the North Star of better outcomes for families, 2Gen is a promising approach. A next step to embracing 2Gen requires an assessment of how practitioners, organizations, and policymakers are serving families holistically across the six 2Gen components and how they are leveraging the five core principles. For many, an important step toward 2Gen involves creating a 2Gen strategy to align and coordinate services for the entire family. Moving towards this vision of 2Gen in LA County would be incredibly impactful for young parents and their children.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

There are decades of evidence that demonstrate that engaged and supportive families are a major contributor to positive child outcomes. This evidence supports structural changes that move from providing services and information solely to the parent or the child to empowering families by combining child and adult-focused services and prioritizing two-way communication and partnerships. Many organizations in LA have begun to make significant strides in integrating 2Gen approaches into their current work; however, more can still be done. Exhibit 3 below shows the policy and practice areas that participants from the County-Wide Convenings identified as most important to address for young parents and their families in LA County.

Exhibit 3. Convening Perspectives: Key policy and practice² issue areas convening participants identified as most important to address for young parents and their families in LA County (N=46)³



This section digs deeper into the specific issues and challenges young families face across these core components of 2Gen⁴ and expands on why advancing 2Gen approaches in these areas is essential for supporting young parents and their children in LA County.

² By 'practice' we mean direct service/community-based provider innovations and support

³ Convening participants could select more than one policy and practice area. Percentages reflect the percentage of participants that chose an issue area

⁴ For the purpose of this report, we focus specifically on the five 2Gen components outlined in this section. The K-12 component was not included because most young parents with young children do not engage with the K12 system. It is important to note that for parents who have experienced trauma or child welfare engagement, the K12 system plays an important role in addressing and educating in relation to 2Gen approaches.



Early Childhood Care and Education

The earliest months and years of life are a period of incredible brain development. Early care and early childhood education (ECE) programs shape brain architecture and build the foundation for later learning and development. In fact, [research](#) shows that investments in high-quality early education yield a 13% return on investment based on increased school and career achievement, as well as reduced social costs.

“I wish there was more support on how to help your child—[educators] tell you what you’re supposed to be doing, but they don’t tell you how to actually meet those expectations.”

- Ascend Parent Advisor

For young families in LA County, **42% of their children are enrolled in preschool**. Further, more than half of participants (61%) from Ascend’s County-Wide Convenings highlighted early childhood as a key practice issue and half (50%) identified it as a key policy issue important to address for young parents and their families in LA County.

As Parent Advisors and other stakeholders rooted in the community discussed what it will take to strengthen early childhood and education supports for young parents and their children in LA County, the following key issues and challenges emerged:

- **Unstable ECE supports due to COVID-19 and a lack of availability.** The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the early care and education field will linger for years to come. The immediate impact to families and young children is the loss of access to early childhood programs due to stay-at-home orders that began in March 2020 and began to ease in mid-2021, with some schools remaining closed through early 2022. In some cases, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District, ECE programs shifted to virtual classrooms settings. According to a report by [LAist](#), about 536 Los Angeles County licensed child care centers and home-based facilities reported permanent shutdowns to the state’s Department of Social Services.

We also know that ECE providers are undercompensated and are overworked due to the increase in demand due to care provider shortages creating supply and workforce challenges. In LA County, kindergarten teachers earn about \$66,000 annually (benefits included) compared to ECE teachers, who earn just above the minimum wage – neither of which is a living wage given the high costs in the region. The financial stress has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made the low wages

Promising Programs: Early Childhood Care and Education

[First 5 LA](#) serves as a funder and convener of parents, community stakeholders, and broad partners to help create sustainable solutions, and by advocating for broadening investments into early childhood systems and support for LA’s youngest children.

[Abriendo Puertas](#) (Opening Doors) is the first evidence-based program developed by and for Latino parents with children ages 0 to 5. The program co-designs the curriculum and with parents to ensure it is culturally appropriate. Parents participate in local programs to strengthen their leadership, knowledge, social capital, and support systems, while building strong foundations for helping their children in reading, math, technology, health, and more.

[Children’s Institute](#) adopts a dual-generation wraparound approach to support parents and their children in order to end the cycle of poverty. Families receive a range of services and supports including early childhood education, counseling services, the Healthy Homes Program, Project Fatherhood and more.

educators depend on even more unreliable.

Parent Advisors said that they haven't fully recovered from the disruption the pandemic had on childcare. Some lost their access to Early Head Start and Head Start spots, while other private child care centers fully closed. This, combined with an understaffed workforce, has contributed to an overall less accessible ECE environment for young parents. According to the [County of Los Angeles Unified Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education 2020-2025](#) report, there are approximately 650,000 children under the age of 5 in LA County, yet licensed centers and family child care homes only have the capacity to serve 13 percent of working parents with infants and toddlers.

- **Lack of flexible scheduling.** Parents cited a need for ECE programs that match their own schedules. One parent had to drop out of a Head Start program because it did not offer before and after school care. Another mother was not able to enroll her child in a program because she could not meet the one-day-a-week on-site requirement for parents. Young parents who are working or attending classes to support their families and do not have nearby family support, need programs with flexible hours that meet their schedules. Parents noted this must include extended evening and weekend hours.
- **Barriers in the enrollment process.** California has a complex ECE system that includes a history of strong investments. There are a variety of ECE programs available to young families in LA County, including California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Early Head Start and Head Start, Transitional Kindergarten (TK), and Alternative Payment (voucher). However, each of these programs has different eligibility requirements and serves a different age group. Parent Advisors expressed challenges accessing information about these programs and navigating eligibility requirements. For example, programs might not take children 0-3 years old, programs might not offer full day care, or there might be specific eligibility requirements (e.g., income guidelines) that parents don't meet. A few parents also referenced an enrollment policy that requires two-year-olds be potty trained as an additional barrier to accessing ECE programs. Further, when parents do find programs that meet their needs, there are often long waiting lists. Parent Advisors cited a need for a user-friendly online platform that helps families easily identify which programs and services they qualify for, in a format that streamlines the application process and improves communication.
- **Distrust of providers.** Another issue some Parent Advisors raised is lack of trust and limited information about the quality of care children receive. Specifically, some parents said they are concerned their children might be neglected or abused in centers. Parent Advisors with infants and toddlers 0-2 years old are most likely to seek child care from a trusted family member due to this distrust. One of the issues contributing to this challenge is the limited program information that makes its way into the hands of parents to dispel myths and provide more comprehensive information about safety policies and procedures. Parent Advisors noted that social media and news reports highlighting children being neglected fueled these fears and recommended that early care and childhood programs host open houses to help address safety concerns and cultivate relationships with parents and their children.

"I am currently searching for a good childcare program for my son. I am having a hard time letting him go anywhere and currently have family support."

