



AN ASCEND AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE REPORT

TWO GENERATIONS, ONE FUTURE

MOVING PARENTS AND CHILDREN BEYOND
POVERTY TOGETHER

Acknowledgements

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- Two Generations, One Future Roundtable held in Washington, DC, in March 2011;
- Memphis learning trip, co-hosted with the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis in September 2011; and
- Two-Generation Strategies in Education Roundtable held in Washington, DC, in October 2011, co-hosted with the Foundation for Child Development and the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas-Austin.

Each of these forums provided invaluable insights and perspectives that informed the two-generation framework shared in this paper.

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Executive Summary

Ascend at the Aspen Institute was launched with catalytic support from a core circle of investors with the mission to serve as a hub for breakthrough ideas and proven strategies that move parents, especially women, and their children beyond poverty toward educational success and economic security. *Ascend* takes a two-generation approach to its work and brings a gender and racial equity lens to analysis. Two-generation approaches focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both vulnerable parents and children together. Two-generation approaches can be applied to programs, policies, systems, and research.

This paper outlines the emerging case for and shares a framework for two-generation approaches. Key economic and demographic trends are driving the need for these approaches.

U.S. unemployment has remained stubbornly high over the past several years, pushing many parents and their children into a state of economic vulnerability—and exacerbating conditions for families who were already poor or low-income prior to the 2008 recession.

- Men's labor force participation decreased by nearly 10 percent between 1970 and 2007.¹
- Women comprise half of the U.S. workforce, up from one-third in 1970.² One-third of working mothers are their families' sole breadwinner.³
- More than one in five U.S. children live in poverty, while more than two in five are low-income.⁴
- A higher percentage of U.S. children live in single-parent households than do children in all other industrialized countries studied in a recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.⁵
- Women and children in single-mother families have disproportionately high rates of poverty. Nearly three-fourths of children living in single-mother families are low-income, compared to just under one-third of children living in married-couple families.⁶
- Low levels of educational attainment and poverty are strongly correlated. Only 10 percent of those with a bachelor's degree are poor. Over 30 percent of those with a high school diploma or less are poor.⁷
- A body of research demonstrates the connection between maternal education and child outcomes.⁸

OVER THE PAST YEAR, ASCEND:

- Convened leaders in policy development, research, program design, evaluation, and community engagement to share knowledge, identify promising programs, and expand the conversation around new approaches to move families beyond poverty.
- Commissioned new data analysis from Child Trends, a nonpartisan nonprofit research center, to examine poverty and income data through a two-generation lens.
- Commissioned a series of focus groups by the bipartisan team of Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint to capture the often-missing voices, aspirations, and perspectives of low-income parents.⁹

The resulting findings support the core components that Ascend has identified in its “equation” for two-generation approaches: Education + Economic Supports + Social Capital.

- **Education:** Parents' level of educational attainment—particularly postsecondary education—is a strong predictor of economic mobility. Education that includes skill development linked to high-demand jobs with opportunities for advancement is key. At the same time, the return on investment for early childhood education for at-risk children is significant over a lifetime.
- **Economic Supports:** These include housing, transportation, financial education and asset-building, tax credits, child care subsidies, student financial aid, health insurance, and food assistance. They provide an important scaffold for families as they work to build the skills that lead to better jobs and longer-term financial stability.
- **Social Capital:** This manifests itself as peer support; contact with family, friends, and neighbors; participation in community and faith-based organizations; school and workplace contacts; leadership and empowerment programs; use of case managers or career coaches; and other social networks such as cohort models and learning communities. Such support appears to be a powerful success factor in programs that help move families beyond poverty. Social Capital builds on the strength and resilience of families, bolstering the aspirations parents have for their children.

Ascend's blueprint for action centers on helping parents pursue skills and complete education to improve their own economic security and stability, while simultaneously ensuring their children are on a path from the earliest age to engage in lifelong learning. As a hub for the emerging two-generation field, Ascend will:

- Spark a new conversation;
- Develop an economic case with solid metrics;
- Build and expand a network of leaders; and
- Elevate promising practices and policy ideas to build political will.

The United States in 2012 is at a crossroads about ways to ensure that *all its people* fuel progress in the 21st century. By creating partnerships across programs, policies, and systems now focused separately on children and parents, we can create an America in which a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next. We believe this vision shows a way forward. New two-generation strategies can help parents and children achieve their dreams together.

The United States in 2012



There is definitely resilience, hope, and determination. Regardless of what the circumstances are, regardless of the barriers they face every day. Women are saying and single parents are saying, if provided with the right resources, I can make a difference for my children and my family. That is a powerful spirit to have.

