

Two-Generation Lens

Helping Children by Helping Families



About the Center for High Impact Philanthropy

Founded in 2006, the Center for High Impact Philanthropy has emerged as a unique and trusted authority for donors around the world who are seeking to maximize the social impact of their funds. In areas as diverse as closing the achievement gap in the U.S., effective disaster relief, and major global public health issues such as malaria and child mortality, the Center translates the best available information into actionable guidance for those looking to make the greatest difference in the lives of others. Put simply, success to us means moving more money to do more good.

To collaborate with the Center and further advance the field of high impact philanthropy, please contact us at: impact@sp2.upenn.edu.

About this Funder Brief

This brief is part of **Invest in a Strong Start for Children**, an online toolkit that provides donors with key facts, strategies for investment, and our analysis of several high impact opportunities in early childhood. This toolkit is an extension of our ongoing partnership with **The Annie E. Casey Foundation**, a national foundation focused on improving the lives of disadvantaged children.

Methodology

Our funder briefs serve to educate donors on key concepts and considerations they will encounter when exploring philanthropic opportunities in a new topic area, as well as highlight strategies and resources they can leverage to get involved.

Two-Generation Lens provides donors with an introduction to “two-generation” or “dual-generation” strategies for early childhood development, and examples of how they might increase their impact by incorporating these strategies into their philanthropy. It reflects our synthesis of over 20 publications, studies, and websites, as well as conversations with several academics, funders, and nonprofits working in this space. Specifically, we present:

- An overview of the different two-generation strategies used in the field, and the advantages and disadvantages of each;
- Examples of organizations implementing these strategies. Many of these organizations were cited in our review of the literature and/or mentioned as illustrative by those we consulted. We have not analyzed the impact and cost-effectiveness of each example;
- Tips for donors on applying a two-generation lens to their philanthropy;
- And a list of additional resources for donors interested in learning more.

As always, we hope this brief helps donors move from good intentions to high impact.

Summary

Two-generation programs aim to help children by helping their caregivers. This “common sense” approach is backed by research showing that positive relationships with adults are crucial to healthy development in children. Programs can foster these healthy relationships through three different two-generation approaches: information and skill-building, addressing underlying family issues, and direct provision of a range of services. To incorporate the two-generation approach in their philanthropy, donors can fund evidence-based programs, engage in advocacy, invest in research and evaluation, and encourage greater coordination among existing services.

Introduction

As a donor interested in early childhood, sooner or later you are likely to hear a program, project, or approach described as “two-generation” or “dual-generation.” Here’s our working definition of what this means:

A strategy or approach to promote young children’s healthy development by developing the capabilities and resources of parents or caregivers.

In many ways, this is an old concept – many well-established and well-regarded programs have done this for years. More recently, some funders have used the phrase to describe efforts that explicitly link the provision of services for children (such as quality childcare) with the provision of services for their parents (such as employment counseling or housing assistance).

While there are high impact approaches that do not address two generations at once, adding a two-generation lens to inform an early childhood investment strategy may increase the impact of a portfolio of investments. This brief contains additional background information and tips for donors seeking that impact, including the following:

- the reasoning and evidence behind the “two-generation” idea;
- different ways of implementing two-generation approaches;
- and examples of successful programs that have employed a two-generation approach to solving problems affecting young children