- Ascend Parent Advisor

Parent Advisor Recommendations: *Early Childhood Care and Education*

- More **flexible childcare hours** (e.g., evenings and weekends) are especially important for young parents that might be working and going to school simultaneously.
- Strengthen trust between parents and ECE system through "**Parent Councils**" and more opportunities for providers and parents to work together.
- Communicate clearly with parents about safety and quality through **open houses** and increasing frequency of **state inspections**. Parents are interested in receiving a detailed description of the day-to-day programming as well as how their children are treated and clarity about how issues are managed.
- Create clear **communication platforms** and systems for parents and ECE providers in LA County to **disseminate information** about waiting lists and availability. Parent Advisors recommend providers implement outreach campaigns targeted at young parents, especially first-time parents.



Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways

Education is a key driver of family economic security and building a cycle of intergenerational opportunity. Helping parents achieve educational milestones through postsecondary education and workforce development programs leads to higher wages and jobs with greater benefits and opportunities for growth. For example, research shows that parents who complete a college degree [double their incomes](#). A parent's level of educational attainment is also a strong predictor of their child's success ([Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#)). There are [308 colleges](#) in LA County, including nine that are part of the [Los Angeles Community College District](#). A glaring gap identified is the need to develop a comprehensive system that weaves support services for young parents throughout all public institutions of higher learning.

In relation to employment pathways, key workforce programs and policies need to ensure young parents have skills and supports needed to enter workforce at a living wage. [California has a goal to create 500,000 earn-and-learn and apprenticeship](#) opportunities by 2029 as part of its workforce strategy to increase pathways to better jobs. The 2022-2023 Budget included a one-time investment of \$345 million from the General Fund to increase apprenticeships and earn-and-learn pathways.

Parent Advisors note the following challenges in relation to postsecondary education and employment pathways.

Promising Programs: Postsecondary Education and Employment

[California State University, Long Beach](#) offers pregnant and parenting students a series of support services including family-friendly study areas, on-campus child care, emotional counseling support, CalWORKs benefits, lactation and changing rooms, and on-campus referrals.

[Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education \(CARE\) program](#) supports students who are single parents and already receive benefits from CalWORKs or Tribal TANF. Resources may include meal cards, gas cards, child care assistance, school supplies, educational grants, and grants to purchase books.

[Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy \(LAANE\)](#) is committed to building a new economy that includes good jobs through grassroots organizing and community-oriented policy development.

[LA Cash for College](#) helps students apply for financial aid across LA County and offers activities throughout the year to educate the entire family about the college process.

[Los Angeles College Promise \(LACP\)](#) is a partnership between Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD), Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), City of Los Angeles, LA Chamber of Commerce, UNITE LA, and private philanthropy that serves first-time, full-time college students with a comprehensive strategy designed to support earning a higher education degree and/or a workforce certificate.

[Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center \(FRC\)](#) is a public/private partnership, and the first and only Family Resource Center on a community college campus in California. It offers an array of supports for students with children, including child care, parenting classes, mentoring, internships, and parent cafes.

[Los Angeles County's Youth at Work Program](#) is available to youth between the ages of 14 -24 years old who are seeking work experience, training, and support through a series of network partners. The program extends priority enrollment to youth participating in CalWORKs, high school dropouts with low incomes, and pregnant or parenting youth.

- **Need for greater awareness and access to resources.** Several LA County colleges and universities offer supports for young parents who are students, but these programs vary across campuses. Parent Advisors cited challenges in determining what supports exist where. For example, one parent pointed to Ascend Network Partner Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center (FRC) as an invaluable resource and contributing factor for her academic success (see program description to the right). But its services are not available on any other campuses. Additionally, Parent Advisors expressed frustration with the lack of central information regarding campus child care and other supports for student parents across LA County.
- **Financial constraints.** Several Parent Advisors noted that student loans and debt are barriers to considering additional coursework or credentials. Others said the cost of child care is preventing them from pursuing additional education. Here, too, more access to information is key. Child care support has to be flexible to accommodate the unique needs of young parents. This should include giving priority child care enrollment at colleges and universities located on campuses, in addition to extending care to accommodate students' academics in the evenings.

“My goal is to further my education and get my own place to move on in life with my children. I would like to get into a nursing program. I received my medical assistance certificate from American Career College. I later learned that I could have received the same certificate for free. I am now paying a high loan.”

- Ascend Parent Advisor

- **Promising Programs: Postsecondary Education and Employment Programs, continued**

[Los Angeles Room and Board \(LARB\)](#) works to ensure community college students succeed in completing their postsecondary education by providing affordable transitional housing to end homelessness and increase retention and completion of academic goals.

[Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Adult Education](#) offers pathways for young parents to earn their high school diploma and to enroll in career training classes to prepare for apprentice programs or state certification.

[Raise the Barr \(RTB\)](#) works to increase the economic mobility of single-parent students in Southern California by providing the resources they need to complete their education, including covering the cost of child care.

[SEIU Family Child Care Provider Registered Apprenticeship Program: Los Angeles](#) supports family care providers who are often excluded from policy and advocacy engagement. This type of model can also support young families seeking to explore a career in the early care and education field.

[University of California Los Angeles \(UCLA\)'s Child Care Access Means Parents in School \(CCAMPIS\) Program](#) provides child care to student parents with low incomes.

Parent Advisor Recommendations: Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways

- **Develop a guide outlining all academic programming opportunities and available supports** for young parents in LA County, including certification programs, technical credentials, and both two- and four-year institutions.
- Create a more **integrated education model that weaves support services** for young parents - including child care, full-year housing, food vouchers, transportation funds, work study options, job listings and placement opportunities, tutoring, mentoring, textbooks, computer devices, access to healthcare, and social and emotional supports - throughout all public institutions of higher learning.



Economic Assets

Financial security is critical to a family's economic and social mobility. Families with low incomes face enormous pressures from the costs of housing, transportation, food, child care, and education, creating an overload of stress that can undermine a family's well-being. Even a relatively small increase in household income can have a significant, lasting positive impact on the life of a child. In fact, a \$3,000 annual increase in parents' income when their child is young is associated with a [17% increase](#) in the child's future earnings ([Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#)).

From our analysis of ACS data, on average, young families have five people in their households, which include three adults and two children. Approximately one-third of young parents (36%) live in a household as a couple and approximately one-third (35%) are single females who live in a three-generation household. This pattern varies by race: 53% of young Black parents are single females who live in a three-generation household. In contrast, approximately 40% of young White and Asian parents live in couple households. A greater percentage of young parents and children in single parent households live below the FPL as compared to families in other household types.

This section features the biggest barriers to economic asset building that the Parent Advisors are grappling with.

- **Lack of affordable housing.** In 2016, then-Governor Jerry Brown declared California a "Housing First" state and required state housing/homelessness services agencies to adopt elements of [Housing First](#), a research-based solution that prioritizes the unconditional provision of housing to individuals experiencing homelessness. However, Parent Advisors cited gaps in the Housing First approach, including a lack of focus on safety, accessibility, and retention as well as a need for more tailored understanding and services for young families.