— Alandra Washington,
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The United States remains in an economically tumultuous period, and many American families are anxious and deeply concerned about their future and that of their children. The Great Recession has shifted the terrain of the nation's economy in unprecedented ways. Unemployment has remained stubbornly high, pushing many parents and their children into economic vulnerability—and exacerbating conditions for families who were already poor or low-income prior to the recession. In 2010, some 30 percent of working-age adults (ages 18-64) were low-income, up from 24 percent in 2000. More than one in five children in the U.S. lives in poverty, while more than two in five are low-income.¹¹ For low-income Americans, upward economic mobility remains more of a challenge than for low-income people in many other developed nations.¹²

In late 2011, Ascend commissioned a bipartisan team to conduct focus groups to hear directly from lower-income parents about their experiences in the current economy, and about their perspectives on the future. The groups included parents across lines of gender, family structure, race/ethnicity, geography, and political affiliation.¹³ Parents generally expressed strong frustration with the way things are going for people like them in the current economy. Common words they used were:

- Disappointed
- Frustrated
- Concerned
- Stressed

The focus groups revealed that despite economic conditions, parents' aspirations and dreams for their children remain strong, and their commitment to education as a pathway to those dreams is unwavering. In particular, single mothers were the group of parents most hopeful that their children—the next generation—would have an opportunity to fare better than they had. As one Latina single mother from Los Angeles said, “I’m going to make sure that she is more ambitious than me. I’m going to make sure she hangs around the right kids and gets a network going in school and college. . .”

Like that mother, our nation's families need an economy that works for them. They also need new strategies and solutions—ones fueled by new partnerships among

business, government, philanthropy, and communities—that support them in providing the education and economic stability their children need to thrive and to lead the nation to a new century of progress. America's economic future may depend upon how well society can support the aspirations and goals of these two generations of parents and children.

Although businesses, nonprofits, and governments are straining to cut costs, opportunities exist to lay the groundwork for pathways to economic security with more effective and creative solutions. Gaps are visible among the big-picture discussions at the national level, systems-change conversations at the state level, and the realities of families' lives at the community level. We need networks that can bridge these gaps to generate solutions that move from good ideas into effective action.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND A NEW ECONOMIC REALITY

A closer look at major shifts in the nation's family demographics and structure, as well as in the skills and education the economy now demands, underscores the fact that it is imperative to change the ways in which we help families succeed.

America is in the midst of a dramatic social transformation—one driven by race, gender, and family structure. In the next 30 years, the United States will become a “majority-minority” nation.¹⁴ In 2011, the Census Bureau noted an important tipping point—the majority of three-year-olds were children of color.¹⁵

Another shift involves the number of women, especially mothers, in the workforce. Women now comprise half the U.S. workforce, up from one-third in 1970.¹⁶ A third of working mothers are their families' sole breadwinner.¹⁷ In addition, women's gains in educational attainment have significantly outpaced those of men over the last 40 years. Higher percentages of women than men age 25–34 have earned a college degree, and more women than men have received a graduate education.¹⁸

Conversely, men's labor force participation decreased by nearly 10 percent between 1970 and 2007.¹⁹ Men in all racial and ethnic groups are now less likely to complete college than their female counterparts. In 2007–2008, men accounted for only 34



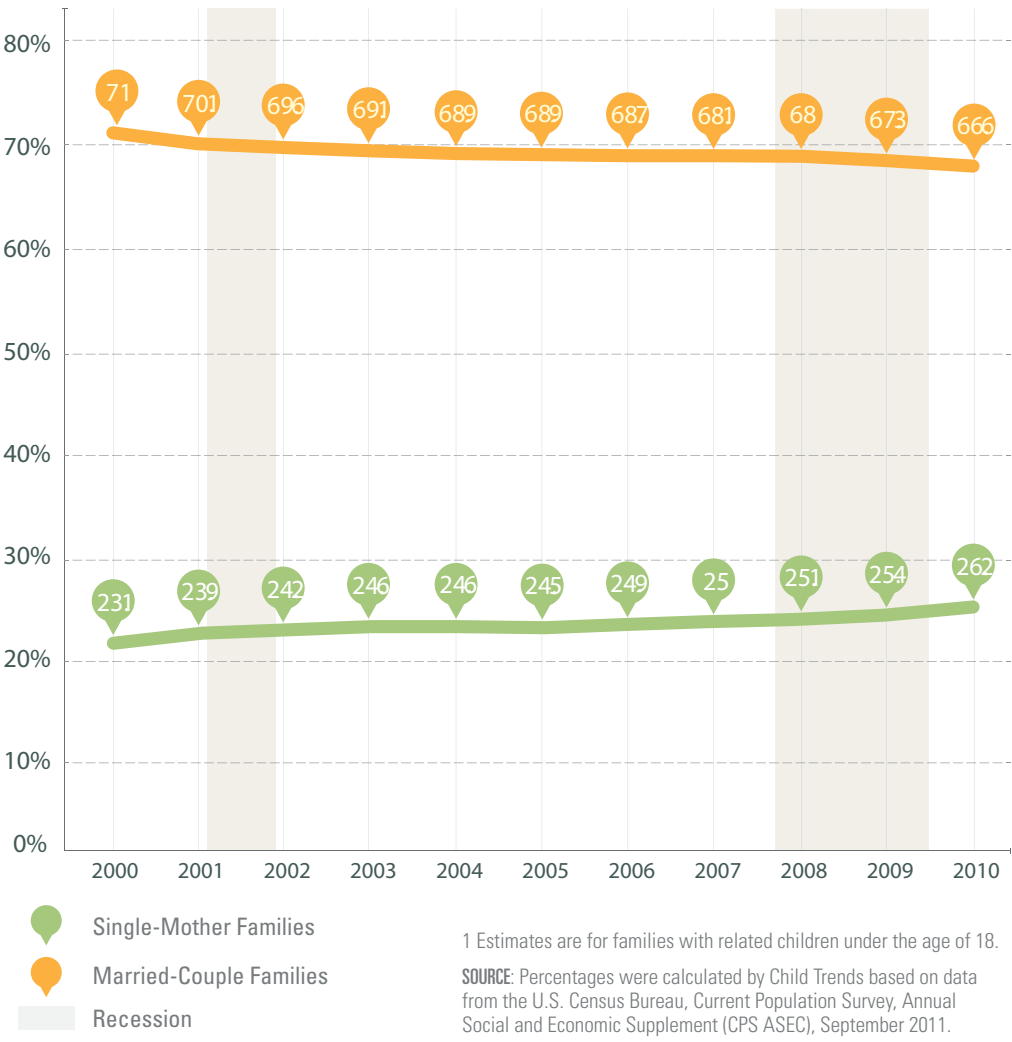
I think it would be important if we went back to talking about what is right, and what is wrong, and how we need to see them not as ‘poor people’ but people on whom our country depends for its future, because that is exactly who they are.

