

# When Brain Science Meets Public Policy:

Designing for Outcomes through a Two-Generation Lens—Good Science & Good Common Sense

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What if we really meant it when we talk about educational and economic success as the legacy that passes from one generation in America to the next?<sup>1</sup> What if we focused on policies, practice guidance, program design and systems development related to the family “as a unit,” inclusive of children, birth parents, kin, and other adults who touch the lives of family members?<sup>2</sup>

Could this kind of common sense, science-informed “two (or more) generational approach” really help us begin to lock the door on chronic, multi-generational poverty in our vulnerable neighborhoods and communities? Could it promote significant improvement in young children’s school readiness at entry to kindergarten? A growing chorus of scientists, policy makers, organizations, and individuals believe it can.

We present this report for several reasons. First, working with the family “as a unit” is not new in America. It has long roots in program design and practice that need to be respected and understood.<sup>3</sup> Second, despite the explosion of current attention to this topic, research over the past 50 years reveals a pattern of significant complexity and challenge throughout the process of implementation.<sup>4 5</sup>

On the other hand, the incredible science of brain development coupled with ongoing research on the impact of adversity and toxic stress reveals an important opportunity to improve child and adult outcomes by attending to the needs and capacity of both of them, *together to the greatest extent possible*.<sup>6</sup> Equally important, creating policies,

## IN THIS BRIEF

- p2. Unpacking the science of scarcity, stress and adverse experiences
- p5. From Head Start to current two-gen programs: 50 years of learning
- p9. Emerging two-generation frameworks
- p14. Taking action: two steps for building knowledge and policy change
- p17. Appendix: a resource for state charting

1 Two-Generation Approach, Ascend at the Aspen Institute. Online at — <http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org>

2 Gruendel, J. Two (or More) Generational Frameworks: A Look Within and Across, March 2014. Online at — [www.nhsa.org/research\\_blast\\_may\\_2014#21](http://www.nhsa.org/research_blast_may_2014#21)

3 Scheuer, J. Origins of the Settlement House Movement, The Social Welfare History Project, 1985. Online at — [www.socialwelfarehistory.com/organizations/origins-of-the-settlement-house-movement](http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/organizations/origins-of-the-settlement-house-movement)

4 St. Pierre, R., Layzer, J. & Barnes, H., *Regenerating Two-Generation Programs*. ABT Associates, June 1996. Online at — [http://b3cdn.net/ascend/413efa02127d12d9c6\\_1am6b5wvu.pdf](http://b3cdn.net/ascend/413efa02127d12d9c6_1am6b5wvu.pdf)

5 Helping Parents, Helping Children: Two-Generation Mechanisms. The Future of Children, Spring 2014. Online at — [http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/24\\_01\\_FullJournal.pdf](http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/24_01_FullJournal.pdf)

6 Denboba, A.D., Sayre, R. K., Wodon, Q.T., Elder, L.K., Rawlings, L.B., & Lombardi, J., Stepping Up Early Childhood Development: Investing in Young Children for High Returns, World Bank, December 2014. Online at — <http://blog.bernardvanleer.org/2015/02/13/calling-for-a-two-generation-approach-to-child-development>

(by)

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guiding practice and making investment through a two (or more) generation lens, frankly, brings us much closer to the families we are charged to serve and in a much more respectful and responsive manner. Finally, economic analyses clearly show that addressing the negative impact of adversity at the parent-child level can save billions of dollars spent annually to treat common adult challenges such as hypertension, obesity, diabetes, mental disorders, and heart disease.<sup>7</sup>

## (unpacking the science of scarcity, stress and adverse experiences)

### The Science of Scarcity

A substantial body of research shows that many children who grow up in poverty experience poorer outcomes than their peers who do not live in circumstances of economic challenge. These differences can be seen across a range of areas including health and mental health, early childhood development and school readiness, K-12 academic achievement and post-secondary education, and later workforce participation and economic security.<sup>8</sup>

Today about 16 million children in America live in families at or below the current Federal Poverty Level (\$23,500 for a family of four). About twice as many live in low-income families (200% of the poverty level or less). In many cases, these families represent the working poor.<sup>9</sup> Poverty rates rose during the recent recession particularly among those populations

already at higher risk, including children, young adults, and young or single parents. In addition, economic, health and educational disparities are heightened for non-white families. Even among families living at or below the Federal Poverty Level, seven in ten (72%) have one or both parents in the workforce.<sup>10</sup>

“  
The biological effects of stress undermine [children’s] ability to concentrate, remember things, and control and focus their own thinking.

Ross Thompson  
Future of Children, 2014

Described by some as the stress of scarcity,<sup>11</sup> it is now clear that living with chronic poverty can create biochemical changes in brain functioning of both adults and children that negatively impact their health, mental health and executive functioning.<sup>12</sup> The impact of these biological

changes is most significant for children in their early years because that is when brain growth is most rapid and the neural architecture is expanding and solidifying.<sup>13</sup>

7 Shonkoff, J. Driving Science-Based Innovation to Strengthen the Foundations of Lifelong Learning, Behavior, and Health. Legislative Summit, National Conference of State Legislatures, Atlanta, GA. August 13, 2013. Online at — [www.ncsl.org/documents/summit/summit2013/online-resources/ShonkoffPresentation.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org/documents/summit/summit2013/online-resources/ShonkoffPresentation.pdf)

8 Duncan, G.J. & Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, J. (eds). *Consequences of growing up poor*. Russell Sage Foundation, 1995

9 Child Trends Data Bank. Children in Working Poor Families: Indicators on Children and Youth. Retrieved from [www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/74\\_Working\\_Poor.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/74_Working_Poor.pdf)

10 Demographics of Low-Income Children in the United States, National Center for Children in Poverty, May 2014. Online at — [www.nccp.org/profiles/US\\_profile\\_6.html](http://www.nccp.org/profiles/US_profile_6.html)