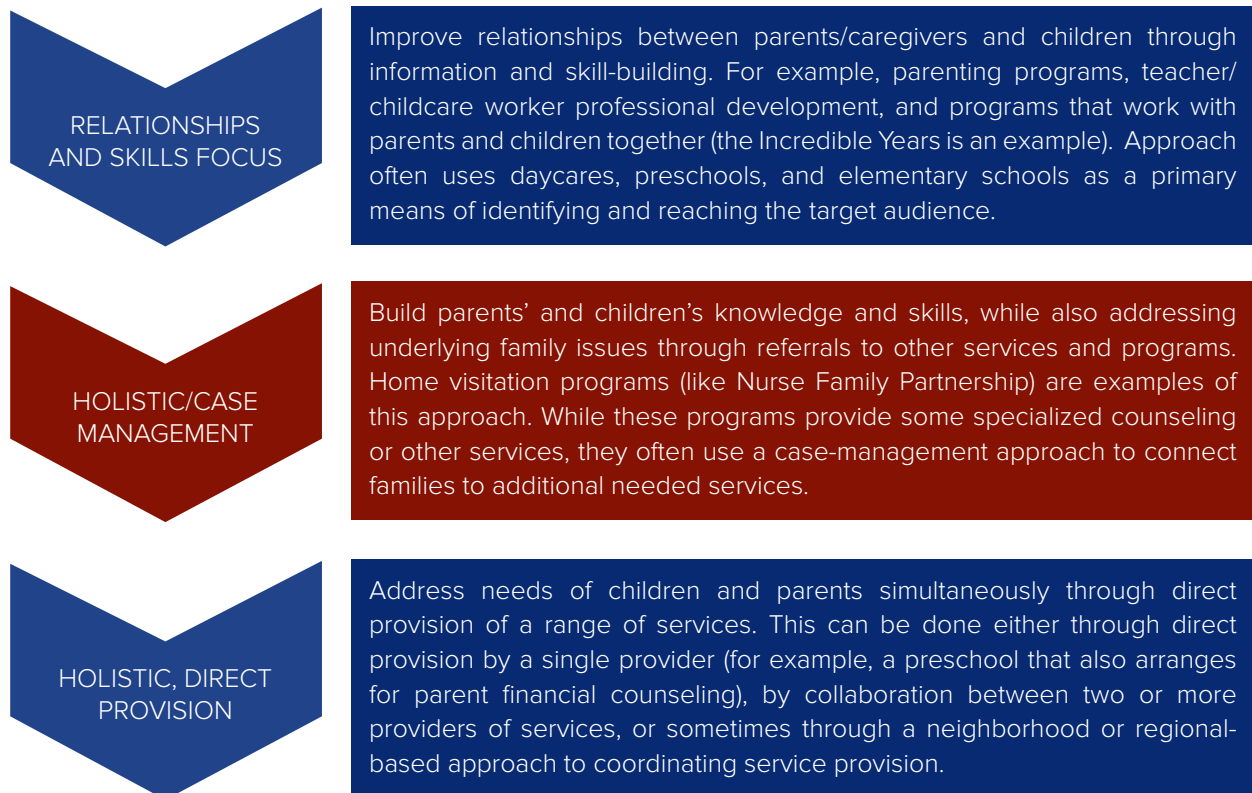
Why two generations?

When children are very young, you will reach them by working with and through the adults in their lives. This piece of common sense is backed up by evidence from several bodies of research:

- Brain research shows that parents, caregivers, and relationships matter—a lot. Young children are dependent on parents and caregivers not only for their safety and health, but also the daily, positive interaction and reinforcement that literally build children’s brains. But when parents lack good information or parenting role models, or face difficult circumstances over a prolonged period, brain research shows that family stress can negatively affect a child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. On the flip side, having a stable, positive relationship with an adult is protective for children, independent of family circumstances.¹
- Young parents in particular may present a “window of opportunity” for addressing capabilities of both parent and child. Recent neuroscience has shown that there is a burst of brain development in adolescence to early adulthood that appears to be related to impulse control and decision-making.² Working with young parents and their children simultaneously may allow programs to catch two critical developmental periods at once. Moreover, becoming a parent can provide a motivational boost for young adults to make positive changes in their lives.
- Improving family circumstances can help improve children’s health and learning achievement. For example, children’s educational outcomes are strongly linked with socio-economic status and their mother’s level of education. These linkages offer an opportunity to create positive impact for both parents and children – improving mother’s education levels can lead to improved learning for her children,³ and programs that supplement a working family’s income have shown improved education outcomes for children.⁴
- High-quality childcare and preschool improve children’s life trajectories, and one element of quality may be parental involvement.⁵ Evidence from long-term studies of several high-quality early childhood programs targeted to low income families indicates that participating children did better in school, earned more money, had healthier behaviors, and were less involved in crime than peers who did not participate. Both programs included structured and supportive caregiver/child interaction and substantial parent engagement. For more on high quality childcare and preschool see: **Provide Great Places to Learn.**

What does a two-generation approach look like?