— Merle Chambers,
Chambers Family Fund

percent of degrees awarded to African Americans, 39 percent of degrees awarded to Hispanics and Native Americans/Alaska Natives, and 45 percent of degrees awarded to Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders.²⁰

Family structure is also evolving. Marriage in the United States is on the decline overall: today just 51 percent of all adults age 18 and over are married.²¹ The share of married families with children is declining (from 72 percent in 2000 to 66.6 percent in 2010) and the share of families with children that are headed by single mothers has risen steadily over the past decade (from 23 percent in 2000 to 26 percent in 2010).²² These shifts have been more pronounced during and just after the two recessions of the past decade.

Percentage of Married-Couple and Single-Mother Families with Children¹ in the United States, 2000-2010



A higher percentage of U.S. children live in single-parent households than do children in all other industrialized countries studied in a recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.²³ In the United States, half of African-American children live in single-mother households, as do a third of Latino children.²⁴

More families are struggling to move beyond poverty toward educational success and economic security. Today, more than seven in ten children living with a single mother are living in a low-income household.²⁵ Research suggests that the struggles of children growing up in single-parent households go well beyond just economics, and that those children are more likely to drop out of school and detach from higher education and workforce opportunities, and are more likely to become teen parents.²⁶ Their parents – both mothers and fathers – face similar challenges.

Changes in American life are not limited to demographics. The economic landscape has also shifted. While unemployment remains high, the labor market is transforming as technology and innovation offer opportunities and challenges for young parents and their children.²⁷ Success in today's economy requires both education and skills training that are linked to future job growth and provide opportunities for advancement.²⁸ While quality early childhood education is central to school readiness, not all students receive it.

Similarly, postsecondary education is increasingly important to obtain a job that offers family-supporting wages, but significant challenges to college completion face students who are also parents.²⁹ Nearly a quarter of all college students today are parents, and 13 percent of all college students are single parents.³⁰ Programs that provide education and skills training to adults often view children as a barrier to participation, rather than designing models that engage whole families. Meanwhile, programs focused on children often see parents as merely facilitators of children's education, rather than seeking opportunities for parents to increase their own education attainment and marketable job skills.

The economy demands new solutions. Institutions and individuals are working in these challenging times to make the case that two-generation strategies have the potential to produce remarkable strides for families.



One size doesn't fit all... We are working in the trenches. It is really tough work. Keeping a strong racial lens is going to be important to this work, and remembering that many of these people feel invisible.

— the late Elouise Cobell,
Blackfeet Nation

New Landscape, New Approaches

Ascend at the Aspen Institute was launched with catalytic support from a core circle of investors with the mission to serve as a hub for breakthrough ideas and proven strategies that move parents, especially women, and their children beyond poverty toward educational success and economic security. Ascend takes a two-generation approach to its work. A review of the research, data, and demographic trends described above has led Ascend to bring both a gender lens and a racial equity lens to its analysis.



We envision an America in which a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next.

There is an enormous pool of untapped and underutilized talent out there in our workforce. It is parents and it is, in particular, moms.