11 Days Late, Dollars Short: The Psychology of Scarcity. *The Economist*, August 31, 2013. Online at — [www.economist.com/news/books-and-arts/21584303-those-too-little-have-lot-their-mind-days-late-dollars-short](http://www.economist.com/news/books-and-arts/21584303-those-too-little-have-lot-their-mind-days-late-dollars-short)

12 Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, e. & Zhao, J. Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function. *Science*, August 2013. Online at — [www.sciencemag.org/content/341/6149/976](http://www.sciencemag.org/content/341/6149/976)

13 Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper 3, Updated Edition. 2004/2014 Updated Edition. Online at — [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download\\_file/-/view/469/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download_file/-/view/469/)

Research has also documented that many adults (and their children) living in low-income circumstances experience other stressors that often co-occur with economic challenges. These include low educational attainment and living in a single parent family, experiencing domestic and neighborhood violence, residential instability, and chronic health and mental health challenges. These findings have direct relevance for many governmental health and human service systems, including early education and subsidized child care, child welfare, child and adult mental health, and economic and workforce development programs.<sup>14</sup>

### Adverse Childhood Experiences

In addition to the stressors associated with living poor, child and adult challenges are increased as the result living with adversity in the early years of childhood.<sup>15</sup> Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) include “...verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, as well as family dysfunction (e.g., an incarcerated, mentally ill, or substance-abusing family member; domestic violence; or absence of a parent because of divorce or separation). ACEs have been linked to a range of adverse health outcomes in adulthood, including substance abuse, depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and premature mortality.”<sup>16</sup> A recent research brief by Child Trends provides ACEs prevalence data for each state and the nation as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

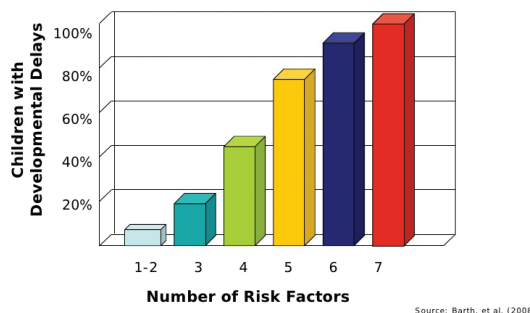
*Research has consistently found that the more types of ACEs that individuals experience in their early years, the greater likelihood of significant health, mental health and behavioral challenges from childhood throughout the later years of life.*


While the cumulative impact of these experiences can lead to significant health and mental health problems over an individual’s lifetime, it is especially troublesome in the first three years of life when the brain is growing the fastest. As exposure to ACEs increases, the likelihood of developmental delays in the first three years of life grows dramatically. More than three-quarters of youngsters ages birth to three who experience five or more risk factors experience developmental delays.<sup>18</sup>

### From Positive to Toxic Stress

Social scientists affiliated with the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University talk about three levels of stress that have an impact on children’s physiological and psychological development: positive,

**Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years**



Center on the Developing Child  HARVARD UNIVERSITY

<sup>14</sup> Driving Science-Based Innovation, Op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved October 31, 2014 from — [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/)

<sup>16</sup> Adverse Childhood Experiences Reported by Adults--Five States, 2009. Weekly, December 17, 2010 /59(49): 1609-1613. Retrieved October 31, 2014 from — [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5949a1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5949a1.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Sacks, V., Murphey, D. & Moore, K. Adverse Childhood Experiences: National and State Level Prevalence. Child Trends, July 2014. Online at — [www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> The slide above is from the Center for the Developing Child and was included as part of the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Early Brain and Child Development presentation. Op. cit.

tolerable and toxic stress. The degree to which each of these levels is helpful or harmful is a function of the presence or absence of nurturing adults.<sup>19</sup>

**“Positive stress** refers to moderate, short-lived stress responses, such as brief increases in heart rate or mild changes in the body’s stress hormone levels. This kind of stress is a normal part of life, and learning to adjust to it is an essential feature of healthy development. Adverse events that provoke positive stress responses tend to be those that a child can learn to control and manage well with the support of caring adults, and which occur against the backdrop of generally safe, warm, and positive relationships.”

**EXAMPLES FOR  
YOUNG CHILDREN**

*Meeting new people; entering a new child care setting, preschool or kindergarten; getting immunized; overcoming a fear of animals*

**“Tolerable stress** refers to stress responses that have the potential to negatively affect the architecture of the developing brain but generally occur over limited time periods that allow for the brain to recover and thereby reverse potentially harmful effects... [T]he presence of supportive adults who create safe environments that help children learn to cope with and recover from major adverse experiences is one of the critical ingredients that make serious stressful events such as these tolerable. In some circumstances, tolerable stress can even have positive effects, but in the absence of supportive relationships, it also can become toxic to the body’s developing systems.”

**EXAMPLES FOR  
YOUNG CHILDREN**

*Serious illness or death of a loved one; a frightening accident; an acrimonious parental separation or divorce; persistent discrimination*

**“Toxic stress** refers to strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the body’s stress management system. Stressful events that are chronic, uncontrollable, and/or experienced without children having access to support from caring adults tend to provoke these types of toxic stress responses. Studies indicate that toxic stress can have an adverse impact on brain architecture. In the extreme, such as in cases of severe, chronic abuse, especially during early, sensitive periods of brain development, the regions of the brain involved in fear, anxiety, and impulsive responses may overproduce neural connections while those regions dedicated to reasoning, planning, and behavioral control may produce fewer neural connections. Extreme exposure to toxic stress can change the stress system so that it responds at lower thresholds to events that might not be stressful to others, and, therefore, the stress response system activates more frequently and for longer periods than is necessary, like revving a car engine for hours every day. This wear and tear increases the risk of stress-related physical and mental illness later in life.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain, Working Paper #3, Harvard Center on the Developing Child, Updated Version, 2005/2015. Online at — [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download\\_file/-/view/469/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download_file/-/view/469/)

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., pp. 1-2

*This evolving science of adversity and stress is highly relevant to the design of two-generation frameworks. Children who have experienced ACEs and chronic toxic stress, with its attendant biochemical stress response challenges, may eventually become parents themselves. If their capacity for positive, effective parenting has been compromised as the result of adversity and stress, the critical relationships that they have with their young children will be impaired. This can create a multi-generational cycle where poor outcomes typify the lives of children, their later functioning as adults, and the children that they bear.*

### **(from Head Start to current two-gen programs: 50 years of learning)**

The persistence of poverty in America and the negative impact of its associated stressors has led to a call for a greater focus on interventions that address the needs of both the child and his or her adult caregiver(s) together. These programs and interventions are variously described as two-generation, dual generation or multi-generation frameworks.

