

# THE WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT

POLICY BRIEF ■ SUMMER 2014

## CONSIDERING TWO GENERATION STRATEGIES IN THE STATES

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### THE WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT

#### Strengthening State Policies for America's Working Poor

Millions of American breadwinners work hard to support their families. But, despite their determination and effort, many are mired in low-wage jobs that provide inadequate benefits and offer few opportunities for advancement. In fact, nearly one in three American working families now earn wages so low that they have difficulty surviving financially.

Launched in 2002 and currently supported by The Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce, and Kresge foundations, the Working Poor Families Project is a national initiative that works to improve these economic conditions. The project partners with state nonprofit organizations and supports their state policy efforts to better prepare America's working families for a more secure economic future.

For more information:  
[www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org)

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, a new interest has emerged in two-generation (2 Gen) anti-poverty strategies. Federal and state policymakers, philanthropies, direct service nonprofits, and others have begun looking at better ways to provide low-income parents and children with resources to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and improve economic mobility.

Definitions of 2 Gen strategies include those that generally support family income growth and those that focus on providing children with excellent early childhood education and parents with tools to support children's educational success. However, many 2 Gen policies and programs now start with the premise that what low-income families most need is access to quality education, good jobs with benefits, and a full array of family services and supports.<sup>2</sup>

While 2 Gen anti-poverty strategies are not new, what has changed is their focus. Our modern notion of 2 Gen first strategies emerged in the 1960s with a focus on children. Program design was centered on providing early childhood education, combined with adult parenting or literacy classes.

In their newest incarnation, 2 Gen initiatives focus on meeting the needs of the entire family. The new approach recognizes that early childhood education alone, while necessary, does not stop intergenerational poverty. Children may still live in dangerous, stressful neighborhoods and return to fragile or chaotic homes, where parents struggle to achieve economic security and overall family well-being.

As 2 Gen efforts gain more attention nationally, states are being recognized for their potential to stimulate new policies to better serve low-income families and address the long-standing challenges of intergenerational poverty and economic mobility.

The **Working Poor Families Project (WPPF)**, a national initiative that supports state nonprofit groups to strengthen state policies for low-income working families, is well positioned to bring attention to this issue and to advocate for more effective state policies addressing the needs of low-income families. The WPPF also provides the opportunity to think about 2 Gen strategies from another perspective.

WFPF's mission is to strengthen state policies that help parents build family income through skills training, education, employment, and work supports. Thus, WFPF and its state partners are positioned to approach 2 Gen strategies by first focusing on the state systems, policies and programs that help parents achieve economic success. They then can look at how these parent-focused systems can better partner with other state systems to enhance the personal, social, and educational development of children and the family as a whole.

This WFPF policy brief examines opportunities for states to play a prominent role in the evolving 2 Gen movement. The first section reviews the continuing need to address poverty in America, the history of 2 Gen strategies in America, the evidence suggesting the promise of 2 Gen efforts, and current efforts to bring renewed attention to 2 Gen work. It also elaborates on the WFPF's approach to 2 Gen state policy work. The second section examines the role of states in pursuing 2 Gen strategies, with a particular focus on the state systems and policies that help adults to achieve economic success and maintain strong, stable families. The final section of this brief offers recommendations to support and stimulate state 2 Gen efforts.

## A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO FAMILY MOBILITY: 2 GEN STRATEGIES

Although 2 Gen anti-poverty strategies have waxed and waned in popularity, the need for anti-poverty policies and programs that help the entire family has never gone away. Renewed attention to 2 Gen strategies is prompted by the increasing challenges confronting low-income families, and the belief that emerging evidence on the effectiveness of specific anti-poverty strategies can be directed to produce better outcomes when applied to both the adults and children within these families.

Initially, 2 Gen public policy surfaced in the War on Poverty, as a strategy for improving children's economic mobility. Over time, 2 Gen has come to mean any anti-poverty strategy that helps both children and parents access the needed education, resources, and skills to move out of poverty. The concept has relevance today because one out of three working parents with children struggles to provide adequately for his/her family, increasing

the likelihood that these children will also struggle financially as adults.<sup>3</sup>

Although the War on Poverty improved conditions for many poor families over the past 50 years, far too many continue to struggle to make ends meet, making it difficult to provide a supportive environment in which their children can thrive. In 2012, thirty-two percent of working families with children in America were low-income—10.6 million working families with almost 24 million children under the age of 18.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the research is clear that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to be poor as adults, and this likelihood increases the longer they live in poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Sadly for a growing number of working families with children, economic security is out of reach. Between 2007 and 2012, the share of working families that are low-income—below 200 percent of the official poverty threshold—increased annually, rising from 28 percent to over 32 percent nationally.<sup>6</sup> The percentage of female-headed families that are low-income has also increased from 54 percent to 58 percent between 2007 and 2012.<sup>7</sup> Nearly 65 percent of children living in female-headed households were low-income in 2012.<sup>8</sup>

Low-income families come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Although female-headed working families make up about 39 percent of low-income working families nationwide, the proportion is much higher among African Americans (65 percent), compared with Whites (36 percent), Asians (20 percent), Latinos (31 percent) and those in other racial groups (45 percent). However, in terms of overall numbers, Whites account for the largest group of low-income, working families headed by single women (1.6 million).<sup>9</sup>

For millions of parents struggling to provide enough for their families, myriad barriers combine to make it difficult to escape the long arm of poverty. Parents and children can suffer long-term consequences from the chronic stress of living on too little income, in dangerous neighborhoods, or in overcrowded, chaotic homes.<sup>10</sup> With the growth of low-paid, unpredictable service jobs, many families can't rely on one or even two jobs to provide enough.<sup>11</sup> And when employment is based on just-in-time work schedules, with unreliable scheduling and often few hours, it becomes nearly impossible for working parents to plan for childcare, obtain needed services, or return to school to increase their career opportunities.