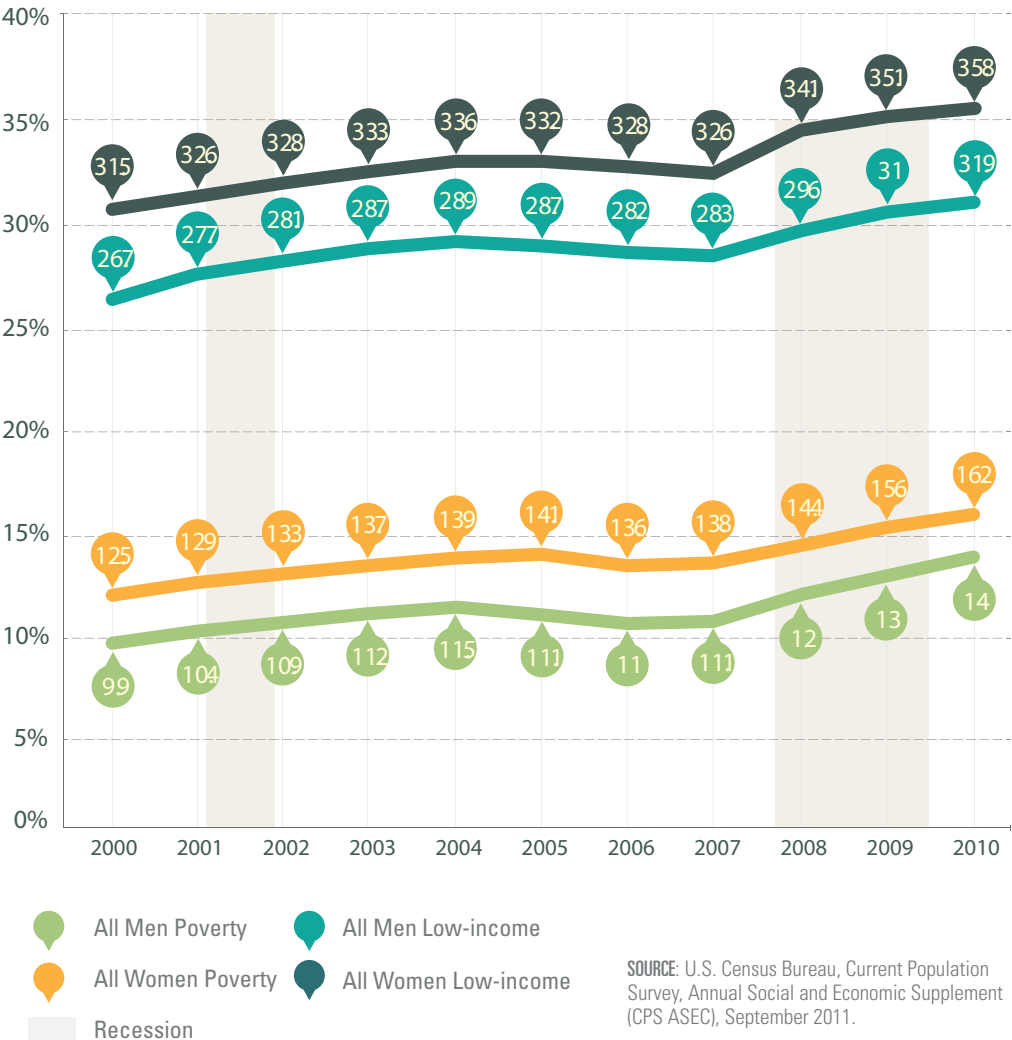
— David Leonhardt,
The New York Times
2011 Aspen Ideas Festival

WHY A FOCUS ON WOMEN AND MOTHERS?

While it is important to consider the opportunities and needs of all low-income parents—mothers and fathers—four factors make the case for a particular focus on women and mothers:

- A body of research demonstrates the connection between maternal education and child outcomes.³¹
- More and more American women are primary breadwinners, bringing home the majority of the family's earnings, or co-breadwinners, bringing home at least a quarter of the family's earnings.³²
- Women and children in single-mother families have disproportionately high rates of poverty. Nearly three-fourths of children living in single-mother families are low-income, compared to just under one-third of children living in married-couple families.³³
- There is strong potential to build on lessons learned from international findings about the high return on investing in women.³⁴