#### **Head Start**

We all know someone or someone's children who attended Head Start. In fact, Head Start was really the first federal investment in a two-generation approach to improve child and parental outcomes as a way out of poverty.<sup>21</sup> In January of 2015, the national Head Start Association in partnership with Ascend at the Aspen Institute celebrated this history with a new report entitled "Two Generations Together: Case Studies from Head Start."<sup>22</sup> This report updates evaluation findings from many cohort and longitudinal studies on the impact of Head Start.

#### *What have we learned?*

The results of decades of research on Head Start are largely positive, as "...numerous assessments...have found improvements in children's test scores, as well as their rates of high school graduation, college attendance, and delinquency, especially among children from disadvantaged backgrounds."<sup>23</sup> More specifically, the longitudinal Head Start Impact Study Final Report<sup>24</sup> revealed that "...access to Head Start has a positive impact on children's preschool experiences... (with) statistically significant differences between the Head Start group and the control group on every measure of children's preschool experiences

**Advances in neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, and the behavioral and social sciences could be mobilized to catalyze more effective policies and practices across multiple sectors to strengthen the foundations of effective learning, lifelong health, economic productivity, and responsible citizenship.**

Jack Shonkoff  
NCSL Legislative Summit,  
August 2013

21 Schmit, S., Matthews, H. & Golden, O. Thriving Children, Successful Parents: A Two-Generation Approach to Policy. CLASP, July 9, 2014. Online at — [www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Two-Gen-Brief-FINAL.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Two-Gen-Brief-FINAL.pdf)

22 Dropkin, E. & Jauregui, S. Two Generations Together: Case Studies from Head Start. National Head Start Association and Ascend at the Aspen Institute, January 2015. Online at — [www.nhsa.org/files/static\\_page\\_files/179756B0-1D09-3519-AD47DF7DB7607D6B/NHSA\\_2Gen\\_Report\\_%20for\\_Web.pdf](http://www.nhsa.org/files/static_page_files/179756B0-1D09-3519-AD47DF7DB7607D6B/NHSA_2Gen_Report_%20for_Web.pdf)

23 Haskins, R. Garfinkel, I. & McLanahan, S. Introduction: Two-Generation Mechanisms of Child Development." In *Helping Parents, Helping Children: Two-Generation Mechanisms, The Future of Children*. Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University and The Brookings Institution, Spring 2014. p. 3

24 Head Start Impact Study Final Report, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, January 10, 2010. Online at — [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/head-start-impact-study-final-report-executive-summary](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/head-start-impact-study-final-report-executive-summary)

measured in this study.”<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> With specific regard to two-generation impacts of Head Start, “...a recent analysis of data from the Head Start Impact Study found greater success in all content areas for children with more engaged parents and suggested that enhancing parent engagement for less engaged parents may play a key role in Head Start’s impacts.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Two-Gen 1.0 Programs through 1995<sup>28</sup>**

The federal investment in Head Start was followed, during the 1980s and 1990s, by additional two-generation spending. The Federal Department of Health and Human Services funded the Early Head Start program, which expanded Head Start to pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers, the Comprehensive Child Development Center demonstration, Head Start Family Services Centers, and the Child and Family Resources Program. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Education funded the Even Start Family Literacy program which integrated efforts to support adult literacy, early childhood education, parenting education, and parent-child literacy activities.

In 1996, social scientist Robert St. Pierre and his colleagues published a review of research<sup>29</sup> focused on the federal programs described above. In addition, the authors included two other programs, Avance,<sup>30</sup> which is still operational in Texas, and New Chance, a research and demonstration program operating between 1989 and 1992.<sup>31</sup> St Pierre’s review revealed a great deal of variation in the design of these programs along with recurrent challenges in their capacity to implement with fidelity. While programs were generally successful in increasing the number of services used by participants, they had few effects on adult employment or income and “...no effects on the psychological status of participating mothers as measured by levels of depression, self-esteem, or use of social supports.” Similarly, they found “...small or no short-terms effects on a wide set of measures of child development.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Two-Gen 2.0 Programs from 1995 through 2014**

In the spring of 2014, the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution dedicated an entire issue of *The Future of Children* to a detailed examination of research on “two-generation mechanisms.”<sup>33</sup> In their chapter, Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn review program characteristics and outcomes from four types of two-generation programs.

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25 Op. cit., p. 24

26 The Head Start Impact Study also reported findings revealing that Head Start gains appeared to fade out from children by the end of the 1st grade. While this short term “fade out” is often cited by critics of the Head Start investment, it is clear that essential growth occurs with enrollment in Head Start programs and positively influences later education and life accomplishment as well. We now need to understand the contribution of the kindergarten and early elementary school experience to the short term dip in academic performance.

27 Two-Generations Together, Op. cit., p.5

28 The description of two-generation models as “1.0” and “2.0” was coined by P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn in their 2014 report, Two Generation Programs in the Twenty-First Century. In *Helping Parents, Helping Children: Two-Generation Mechanisms*. Op. cit., pp. 13-40.

29 St. Pierre, R., Op. cit.

30 Avance, with multiple chapters in Texas, was recently identified by Ascend at the Aspen Institute as a Top 10 “2-Gen” program. Online — [www.avance.org/aspenspend-thinkxchange-avance-and-the-top-ten-for-2gen](http://www.avance.org/aspenspend-thinkxchange-avance-and-the-top-ten-for-2gen). Retrieved November 4, 2014

31 Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children, MDRC, January 1997 ([www.mdrc.org/publication/new-chance](http://www.mdrc.org/publication/new-chance)) Retrieved November 4, 2014

32 St. Pierre, R. Op. cit., p.16

33 *Helping Parents, Helping Children*, Op. cit.