According to [EdSource](#), demand for family student housing has increased across California in recent years and includes a growing need for year-round housing. Parent Advisors noted that housing is an

Promising Programs: Economic Asset Building

[CalHome Mortgage Assistance Program](#) is a program funded by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to help families with low incomes purchase their first home by providing mortgage assistance funds to ensure affordable monthly housing costs.

[New Economics for Women](#) provides family support and housing services for people with low incomes in the City of Los Angeles.

[A New Way of Life](#) provides housing services for less than half the cost of incarceration.

[Hope Scholars Program](#) is a federal program that provides services to unhoused students or those who lack stable housing. LA County's [Rio Hondo College](#) offers the program to its unhoused students.

[BenefitsCal](#) is a website that provides a one-stop shop to learn about and access benefits across California.

[Imagine LA](#) is developing the [Social Benefits Navigator](#) (SBN) to support a single online site that quickly helps case managers, families, and individuals to understand, navigate, receive and maximize public benefits and tax credits (local, state, and federal), as well as show the impact of potential income changes on benefits and identify benefit cliffs before they happen.

[LIFT](#) partners with parents to set long-term goals and provides monthly financial, educational, and employment coaching to support attain the goals.

[Maternal mental health](#) and [home visiting](#) are two additional issue-based online platforms to help LA County residents access available supports.

[CalWORKS](#) is a public assistance program that provides cash aid and services to eligible families with children.

essential resource that should be packaged differently for young student parents as well as building on lessons from national programs such as [Jeremiah Program](#), which provides housing for student parents in proximity to postsecondary and workforce programs. Stephanie, a Parent Advisor, recounted the numerous hoops she has had to jump through to access information about affordable housing, including speaking with insensitive case managers and enduring referrals that hit dead ends. She explained, “When they ask why we’re applying [for housing], there are expectations that you’ve had a difficult time, have trauma. We should be trying to avoid trauma.”

“People with housing vouchers have a hard time securing housing due to background checks. Also, landlords will not take Section 8 Vouchers and so building a housing complex model would be most helpful for securing housing.”

- Ascend Parent Advisor

- **High cost of living.** Parent Advisors noted how expensive LA is and the impact of that on their lives. For example, some parents avoid driving to potential job interviews due to the cost of gas, while others visited food pantries for the first time in 2022. One parent reported surviving on a \$200 per month food budget to feed her family of three. Another parent is holding off on retaking the test to become a Magnetic Resonance Imaging Tech (MRI) because she can’t afford the \$200 testing fee. One parent from Partners for Children South LA received the Child Tax credit while homeless and used the money to buy clothes and shoes for her daughter.
- **Lack of connected and aligned opportunities to access public benefits.** On average, only a small percentage (10%) of young parents in LA County receive public assistance. Public assistance uptake is similar for most parents across race/ethnicity with two exceptions - 15% of “other” young parents and 27% of young Black parents receive public assistance. Parent Advisors expressed frustration over accessing public benefits and explained that it sometimes feels like they are administered based on the whims of their case managers. They voiced support for efforts to promote and provide access to a range of benefits available to families in LA County that are often underused, including diaper giveaways, food banks, child care, home visiting, mental health therapy, and parenting classes. Parent Advisors, who are all digitally connected, recommended creating a county-wide, digital one-stop site for families to access all of the public services available to them.

“Access to resources and services is limited to what organizations offer and are familiar with.”

- Ascend Parent Advisor

- **Benefit cliffs are destabilizing and detrimental.** For young parents who are overwhelmed and stressed about how to meet their families' basic needs, providing access to flexible financial support is key. However, while Parent Advisors voiced general support for cash assistance programs and guaranteed income pilots, they shared concerns about the benefit cliffs, which causes families to lose important benefits when their income increases even marginally. As initiatives work to increase access to cash for young families, they must include provisions that safeguard families from losing other existing benefits.

Parent Advisor Recommendations: *Economic Asset Building*

- Ensure **websites are user friendly and produce a roadmap** to help users complete their benefit applications.
- **Transitional housing organizations should provide workforce development and training** to help employees understand and support the unique challenges and strengths facing young parents and their families. **Recruiting workers with lived experience**, especially as frontline workers in organizations that directly serve young families with low incomes, can help build trust and connections with the families and improve their ability to access the services they need.
- California State University Northridge and the University of California system presently provide family housing to students and should also consider **granting additional financial aid dollars to pay for full-year housing at the facilities reserved for families.**
- Although **increasing the number of housing vouchers available to young families** must form part of the housing strategy, Parent Advisors **recommend aligning rent amounts to the medium income of lower income communities** to give more families access to affordable housing and lessen the need for housing vouchers.



Health and Mental Health

[To ensure families' ability to thrive](#), children and the adults in their lives must have healthy environments, [sound nutrition](#), and access to high-quality care for physical and mental health. In September 2021, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted a motion to create a Prevention Task Force that would explore options to support a structure to increase collaboration of prevention services in LA County. A taskforce led by the Executive Director of Racial Equity will make recommendations on how to better align current prevention and promotion strategies and improve coordination of these efforts across County departments. The intent is to reimagine the entire LA County structure by centering anti-racist principles and an equity-driven lens to deliver upstream interventions that address the

“Black and Brown people don’t trust the system, but the system doesn’t trust Black and Brown people either.”

- Ascending Together Summit Attendee

social determinants of health and improve overall well-being for adults and children, youth, and families. This effort has the potential to transform the current health delivery system, including addressing outdated systems that hinder access to health services and support for young families with low incomes.

[Medi-Cal](#) provides comprehensive perinatal health services for women, including individual and group counseling for pregnant and postpartum individuals with particular risk factors, such as a history of depression, being low-income, being a single parent, or being an adolescent. California has made strides towards serving all Californians and as of May 1, 2016, [undocumented low-income children](#) have full coverage via Medi-Cal. It is projected that about [36,000 undocumented children](#) under the age of 16 live in Los Angeles County.

The top challenges that Parent Advisors raised in relation to health and mental health in LA County are described in more detail below.

Promising Programs: Health and Mental Health

[Crittenton Services for Children and Families - Southern California](#) provides both in-home and community-based services to families experiencing a crisis situation.

[Partners for Children South L.A.](#)'s mental health campaign works to familiarize residents with the signs of trauma and destigmatize discussions about self care, emotional well-being, and counseling.

[Maternal Mental Health Now](#) manages an online directory to help locate mental health therapists across LA County at a very low price or free of charge. [The Los Angeles County Mental Health Directory](#) is a comprehensive tool for mothers seeking emotional wellness support near their home.

[The Los Angeles County African American Infant and Maternal Mortality \(AAIMM\) Initiative](#) is a coalition focused on addressing the high rates of Black infant and maternal deaths.

[The Nurse-Family Partnership Program](#) is an evidence-based community health program where trained nurses make regular home visits to young, first-time mothers during pregnancy and until the child turns 2.