Trends in Poverty for All People, by Gender, 2000-2010

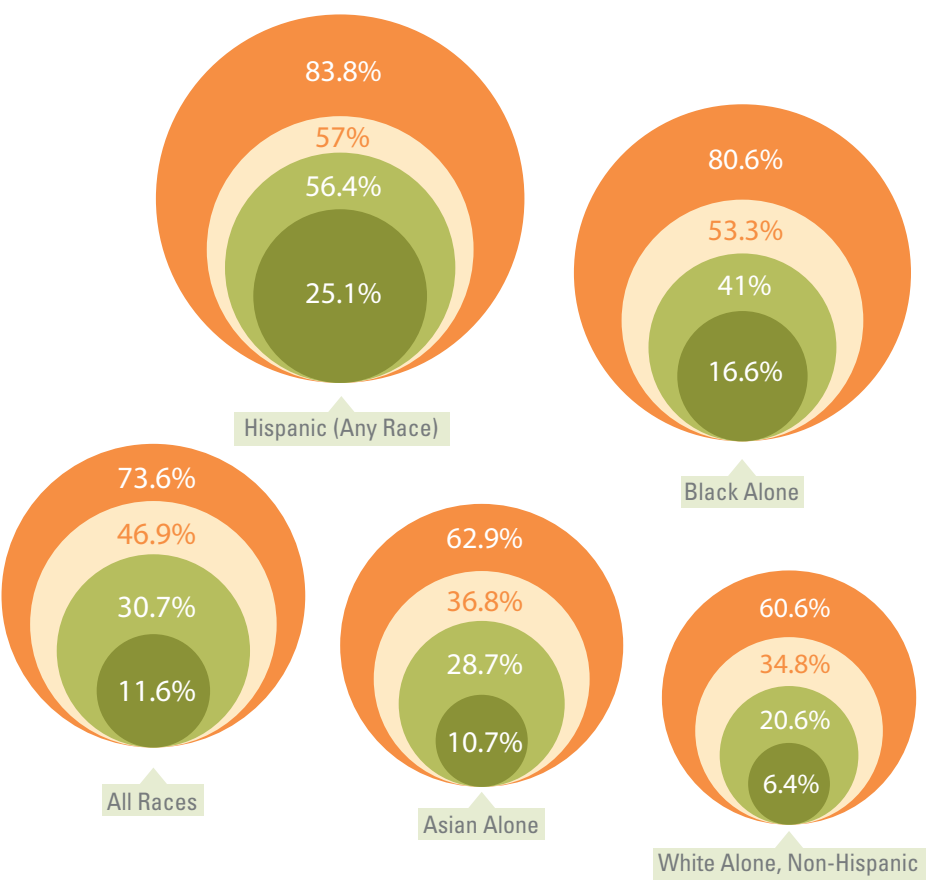


WHY A FOCUS ON RACE/ETHNICITY?

Parents and children of color have disproportionately high rates of poverty, reinforced by structural barriers such as labor market discrimination and lack of access to educational and economic opportunities. Recent polling data reveal that 53 percent of likely voters say children of different races tend to face unequal barriers to opportunity.³⁵ In 2010, 39 percent of Blacks, 35 percent of Hispanics, 14 percent of Asians, and 12 percent of Whites were poor. Native Americans also experience high levels of poverty. For example, 47 percent of Native American families with children under 18 were living below the poverty level in 2010.

Looking at gender and race together reveals some of the populations that are most vulnerable to being poor or low-income: more than 80 percent of children in Black and Hispanic single-mother families are low-income.³⁶

Percentage of Children Under the Age of 18 Living in Poverty and Low-Income, by Family Structure, Race and Hispanic Origin, 2010



- Single-mother families, low income
- Single-mother families, in poverty
- Married couple families, low income
- Married couple families, in poverty

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), September 2011.

WHY A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH?

Data from the early-childhood and adult ends of the education spectrum make the case for investment in educational opportunities for both parents and children. A two-generation approach presents the potential to multiply the return on investment in early childhood education for children and in postsecondary education for young parents. For at-risk children, quality early education can produce an annual rate of return in the range of 7 to 10 percent.³⁷

Simultaneously, parents' level of educational attainment is the best predictor of economic mobility for their children.³⁸ Part of the road ahead is building the evidence that two-generation approaches are more effective, and potentially more efficient, than serving children and parents in isolation from one another. A "benefit-cost analysis"³⁹ of these two-generation approaches will also be important to pursue.

Early indications from emerging two-generation approaches highlight the importance of "mutual motivation" when both parents and children have access to opportunities. As noted earlier, a body of research highlights the impact of maternal work and education on outcomes for children. At the same time, children can serve as a motivating factor for adults, particularly mothers.⁴⁰

Focus group data from the Community Action Project's CareerAdvance® program suggest important ways in which mothers who return to school are motivated by and for their children, as well as ways in which these mothers become more involved with their children's learning and homework as a result of their own participation in postsecondary education. These mutually reinforcing investments suggest that the benefits of two-generation programs may be greater than the sum of their separate programmatic parts.⁴¹



If you look at the challenges our country faces, we cannot solve them by putting people and putting issues in siloes. We have to think about much higher leverage and impact. And thinking about two generations at once – that if you improve things for the parents, you improve life for their children, and, in fact, the other way around – is critical.

— Hilary Pennington,
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

VOICES OF PARENTS: CHILDREN ARE A MOTIVATING FACTOR

"A secure life, like for my children to have something that they can start with, but I think a lot of times we don't have anything to start with."

— African-American Single Mother, Detroit

"A degree, so I can get a better job and provide for my family."

— African-American/Latino Married Father, Detroit

"Providing a better path for my son. It's his future; not mine. It's his future."

— Asian Single Mother, NY

"For my daughter to be...I know it's not me, but for my daughter to be as successful as she can be."

— African-American/Latino Single Father, NY

"I would like to have my own home here in Albuquerque so my son can have a good education."

— Native American Single Mother, NM

"Have my kids have all the opportunities to do the things I couldn't do."

— White Single Father, NM

SOURCE: Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint. Toward a Two-Generation Strategy: Voices of American Families, 2011.

Our student parents often say the entire reason for going to school is to impact their kids. That's the main reason. We have students who say, "I can't help my kids with their homework," or "my kid was going to drop out and said, 'you don't have a GED, so why should I?'" Kids impact their parents' decisions, and vice versa.

— Ann Lyn Hall,
CNM>Connect at Central New
Mexico Community College

WHAT IS A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH?

A simple working definition for two-generation approaches is as follows:

Two-generation approaches focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both vulnerable parents and children together.

Two-generation approaches can be applied to programs, policies, systems, and research.

In terms of policies, a few examples worth examining for their potential to incorporate two-generation approaches include the Higher Education Act (e.g., changes in Pell Grants to better take into account the financial needs of students who are parents), Head Start (e.g., developing programming that goes beyond parent engagement to create educational and workforce opportunities for parents), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF; e.g., use of resources to provide postsecondary education for parents linked to high-wage jobs, in coordination with high-quality early care and education for children).