- *Programs for children that are added to adult services*: examples include Career Advance Community Action Project of Tulsa, OK, and the College Access and Success Program of the Educational Alliance
- *Programs for adults that add child services*: for example, Dual-Generation and Green Jobs of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy
- *Adult and child programs within an existing agency or organization*: Advance Parent-Child Education Program; Annie E. Casey Atlanta Civic Partnership; Garrett County Community Action Committee
- *Adult and child programs as “residential programs”*: Keys to Degrees at Endicott College; Housing Opportunity and Services Together at the Urban Institute; Minneapolis - St. Paul Jeremiah Program.

Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn observe that while emerging two-generation programs such as these are “still in their infancy,” they have “...sought to rectify the flaws of earlier efforts, largely by building strong connections between components for children and adults, by ensuring that children and adults receive services of equal duration and intensity, and by incorporating advances in education and workforce development.”<sup>34</sup>

Other chapters in the 2014 *Future of Children* are organized to tackle research findings related to core design components of two-generation programs. These reviews identify areas where positive results have been found but also caution about the significant number of questions that remain to be answered.

### *Intergenerational Benefits of Education*

From her review of the research, Neeraj Kaushal concludes that “...education has large intergenerational payoffs in many areas of children’s lives, and that these payoffs persist over time.”<sup>35</sup> She notes, “These benefits are not fully captured in the traditional measures of returns to education, namely income and productivity,” but cautions that, by themselves, “...two-generation programs will not necessarily ameliorate the structural factors that perpetuate inequality in this country.”<sup>36</sup> She further observes that the strongest correlation between more education and better outcomes exists in countries that have greater inequality and a lower investment in public education.

”  
**There is solid evidence that parental education, parental health, family income, employment and assets are linked to children’s development. Programs that raise the level of parents’ education, health, and income can have a causal impact on children’s development.**

Ross Thompson  
*Future of Children, 2014*

34 Haskins, R., Garfinkel, I. & McLanahan. Introduction: Two-Generation Mechanisms, *Helping Parents, Helping Children*, Op. cit., p, 6

35 Ibid, p. 7

36 Kaushal, N. Intergenerational Payoffs of Education. In *Helping Parents, Helping Children*. Op. cit., p.73

### Child and Parent Health

Sherry Glied and Don Oellerich report that the “...rationale for two-generation programs that target both children’s and parents’ health problems is strong.”<sup>37</sup> Yet they note that we have few two-generation programs that explicitly target pregnant women, newborns, and very young children because “...structural barriers in the U.S. health care system stand in the way of such programs.”<sup>38</sup> The authors help us to understand that, “Many of children’s health problems are

“Some of these [structural] barriers have to do with health insurance, access to care, and benefits, but the biggest one is the fact that physicians typically specialize in treating either children or adults.

Sherry Glied & Dan Oellerich  
*The Future of Children, 2014*

linked to the family’s environment and behaviors...,” and that, “Effective two-generation programs that address these problems exist. Structural factors have limited their dissemination in the past, but the ACA offers new opportunities to develop and implement such programs.”<sup>39</sup>

### Family Income

Greg Duncan, Katharine Magnuson and Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal address the question of whether “...increasing poor parents’ incomes, independent of any other sort of assistance, help their children succeed in school and in life.” The researchers conclude that “...childhood income does indeed improve at least some key child, adolescent and adult outcomes...”<sup>40</sup> Because poverty in the

early years of life has the strongest negative impacts on development investing in income supports at that time may yield the largest benefits. The researchers conclude, however, that “...the policy implications of income support programs rest on collective impacts across all of these domains... Small impacts in several different domains of child functioning could add up to a total benefit that exceed costs, even if no single component shows such a level of effort.”<sup>41</sup>

### Family Assets

Michal Grinstein-Weiss, Trina Williams Shanks, and Sondra Beverly examined studies of family assets and report that “...parents can be induced to save, especially if an account is opened for them and if their savings are matched, but it is not yet clear whether these savings improve either their wealth or the well-being of their children in the long term.”<sup>42</sup> There is, however, “...reason to believe that children who grow up in families with assets are better off than those who grow up in other-wise similar families without them. There is also reason to believe that asset-building programs increase family assets and improve children’s outcomes.”

### Parental Work

Carolyn Heinrich reports that “...parents’ work can have both positive and negative effects upon on their children...The families most likely to experience employment’s negative consequences are precisely those where the parents work in low-paying, low-quality jobs that lack

37 Glied, S. & Oellerich, D. Two-Generation Programs and Health. *Helping Parents, Helping Children*. Op. cit., p. 92

38 Haskins et al, *Helping Parents, Helping Children*, Op. cit., p. 7

39 Glied & Oellerich, Op. cit., p. 92

40 Duncan, G., Magnuson, K. & Votruba-Drzal, E. Boosting Family Income to Promote Child Development. *Helping Parents, Helping Children*. Op. cit., pp. 99, 113

41 Duncan et al, Op. cit., p. 109

42 Haskins et al, *Helping Parents, Helping Children*, Op. cit., p. 8



autonomy and benefits such as sick leave and maternity leave; these conditions are especially detrimental for single mothers and their children.”<sup>43</sup>

### What have we learned after 50 years of programming that touches on the lives of children and also their parents?

University of California, Davis Professor Ross Thompson offers a set of cautionary but positive messages for policy makers, practitioners and funders alike.

**First, we know what the core “mechanisms” of two-generation approaches are and that they work.** There is “...solid evidence that stress regulation, parental education, parental health, family income, employment, and assets are linked to children’s development...[and] programs that raise the level of parents’ education, health, income, etc., can have a causal impact on children’s development.”<sup>44</sup>

**Second, we should not expect dramatic gains from any one mechanism but, rather, cumulative effects across them.** Research “...shows that among social intervention programs generally, positive effects are infrequent and, when they occur, usually modest.”<sup>45</sup> But the authors also report that “...income supplements early in life can have positive effects on the developing child.”