[Healthy Steps](#) is a dyadic care model that brings a child development expert and behavioral health clinician (HealthySteps Specialist) together with the pediatric primary care team to jointly screen the child for developmental, social-emotional, and behavioral challenges.

Food Equity can be defined in a few different ways, including: (1) Procedural Equity – People have agency over the types of food they produce, access, and/or consume, (2) Distributional Equity – Different communities have equivalent levels of access to food, (3) Structural Equity – Investments are made into the communities that have seen historical disinvestment, and (4) Transgenerational Equity – The food system is structured in a way that is sustainable for future generations. These definitions are inclusive of the different roles the food system and structures play in peoples' lives. For more information about these definitions and food equity, visit the [Food Equity Roundtable](#).

- **Timely access to mental health services is vital.**

Several Parent Advisors lifted-up the importance of mental health services to help parents achieve their personal goals and better support their children. High levels of stress contribute to low levels of bandwidth, which has a radiating impact on parents' ability to pursue workforce training, obtain living wage jobs, and connect with their families and their communities.

Attaining timely access to mental health support is a major barrier in LA County, especially once a parent has been assessed and diagnosed. Parent Advisors noted that the referral process is burdensome and time-consuming, often leading to prolonged delays in treatment and support.

"I lost connection to a lot of people, when you are young and pregnant you lose a lot of friends and family. It is also hard to get mental health support, the wait time is long and they ask for insurance."

- Ascend Parent Advisor

- **Services must be culturally appropriate and asset-based.** Parent Advisors stressed that it is critical for mental health organizations supporting communities of color to adopt asset-based language into their outreach and engagement strategies. For example, Latinos are unlikely to seek mental health services due to the cultural stigma of therapy. Shifting from clinical terms to ones that empower young families is an important part of the healing process. Some programs use a strong social capital approach to address and mitigate stress, demonstrating how much social connectedness is tied to well-being.
- **There is a fear of losing children if parents share their mental health struggles.** Several Parent Advisors voiced concerns about being honest about needing emotional health support due to postpartum depression and worry that if they ask for support they will lose their children. To reduce the stress and stigma of the process, Parent Advisors recommend intake coordinators be trained to properly document families' stories and traumas to reduce the number of times applicants must retell their stories.

Parent Advisor Recommendations: *Health and Mental Health*

- Outreach and engagement from health and mental health services must be **culturally competent, asset-based, and trauma-informed.**

Suggestions from others in the field:

- Fund a **tele-consult and tele-health program** to connect medical staff to a psychiatrist that specializes in pre- and post-natal care to develop an action plan to support mothers. This can also help reduce appointment wait times to ensure families and their children seek medical attention in a timely manner.
- Medi-Cal could provide even stronger support to young mothers and their children by adopting a **family-centered approach** that implements coverage extensions, supports care by community health workers and doulas, and provides dyadic services, family therapy and home visiting services.
- **Medi-Cal needs to authorize billing for mental health and physical health visits that occur on the same day.** This means that if a parent is screened for depression and diagnosed with a mental health condition during a visit, the care provider is not able to provide immediate care or schedule a follow-up appointment. Having to return at a different date and time creates unnecessary stress for families who might experience child care and transportation barriers. This is a state and federal barrier that county leaders can lift up.



Social Capital

To thrive and move ahead in life, both adults and children need connections to people and information, along with opportunities to both give and receive support. This includes contact with family, friends, and neighbors; participation in community and faith-based organizations; leadership and empowerment programs; and mental health services. Social capital builds on the strengths and resilience of families and bolsters the aspirations parents have for themselves and their children. Evidence suggests that developing social capital contributes to a range of benefits for families, from [improving parents' well-being](#) to [increasing children's regular school attendance](#).

Over the course of the eight months, Parent Advisors developed trusting relationships with one another, building a sense of community through shared experiences, challenges, and support. They consistently shared the names of programs, case managers, and short-term initiatives - such as a local diaper drive - with one another. Parent Advisors became a prime example of both the need to and benefits of building social capital. Challenges and barriers Parent Advisors have experienced in relation to social capital are shared below.

"I tried making friends but it's hard. I have been alone for a while. I am starting school in August because I want to get out into the world. It's not easy to not have a lot of people to talk to."

- Ascend Parent Advisor

- **Many young parents feel socially isolated and often deeply alone.** While social media is a resource and connector, it does not provide the same level of community, education, and support that in-person and/or direct efforts to build trust and relationships do. Parents shared that they felt especially lonely when they first became pregnant and experienced social stigma, from both family members and institutions, including hospital staff. There is an opportunity for organizations in LA

Promising Programs: Social Capital

[The Los Angeles County Perinatal and Early Childhood Home Visitation Consortium](#) is a network of more than 60 perinatal and early childhood home visitation programs, family and child health organizations, advocacy groups, and stakeholders. The collaboration includes an [online directory for parents](#) interested in participating in a home visiting program.

[Project Fatherhood](#), a program of the Children's Institute, provides group support, personal and family counseling services, therapeutic child activities, job training, and legal workshops and consultation to help fathers be more engaged in the lives of their children.

[Parent Cafes](#) offer parents safe convening spaces to interact and share struggles and triumphs experienced while raising children.

[Generation Her](#) supports social capital among teen and young mothers aged 13-25 in Southern California by creating support services to connect mothers to one another, provide them with resources, and teach skills needed to support their parenthood journey.

[Friends of the Children-Los Angeles](#) (Friends LA) uses a 2Gen approach to pair 4- to 6-year-olds who have been impacted by the child welfare system with a paid professional mentor who mentors the child over the course of 12 years.

[Families Forward Learning Center \(FFLC\)](#) serves Pasadena families to foster young children's social and cognitive development and prepare them for a successful transition to kindergarten, while helping their parents gain the skills and confidence needed to actively support their developmental success.

[Expectant and Parenting Youth Conferences](#) are designed to identify and address the needs of any expectant or parenting youth and are supervised by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

[Thriving Families. Safer Children](#) includes the Department of Children and Family Services and other partners to form part of a national effort to transform the child welfare system. This effort unites the public, private, and philanthropic sectors to support the advancement of family well-being and incorporates community voice into ideas on how to better support families.

County to create more cohort-oriented initiatives and invest in parent policy councils that prioritize social connectedness and build trust and relationships among young families.

- **Engaging fathers in programs is key but it can be hard to find those that want to participate.** Connecting with young fathers to serve as Parent Advisors remained an unmet challenge. Parent Advisors spoke about the importance of their partnerships and the importance of inclusion of fathers in programs. One Parent Advisor noted how challenging it is to find transitional or emergency housing if one is partnered but not single. Philanthropy as well as county, state, and federal agencies can encourage more father engagement by earmarking resources for outreach programs that target young fathers. Additionally, existing engagement and outreach strategies should be assessed and updated to include strategies to support young fathers in particular. Legal requirements and conditions—such as the need to have stable housing and income prior to establishing visitation—become barriers for some fathers, especially those who may have histories of incarceration, substance abuse, or mental health issues. These obstacles must also be confronted as part of an increased father engagement strategy.