Examples of applying two-generation approaches to programs are described

in text boxes that follow (e.g., ways a postsecondary institution and early childhood education program might partner and coordinate services to meet the needs of both parents and children together). Two-generation approaches might also be applied to systems—formal (e.g., a municipal public housing authority, a statewide community college system) or informal (e.g., the patchwork of early childhood education funding streams that exists in many states). These systems may be loosely configured or more integrated depending upon the state or community.

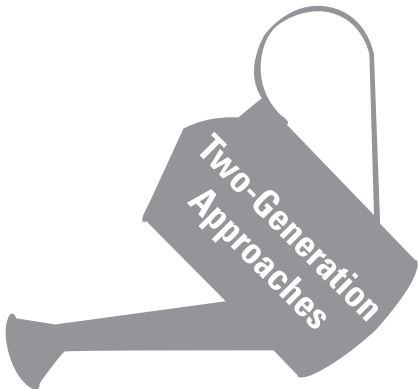
Finally, two-generation approaches may be applied to research, which is needed to build an evidence base showing what works best for whom, and to undergird effective policies, programs, and system change.

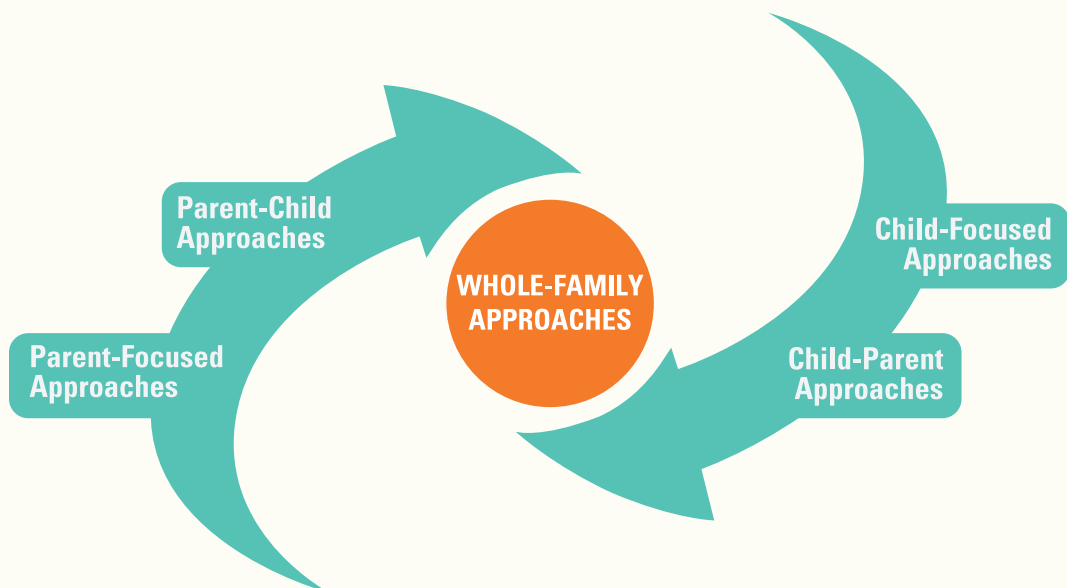
Two-generation approaches can be found along a continuum. The graphic on the following page illustrates the starting point (parent or child) and the relative emphasis:

Whole-family approaches focus equally and intentionally on services and opportunities for the parent and the child (for example, see box on the Jeremiah Program).

Child-parent approaches focus first or primarily on the child, but are moving toward a two-generation approach and also include services and opportunities for the parent (for example, see box on the Community Action Project's CareerAdvance® Program).

Parent-child approaches focus first or primarily on the parent, but are moving toward a two-generation approach and also include services and opportunities for children (for example, see box on the Endicott College Keys to Degrees program).





WHOLE-FAMILY APPROACH: JEREMIAH PROGRAM

Shandrell, a single mother in St. Paul, Minnesota, is completing her bachelor's degree in design while her young daughter goes to a quality early childhood education center just blocks from her mother's college campus – and in the same building where the family lives. Shandrell and her daughter are enrolled in the Jeremiah Program, which provides housing and life skills and began in the Twin Cities in 1998. Designed to help single parents pursue postsecondary education while ensuring their children are successfully prepared for kindergarten, Jeremiah has expanded to two U.S. "campuses" with plans for two more.

The program, led by President and CEO Gloria Perez, takes a "wraparound" or comprehensive approach with families:

the St. Paul site, where Shandrell and her daughter live, is an 88,000-square-foot campus with 38 apartments, computer labs, a child-development center, four classrooms, a library, and a playground. The program also provides career and life coaching, job placement assistance, and access to an alumnae network. The results are tangible: 55 percent of Jeremiah women graduate with an associate's degree and 45 percent graduate with a bachelor's degree. Every 2010 graduate now has career-tracked employment at a livable wage, and all enrolled Jeremiah children are performing at the appropriate developmental level.

CHILD-PARENT APPROACH: COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT'S CAREERADVANCE® PROGRAM

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, three young children are enrolled in a quality early childhood education center, where their attendance has vastly improved since their mother, Christy, began classes to earn her licensed practical nursing degree. The program, Community Action Project's CareerAdvance® program, started after Steven Dow, Executive Director of the Community Action Project, noticed that many parents of the children enrolled in local Head Start programs had no clear plans – jobs, classes – after dropping their children off.

