

## **The Two-Generation Approach: Parents Work, Children Learn, Families Thrive**

### **Summary**

Intergenerational poverty threatens the well-being of Austin's citizens and its economy.

Two-generation programs are one new and promising strategy for reducing poverty in the short run and preventing poverty in future generations. Both philanthropic foundations and the federal government have expressed interest and offered funding for such programs.

Two-generation programs explicitly target low-income parents and children from the same family, providing **high quality** services for both. Programs can include

- *For children:* health and education services, home visiting, early childhood education, out-of-school programs
- *For parents:* education for parenting, literacy and basic educational skills, workforce training for jobs that offer opportunities for advancement.
- Strong connections and coordination between the services for parents and children.

Over the past year, a small group of stakeholders and thought leaders from the Austin community, who represent adult workforce, adult education, and early childhood education programs, have met to discuss how local service providers might collaborate in implementing such a strategy for Austin. We have met with many service providers and are ready to take the next steps toward making two-generation programs a reality in Austin.

### **The Two-Generation Vision**

Our two-generation vision for Austin is that:

*Policies and programs are designed, and their resources are aligned, to help parents improve basic educational skills and become economically stable, to strengthen parents' ability to be positive influences on their children's development, and to help children achieve their maximum potential by simultaneously addressing the needs of parents and children. Meeting the needs of both generations will produce larger and more enduring effects than can be achieved by serving parents and children separately.*

### **Why Do We Need Two-Generation Programs?**

Intergenerational poverty is a major problem in the United States. Economic mobility across generations (or the ability for children to do better financially than their parents) has diminished over time, and Austin is no exception, with lower mobility rates than many major cities (Chetty et al. 2014). Although the causes of this decline are numerous, it is clear that many low-income families experience a complex network of challenges that hamper their ability to get ahead. Low-income parents often have low levels of education and job skills that limit their economic opportunities as well as the quality of the environments they provide for their children. Chronic poverty produces toxic stress that affects adults' abilities to perform well in the workplace and to provide a high quality home environment, which in turn impairs children's cognitive and emotional well-being. A chronic lack of affordable, quality childcare in lower income communities in Austin makes it difficult for parents to acquire and maintain employment.

They are often forced to choose child care of low quality, which leaves their children at an academic disadvantage long before they enter school. While there are many good programs in Austin addressing these issues, most focus solely on low-income adults or solely on their children, ignoring the fact that economic and social challenges affect whole families. The current fractured service delivery approach exacerbates the problem, as each member of the family can be a barrier to the progress of other family members.

## What Are Two-Generation Programs?

Two-generation strategies can take various shapes and forms, but they have what Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn (2014) call a “unifying form”: they explicitly target low-income parents and children from the same family (Aspen Institute, 2012; Gruendel, 2014). Such programs encompass health and education services, home visiting, early childhood education, and other services for children, and parenting, literacy, education, job training and other services for parents.<sup>1</sup> This document outlines a vision for a particular type of two-generation model that supports the financial, cognitive, and emotional well-being of parents and their children by coordinating high-quality adult education and job training for parents with high quality early childhood education services for their children. Over the past year, a small group of stakeholders and thought leaders from the Austin community, who represent adult workforce, adult education, and early childhood education programs, have met to discuss how local service providers might collaborate in implementing such a strategy for Austin. Both the federal government and prominent foundations are working to promote two-generation approaches across the nation, and we hope to build on this momentum.

**Anti-poverty efforts can address the separate but linked needs of low-income parents and their young children as *opportunities* rather than obstacles to interventions when adult education, workforce development, and early childhood education are coordinated.** Family income and maternal education are among the strongest predictors of early child development (Duncan et al., 2014; Mulligan, 2011), and advances in both parent education and family income when children are in the first few years of life have a particularly powerful effect on children’s development. When parents advance their own education, they offer their children more educational opportunities and serve as models for achievement. (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Kaushal, 2014; Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean, & Huston, 2009; Sommer et al., 2012). High quality child care or early childhood education programs have been found to promote young children’s academic achievement and social-emotional development (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant, & Clifford, 2000). Such programs also serve the dual purpose of enabling parents to be in the workforce (King et al., 2011) or to pursue their own education (Sommer et al., 2012). When services for children and parents are coordinated, children benefit from the improved environments provided by both parents and early education settings, and parents’ motivation and effort in the workforce increases as they see that they can be models for their children. When children come home from early education with enhanced language and behavioral skills, the adults around them respond with increases in cognitive stimulation and reductions in punitive parenting.