There is evidence that a variety of work supports can supplement families' insufficient incomes, thereby improving family stability, reducing chronic stress, and improving children's long-term outcomes.<sup>12</sup> However, families often run into fragmented state systems with conflicting eligibility rules that require repeated visits during precious work hours. These and other challenges put services such as food stamps, childcare assistance, mental health services, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and Medicaid out of reach of many families who would otherwise qualify.<sup>13</sup>

Systems that can help parents build the skills they need to earn more for their families, such as higher education or skills training, often see children as barriers, and fail to provide realistic options, especially for low-income working parents with children. Although in the past most 2 Gen strategies have focused on programs based in children's systems, 2 Gen is beginning to provide new ways of thinking about these broader challenges faced by families trying to move out of poverty.

## The History of 2 Gen Initiatives

Starting with federal early childhood education policy in the 1960s, public policy has been a major driver of the 2 Gen approach. From its inception the Head Start program has included elements to "promote the maximum feasible parent participation."<sup>14</sup> However, the program continues to lack clarity about what parent participation means and as a result, parental engagement has varied greatly across sites.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1970s, the federal Child and Family Resource Program demonstration was started to address children's needs and build parenting skills within low-income families.<sup>16</sup> That same decade, Avance, a program based in Texas, began helping parents to learn teaching skills and to access education and job training themselves.<sup>17</sup>

In 1988, the federal government initiated one of the first early education-based 2 Gen programs, to engage parents in a more meaningful way to improve literacy and, through that, economic mobility for both children and parents. The Even Start Family Literacy Program was targeted at parents eligible for services under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and their children up to age 7.<sup>18</sup> The program explicitly focused on early childhood education, adult

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literacy, parenting skills, and combined family literacy activities. The next year, a consortium of public and private funders financed New Chance, a program for disadvantaged young mothers.<sup>19</sup>

Around this time the Foundation for Child Development also coined the phrase "two generation" and sponsored a book on the topic.<sup>20</sup> Even Start was expanded and became part of a larger series of federal projects aimed at providing access to early childhood education for low-income families, with family support services and skill building for parents.

More than past programs, the new wave of federal programs sought to improve children's academic success and future economic mobility, in part by helping their parents build skills and earn more for the family in the short-term. Federal programs such as the Comprehensive Child Development Program and Head Start Family Service Centers usually provided some combination of early childhood education and parenting education with adult education, support services, referrals, or home visitation.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the Child Care Development Fund (CCDBG), expanded the Head Start-based foundation of early childhood education programs to include childcare networks, investments in quality care, and childcare subsidies nationally.

In the mid-1990s, the tide turned. A controversial evaluation of Even Start led to funding cuts, and the new work-first orientation of Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) changed the political dialogue. While funding for programs like Head Start and CCDBG continued, the federal interest in skill building for low-income parents was superseded by the push to get parents into a job, any job. Much of the subsequent federal and state

anti-poverty policy followed the new push for employment and de-emphasized education and skills building.

Recently, a burgeoning interest in 2 Gen strategies in the philanthropic and nonprofit worlds has coincided with 2 Gen changes in federal and state policy. Government initiatives, such as the Early Childhood Comprehensive Grants and Promise Neighborhoods, include early childhood education and support services designed to help the entire family move out of poverty. States have begun to engage in 2 Gen work as well, with legislation in Utah, Connecticut, and Vermont, and state agency initiatives in Colorado and Washington, designed to address family economic mobility with 2 Gen approaches.

## The Evidence for a 2 Gen Approach

An important impetus for early 2 Gen strategies came from research suggesting that early childhood education and maternal education had a significant impact on child educational attainment and future income.<sup>22</sup> As a result, many earlier 2 Gen programs were more focused on children's outcomes, although most included some element of parental impact, such as parenting practices. More recent 2 Gen strategies have been influenced by research on the negative impact that chronic poverty-related stress can have on brain development,<sup>23</sup> essentially making it harder to develop the very executive functioning skills needed to break out of poverty, as well as research on the importance of family income in early childhood development.<sup>24</sup> The core 2 Gen theory of change is that helping children develop academic and social skills, while helping their parents learn new work and family management skills and obtain higher paying jobs, improves the entire family's future economic success.