A broad definition of a “two-generation” approach, like the one we offer above, encompasses a wide array of existing programs. Not everyone uses the phrase “two-generation” in the same way, however. Below are three commonly employed two-generation approaches, listed by increasing order of comprehensiveness, complexity and cost:



Trade-offs of the different approaches:

While all three of these approaches are valid, there are trade-offs among them, including tensions between customization and scale, as well as between direct control over quality of services and implementation complexity. Here are some additional things for donors to consider:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Focus on Building Relationships and Skills	Certain proven practices can be standardized in a curriculum and can be taught to a group (often lowering the cost); if working through schools (either preschool or elementary), the target population is not hard to find, and implementation is not complex.	These approaches (when school-based) often fail to reach parents and children during the earliest years, and tend not to address specific underlying family stressors (such as unemployment or hunger) that may be affecting relationships in the first place.
Holistic focus, specialized service provision and referrals to other needed services	More tailored and comprehensive approach to meeting family needs.	A constraint is the specialized and labor-intensive nature of the service or services provided, as well as occasional difficulties in effectively accessing additional services for families.
Holistic family focus, with direct provision of multiple services	Ease of access to linked services for families and a relatively high degree of control over the quality of services provided.	Complexity of integrating disparate organizational systems, or, if a single organization, of moving into areas outside of original organizational expertise.

Examples of Two-Generation Approaches in Practice:

The chart below gives an idea of where a sample of evidence-based programs, both proven and promising, could fall within a broad definition of a two-generation focus.

	Focus is primarily on parents/adults	Whole family focus	Focus is primarily on children
Focus is primarily on relationships, skills and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Corps • Incredible Years parent and teacher programs • FAST 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incredible Years child program
Holistic focus, includes specialized services with case management approach to accessing other services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurse-Family Partnership • Child First • Avance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educare
Holistic family focus, with direct provision of a range of services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educare - Atlanta/Dunbar • Tulsa Community Action Project • Jeremiah Program 	

How can I incorporate a two-generation approach into my philanthropy?

- **Directly fund programs with a two-generation orientation and an evidence base:** The programs listed above all have some evidence of effectiveness; several, like **Nurse-Family Partnership**, have been proven effective in multiple rigorous studies. Other two-generation programs (with a range of evidence) have been identified by entities like the Ascend initiative through the **Aspen Institute**, which has developed an interactive map of promising programs.
- **Mobilize networks and influence to advocate for the expansion of public funding to proven programs:** Given that effective early childhood investments save society a lot of money in the long term, there is a good argument that, as a society, we should be spending more of our public resources on programs that have a strong track record of success. For example, donors supporting early childhood investments in Washington state have lobbied in support of expansion of home visitation programs, like Nurse-Family Partnership.
- **Invest in research & evaluation to innovate for the future:** Another option is to help build the evidence base around what works for new two-generation approaches. For example, some of the newest two-generation approaches link quality childcare with the provision of parenting guidance, employment opportunities, and other supports for parents (for example, Educare Atlanta's **Dunbar Learning Complex**). This is largely an experimental area, and the evidence about what works is still being gathered. Increased knowledge about what works has the potential to increase the impact of every single dollar spent, public or private.
- **Encourage greater coordination among existing services to support a family focus:** Donors are also in a unique position to encourage more coordination and cooperation amongst existing non-profit and local government service providers (see, for example, work being done at the state level by the **BUILD Initiative**). One of the biggest challenges in providing coordinated services to parents and children is the complexity of existing service structures. While addressing family issues holistically makes sense, there are practical barriers. Many social services for parents and children operate in silos, and there are often information-sharing issues and other hurdles to overcome in bringing different services together. The federal Department of Education's **Promise Neighborhoods** initiative provides seed money to encourage better coordination of services at a local level; some funders have also focused on a particular geographic location as a strategy to ensure better coordination.