**Third, despite this nation’s long history of interest in whole-family approaches, much of the research in this arena “...has only just left its infancy...[Nonetheless]... there is good reason to expect that interventions based on these mechanisms [i.e., child and parental health, family assets, family income, parental employment and child and parental education] will improve as research proceeds.”**<sup>46</sup>

### (emerging two-generation frameworks)

Today’s thinking about two (or more) generational approaches is significantly informed by both the science of brain development and the science of adversity and trauma. *Importantly, taking a two-generation approach does not imply a single “program model,” but rather a series of policies, practices, services and supports designed to help families and children together improve their functioning and well-being.*

A recent review by the present author entitled *Two Generation (or More) Frameworks: A Look Across and Within*,<sup>47</sup> examined current two-generation approaches being advanced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation,<sup>48</sup> Ascend at the Aspen Institute,<sup>49</sup> the National Human Services

43 Grinstein, M., Williams-Shanks, T. & Beverly, S. Family Assets and Child Outcomes: Evidence and Directions. *Helping Parents, Helping Children*. Op. cit., p. 164

44 Op. cit., p. 9

45 Ibid

46 *Helping Parents, Helping Children*, Op. cit., p. 10

47 *Two Generation (or More) Frameworks*, Op. cit.

48 A Two-Generation Strategy, Annie E. Casey Foundation, December 2013. Retrieved August 13, 2014 from — [www.aecf.org/blog/a-two-generation-strategy](http://www.aecf.org/blog/a-two-generation-strategy). See also — [www.aecf.org/work/past-work/making-connections](http://www.aecf.org/work/past-work/making-connections).

49 The Two Generation Approach, Ascend at the Aspen Institute. Op. cit.

Assembly,<sup>50</sup> the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas in Austin<sup>51</sup>, and the MOMS Partnership<sup>52</sup> in New Haven, Connecticut. Within these frameworks, the most common element directed at young children is high quality early education. Core supports and services for adult caregivers include:

- ☑ Adult post-secondary education (or completion of HS/GED as relevant)
- ☑ Sector-specific workforce preparation, certification and skill building
- ☑ Economic supports, including connections to existing financial benefits and asset development
- ☑ Social capital networks, including peers, neighbors, coaches and mentors
- ☑ Parenting supports and high quality early learning and care for young children in the family
- ☑ Attention to health and mental health needs and challenges, including the impact of toxic stressors and Adverse Childhood Experiences on executive function and self-regulation skills.

The chart on page 11 presents core components of the five two-generation frameworks that are informing national and state policy, practice and program improvements now. Many of the components **highlighted in blue**—while initially unique to each framework—are beginning to emerge across these five two-generation frameworks. Notably absent from these frameworks are young adult male populations (either as the “child” component of a two-generation family, or as young parents themselves) as well as grandparents raising their grandchildren. Also, attention to the role of toxic stress and adversity in the development of key learning and life skills (called executive function and self-regulation skills) is notably lacking in all frameworks except the MOMS Partnership, developed and expanding in New Haven, Connecticut.

### *Core Operating Principles*

Examining each of these in considerable detail, Gruendel offered the following core principles for all two-generation designs:

***Operating Principle #1:*** Community supports and services are wrapped around the family as a whole. They encourage and are supportive of family decision-making, and are committed to family engagement over a period that may extend for one or two years, or longer.

***Operating Principle #2:*** Supports and services are delivered simultaneously to the child and the parent or other primary caregiver (as well as individually) and are integrated across service domains and sectors to decrease cognitive load

50 *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Young Families: Two-Generation Strategies for Working with Disconnected Young Parents & Their Children*. December 2013. Online at — [www.nassembly.org/Knowledge/documents/NHSAFull\\_Report2GenOSOWFamilies.pdf](http://www.nassembly.org/Knowledge/documents/NHSAFull_Report2GenOSOWFamilies.pdf)

51 *Promoting Two-Generation Strategies: A Getting Started Guide for State and Local Policy Makers*, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, November 2013. ([www.utexas.edu/research/cshr/rmcl/index.php/publications/workforce-development/1018-getting-started.html](http://www.utexas.edu/research/cshr/rmcl/index.php/publications/workforce-development/1018-getting-started.html)). Retrieved August 13, 2014)

52 New Haven MOMS Partnership, Yale University School of Medicine. Retrieved August 13, 2014 from — <http://newhavenmomspartnership.org>

Annie E. Casey Foundation	Ascend at the Aspen Institute	National Human Services Assembly	Ray Marshall Center, U. of TX	MOMS Partnership, Yale
Family economic security	Economic supports and asset building	<b>Positive Youth Development</b>	Adult education (HS/GED/post-secondary) and <b>sectoral job training</b> associated with high-paid work	<b>Evidence-based mental MH (CBT) for adult caregivers</b>
Capacity building for parents and <b>caregivers</b>	High quality ed for children and post-secondary education/skill training for adults	“Baby Boosts” to develop parenting skills	High quality early education (PK-grade 3)	<b>Executive functioning and self-regulation skills</b>
Early care and quality education	Social capital networks for <b>family strength and resilience building</b>	Family development	Family and peer support services, including <b>intensive wrap around</b>	<b>Community MH Ambassadors</b>
	Health and well-being	Social connections		Social connections
				Tiered education and workforce development framework

on the consumer, increase service effectiveness for the provider, and maximize resource efficiency and effectiveness for the funder.

**Operating Principle #3:** Supports and services quickly focus on individual and family strengths and assets, including within the extended family, and seek to build on family and community protective factors with the goal of helping children and families become resilient, that is, strong in the face of adversity and chronic challenges.