The theoretical basis for the 2 Gen approach is based in well-established programmatic research, but creating successful policies and integrated or comprehensive strategies can be challenging; thus the evidence of their efficacy is somewhat limited. There is some evidence that a combination of early childhood education, parenting education, and adult education or skills training have had positive effects on families' interaction or parents' educational and employment levels. However, most of the early 2 Gen programs, such as New Chance and the Child and Family Resource Program, had

widely varying costs, time requirements, types of parent engagement, and results.<sup>25</sup> Programs like the Child-Parent Centers in Chicago resulted in gains in school preparedness for children, and other programs, such as Project Redirection, showed some short-term improvement in parents' likelihood of being employed or in school.<sup>26</sup>

In the mid-1990s some key 2 Gen evaluations of programs with an adult education component fairly consistently showed large gains in parent General Educational Development (GED) attainment, even when the impact on parent literacy, child literacy, or even family income gains were mixed or negligible.<sup>27</sup> Assessments found that New Chance, Even Start, and Avance mothers were 13 to 34 percent more likely to attain a GED than other similar parents not involved in these programs.<sup>28</sup>

While some program evaluations lent credence to the 2 Gen theory of change, other programs struggled to show the intended results.<sup>29</sup> Enhanced Early Head Start was designed to add a parent education component to Early Head Start's comprehensive child development services.<sup>30</sup> A unique aspect of the program was that it included a specialist who assessed parents and provided information to them about education and job training. Unfortunately, early evaluations revealed almost no significant differences in outcomes for parents or children as a result of participation.<sup>31</sup>

More recent 2 Gen models have shown positive results, although it can be difficult to find rigorous evaluations. Many of the college-based 2 Gen programs that provide housing and support services for low-income families have reported improved college completion among single mothers in particular, but well-documented data on family impact and intergenerational poverty will take more time and funding to compile.<sup>32</sup> One program currently undergoing a rigorous evaluation, Career Advance at the Community Action Project in Tulsa (CAP Tulsa), combines high-quality early childhood education with sector job training for parents, and wrap-around family and peer support services.<sup>33</sup> Although extensive program results on the entire family impact are not yet available, parents enrolled in the sector training have shown unusually high rates of job retention and employment progress.<sup>34</sup>

Although the theoretical basis of 2 Gen programs is sound, more evidence is needed to show that 2 Gen strategies actually reduce intergenerational poverty

and foster economic mobility. State policies linked to evaluation may prove a useful laboratory in which to test the long-term impact of 2 Gen strategies.

## The New Wave of 2 Gen

Recently, 2 Gen poverty-alleviation strategies have experienced a resurgence of interest from the nonprofit, policy, and philanthropic sectors. Although federal and state policy seeded the base of early childhood education programs and parent resources, foundations, national groups, researchers, and local nonprofits have all promoted this approach in different ways.

The federal government's role in supporting 2 Gen strategies is obvious. What is not as obvious is the role of state government. Although state governments have taken a supportive role, many of the early 2 Gen initiatives were based in Head Start, which is administered directly at the local level. In more recent years, a few states have initiated 2 Gen-focused state law or agency policy, which explicitly engages both parents and children. States have also developed 2 Gen-supportive policies that do not engage both children and parents explicitly, but benefit both, such as improvements to childcare tax credits or income supports. (The section below provides a fuller discussion of state efforts.)

Foundations have also played an important role as stimulators of 2 Gen strategies. The Foundation for Child Development was instrumental in fostering 2 Gen research and continues to work in this arena. The philanthropic community has also supported development of a network of organizations and researchers promoting 2 Gen strategies. Major supporters in the foundation world include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has sponsored considerable work in this area and continues to be a thought leader, as well as the W. K. Kellogg, Gates, and George W. Kaiser foundations.

National groups are key players in the 2 Gen movement, including Ascend, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and the Future of Children, a collaboration between the Brookings Institute and Princeton University. The Ascend project at the Aspen Institute has been one of the most widely recognized 2 Gen leaders, with a network of fellows, resources, and publications for nonprofits and policymakers. Its focus is on early education,

postsecondary education and employment pathways, economic supports, social capital, health, and well-being. The Center for the Study of Social Policy works to improve supports to families as a way to reduce child abuse, through a network of state partners that have instituted elements of the Center's Strengthening Families initiative into child welfare systems.

Several promising local programs have boosted interest in the 2 Gen approach and may inform state policy initiatives in the future. Compared to past models, many of these programs provide a higher level of skills training and access to postsecondary education with wrap-around support services to help parents access much better paying jobs and to improve their children's chances for a better life. Some of these programs help children prepare for school through early childhood education and improved parental engagement, or simply provide safer, more supportive living environments for the entire family.

The aforementioned Career Advance program run by CAP Tulsa is targeted at parents whose children receive early childhood education and provides supports and intensive training based on the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model in Washington State.<sup>35</sup> Based on extensive local labor market research and family needs analysis, the program includes a curriculum developed in collaboration with employers, extensive support services such as career coaching, and a cohort approach to help parents develop support networks.<sup>36</sup> The Jeremiah Program, Single Parents Reaching Out For Unassisted Tomorrows (SPROUT) at Baldwin-Wallace College, and Buckner Family Place are just a few of the programs that have developed to provide low-income parents with safe housing, counseling, and support while they attend college.<sup>37</sup>

A new crop of local programs has begun to emerge although it is too early for measurable results. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has funded four Family Economic Success-Early Childhood sites that form an action learning network to build evidence about effective 2 Gen practices for low-income families. The Promise Neighborhoods movement, based on the successful Harlem Children's Zone, is focused on transforming neighborhoods to create a broad support system for families to help children thrive.<sup>38</sup>