Designed in partnership with the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at the University of Texas at Austin and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard, CareerAdvance®

provides free training and support for parents that leads to a degree in Registered Nursing or Health Information Technology. The program emphasizes skill development that prepares participants for high-paying jobs, along with support in balancing child care and transportation.

"It occurred to us there are often these moments at which adults are willing to change their behavior...and the birth of the child represents one of those moments where the adult is willing to think about doing some things differently," Dow explains. "We began to think if we really want to focus on stabilizing the family economically, as a precondition of the work to help their kids, we thought we have to stabilize the economic unit around the child."

PARENT-CHILD APPROACH: KEYS TO DEGREES AT ENDICOTT COLLEGE

In Beverly, Massachusetts, Yolanda, a sophomore at Endicott College, is a full-time student and single parent working toward her bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Yolanda is on the Dean's List and is enrolled in Endicott's Keys to Degrees program, which allows her to live on campus with her young son. They and other single-parent families live in a residential facility equipped with a children's playroom, full kitchens, living rooms, and an outside play area that is safely enclosed. Yolanda's child is enrolled in an off-site quality early-care and education center while his mother takes a full slate of classes. Most recently, as part of Endicott's internship program, Yolanda completed an internship in the Lawrence District Courthouse in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

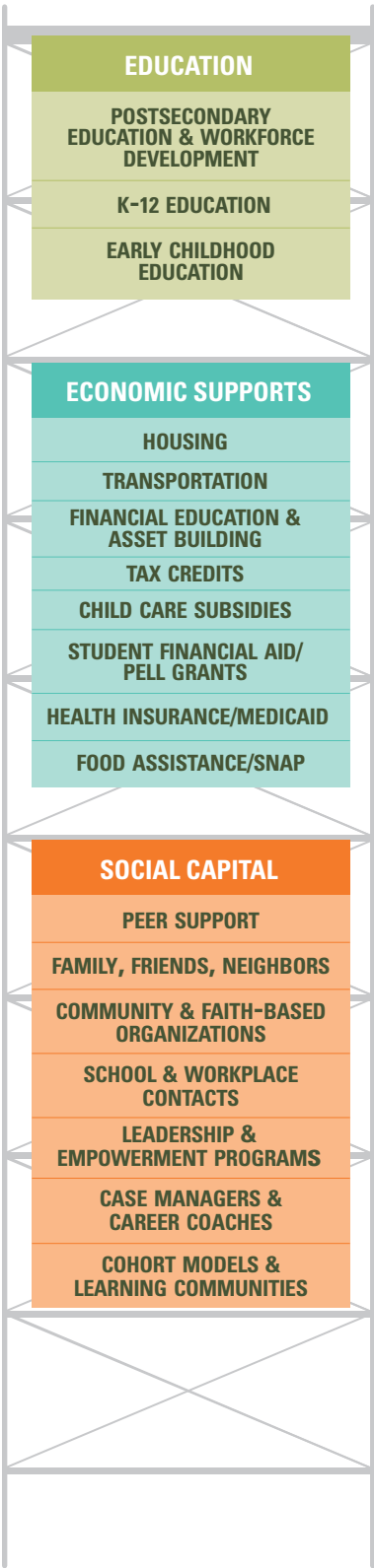
Created in 1993 under the leadership of President Richard Wylie, Keys to Degrees provides an immersion college

experience for student parents while ensuring quality early education for their children. Students also receive workshops on parenting, personal finance, and healthy cooking; academic tutoring and financial aid; and regular meetings with a mentor from the Endicott community. They volunteer at a "Keys Retreat" each summer, where they participate in panel discussions with local organizations and single parents from the community.

"Part of our success has been in trying to find unique ways to deliver success to our young people," says President Wylie. "What we need is to be inclusive and not exclusive. Every college in the country, whether research or field-based, needs to have the opportunity to participate in a program like this and to be expected to do so." Of the Keys to Degrees students who graduated before 2010, 80 percent are employed and 50 percent are furthering their education.

COMPONENTS OF A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH:

Education + Economic Supports + Social Capital



EDUCATION IS AT THE CORE

Education, from early childhood through postsecondary, is a core component of two-generation approaches. There is a strong correlation between low levels of educational attainment and poverty. Only 10 percent of those with a bachelor's degree are poor. More than 30 percent of those with a high school diploma or less are poor.⁴² The poverty rate does not decrease until people have at least some education beyond high school. In addition, as noted above, there is a strong link between maternal education and outcomes for children, particularly school readiness for kindergartners.⁴³ There is also some evidence that parent engagement can further enhance these positive outcomes.⁴⁴

While education is at the core of two-generation approaches, education in and of itself is not sufficient if policies, programs, and systems are to move both parents and children beyond poverty.

ECONOMIC SUPPORTS PROVIDE A SCAFFOLD

Economic Supports, including (but not limited to) housing, transportation, financial education and asset-building, tax credits, child care subsidies, student financial aid, health insurance, and food assistance, provide an important scaffold for families as they work to build the skills that lead to better jobs and longer-term financial stability.