*Charting the Five Frameworks against the Research*

How do these frameworks compare with the evolving research findings on two-generation outcomes summarized in the *Helping Parents, Helping Children* volume?

At the end of this report is a detailed chart identifying how each framework addresses the “two-generation mechanisms” for which there is evolving research support. This detailed charting will be useful to state human services, health and education administrators, including those managing welfare and TANF programs, WIA and workforce development programs, child welfare and adult mental health services, education programs geared to PK-12, GED and post-secondary offerings, public health and nutrition services including WIC and SNAP, and early childhood services including home visiting, preschool and child care.

**Research-Informed Two-Generation Mechanisms**

- Stress reduction
- Parental education
- Parental health
- Parental employment
- Family income
- Family assets

### Seven Key Questions

Comparing a state’s two-generation offerings to the five emerging two-generation frameworks and the six two-generation “mechanisms” will be a useful first step for states who wish to apply a whole family, two-generation lens to policy, practice and program development. As you review the chart compared with agency offerings in your own community, county or state, the following questions will also be helpful:

- To what extent, does your two-generation design employ evidence-based programs and practices, and also leave room for innovation and customization?
- To what extent are multi-generational programs across agencies coordinated and/or integrated through a single eligibility determination process?
- To what extent is case management and/or care coordination shared across agencies and programs to reduce duplication, foster a whole family plan, and organize services and appointments to reduce family stressors?
- How easily is data shared and with what permissions for those families who receive services and supports across categorically-funded programs?
- Do individual state or local governmental agencies provide co-training opportunities for their staff members across agencies?
- Do current state and local programs include fathers, as well as grandparents and other kin who are primary caregivers?
- Does case practice in each agency support a strong family-decision making process—including for example Child and Family Teaming—and the development of a family plan rather than completely separate plans for children and adults in the family?

### Applying the Research in 2015: A State Case Example

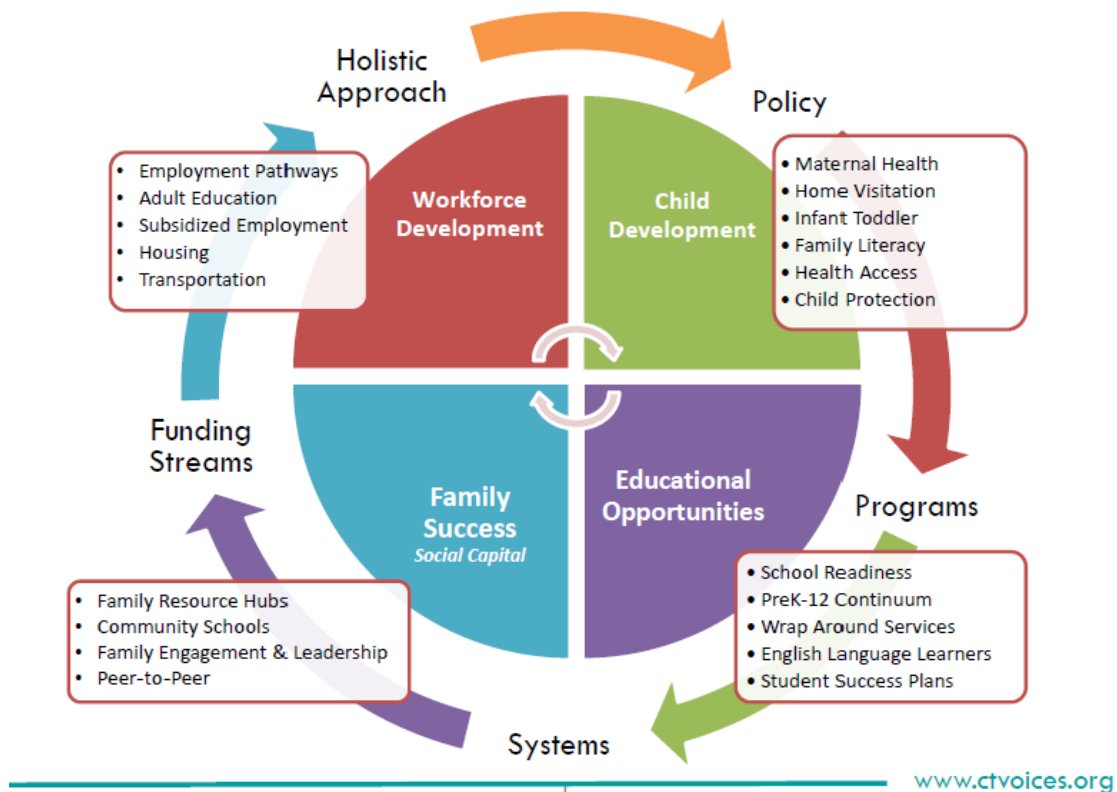
Acting under a mandate passed as part of the 2014 State of Connecticut budget, the Connecticut Commission on Children recently spent six months reviewing data on children’s needs and how the results of this body of research should inform the state’s emerging two-generation approach. Its recently released report, *A Two-Generational Approach: Helping Parents Work and Children Thrive*<sup>53</sup> presents the following graphic representation (page 13) of what a two (or more) generation approach would include in Connecticut.

The Commission’s report also identified seven areas within state government policy that should be examined for applicability to any state’s evolving two-generation design. Detail for each is provided in the Commission on Children’s report and will be useful for governmental policy leaders seeking areas within which to begin to apply two-generation principles. These areas include: housing; welfare reform; adult employment and post-secondary education; early childhood; health and mental health; evaluation, accountability and financing; and existing federal and state policy opportunities.

Finally the Commission made a series of recommendations to begin implementation of Connecticut’s two-generation approach.