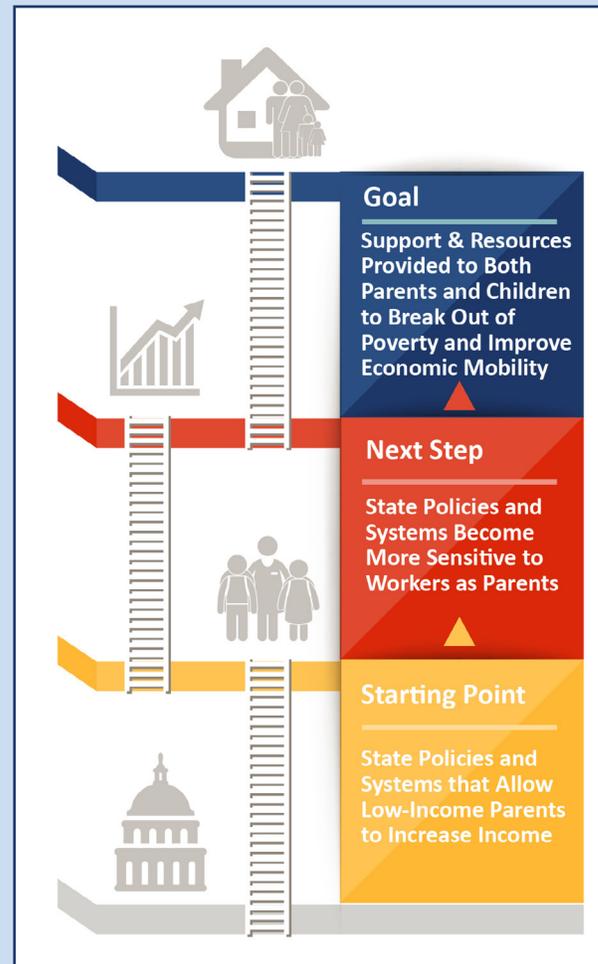
## A WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT PERSPECTIVE ON 2 GEN STRATEGIES

As interest in 2 Gen strategies grows among public policy makers at all levels of government and among philanthropic, nonprofit and community leaders, efforts are emerging that encompass a variety of approaches to engaging in 2 Gen work. As noted earlier, the Working Poor Families Project approaches this subject based on its mission of strengthening state adult-focused systems and policies that support parents in advancing their economic opportunities and income through skills training, education, employment, and work supports.

In approaching 2 Gen strategies from its core mission, WFPF suggests a theory of change that proposes that in working to improve the economic potential and well-being of parents, actions can also be taken to enhance their children's personal, social, and educational development, thereby breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Both short- and long-term strategies can increase the likelihood of children becoming economically self-sufficient adults and parents. Such approaches include interventions with parents and children, or with parents that indirectly generate benefits for their children.

Key elements of the WFPF approach to 2 Gen state policy work:

- Starts with state systems that serve low-income parents or adults, such as postsecondary education, adult basic education, TANF, tax and employment law, to ensure that the breadwinners can increase their income and have the opportunity to achieve economic security.
- Increases awareness within adult-focused state systems of the overall family benefits from connecting with children services and resources, such as education and skills training, work supports, income enhancements, parenting skills, childcare, and health care.
- Focuses on strengthening state policies within these systems that bring together the services and supports to address the needs of both (low-income) parents and children collectively, and helps engage parents in skill building with their children.



## THE STATE ROLE IN PROMOTING 2 GEN STRATEGIES

States have considerable autonomy to create policies to support 2 Gen initiatives through well-established educational, human services, economic development, and workforce infrastructure, reaching millions of families. As laboratories of democracy, states are a perfect place to test the efficacy of 2 Gen approaches, as states are uniquely positioned to stimulate systemic change and bring successful innovations to scale.

As noted above, a small number of states are now focusing on how to best engage in 2 Gen strategies. The states with the most 2 Gen-focused strategies, such as Washington and Colorado, have benefitted from state agency leaders taking an active interest. Whereas past policy efforts were primarily based in systems serving children, in these states policymakers have included an explicit interest in parents. In both states, much of this work has occurred through the state human services agency and has involved cross-department coordination to better serve families in need, including helping low-income parents access transitional jobs or education and training.

A few states have used legislation to pursue 2 Gen-focused strategies. Utah and Connecticut have passed legislation to spur 2 Gen initiatives via planning at the state agency level. Utah is collecting data on intergenerational poverty and its Department of Workforce Services is designing effective programs to improve success in education and the workforce for parents and children.<sup>39</sup>

As existing states deepen their 2 Gen efforts and other states consider taking action, it is important to become more aware of the variety of opportunities for promoting 2 Gen policies and actions, including looking beyond the more traditional efforts embedded in the systems that serve children and considering the potential of state systems that assist adults' access to education and skills training, better jobs, and work supports.

### State Systems that Serve Adults

As discussed above, early 2 Gen efforts included efforts to assist the parents of children being served, leading to some connections to adult-serving systems like adult education programs.

But what could be gained if a complementary approach was taken to deliberately initiate efforts through the state systems that serve adults to improve outcomes for both the adults and children of the families?