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<sup>1</sup> Two-generation strategies may serve grandparents when they are the primary caregivers.

## Why is Two Better than One? One Plus One Equals Three

Two-generation programs are based on the assumption that the benefits from each component multiply to produce a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Experience with such programs in other locations provides guidelines about their essential components (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014):

- High quality services for both parents and children that are of equal duration and intensity.
- Workforce programs that incorporate basic and postsecondary education with and workforce development for jobs that offer opportunities for advancement.
- Strong connections and coordination between the services for parents and children.

In other localities, two-generation programs have begun in several ways: programs for adults have expanded to include quality early childhood education; programs for children have expanded to include adult education and workforce development; or programs containing both components have been expanded. We seek to encourage a two-generation focus across the Austin/Travis County community; hence, any of these avenues may be possible.

## What Constitutes High Quality Two-Generation Programs?

For two-generation approaches to be successful, each component (adult education and workforce training or education, early childhood education, and the coordination between the two) must be of high quality. An appreciation of what constitutes quality has developed out of decades of research on individual programs, and we can bring this knowledge to bear in the coordination of two-generation programs. Initially, programs may encompass many but not all of these components, but, over time, the path to including most of them should be clear.

### Adult Workforce & Education Programs

After years of research indicating that workforce and education programs were only somewhat effective (e.g., LaLonde, 1995, Orr et al., 1995), recent years have seen the emergence of highly effective workforce programs for adults and older youth (e.g., King, 2014; King and Heinrich, 2011; Maguire et al., 2010, Smith and King, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Such results have been confirmed in multi-state evaluations of Workforce Investment Act programs (Heinrich et al., 2008, Hollenbeck et al. 2005).

What do high quality workforce and education programs for adults look like? Such programs:

- Have **clear near- and longer-term goals for success**, largely centered on attaining **economic self-sufficiency and stability** and meeting **client-defined goals**.
- Focus on **growth sectors** of local labor markets, offering **well-defined opportunities for career advancement**, such as health care, advanced manufacturing, water/waste management.
- Feature **stackable credentials** associated with **well-structured career pathways**.
- Stress **substantive skills development** for positions with long-term career advancement rather than immediate job placement in any job.
- Provide **basic education programs** to help lower-skilled individuals acquire the foundational skills needed to move into and succeed in higher-level skills development.

- **Contextualize adult education and English-language skills acquisition** within occupational skills development.
- Emphasize **intensive, competency-based services**, in which participant progress is based on performance and accomplishment rather than simply hours spent in a classroom.
- Employ **career coaches/counselors/navigators** to guide participants in making decisions about career pathways and to ensure that they actively and regularly participate in key activities.
- Rely on **peer assistance via cohort-based approaches** to actively engage participants in providing their own support for participation and success.
- Often provide **asset building and financial literacy** assistance as well to ensure that income gains are sustainable.

## Early Childhood Education & Childcare Programs

Although two-generation programs can encompass services for children from infancy through adolescence, we emphasize early childhood programs because of solid evidence that such programs as Head Start, pre-kindergarten, High-Scope/Perry Preschool, and the Abecedarian Project, have positive effects on children's cognitive skills and school readiness (Shore, 2009). Rigorous evaluations have documented effects lasting into adulthood across an array of important outcomes, including socio-emotional and non-cognitive skills, educational attainment, labor-force participation, economic well-being, and health (Camilli et al., 2010, Campbell et al., 2014, Deming, 2009; Heckman, 2008; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). High quality early childhood programs, such as those operated as part of Educare's Bounce Network (Yajezian & Bryant, 2010) and in such places as Tulsa, Oklahoma (Bartik et al., 2012; Gormley et al., 2011), yield substantial impacts on children's intellectual and social-emotional development that enable children to succeed in school and in life.