These options are not mutually exclusive. Whether you support high impact programs that have already demonstrated results, strengthen quality and coordination among existing services, or invest in research and development so we have better tools in the future, the ultimate impact is the same: healthier families and children who are better able to achieve their full potential and a stronger society for us all.

Additional Resources on Two Generation Programs and Initiatives:

Ascend: The Aspen Institute in Washington DC founded the Ascend initiative in 2010 with the support of a group of foundation funders interested in early childhood and two-generation approaches.⁶ The goal of the Ascend initiative is to generate policy discussions and build leadership around effective two generation approaches to address the needs of low income children and parents. The website features a map of promising and proven programs across the US that use a two-generation approach.

Foundation for Child Development: This New York based foundation has partnered with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation in funding the development of research and information on two-generation strategies. Many of these resources can be found on their website.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University: Dr. Jack Shonkoff and his colleagues have been an important voice in translating new brain research into public awareness and policy. They have also been promoting a focus on active skill-building for parents and caregivers as potentially the most effective and sustainable approach to improving child outcomes. This **animated video** presents a theory of change behind the two-generation strategy.

Annie E. Casey Foundation: The Foundation has a history of promoting family economic success as part of its approach to improving children's outcomes. More recently, the Foundation has funded a number of experimental programs that attempt to link family and child interventions more tightly. One example of this work is being done through the **Dunbar Learning Complex** in Atlanta. Descriptions of other place-based, two-generation investment strategies can be found in their **Making Connections** series of reports.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation: Kellogg is another major foundation that has been exploring two-generation approaches to improving child well-being, and particularly **educational outcomes**. See this recent Huffington Post article by their Vice President for Program Strategy on their approach and grantees.

The Seimer Institute for Family Stability: The Siemer Family Foundation, based in Columbus, OH, pioneered the **Family Stability Initiative** in 2003, which has since been implemented in 10 cities nationwide. In each city, Siemer partnered with the United Way and other non-profit organizations to address family housing issues and prevent homelessness, as a means of minimizing academic disruption and emotional stress on children.

Many smaller, local family foundations have supported integrated, two-generation approaches to helping children and families for years before the term gained currency. Regional grantmaking or donor associations and/or **The Association of Small Foundations** (now Exponent Philanthropy) may be additional sources of information regarding other donors funding two-generation strategies and programs in a particular geographic area.

¹ The Science of Early Childhood Development. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2007. Retrieved 2/08/14 at: http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/science_of_early_childhood_development/

² National Institutes for Mental Health: The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction. Retrieved 2/08/14 from: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml>

³ Magnuson, K. (2007). Investing in the Adult Workforce: An Opportunity to Improve Children's Life Chances. Retrieved 2/08/14 at: <http://www.aecf.org/news/fes/dec2008/pdf/Magnuson.pdf>

⁴ Morris, Pamela A., Lisa A. Gennetian, and Greg J. Duncan. 2005. "Effects of Welfare and Employment Policies on Young Children: New Findings on Policy Experiments Conducted in the Early 1990s," Social Policy Report 19, no. 2.

⁵ For a recent summary of research on parental involvement and additional models to improve parental support of children's learning see: Smith, S., Robbins, T., Stagman, S. and Mathur, D. (2013) Parent Engagement from Preschool through Age 3: A guide for policymakers. National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved 2/08/14 at: http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1084.pdf

⁶ These include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Open Society Foundation, and several smaller family foundations.

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