A review of state systems reveals that there are many that help adults improve their ability to provide economically for their families and to create safe and stable home environments. Relevant state systems encompass education and skill training efforts found in publicly supported community colleges and potentially supported through various public assistance program such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T). Parents might also receive housing or health care assistance, or get services and supports for reentering society from the corrections system. Under the Affordable Care Act No Wrong Door policy, states also have the opportunity to create a common entry point for families to receive health insurance coverage, as well as a number of other essential state services and programs.<sup>40</sup>

Even state tax, income, and labor laws can be used to enhance family resources, working conditions, and earnings, for example via childcare credits, minimum wage rates, and paid leave. Not to be overlooked are state community development resources, such as the Community Services Block Grant program, which is administered by states and is home to relevant community action agencies and the Head Start program, one of the early pioneers of 2 Gen strategies.

Each potential state system, many of which are identified in the text box below, might be considered as a resource or tool in state 2 Gen efforts. As this brief continues, it discusses the rationale and opportunity for focusing 2 Gen strategies through key state systems. Each system may offer important opportunities for connecting with additional systems that serve children.

**Education and Skills Training.** In today's knowledge- and skills-based economy, it is nearly impossible to make a significant increase in family income without improving the earnings opportunities for parents. This often means improving parents' education and skills so they are qualified to advance to higher paying jobs that can improve their family's long-term economic stability. In 29 percent of low-income working families,

## POTENTIAL ADULT STATE SYSTEMS FOR 2 GEN EFFORTS

The following state systems engage millions of low-income parents annually and could be better coordinated to provide support and pathways out of poverty for the entire family.

- Postsecondary Education (Community College System Focus)
- Adult Education
- Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF)
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Sector and Unemployment Insurance Skills Training, and Other Workforce Training Programs
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education & Training (SNAP E&T)
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Health Care
- Childcare
- Child Support (Non-Custodial Parents)
- Income and Tax Enhancements
- Employment Law and Work Supports
- Corrections
- Community-based Development

at least one parent lacks a high school degree or credential, making it difficult for that individual to advance beyond the most basic low-wage jobs.<sup>41</sup> In addition, 49 percent of low-income working families include parents with no postsecondary experience, which can also seriously limit the income they can earn.<sup>42</sup> Simply earning a high school diploma can increase a parent's earnings by 51 percent annually;<sup>43</sup> postsecondary education can lead to even higher annual earnings.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the children of low-income parents who successfully complete a credential are more likely to reach their own postsecondary goals.<sup>45</sup>

States can also tap the full potential of the training and support service dollars available through workforce-related funding such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), TANF, SNAP E&T 50/50 funding, and Unemployment Insurance. For example, most states use TANF funds for childcare assistance, but few allow the maximum number of TANF participants to attend adult education, vocational programs, or postsecondary education, despite the long-term benefits to the entire family.<sup>46</sup> In Texas, Florida and Utah, the WIOA One-Stop system is structured in a way that promotes 2 Gen activities: Parents are able to access job training and multiple resources such as unemployment insurance, TANF, food stamps, childcare subsidies, and housing in one location.<sup>47</sup> In addition to being more cost-effective for the state, this cuts down on the wages and time lost that low-income working

parents face going to multiple offices to apply and recertify, filling out similar government forms repeatedly.<sup>48</sup>

Systems that help adults build skills and credentials, such as adult and postsecondary education and workforce development, can be incredibly important in a state 2 Gen initiative. Because these sources can provide support services such as intensive advising, childcare, or transportation assistance that can be essential to fostering success,<sup>49</sup> they provide an opportunity to think about the potential and needs of all family members. For example, one specific area of attention could be ensuring that all low-income parents engaged in education and skills training have access to quality childcare and early education for their children. Such a focus creates an excellent opportunity for creating explicit 2 Gen state programs in partnership with the early childhood, elementary or secondary education systems.

**Tax, Income and Labor Laws.** Researchers agree that raising family income, even by as little as \$3,000 annually, is an important step in reducing family stress and improving outcomes for parents and children.<sup>50</sup> Strategically, it makes sense for states to start with the systems that help parents earn more both now and in the future.

One approach is to help families access income supports through the childcare, tax, and work

Systems that help adults build skills and credentials, such as adult and postsecondary education and workforce development, can be incredibly important in a state 2 Gen initiative.

support systems. States can—and should—use tools like childcare subsidies, Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), and childcare tax credits as part of a broader 2 Gen policy initiative. State policies supporting paid sick leave, family and medical leave, parental leave for education, health insurance access, and higher minimum wages for parents also can generate resources for the large numbers of low-income families who are stuck in low-paying jobs, often without benefits.

These actions, targeted at parents, produce resources and other outcomes that benefit the entire family. Identifying opportunities where these systems can be used to directly benefit both parents and children is more elusive, but might involve crafting paid leave laws allowing parental leave to participate in their children's educational activities and expanding state EITC refundable credit amounts to parents who use these monies to establish children's savings accounts.

#### **Engaging Noncustodial and Incarcerated Parents.**

Mothers and children have been the primary focus of 2 Gen strategies, despite the fact that fathers can and should play an important role in the development and financial support of their children. However, many fathers find it difficult to support their children financially without a GED or college credential. In fact, a 2007 report by the Center for Law and Social Policy found that parents with less than \$15,000 in average annual income owed approximately 80 percent of child support arrears.<sup>51</sup> Difficulty paying child support

can in turn make it difficult for a parent to take an active, positive role in their children's lives.