<sup>53</sup> *A Two-Generational Approach: Helping Parents Work and Children Thrive*, Connecticut Commission on Children, December 2014. Online at -- [www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/two-gen/2015-02-03\\_report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/two-gen/2015-02-03_report_FINAL.pdf)

## Two Gen Strategy



1. Create two-generation demonstration models (pilots) to test approaches that blend service provision with neighborhood and systems change.
2. Create one or more public-private partnerships with philanthropy in the design, implementation plan and evaluation of the two-generational pilots.
3. Support a workforce liaison to administer and guide two-generation strategy and build connections between partner programs and employers.
4. Develop two-generational co-training opportunities for leadership and staff members across agencies in workforce, human services and early childhood.
5. Build two-generational state programming over four years, guided by a four-year target of increased two-generational cross-agency programming.
6. Create a no-wrong door approach to connect families to needed programs.
7. Incentivize adult education to develop a cross-generation strategy in the ten Connecticut towns with the highest levels of low-literacy adults.
8. Create a state interagency working group to align policies, implement strategic financing, implement a learning collaborative, and manualize two-generation practice.
9. Modernize TANF within a two-generation context that reflects the state's new economic context.
10. Partner, along with the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures, with three other states actively developing a two-generation approach.

## (taking action: two steps for building knowledge and policy change)

Those of us working in state, county and municipal jurisdictions have a wealth of excellent resources to draw on as we examine our policies, practices and funded programs to determine how closely they reflect the solid science and common sense of taking a robust multi-generational approach. Several of these are summarized below but many more reports and



conversations can be found by simply googling the terms “two-generation,” “multi-generation, or dual generation,” or by using the references provided throughout this report as a starting point.

### Build an Expanding Knowledge Base about Two-Generation Approaches

The electronic world is now awash in wonderful knowledge resources to help us build the understanding among our many stakeholder groups and partners that we can make really good public policy decisions when we apply “good science and good common sense.”

Ascend at the Aspen Institute hosts an amazing website of resources that is constantly updated. Resources useful in managing an effective knowledge building and strategic communications process include:

- *Two-Generation Playbook* (January 2014)<sup>54</sup>
- *Top 10 for 2-Gen: Policy Ideas to Advance Two-Generation Efforts*, November 2014<sup>55</sup>
- *Two-Generation Approaches: National Voices Project*, November 2014<sup>56</sup>
- *Voices for Two-Generation: Opportunities for Policy Change. Findings and Messaging Tips* from a National Survey Commissioned by Ascend at the Aspen Institute, December 2014.<sup>57</sup>

Another resource to be treasured is the website of the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University. Here you will find the latest science of early development coupled with emerging resources on building adult caregiver capacity, available as scientific reports, briefs, video, YouTube materials and slides that you can use.

54 The Two-Generation Playbook, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, January 2014. Online at — <http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/pages/two-generation-playbook>

55 Top 10 for 2-Gen: Policy Ideas to Advance Two-Generation Efforts Online at — [http://b.3cdn.net/ascend/44965db1fbd230683b\\_dqm6bb2fi.pdf](http://b.3cdn.net/ascend/44965db1fbd230683b_dqm6bb2fi.pdf)

56 Two-Generation Approaches: National Voices Project, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, November 2014. Online at — [http://b.3cdn.net/ascend/bed174c8d9ae54f897\\_72m6iy0bg.pdf](http://b.3cdn.net/ascend/bed174c8d9ae54f897_72m6iy0bg.pdf)

57 Voices for Two-Generation Opportunities for Policy Change: Findings and Messaging Tips from a National Survey, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, December 2014. Online at — [http://b.3cdn.net/ascend/1f66817f792152dedd\\_zdm6ig17g.pdf](http://b.3cdn.net/ascend/1f66817f792152dedd_zdm6ig17g.pdf)

Within a two-generation context, be sure to take a look at the following resources:

- *Building Adult Capabilities to Improve Child Outcomes: A Theory of Change*<sup>58</sup>
- *Driving Science-Based Innovation in Policy and Practice: A Logic Model*<sup>59</sup>
- *Tackling Toxic Stress*<sup>60</sup>
- *Using Science to Coach Caregivers*.<sup>61</sup>

### Create a State-Specific Two-Generation Policy Agenda

In July of 2014, CLASP published “Thriving Children, Successful Parents: A Two-Generation Approach to Policy.”<sup>62</sup> This concise report outlines five areas that ought to be included in any two-generation policy agenda.

- 1. Connect education and training pathways with child care and early education.** To accomplish this in a research-informed context, barriers would have to be overcome. As one example, “...federal post-secondary financial aid for shorter-term credential programs thwarts the development of innovative programs that could combine short-term training for parents of young children with early childhood education.” To address this would require program redesign involving “...TANF, workforce development, higher education, child care and Head Start.”<sup>63</sup>
- 2. Focus on the earliest years of childhood through expanded home visiting and other effective family-support programs.** “Take advantage of the opportunities to use TANF to provide two-generational services and to exempt parents of infants from narrow participation requirements.”<sup>64</sup>
- 3. Strengthen child care policies for both parents and children.** As one example, when parents’ work schedules or incomes are “...in constant flux due to erratic work schedules beyond their control, they risk losing child care—so removing work schedule verification requirements and allowing for broader authorizations can make child care assistance more usable for parents.”<sup>65</sup>
- 4. Improve labor policies for low income workers.** This could involve a comprehensive portfolio of labor polices “...including an increase in the minimum wage, advance notice of job schedules, the right to request and receive flexible and predictable job schedules, minimum hours, paid family and medical leave, and paid sick days...”<sup>66</sup>

58 *Building Adult Capacities to Improve Child Outcomes: A Theory of Change*, Harvard Center on the Developing Child, undated. Retrieved February 27, 2015 from -- //developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/theory\_of\_change

59 *Driving Science-Based Innovation in Policy and Practice: A Logic Model*, Harvard Center on the Developing Child, undated. Retrieved February 27,2015 from — [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/multimedia/interactive\\_features/a\\_logic\\_model\\_to\\_drive\\_science\\_based\\_innovation/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/multimedia/interactive_features/a_logic_model_to_drive_science_based_innovation/)

60 *Tackling Toxic Stress*, Harvard Center on the Developing Child, undated. Retrieved on February 27, 2015 from — [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/stories\\_from\\_the\\_field/tackling\\_toxic\\_stress/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/stories_from_the_field/tackling_toxic_stress/)

61 *Using Science to Coach Caregivers*, Harvard Center on the Developing Child, undated. Retrieved February 27, 2015 from — [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/stories\\_from\\_the\\_field/innovation\\_in\\_action/find\\_using\\_science\\_to\\_coach\\_caregivers/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/stories_from_the_field/innovation_in_action/find_using_science_to_coach_caregivers/)

62 *Thriving Children, Successful Parents*, Op. cit.

