



## **Economic Well-Being of Rhode Island Families: The Promise and Practice of Two-Generation Approaches**

### *Executive Summary*

Children who grow up in low-income families are likely to suffer adverse long-term consequences and continue the cycle of poverty as adults. Some interventions to promote economic well-being, focused on either the child or the parent, have shown only modest effects in disrupting the pattern. Workplace development programs sometimes ignore parental constraints in participation and some early childhood education (ECE) programs do not consider the family conditions to which a child returns. Two-generation policy approaches promote family economic well-being by explicitly combining intensive, high-quality program components targeted to both adults and their children. Emerging evidence from program evaluations supports the continued consideration of two-generation policy alternatives.

### *Economic Well-being of Rhode Island Families*

Families are responsible for several tasks essential to a well-functioning society. Families routinely provide both childcare and economic support, but sometimes they need additional assistance. Rhode Island's Temporary Caregiver Insurance program, only the third paid family leave program in the country, is a step in the right direction to support working parents and protect jobs in times of medical crisis or at childbirth. Some family economic struggles, however, represent a persistent challenge over time. According to 2013 estimates compiled by RI Kids Count, 22% of children are growing up in households with incomes at or below the federal poverty line. The unemployment rate for parents actively seeking jobs was 9% in that year. Even households with employed parents struggle for economic self-sufficiency. Among families with at least one parent working for at least a full year, 18% were still considered low-income. 34% of families with children did not have regular, full-time employment.

### *Child Development in Economically Disadvantaged Families*

Research has repeatedly shown that children who grow up in economically disadvantaged homes are more likely to suffer adverse developmental effects than other children. Educational effects include low school readiness, low academic proficiency, and increased risk of not completing high school. Adverse health effects of child poverty include higher rates of asthma, diabetes, acute illnesses, hearing and vision issues, and speech problems. Furthermore, children growing up in poor families are much more likely to face economic disadvantages as adults, thus continuing an intergenerational cycle of poverty. The effects may be particularly acute if poverty occurs during the earliest years of childhood. Policy interventions that directly target children's developmental needs and promote parental employment simultaneously hold promise for disrupting negative consequences.



## The Promise of Two-Generation Anti-poverty Strategies: Existing and Emerging Evidence

By Dr. Christopher T. King



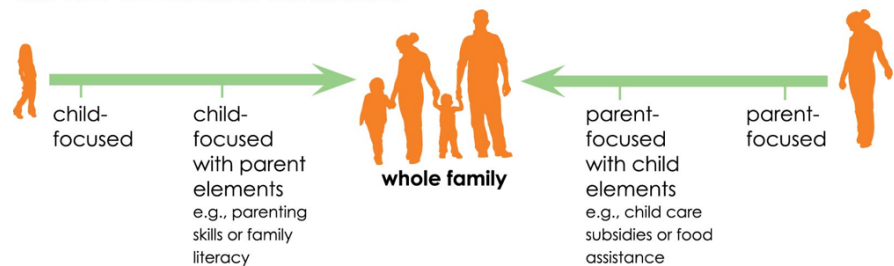
### What Are Two-Generation Approaches?

Two-generation programs seek to improve family economic well-being by explicitly combining interventions targeted at both adults and their children. In contrast, anti-poverty strategies have typically focused on adults or children. For decades, programs have helped adults through education and training or supported children through early interventions. In two-generation approaches, these essential elements of ECE for children and education and workforce development programs for adults are complemented and reinforced by additional components including support services, asset-building, health promotion, and the development of social capital networks through coaching and peer support. A particular two-generation strategy may emphasize a child or adult focus, as illustrated by the Continuum shown below, but the two-generation approach always considers the well-being of the whole family.

### Why Use Two-Generation Approaches?

Poverty may affect child development through multiple mechanisms. The chronic stress associated with persistent economic disadvantage may interfere with brain development, affect cognitive functioning and emotional regulation, and increase the likelihood of physical and/or

#### The Two-Generation Continuum



mental health issues. Limited resources and opportunities associated with low incomes, few assets, and limited parental education may also affect child outcomes. Parental employment can positively impact children through provision of role models and higher income for children, but it also decreases parenting time and increases stress, especially for parents with unstable, low-wage jobs without benefits. The variety of poverty-related factors that influence child development suggests the need for a multi-faceted, coordinated strategy focused on the whole family to disrupt pathways leading to negative outcomes.

Programs focusing primarily on either children or adults have not shown strong effects on economic well-being of families. Evaluations of ECE programs have shown mixed results, including the initial two-generation models that added low-intensity parenting components. Recent ECE evaluations highlight the challenges of replicating the positive effects found in a few early studies. Children return home from such programs to families that are likely struggling with limited income, education, and skills. Traditional workforce development programs focused on adults have produced only modest effects on parental income and employment. Intensive, sector-specific career pathway programs have yielded larger and more lasting returns on investment. Parental constraints, however, make it challenging for some low-income individuals to participate. Two-generation approaches to promote family economic well-being adopt a holistic perspective and rely on coordinated services.

### Do Two-Generation Programs Work? Emerging Evidence from CareerAdvance® and Other Initiatives

Two-generation approaches have been implemented in several sites and the early results are promising. One example, CareerAdvance,® is a work-readiness and training program piloted in Tulsa, OK that helps low-income parents with young children pursue economic self-sufficiency.