States can seek to improve the economic mobility of millions of low-income fathers through child support, unemployment insurance, and workforce development systems. One 2 Gen policy approach to reduce family poverty could involve providing additional education and quality parental engagement for noncustodial parents through the child support system in combination with some of the systems mentioned above.

In addition, in light of the high rate of incarceration of nonviolent offenders in the United States and the difficulty someone with a criminal record and little education has finding a job, states may want to create new strategies for helping nonviolent ex-offender fathers to reenter society, and if appropriate, reconnect with their children. Since access to education is a key factor for reducing recidivism, corrections departments can help support families by coordinating with adult education, postsecondary, workforce development, and P-20 systems (i.e., pre-school through higher education) to develop skill building and executive functioning for the entire family.<sup>52</sup>

### **Using State Policy to Promote 2 Gen Strategies**

State policymakers are beginning to take note of the 2 Gen approach. In some states, advocates have successfully pushed for 2 Gen-supportive policies, while in others state legislation or administrative action has been used or considered to generate larger 2 Gen initiatives.

Four examples of specific state initiatives where state policy actions are being considered to promote 2 Gen efforts follow. In Colorado, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, WFPF state partners have played an important role in promoting and supporting these efforts.

**Colorado.** Under the leadership of the state Department of Human Services (DHS), Colorado is embarking on an ambitious 2 Gen initiative that focuses on numerous state policies and programs serving both adults and children. Unlike other initiatives that have been confined to discrete programs without attention to broader systemic change, the Colorado initiative includes a completely new approach to serving families

that includes efforts at the state agency and legislative level. DHS has begun tracking both parent and child outcomes and identifying ways the department can improve both. The executive director of DHS hired a manager to coordinate 2 Gen initiatives, with a focus on program collaboration and cross-team efforts to improve the benefit to families.

For example, the Division of Youth Corrections is taking multiple steps to include the family as an integral part of a child's rehabilitation ranging from engaging parents as partners in decision-making, connecting family members to the financial, educational and other supports as needed, and making facility visitations more family-friendly.<sup>53</sup> CO-PEP, the Colorado Parent Employment Project, uses money from a federal demonstration project to provide noncustodial parents who are able to work and want a relationship with their children with a variety of services: a 16-hour nurturing parent curriculum, parent/child activities, parenting time order agreements (when appropriate), a transitional jobs program (ReHire CO), access to adult education, child support arrears forgiveness modification, and work supports.<sup>54</sup>

These explicit 2 Gen initiatives have been bolstered by several successful bills that have improved access to childcare subsidies, transitional jobs, and childcare tax credits. House Bill 14-1317 made a number of changes including requiring all counties to treat postsecondary education and job training as an eligible activity under Colorado's Child Care Assistance Program and to cover childcare for up to two years as parents pursue education. This was particularly important to improving economic opportunity for low-income families; counties administer the program and many counties did not allow low-income parents to receive childcare funding assistance while they attended adult education or postsecondary education.

**Connecticut.** The legislature recently passed a bill that lays the groundwork for a 2 Gen strategy.<sup>55</sup> The bill explicitly requires the Connecticut Commission on Children to provide a plan that includes both children and parents, and focuses on families living at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The new initiative must also assist parents in attaining their GED or technical skills. This new plan is intended to go far beyond

the reach of past 2 Gen projects based in local early childhood centers, reaching a broader group of parents and children statewide and expanding the training and services available. The planning team will develop a comprehensive 2 Gen plan focused on influencing multiple levels of state policy, developing systems and collaborations between agencies, and expanding programs for families.

In addition to drawing from other programs, it will utilize lessons learned from a successful Even Start program housed in the adult education and early childhood education systems in Connecticut. This program had better outcomes for adult education completion than traditional programs, due in part to a wrap-around services model and a strengths-based approach that empowered parents.<sup>56</sup> Planners hope some program elements from this combination of early child care education, interactive literacy and numeracy training, parent engagement, wrap-around supports, and adult education can be integrated into other adult-serving systems such as the college and workforce development systems.<sup>57</sup>

**Massachusetts.** The Crittenton Women's Union (CWU), a nonprofit organization that transforms low-income women's lives through innovative social service programs, applied research and advocacy in calling for the state to adopt new economic mobility policies that provide more comprehensive and integrated education, training, and support services to low-income families. In a recent report, CWU recommended that state TANF service delivery (or case management) policy be modified to require that all vendors and state staff working with TANF participants be trained in motivational interviewing and executive function coaching practices, as well as engaging families in short- and long-term goal setting and attainment.<sup>58</sup> This approach is unique in that it empowers families by giving them new tools to work together with support professionals to address family challenges and plan for the future. These skills and tools are not only useful to parents to help move their families out of poverty, but also help children themselves to prepare for a successful future.

This advocacy effort is being expanded so that these same service delivery principles can be provided through an intergenerational family mobility approach, by improving the service delivery policies within the state's Early Education and Care, Labor and Workforce Development,

Higher Education, Health and Human Services, Department of Children and Families, and corrections systems. In all, this effort is pursuing a 2 Gen state policy change strategy for Massachusetts families.