Parent Advisor Recommendations: *Social Capital*

- Develop a **directory that includes resources for pregnant and parenting adults with children up to age 5**. They also noted a gap in services once children turn 6 years of age and so recommend expanding key support services until families are able to stand on their own.
- Create **programs just for fathers** so they have the opportunity to talk about the issues impacting their families.

PLAN OF ACTION

LA County has an opportunity to achieve better outcomes for young parents and their children by **embedding transformative approaches** across strategies, organizations, and systems through **intentional leadership** and by **listening to the voices of young parents** and their families. Driven by Parent Advisors and validated by learnings from the input of community-rooted partners, the county-wide convenings, and the landscape analysis, a set of principles and lessons are emerging that make up a vision for 2Gen in LA County. This vision and its corresponding recommendations in this Plan of Action are not all new to the field – many of the proposed ideas have been circulating among LA County for years and represent ways of working that people who serve young families are passionate about. However, there is the need to continually reinforce and honor the experiences of young parents, especially the solutions they say will improve their lives.

This Plan of Action identifies specific opportunities and recommendations for strengthening a 2Gen approach that embraces the experience of multiple generations and acknowledges the various layers of family well-being. The recommendations for **programs, partnerships, policies, and systems** in LA County that are provided are a crosswalk of input from Parent Advisors and other partners and are inspired by examples of promising approaches underway.



Create a no-wrong-door approach to accessing benefits.

Parent Advisors consistently shared their worries about applying for public benefits, expressing concern that they either might be taking resources from others in greater need, or that the stigma of accessing benefits was overwhelming. And yet, new parenthood is when parents are most likely to need access to resources from multiple organizations. One of the biggest barriers to accessing social services is the complex public benefits landscape, which is made up of siloed services and cumbersome application processes. All too often, undue burden is placed on families to navigate a myriad of systems and processes in order to receive the holistic supports their families need to thrive.

A prominent vision voiced by Parent Advisors, convening participants, and stakeholders at the policy level is the need for a “no wrong door” approach to accessing public services. The creation of a clear, cohesive, and digitally accessible platform that can identify all social services families qualify for would ensure young parents and their children have access to benefits, including but not limited to CalFresh, WIC, Affordable Housing, CalWorks, and other supports and resources across the six 2Gen components. Taking a 2Gen approach would mean a service like this one would be able to

Examples of Key Partners

- Dept of Public Social Services
- Dept of Children and Family Services
- Dept of Public Health
- Dept of Mental Health
- Dept of Economic Opportunity
- LA County Development Authority
- LA County Affordable Housing Solutions Agency
- Poverty Alleviation Initiative
- Magnolia Place
- The Zev Yaroslavsky Family Support Center
- Imagine LA

identify benefits for both parents and their children, ensuring both generations are receiving supports simultaneously.

“Sometimes you go to a place to get support or information and they say no...but do not offer you other places to go.”

- Ascend Parent Advisor

The good news is this is an issue that leaders are working on addressing. Imagine LA is a nonprofit organization working to develop the [Social Benefits Navigator](#), a single online site that quickly helps case managers, families, and individuals to understand, navigate, receive, and maximize public benefits and tax credits (local, state, and federal), as well as show the impact of potential income changes on benefits and identify benefit cliffs before they happen. LA County’s [Poverty Alleviation Initiative](#) supports advocacy efforts to address this at the state and federal levels, as one of its three main focus areas is “Improving residents’ access and experiences with obtaining County services.”

Recommendations

Policies and Systems

- **Create a countywide digital hub for support services.** Parent Advisors, who are all digitally connected, suggested the need for creating digital one-stop site or app for families to access all of the public services and related resources available to them. This connects to the 2Gen principles of aligning and linking systems and equitable access.
- **Websites need to be user-friendly and avoid the need to enter the same information repeatedly.** It would be beneficial if public sector websites or IT systems could also provide users a roadmap to facilitate the completion of applications. This maps to the 2Gen principles of aligning and linking systems and equitable access.



Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems.

Parent Advisors have illuminated the persistent information gaps that exist and make it difficult for programs and resources to reach LA County’s young parents. In addition to creating platforms and resources that aggregate information in one place, intentional trust and rapport needs to be built between young parents and public systems so families feel confident sharing their needs and accessing services.

Examples of Key Partners

- LA County’s Chief Information Office
- Dept of Children and Family Services
- Dept of Public Social Services
- Dept of Public Health
- Dept of Mental Health
- Board of Supervisors
- Dept of Education
- LA Unified School District
- Postsecondary education systems (including Community Colleges, Cal State, University of California)
- Philanthropic organizations investing in technology
- Early childhood organizations like First 5 LA

There are multiple barriers that impact young parents' ability to place trust in public services and systems. For example, there aren't always adequate strategies for communicating with young people and meeting parents where they are at, and some parent advisors emphasized the need for staff to be more compassionate and respectful to their unique needs. Other young parents expressed the fear that voicing their need for support to certain systems or agencies like mental health could "lead to their children being taken away." Lastly, the pandemic has further removed young parents from public systems and hindered their ability to connect and build trust.

Several Parent Advisors recalled how people – both within their family and beyond - questioned their capacity and capability to care for their child and doubted their ability to be a responsible mother just because of their age. They also described instances where they felt judgment from social workers and were anxious to go to doctors' visits because they were concerned about what they would think. Parent Advisors

"I wish they were more sensitive to single mothers' circumstances. They have an attitude of 'you got yourself into this situation.' Be more supportive – [so parents don't] leave places [without] help and feeling judged."

- Ascend Parent Advisor

emphasized that every parent is a new parent at some point, and young parents' experiences are just as valuable because "motherhood doesn't come with age, it comes when you give life." One Parent Advisor said, "The reality is there are so many young parents and we're not stuck. We're going places." Navigating parenthood is challenging enough, young parents do not need additional micro-aggressions working against them. Parent Advisors called for an end to "the stigma and penalizing of young parents for having a child." Implicitly and explicitly addressing how young parents are portrayed, perceived, and treated has implications not only for every person who engages with them but also for every program, policy, and system that is designed to support them as they strive to build the best life possible for

themselves and their children.

One step in increasing trust involves increasing access to information to dispel any myths or fears that exist. One Parent Advisor said sharing information and resources at venues where young parents are most likely to be – like colleges and high schools – is one strategy to do this. Strengthening public-private partnerships is also recommended, as many nonprofit organizations are already seen as trusted partners to young parents and could serve as a bridge to public entities that young parents are less likely to engage with. Lastly, Parent Advisors and providers at the county-wide convening discussed the creation of 'Parent Councils' that place parents at the center of tables when decisions are being made across public systems.

Ultimately, young parents are the gateway for their children to receive access to services and benefits, so stronger connections between young parents and public systems will strengthen a 2Gen approach and ensure both generations are getting their needs met.