63 Op. cit., p. 5

64 Op. cit. p. 6

65 Ibid

66 Ibid

- 5. Improved access to health care and mental health treatment.** One very important example is the provision of treatment options for maternal depression. “Strong and consistent evidence indicates that a mother’s untreated depression undercuts young children’s development, including risks to learning and success in school, and may have lifelong effects.”<sup>67</sup>

A recent report by the National Center for Children in Poverty entitled “State Policies through a Two-Generation Lens”<sup>68</sup> identifies three areas of policy supports for families worth examining: early education and care; health and nutrition; and parenting and economic supports. This report is especially helpful in a state-specific context as it provides the status of adoption of all polices in each of these three areas, by state.

### *The Special Case for EITC*

If living with economic scarcity and insecurity is one of the greatest contributors to poor child and adult outcomes, it makes sense to look at the research on family income as a key two-generational policy approach. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities has updated its resource brief on the Earned Income Tax Credit at both the federal and state levels.<sup>69</sup> “The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a federal tax credit for low- and moderate-income working people. It encourages and rewards work as well as offsets federal payroll and income taxes. Twenty-six states, including the District of Columbia, have established their own EITCs to supplement the federal credit.”<sup>70</sup>

In their review of the impact of income-support programs, including EITC, Greg Duncan and his colleagues articulate considerations for policy makers at the state and federal level.

- Since the impact of poverty is greatest on younger children, “...then it may make sense to consider income-transfer policies that provide more income to families with young children.”<sup>71</sup>
- “Another step might be to ensure that sanctions and other regulations embedded in welfare policies do not deny benefits to families with very young children.”<sup>72</sup>
- Consider additional awards of cash assistance “...that depend on the behaviors of parents and children.” These are called “conditional cash-assistance programs.”<sup>73</sup>

Duncan and his colleagues conclude with a significant note of caution. “The wider discussion of policy has been cast in the optimistic light of benefits that might result from increasing the incomes of low-income families. It is important to remember, however, that reductions in the generosity of programs such as the EITC can be expected to reduce children’s success at school and increase their mothers’ stress levels and mental health problems. With achievement and

67 Op. cit. p. 7

68 Smith, S., Ekono, M. & Robbins, T. State Policies through a Two-Generation Lens: Strengthening the Collective Impact of Policies that Affect the Life Course of Young Children and their Parents. National Center for Children in Poverty, September 2014. Online at — [http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text\\_1092.pdf](http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1092.pdf)

69 Policy Basics: The Earned Income Tax Credit. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, January 2015. Online at — [www.cbpp.org/files/policybasics-eitc.pdf](http://www.cbpp.org/files/policybasics-eitc.pdf)

70 Op cit., Online at — [www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=2506](http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=2506)

71 Op. cit., p. 113

72 Ibid

73 Op. cit., p. 114



attainment gaps between low- and high-income children larger than any time in the last 40 years, we should think twice about policy changes that would further increase these gaps.”

### The Bottom Line

Regardless of political persuasion, applying the neuroscience of human development and adversity along with good common sense offers us perhaps the best current opportunity to address the gnarly problems of intergenerational poverty and increasing disparities in health, economic, educational and life outcomes. Research also tells us that employing a two (or more) generational lens to this work will markedly improve outcomes for our children, their families and neighborhoods, as well as for the tax-paying public.

### (appendix: a resource for state charting)

#### Two-Generation Mechanics across the Five Emerging Two-Gen Frameworks

Mechanism	AECF	Ascend	NHRA	Ray Marshall	MOMs
<b>Stress Reduction</b>	Developing adult executive function skills	Supports to prevent toxic stress and build social capital, including family, friend and faith networks	Supports for peer networks to reduce social isolation	Provide wrap around family and peer support services, including transportation, earnings supplements, peer community building	Meet basic needs, including housing, food, diapers, safety
	Supports to address parental stress	Access to health insurance, mental health services, and supports for basic needs such as food, housing, child care, transportation	Strengthen existing ties to supportive adults for each young family		Provide evidence-based mental health intervention (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)
<b>Parental Education</b>	Development of social networks		Supports to address basic needs, including housing, food and health care		Peer coaching and service connections with peer MH Ambassadors
	Comprehensive basic services such as health care, nutrition, mental health				
<b>Parental Education</b>	Education and training for adults	Post-secondary education	Parenting education	Adult basic and developmental education	Executive function skill development
	For children: High quality early and elementary education, successful transitions, effective teaching	For children: early education and care, K-12 education, and family literacy	For children: early education and care with parents as partners	Post-secondary education  For children: Early Head Start, Head Start, PreK and K-3rd	

Mechanism	AECF	Ascend	NHRA	Ray Marshall	MOMs
<b>Parental Health</b>	Comprehensive services, including health, nutrition and mental health	Access to health insurance Mental health support	For children: timely health services including prenatal care, early preventive care, early detection of delays	●	Evidence-based mental health intervention (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)
<b>Parental Employment</b>	Training, job assistance and other workforce development and career-enhancing strategies leading to “family-supporting work”	Workforce development and contacts Career coaches	●	Career coaching Workforce intermediaries Industry- and geographically-specific employer-driven job training	Executive function informed workforce development framework in development
<b>Family Income and Assets</b>	Financial coaching, asset, financial education, access to non-predatory financing products and services Access to public benefits	Financial education and asset building Child care subsidies Student financial aid and Pell Grants Tax credits Public food assistance (e.g. SNAP)	●	Earning supplements	●



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