**Utah.** As noted earlier, in 2012 Utah enacted legislation requiring the Department of Workforce Services to collect data on intergenerational poverty.<sup>59</sup> In 2013, the legislature augmented the initial bill to require regular reports on intergenerational poverty and created a commission and advisory committee to address this issue.<sup>60</sup> Composed of the leaders of five state agencies, the Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Workforce Services, State Office of Education, and Juvenile Justice Services, the commission is tasked with developing recommendations for a state strategy to reduce intergenerational poverty. The Advisory Committee includes local government officials, advocates, and nonprofit representatives who advise the Commission on solutions.

The language in the bill focused on children, but the data made it immediately obvious to both groups that any plan to end intergenerational poverty must include attention to the needs of parents.<sup>61</sup> As a result of this work, Utah is beginning to develop new state programs to address intergenerational poverty through the workforce system, a more strategic approach to family mobility than previously seen in the state.<sup>62</sup>

These examples represent state policy actions designed to foster major 2 Gen policy changes or initiatives, but there are many other more specific policy changes that can be taken that offer opportunities to promote a 2 Gen agenda. Such policy opportunities can be found in any of the state systems noted above.

These broad illustrative possibilities of state policy ideas might be refined and adopted in any state:

- Support two-year community and technical colleges to provide high-quality, on-site early childcare learning for low-income students who are parents.
- Adjust state need-based financial aid eligibility formula to include cost of childcare, living expenses based on family size, and child support in calculating aid.

- Modify state 529 college savings plan rules to ensure that the savings plan allows both parents and children to be beneficiaries, especially those of low-income families.
- Expand and contextualize state-approved adult education curriculum to cover family financial literacy and asset-building instruction.
- Incentivize local providers of Adult Basic Education Literacy and English as a Second Language services to include opportunities for child-parent learning, such as family literacy and numeracy activities.
- Modify state unemployment insurance-financed skills training funds (and other state financed training funds such as sector or industry partnership training) to include resources to cover support needs for training participants such as childcare and transportation.
- Prioritize subsidized childcare for the length of the program of study for low-income student parents who qualify for need-based financial aid in state-supported community colleges.
- Modify child support arrears to eliminate overwhelming debt for noncustodial parents who consistently pay their full child support payments for a specified period.
- Expand state EITC resources to parents who invest a portion of those additional resources in a child's postsecondary education savings account (e.g., 529 plans).
- Within the corrections system, give parent inmates without a high school degree or equivalent priority for adult basic education services and link the adult basic education services to the educational activities of their children through on-line services.
- Encourage states to adopt policies that require employers to provide job-protected, paid time off to workers when they need to care for their own health needs or that of a family members, bond with a new child, or attend to a child's education needs.

## Aligning and Connecting Adult and Children Systems

One of the key innovations of the 2 Gen approach is that it calls on states to recognize low-income workers as parents, addressing their needs in that capacity instead of simply seeing children as barriers to work and education. However, a key challenge in developing 2 Gen state policies is finding ways to ensure the policies support high-quality implementation, engaging both parents and children effectively, in a way that actually reduces intergenerational poverty. Since 2 Gen strategies by nature require expertise in what works for children and adults, this can be challenging given the existing knowledge, funding, and demands placed on state agencies.

By building cross-agency planning teams and initiatives, states may be able to develop 2 Gen policies and strategies that help children and parents develop the potential for increased income now and in the future. State systems such as elementary and secondary education, child care, early childhood education, child welfare, mental health, and children's health insurance are all important partners for connecting to and/or working with adult-serving state systems to address overall family needs and goals. Some ways in which the needs of low-income children and parents might be addressed in tandem include:

- Childcare, including after-school programs, is essential to allowing parents to work or to return to school to prepare for better paying jobs. Childcare costs alone can range from \$3,900 to \$15,000 annually depending on where the family lives, the type of care, and the age of the child.<sup>63</sup> However, access to childcare subsidies and high-quality care varies greatly by state.<sup>64</sup> For both children and parents to benefit, it is important for states to invest in quality rating systems and professional development for a diverse group of providers,<sup>65</sup> and to ensure that subsidies are accessible to low-income parents for the period that parents are engaged in adult education, postsecondary education, or workforce training.
- Because of the particular benefits of early childhood education, 2 Gen strategies often focus on very young children. However, older children also need high-quality

education and support, so partnering with the K-12 system is encouraged. For example, community college campuses could offer summer skill building and activities for school-aged children in partnership with local elementary or secondary schools, while their parents are in class. Providing services for teen parents that engages them not only to complete their high school education, but also to move to the next level of education while also helping their children to gain needed pre-literacy skills is another way states can tackle economic mobility.

- Health care and, when needed, mental health services are essential to parent and child well-being, as well as the ability of parents to provide sufficient income. However, the health care and mental health systems for children and adults are often disconnected. Under the Affordable Care Act, states have an unprecedented opportunity to coordinate provision of health care, mental health, and a myriad of support services, such as the SNAP, across agency boundaries without additional state expenditures. States can use the guidelines for the No Wrong Door to ensure that families are enrolled in the health insurance programs most appropriate for them to reduce the impact of medical costs on tight budgets, with one entry point to get access to the range of state programs that can boost parents' incomes and children's future incomes.<sup>66</sup> States can combine this with provision of mental health services through existing home visitation programs for families with small children, such as the programs incorporated into Head Start, to ensure that parents struggling with severe depression or other mental health concerns are able to get the treatment they need to provide an environment where their children can thrive.<sup>67</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STIMULATING STATE ATTENTION AND ACTIONS

Significant attention is now being devoted to 2 Gen strategies across the nation. State governments offer prime opportunities for both undertaking 2 Gen initiatives and strengthening specific state policies that can better support the needs of low-income adults and children.