Recommendations

Programs

- **Segment data to identify specific experiences and outcomes for young parents.** There are significant gaps in effectively connecting young parent families to programs based on their needs and goals and a limited understanding of their outcomes as they are not often identified as a

distinct “population group” in human services organizations. This links to the 2Gen principle of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents.

- **Target outreach campaigns directly at young parents, especially first-time parents.** Create clear communication platforms and systems for parents (including both mothers and fathers) and providers in LA County to connect and share information and opportunities. This connects to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families and ensuring equity.
- **Take into account the unique needs of young parents.** For example, providing priority child care enrollment at colleges and universities located on campuses and extending care to accommodate students' academics in the evenings. This maps to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families and ensuring equity.
- **Create Parent Policy Councils.** Platforms and seats at the table are needed to empower parents and give them a central role in decision-making processes. This corresponds to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, and ensuring equity.
- **Invest in scaling models that are community-rooted, parent-informed, and trust-based with a focus on stabilizing the family and creating holistic supports.** These key tenets are exemplified in the work [Partners for Children South LA](#) is doing which can serve as an example to basis future work on. This links to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, and ensuring equity.
- **Adapt the [Promotores Model](#).** This will help equip parents with information about existing programs and services available to young families so that they can become ambassadors for the organizations and share within the community. This represents the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, and ensuring equity.

Partnerships

- **Create public/private partnerships to deepen and broaden holistic support for young parents.** For example, The Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center offers an array of 2Gen supports for students with children and is entirely funded through grants from federal, state, foundation and private philanthropy. This connects to the 2Gen principle of aligning and linking systems and funding streams.

Policies and Systems

- **Develop a person-centered service delivery model.** LA County's [Poverty Alleviation Initiative \(PAI\)](#) has shared a range of priority actions, one of which is particularly resonate with what parent advisors and stakeholders at the June 2022 Summit shared, “Create customer service enhancements and improvements to increase eligible customers seeking out and getting needed supports.” This connects to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.



Address the profound issues of childcare and housing.

While a 2Gen approach considers a range of supports and resources that are necessary for families to thrive, Parent Advisors cited childcare and housing as central issues for young parents in LA County. Stable

housing – both permanent and transitional – is a critical component of 2Gen approaches, as it allows young parents to pursue aspirations like job training, postsecondary education, and social capital building. Childcare, most notably comprehensive, accessible, and affordable child care, is also essential for young parents to pursue living wage jobs and postsecondary education and workforce opportunities.

One opportunity that has emerged through this work is the need to support policies and programs that reserve spots or offer benefits specifically for young parents. For example, Parent Advisors explained that student parents often need child care during non-traditional work hours, as they will attend school during the day and have a job to report to in the evening – this might merit child care supports tailored to the unique needs of young parents who are students. Related to housing, a suggested approach includes encouraging affordable housing developers to reserving affordable units for young parents earning lower than 30% of the Area Median Income. To do this, it is essential to identify opportunities to partner with key leaders in the early childhood and housing fields to support more young families in accessing affordable and quality services.

“Los Angeles County has 700 vouchers remaining, which limits the number of low-income parents who are able to secure affordable housing.”

- Monica Mejia, President of the East LA Community Corporation

At the systems and policy level, addressing the “benefit cliffs” has been closely connected to the issues of childcare, housing, and a young parent’s ability to advance in postsecondary and employment pathways. The benefit cliffs refers to the decrease or complete loss of public benefits that can occur with an individual’s small

increase in income. This can cause families to lose some or all economic supports⁵ and if the loss of benefits outpace a wage increase many families lose progress towards social and economic mobility. As previously noted, for young families, affordable childcare and housing is essential to wellbeing, and some young parents acknowledge turning down job opportunities or pay increases to avoid losing housing or childcare subsidies. It is imperative that the benefit cliffs be addressed so young parents don’t need to make the decision between advancing in their careers or losing access to the affordable housing and childcare critical to their family’s wellbeing.

Examples of Key Partners

-  Dept of Public Health
-  LA County Development Authority
-  Dept of Public Social Services
-  Dept of Economic Opportunity
-  Board of Supervisors
-  Poverty Alleviation Initiative
-  First 5 LA
-  Public-private partnerships (e.g., LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, Early Care and Education Coalition, and Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles)

Recommendations

Policies and Systems

- **Ensure anti-poverty and economic development initiatives support and align with efforts to support young families.** In addition to broadening guaranteed income opportunities to young

⁵ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/addressing-benefits-cliffs.aspx>

parents, the California state legislature and Governor Newsom are creating anti-poverty investments that can be replicated by other states. These include the ongoing expansion of earned income tax credits to include undocumented taxpayers, young child tax credits, and expanding baby bonds. This represents the 2Gen principles of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents, fostering innovation and evidence together, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.

- **Expand eligibility of free tuition to income-eligible young parents returning to school.** Moving forward, the state legislature should consider expanding free tuition eligibility to empower more young parents to complete their academic goals which paves the path for greater economic mobility and stability. This corresponds to the 2Gen principles of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.
- **Granting additional financial aid dollars to pay for full-year housing at the facilities reserved for families.** California State University Northridge and the University of California system provide family housing to students, but extending it to full-year would provide more stability to young parents. This connects to the 2Gen principles of equity and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.
- **Increase Housing Choice Vouchers.** Formerly known as Section 8, a federal housing subsidy program that provides vouchers to over 45,000 families in Los Angeles. Families are expected to pay 30% of their income towards rent and the federal government will directly fund the other 70% of the rent. This links to the 2Gen principles of equity and aligning and linking systems and funding streams. Stronger efforts are needed to hold landlords accountable to accepting vouchers.
- **Redesign a child care system to ensure more infants and toddlers are served.** One of the most pressing needs for young parents is accessible, affordable, and high-quality care for their children and the California Department of Social Services and other stakeholder have an opportunity to re-imagine and restructure the insufficient state of childcare in LA County. This maps to the 2Gen principles of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents, fostering innovation and evidence together, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.
- **Increase standard reimbursement rate for early childhood care and education.** There is an opportunity to equitably re-envision the state ECE reimbursement system to pay for the actual cost of providing quality child care and work is underway to do this. This represents the 2Gen principles of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.
- **Concentrate affordable housing production near key public transit infrastructure.** The state has a significant opportunity to make this happen in LA County. This connects to the 2Gen principles of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents, fostering innovation and evidence together, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.

Taking Action

LA County remains a national trailblazer for a range of innovative policies and practices designed to spur economic mobility and growth for families across the economic spectrum. However, programs, policies, and systems designed to serve young families with low incomes—those with the brightest futures ahead—are deeply disconnected, resulting in inequitable and opaque services and resources. Using the 2Gen LA County Collaborative Framework and Plan of Action, leaders across LA County have an opportunity to strengthen service alignment, build better mechanisms for hearing directly from families, and implement programs and policies that fuel a cycle of intergenerational opportunity for decades to come.