### What do high quality early childhood education programs look like? Such programs:

- Offer **continuity of services to children** for at least 15 hours a week for a minimum of nine (9) months of the year—high rates of attendance are critical to success.
- **Meet high-quality standards** as defined by the top tier of the Texas Quality Rating Information System (QRIS, currently in development), National Association of Childcare (NAC) or National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation.
- Offer **sufficient subsidies** through contracts with the Child Care System (CCS), center-based scholarships, or other funding sources to help low-income families access and maintain services.
- Employ **highly skilled professionals** who are family-focused, culturally sensitive, and linguistically matched to the enrolled families.
- Provide a **warm and responsive learning environment**, with scores above the national average in all categories of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008).
- Use **evidence-based curricula** that **address both cognitive and social/emotional development**.
- Involve parents in ways that are sensitive to and aligned with the **cultural values and dynamics** of the families.

- Promote **healthy behavior**, including good nutrition and physical activity

## Coordination and Support Services

To support families and enable them to take full advantage of workforce and early childhood education services, two-generation programs coordinate their services and offer additional supports. Ideally, two-generation programs should:

- Provide **requisite support services**, including transportation, financial literacy, and housing assistance, if needed, to facilitate families' successful participation in programs and subsequent success.
- Maintain a **continuity of services and supports** across family transitions and entering or exiting programs.
- **Schedule activities and services** in a coordinated fashion to minimize the burden on families' time.
- Ensure all levels of staff **communicate** across programs in a consistent and systemic way.
- Develop a common understanding of the **community need** across partner agencies.
- Coordinate and design **eligibility requirements, renewal schedules, and applications** across systems.
- Ensure that agencies understand **the outcomes and procedures of their partner agencies**.
- Partner with a third-party evaluator to assess the program **across the entire collaboration** rather than separately within each partner organization.

## How Can We Implement Two-Generation Programs in Austin?

Our community has many low-income families with young children, and childcare is very expensive. Data from the Texas Regional Opportunity Index demonstrates that childcare currently constitutes 14.5 percent of a family's budget in Travis County, which is higher than the 11.1 percent of a family's budget spent on average in Texas. In addition to burdensome costs for childcare, many families are struggling just to get by. Eighteen (18) percent of all individuals live in poverty in Austin, up from 15 percent in 2007.

According to 2012 American Community Survey data, the percentage of children under age 18 living in poverty in Austin was 26 percent in 2012, up from 19 percent in 2007. Furthermore, data reported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation shows that from 2006-2012, the percentage of Austin children living in extreme poverty (less than 50% of the federal poverty level) has risen from 10 percent in 2006 to 15 percent in 2012. This percentage is higher than the statewide average of 11 percent.

These children are growing up with multiple barriers to becoming educated themselves and to becoming productive workers of the next generation. These barriers operate well before children reach formal schooling age. **Changing the opportunities of our families as well as those of their children is not only humane but is essential to the economic well-being of our community.** Two-generation programs are one promising avenue to promote family well-being and to reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

### **What Will This Take?**

It will require agencies that typically work only with adults or only with children to identify common barriers, to coordinate their services, and to share resources. It will require some external support to facilitate and support these collaborations. Finally, it will require a commitment to serving low-income families in Austin in the most efficient and effective way possible, even if it means thinking outside the box. Thankfully, there is an abundance of such a commitment among service providers in the Austin area, and the early excitement they have expressed for a two-generation approach make clear that it is feasible.

Two-generation programs have incredible promise for serving low-income families in Austin. It is time to put them into practice to see how two can indeed be better than one.

The Austin Two-Generation Advisory Committee calls on service providers in the Greater Austin area to endorse the two-generation approach outlined in this document and to strive to create two-generation programs both within and across service providers.

\*The *Austin Two-Generation Advisory Committee* is made up of representatives from Austin Community College, Austin Independent School District, the City of Austin, United Way for Greater Austin, Workforce Solutions-Capital Area, Travis County, and the Sooch Foundation. Drs. Christopher King and Aletha Huston with the University of Texas at Austin are current Advisory Committee co-chairs.

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