WFPF state partners can take advantage of the new wave of interest in 2 Gen strategies to highlight how adult-focused state systems can align and partner with systems that serve children to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

- **Emphasize the Importance of Adults as Parents Within Adult Serving Systems**
  - Stimulate adult-focused agencies to conduct deep data analysis about family income, economic mobility and the overall service needs of the entire family.
  - Acknowledge the importance of adult systems in addressing the full range of family services required to strengthen economic advancement, family well-being, and household stability.
- **Build a 2 Gen Constituency to Create Momentum for Action**
  - Create a cross-interest group to advocate for addressing poverty from a coordinated focus on parents and their children (e.g., workforce coalitions, children's and education groups, ex-offender organizations, equity advocates, etc.).
  - Use effective messaging about the need to provide low-income parents and children with full-family resources to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.
  - Highlight state policies and practices that successfully align and connect services for both adults and their children in forums, reports and op-eds.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Emphasize the importance of adults as parents within adult serving systems
  - Build a 2 Gen constituency to create momentum for action
  - Bring awareness of 2 Gen potential to influential state initiatives
  - Foster the alignment of state adult and child systems
- 
- **Bring Awareness of 2 Gen Potential to Influential State Initiatives**
    - Promote a 2 Gen vision to address the needs of low-income families in P-20 Councils, poverty commissions, legislative committees, and other interagency councils and task forces that assess the adequacy of state policy and state agency performance.
    - Cultivate interest in 2 Gen strategies through a legislatively or executive created interagency task force or commission that uses data analysis and makes policy recommendations.
  - **Foster the Alignment of State Adult and Child Systems**
    - Identify and advocate for the full ladder of supports and services needed for adult and child success, and for the elimination of gaps and cliff effects of these different benefits.
    - Work to dismantle silo mentality within state agencies thru promotion of cross-agency training, alignment of eligibility, goal alignment, and automatic referral for services.

- Promote co-locating adult and child services to maximize access to multiple benefits and resources and minimize family disruption.
- Encourage the professional development of adult systems' staff so they are equipped to identify and address the full needs of families.

## CONCLUSION

Although additional research is needed to ensure the efficacy of 2 Gen approaches, there is much to be said for taking a more thoughtful 2 Gen approach to state policy. States have a number of tools and resources at their disposal to increase family economic mobility while simultaneously improving the short and long-term benefits of state investments for parents and children alike. Deploying carefully crafted 2 Gen strategies may also help states be more effective in reducing poverty as they realize savings through a more effective and efficient approach to helping low-income families.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Dugan Bassett Consulting works with nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies to increase their impact through program development and evaluation, policy research and advocacy, and social media friendly publications; for more information visit [www.duganbassett.com](http://www.duganbassett.com).

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<sup>2</sup> Supports can include childcare assistance, transportation, mental and physical health care, and food assistance as well as resources for education and skills training, including assistance in purchasing books and materials.

<sup>3</sup> Working Poor Families, data generated by Population Reference Bureau from the 2012 American Community Survey.

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<sup>6</sup> Working Poor Families, data generated by Population Reference Bureau from the 2012 American Community Survey.

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Povich, Brandon Roberts, and Mark Mather.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/evenstartformula/index.html> on July 7, 2014.

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<sup>55</sup> See Connecticut General Assembly 2014 House Bill 5597 Section 198 Lines 8128 to 8143 at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/TOB/h/pdf/2014HB-05597-R00-HB.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Judy Carson, May 30, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Personal communication with Elizabeth Fraser, May 16, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Ruth Liberman. 2014. *A Plan for Building Skilled Workers and Strong Families through the Massachusetts TAFDC (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children) Program*, Boston: Crittenton Women's Union.

<sup>59</sup> See Utah General Session 2012 Senate Bill 37 at <http://le.utah.gov/~2012/bills/static/SB0037.html>.

<sup>60</sup> See Utah General Session 2013 Senate Bill 53 at <http://le.utah.gov/~2013/bills/static/SB0053.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Personal communication with Tracy Gruber on April 28, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication with Tracy Gruber on June 13, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Karen Schulman and Helen Blank. (2013). *Pivot Point: State Child Care Assistance Policies in 2013*. Washington, D.C.: National Women's Law Center.

<sup>64</sup> Personal communication with Nisha Patel on March 24, 2014.

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<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Tran. (2012). *The No Wrong Door Policy: Keys to Implementing the Affordable Care Act for Uninsured and Underinsured Asian-Americans*. *Harvard Journal of Asian American Policy Reform*, Volume 22, 2011-2012. See also Government Health IT commentary on the Affordable Care Act retrieved on August 29, 2014 from <http://www.govhealthit.com/news/commentary-acas-no-wrong-door-policy-still-just-vision-many-states-HIX>.

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