“We must question the assumptions when a particular policy or system was put into practice. We have to break that down in order to understand why we do things the way we do in LA County and really think about it in the forward direction of what it’s going to take to have [young parents] thrive.”

- Maggie Cervantes, New Economics for Women

TEMPLATE FOR ASSESSING PLAN OF ACTION

Building off insights from the Collaborative Framework, the 2Gen Plan of Action is intended to provide a blueprint of key actions that policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropy can take to better support young parents with children and ultimately achieve better outcomes for families in LA County. Below is a template for assessing the Plan of Action. It is anchored by five objectives, including: (1) Data, Data Systems, and Evaluation; (2) Funding; (3) Organizing and Collaboration; (4) Communication; and (5) Policies, Practices, and Systems. Some activities can be addressed quickly, and others might take years to accomplish.

Objective 1: Data, Data Systems, and Evaluation

| Tactic | Activity | Action Steps | Responsible Organization(s) or Agency/ Department | Leads | Measure of Progress | Progress Update |
|---|---|--------------|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems. | Segment data to identify specific experiences and outcomes for young parents. | | | | | |

Objective 2: Funding

| Tactic | Activity | Action Steps | Responsible Organization(s) or Agency/ Department | Leads | Measure of Progress | Progress Update |
|---|---|--------------|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems. | Invest in scaling models that are community-rooted, parent-informed, and trust-based with a focus on stabilizing the family and creating holistic supports. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Address the profound issues of childcare and housing. | Granting additional financial aid dollars to pay for full-year housing at the facilities reserved for families. | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|

Objective 3: Collaboration and Integration

| Tactic | Activity | Action Steps | Responsible Organization(s) or Agency/ Department | Leads | Measure of Progress | Progress Update |
|---|--|--------------|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems. | Create Parent Policy Councils. | | | | | |
| | Create public/private partnerships to deepen and broaden holistic support for young parents. | | | | | |

Objective 4: Communication

| Tactic | Activity | Action Steps | Responsible Organization(s) or Agency/ Department | Leads | Measure of Progress | Progress Update |
|---|---|--------------|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems. | Target outreach campaigns directly at young parents, especially first-time parents. | | | | | |

Objective 5: Policy, Practice, and Systems

| Tactic | Activity | Action Steps | Responsible Organization(s) or Agency/ Department | Leads | Measure of Progress | Progress Update |
|---|--|--------------|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Create a no-wrong-door approach to accessing benefits. | Create a countywide digital hub for support services. | | | | | |
| | Websites need to be user-friendly and avoid the need to enter the same information repeatedly. | | | | | |
| Strengthen trust and information between young parents and public systems. | Take into account the unique needs of young parents. | | | | | |
| | Adapt the Promotores Model | | | | | |
| | Develop a person-centered service delivery model. | | | | | |
| Address the profound issues of childcare and housing. | Ensure anti-poverty and economic development initiatives support and align with efforts to support young families. | | | | | |
| | Expand eligibility of free tuition to income-eligible young parents returning to school. | | | | | |
| | Increase Housing Choice Vouchers. | | | | | |
| | Redesign a child care system to ensure more infants and toddlers are served. | | | | | |
| | Increase Standard Reimbursement Rate for Early Childhood Care and Education. | | | | | |
| | Concentrate affordable housing production near key public transit infrastructure. | | | | | |

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY SECTOR

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Segment data to identify specific experiences and outcomes for young parents. There are significant gaps in effectively connecting young parent families to programs based on their needs and goals and a limited understanding of their outcomes as they are not often identified as a distinct “population group” in human services organizations. This links to the 2Gen principle of measuring and accounting for outcomes for both children and their parents.
2. Websites need to be user-friendly and avoid the need to enter the same information repeatedly. It would be beneficial if public sector websites or IT systems could also provide users a roadmap to facilitate the completion of applications. This maps to the 2Gen principles of aligning and linking systems and equitable access.
3. Target outreach campaigns directly at young parents, especially first-time parents. Create clear communication platforms and systems for parents (including both mothers and fathers) and providers in LA County to connect and share information and opportunities. This connects to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families and ensuring equity.
4. Take into account the unique needs of young parents. For example, providing priority child care enrollment at colleges and universities located on campuses and extending care to accommodate students' academics in the evenings. This maps to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families and ensuring equity.
5. Create Parent Policy Councils. Platforms and seats at the table are needed to empower parents and give them a central role in decision-making processes. This corresponds to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, and ensuring equity.
6. Invest in scaling models that are community-rooted, parent-informed, and trust-based with a focus on stabilizing the family and creating holistic supports. These key tenets are exemplified in the work Partners for Children South LA is doing which can serve as an example to basis future work on. This links to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, and ensuring equity.
7. Adapt the [Promotores Model](#). This will help equip parents with information about existing programs and services available to young families so that they can become ambassadors for the organizations and share within the community. This represents the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, and ensuring equity.
8. Create public/private partnerships to deepen and broaden holistic support for young parents. For example, The Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center offers an array of 2Gen supports for students with children and is entirely funded through grants from federal, state, foundation and private philanthropy. This connects to the 2Gen principle of aligning and linking

systems and funding streams.

9. Develop a person-centered service delivery model. LA County's Poverty Alleviation Initiative (PAI) has shared a range of priority actions, one of which is particularly resonate with what parent advisors and stakeholders at the June 2022 Summit shared, "Create customer service enhancements and improvements to increase eligible customers seeking out and getting needed supports." This connects to the 2Gen principles of engaging and listening to the voices of families, fostering innovation and evidence together, ensuring equity, and aligning and linking systems and funding streams.