The program equips parents through programs designed to increase employability, earning potential, and parenting skills while also promoting school readiness and socio-emotional development among children.

CareerAdvance® utilizes a sector-specific career pathway of sequential trainings leading to specific “stackable” credentials needed within the healthcare sector. Key components include coaching, cohort-based training, peer support networks, and performance incentives. The program is paired with high-quality early education to specifically utilize a two generation approach. Recent results show that 95% of the initial 102 participants in the CareerAdvance® nursing pathway completed the core course, 93% passed the certification exam for nursing

assistants, and 71% obtained employment. Participants indicated that key factors in achieving success were the support of peer networks, coaching about work-family balance issues, and the acquisition of particular skills including time management and communication skills.

*"We constantly have the support, not only from our classmates but also from our teachers and our coach...When I was in college before it was just me against the world, basically you know. So if I dropped out, nobody cared."*  
CareerAdvance® participant

The Jeremiah Program and Keys to Degrees represent alternative models of two-generation programs for promoting family economic self-sufficiency. The Jeremiah Program in St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN targets single mothers and provides life skills training, individualized coaching, employment readiness and job placement services to promote economic self-sufficiency. Recognizing the challenges of single parenthood, the program also provides safe, affordable housing on a campus with other participants and on-site early childhood education. A recent study by the Wilder Foundation showed a \$4 return on investment (ROI) to society for every dollar spent on a Jeremiah family.

Keys to Degrees, a program started at Endicott College in Beverly, MA, provides family-friendly housing on college campuses to single custodial parents enrolled full-time as students. Students receive group and

*"I like how they made the program fit around the youngest child's schedule... so only during clinical times do you have to worry about before and after care. But for the most part, we cal still take the kids, kiss them good-bye, do our thing, and then be there to pick them up."*  
CareerAdvance® participant

individualized support from mentors and peers to pursue a 4-year college degree. The program also offers access to ECE and after-school programming. A recent evaluation of program sites, funded by the Kellogg Foundation and conducted by Program Evaluation and Research Group, found that Keys to Degrees participants rely less on the program over time and are making strides toward degree completion and economic self-sufficiency. Financial sustainability of the program is a concern, though, largely because campus housing is subsidized.

### Key Principles in Two-Generation Policy Approaches

Two-generation approaches are also relevant to policy-level reforms and systems interventions. Developing effective and efficient policies relies on careful consideration of the particular context of economic disadvantage that families face. Two-generation approaches can assist families in fulfilling important social functions of childcare, child development, and economic support by incorporating a few key principles:

- 1) Effective coordination is important to address fragmentation in services for low-income families.
- 2) Expanding social capital networks through career coaches and cohort models is an essential component.
- 3) A whole family perspective can be incorporated into initial designs for new programs.

## Policy Implications

- 1) Effective coordination and collaboration is important to address fragmentation in existing services for low-income families.** For example, institutions of higher education and human service agencies need to work together more effectively to provide support and flexibility to low-income parents on campuses. At present, 23% of students in higher education are parents, and the figure for community and technical colleges is about twice that figure. Other opportunities exist to coordinate within and across home-visiting, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and healthcare expansion programs.
- 2) Expanding social capital networks through career coaches, cohort models, and peer supports is an essential component of effective programs.** These interventions help parents address the challenge of balancing childcare and employment responsibilities. Low-income parents are resilient and have a strong motivation to improve the lives of their children, but some education and training requirements create conflicts with parenting tasks.
- 3) A whole family perspective can be incorporated into program designs and proposals related to opportunities for federal funding.** Two-generation strategies for promoting family economic well-being can be pursued through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, ongoing Food Stamp E&T Demonstrations, and upcoming reauthorizations of TANF, Head Start, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. A window of opportunity exists, but the responsibility for high-quality design and implementation of programs for family economic well-being rests squarely on states and municipalities.

*(This summary is adapted from several sources including CareerAdvance® and Capital IDEA evaluation reports prepared by Dr. King and his colleagues at the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Services at the University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs and Northwestern University. Dr. King was a 2012 Fellow with Ascend at the Aspen Institute. His forthcoming two-generation anthology, co-edited with Aspen Fellows, Dr. P. Lindsey Chase-Lansdale and Dr. Mario Small, is being released by the Aspen Institute on April 7, 2015.)*



## About the Family Impact Seminars

The **Rhode Island Family Impact Seminar** is affiliated with a national network of university-based sites in over 25 states called The Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars (<http://familyimpactseminars.org>). In 2014, Brown University was accepted to represent Rhode Island. The Institute provides training and technical assistance to state affiliates. We receive guidance from a legislative advisory council including Senator Louis DiPalma, Senator Gayle Golden, Representative Deborah Ruggiero, Representative Marvin Abney, and Representative Antonio Giarrusso. Legislative staff including Marie Ganim, Lynne Urbani, and Kayleigh Pratt have provided insight and help. Joseph Codega coordinated the 2015 Seminar.

The Rhode Island Family Impact Seminar shares two primary goals espoused by the Policy Institute. One is to strengthen policymaking by providing timely, objective, high-quality research on current issues for state legislators and legislative staff through seminars, discussion sessions, and issue briefs. The Seminar also promotes the adoption of a family impact lens to consider the effects of policy on family functioning and the fulfillment of key social responsibilities including childcare and economic support.



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