| | Early Childhood Care and Education (p. 18-19) | Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways (p. 20-21) | Economic Assets (p.22-23) | Health and Mental Health (p. 24-25) | Social Capital (p. 26-27) |
|----------------------|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| City Agencies | <p>Offer more information and outreach to first time parents about Family & Youth Source Centers – and streamline services</p> <p>Strengthen trust between parents and the ECE system by including parents on boards (i.e. Community Action Board and Commission on Community & Family Services)</p> <p>Collaborate with departments and offices to build toolkit/shared list of city-wide resources on each webpage</p> <p>Increase standard reimbursement rate for early childhood care and education</p> | <p>Work with state to expand eligibility of free-tuition to income-eligible parents returning to school</p> | <p>Update websites to be user-friendly and avoid the need to enter the same information repeatedly in applications</p> <p>Ensure guaranteed basic income programs are resistant to the benefit cliffs where families lose access to benefits as their income increases marginally</p> <p>Ensure anti-poverty and economic development initiatives support and align with efforts to support young families (i.e. expansion of earned income tax credits to include undocumented taxpayers, young child tax credits, and expanding baby bonds)</p> <p>Concentrate affordable housing production near key public transit infrastructure</p> <p>Increase housing choice vouchers and more importantly, align rent amounts to the medium income of lower income communities so families can access</p> | | <p>Develop a directory that includes resources for pregnant and parenting adults with children up to age 5; and expand key support services beyond the age of 6 until families are able to stand on their own</p> |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|--|--|---|
| | | | affordable housing and lessen the need for vouchers | | |
| County Agencies | <p>Strengthen trust between parents and ECE system by offering more opportunities for providers and parents to work together, such as on Early Care & Education Planning Committee, Commission for Children & Families, Early Care & Education Roundtable</p> <p>Offer more ECE provider support and availability – given the increase in demand and workforce challenges, there is a need to increase compensation and jobs</p> <p>Create clear communication platforms and systems for parents and ECE providers in LA County to disseminate information about waiting lists and availability</p> <p>Simplify and streamline enrollment processes, including transparency around eligibility requirements; there is a need for user-friendly online platform to identify which programs &</p> | <p>Develop a guide outlining all academic programming opportunities and available supports for young parents in LA County, including certification programs, technical credentials, and both two- and four-year institutions</p> | <p>Create a countywide digital hub for support services that is user friendly and helps users navigate benefit applications. The hub should provide access to range of benefits to families that are underused (diaper giveaways, food banks, child care, home visits, mental health therapy, parenting classes)</p> <p>Expand Housing First programs to include focus on safety, accessibility, and retention</p> | <p>Simplify the referral process to access mental health support to be less burdensome and time-consuming</p> <p>Outreach and engagement from health and mental health services must be culturally competent, asset-based, and trauma-informed; intake coordinators should be properly trained to document families' stories and trauma</p> <p>Fund a tele-consult and tele-health program to connect medical staff to a psychiatrist that specializes in pre and post-natal care to develop an action plan to support mothers</p> <p>Medi-Cal could adopt a family-centered approach that implements coverage extensions, supports care by community health workers and doulas, and provides dyadic services, family therapy and home visits</p> <p>Medi-Cal needs to authorize billing for mental health</p> | <p>Develop a directory that includes resources for pregnant and parenting adults with children up to age 5; and expand key support services beyond the age of 6 until families are able to stand on their own</p> |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>services families qualify for</p> <p>Encourage after-school programs and Head Start grantees to offer more flexible childcare hours</p> <p>Redesign child care systems to ensure more infants and toddlers are served</p> | | | and physical health visits that occur on the same day | |
| Nonprofit Organizations | <p>Offer more flexible childcare hours</p> <p>Communicate clearly with parents about safety and quality through open houses and increasing frequency of state inspections. Parents are interested in receiving a detailed description of the day-to-day programming as well as how their children are treated and clarity about how issues are managed</p> | <p>Create a more integrated education model that weaves support services for young parents such as childcare, housing, food vouchers, transportation funds, work study options, job listings and placement opportunities, tutoring, mentoring, textbook, computer devices, access to healthcare, and social emotional supports in public institutions of higher education</p> <p>Grant additional financial aid dollars to pay for full-year housing at the facilities reserved for families</p> | <p>Transitional housing organizations should provide workforce development and training to help employees understand and support the unique challenges and strengths facing young parents and their families</p> <p>Organizations should recruit workers with lived experience, especially as frontline workers that directly serve young families with low incomes which can help build trust and connections with the families and improve their ability to access the services they need</p> <p>Higher education institutions should provide family housing to students year round and grant additional financial aid dollars to pay for family housing</p> | <p>Outreach and engagement from health and mental health services must be culturally competent, asset-based, and trauma-informed</p> | <p>Create programs just for fathers so they have the opportunity to talk about the issues impacting their families</p> <p>Develop a directory that includes resources for pregnant and parenting adults with children up to age 5; and expand key support services beyond the age of 6 until families are able to stand on their own</p> |
| Philanthropies | <p>Support private-public partnerships between community colleges and Head Start</p> | | <p>Invest in technology to increase access to information,</p> | <p>Fund a tele-consult and tele-health program to</p> | <p>Support/develop a Parent Advisory Council</p> |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| | | | strengthen trust, and build a gateway for families to receive access to services and benefits | connect medical staff to a psychiatrist that specializes in pre- and post-natal care to develop an action plan to support mothers | for Board of Supervisors Encourage father engagement by designating resources towards outreach programs that target young fathers |
| Private Sector | Consider the option of opening or expanding childcare on-site, or partnering with local early childhood education centers to subsidize costs Explore flexible work arrangements in and outside of the office (nursing rooms, hybrid working hours, flex time) | Conduct internal audit of capacity to partner more effectively with community colleges and workforce development programs | Identify workforce partnership opportunities for young parents in the entertainment industry Assess HR capacity to understand and navigate impact of cliff effect for workers with low incomes | Implement holistic paid family medical leave & paid time for caregiving responsibilities Ensure healthcare plans include mental health coverage | Incorporate families/family-friendly environment into social gatherings Add a parent affinity group to offer space for working parents to share challenges, resources, and offer feedback |

APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARENT ADVISORS AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

We are tremendously grateful to the Ascend Parent Advisors for committing their time and expertise to help drive the direction of the landscape analysis.

- Ana Hernandez, recommended by Children’s Institute
- Annabelle Davis, recommended by Abriendo Puertas
- Brianna Humphrey, recommended by Friends of the Children LA
- Iris Bautista, recommended by Children’s Institute
- Jan Manla, recommended by Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center
- Jessica Lizeth Garcia, recommended by ABC Unified School District
- Karla Escobar, recommended by LIFT LA
- Maria Elizabeth Diaz, recommended by Child360
- Stephanie Toro, recommended by Parent Engagement Academy
- Tori Prescott, recommended by New Economics for Women
- Yazmin Flores, recommended by Abriendo Puertas
- Yesenia Guerrero, recommended by A New Way of Life
- Jenny Rosales, recommended by Parents for Children South LA

Thank you to the members of the 2Gen LA County Planning Committee for sharing their expertise, time, and for nominating parents to serve as advisors for this one-year project.

- Susan Burton, A New Way of Life
- Andi Mazingo, A New Way of Life
- Adrian Pedroza, Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors
- Daisy Castañeda, Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors
- Debbie Ignacio, Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors
- Martine Singer, Children's Institute, Inc.
- Greg Eubanks, National Crittenton
- Jill Bauman, Imagine LA & Social Benefit LLC
- Alison Olson, LIFT LA
- Roxana Tynan, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)
- Marni Roosevelt, Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center
- Maggie Cervantes, New Economic for Women



Ascend at the Aspen Institute is a catalyst and convener for diverse leaders working across systems and sectors to build intergenerational family prosperity and well-being by intentionally focusing on children and the adults in their lives together. We believe in the power of co-creation. We are a community of leaders – well-connected, well-prepared, and well-positioned – to build the political will that transforms hearts, minds, policies, and practices.

2300 N Street, NW, Suite 700 Washington, DC 20037

ascend.aspeninstitute.org

Questions about this report? Contact Sama Sabihi at sama.sabihi@aspeninstitute.org