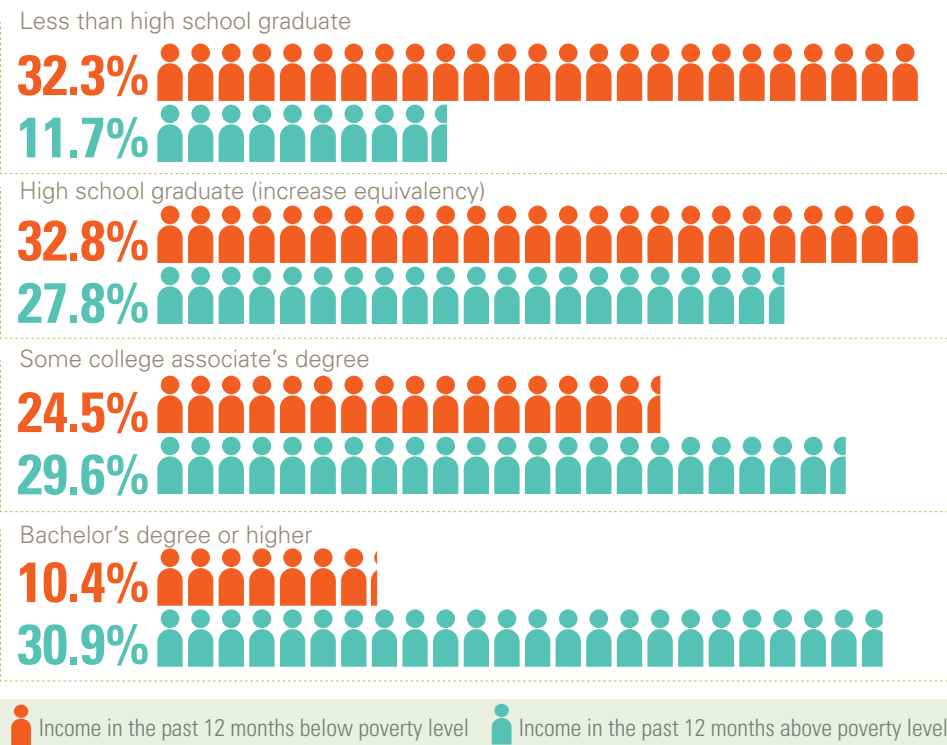
SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILDS ON RESILIENCE

Social Capital appears to be a powerful success factor in programs that help to move families beyond poverty. Social Capital manifests itself as peer support; contact with family, friends, and neighbors; involvement in community and faith-based organizations; school and workplace contacts; leadership and empowerment programs; use of case managers and career coaches; and other social networks such as cohort models and learning communities. These elements build on the strength and resilience of families, especially the aspirations parents have for their children.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

For further discussion of the challenges and opportunities in applying two-generation approaches to policies and programs, please refer to forthcoming papers from Ascend partners: *Investing in Children and Parents: Fostering Dual-Generation Strategies in the United States*, by Christopher King, Tara Smith, and Robert Glover of the University of Texas-Austin; and *Promising Dual-Generation Anti-Poverty Programs for Low-Income Families: Three Approaches and Their Implications for Practitioners*, by Teresa Eckrich Sommer and P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale of Northwestern University.

Poverty Status of People 25 years and over, by Educational Attainment 2010



SOURCE: Percentages were calculated by Child Trends based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, September 2011

The Five-Year Blueprint for a Two-Generation Agenda



You've heard of "no child left behind?" This is different. This is no generation left behind. And that is very exciting. You don't often hear that.

— Charlotte Perret,
Perret Family Trust

More than one in five children in the U.S. lives in poverty, while more than two in five are low-income.⁴⁵ It is an unacceptable situation, one with the potential to devastate families and our economy for generations to come. In 2011, for the first time, a majority of Americans did not believe that children will be better off than their parents.⁴⁶

These alarming national trends drive Ascend's search for new solutions. New approaches to creating economic security for families and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty are essential if the American economy is to thrive in the 21st century.

OVER THE PAST YEAR, ASCEND:

- Convened a series of national roundtables and panels and community-level discussions among leaders in policy development, research, program design, evaluation, and community engagement. Our goal was to bring together innovators from across the country to share knowledge, identify promising programs, and expand the conversation around new approaches to move families beyond poverty.
- Commissioned new data analysis from Child Trends, a nonpartisan nonprofit research center, to examine poverty and income data through a two-generation lens.
- Commissioned a series of focus groups by the bipartisan team of Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint, to capture the often-missing voices, aspirations, and perspectives of low-income parents.⁴⁷

The results grounded Ascend in the reality of our most vulnerable families, and also in the strength of their dreams and where those dreams can take them. We believe the resiliency and aspirations of these families can be channeled to strengthen our country.

Ascend has scanned the field for both what's working and what's not, and what is simmering in between. With techniques ranging from community site visits to "story banking" the personal stories we heard, we learned from people, parents, and practitioners that the economic and political climate has shifted in ways that make business as usual a futile approach. The consensus: We are at a critical moment in time where new approaches can take

hold and leaders will be required to think and act differently.

Ascend is putting forward an approach that engages two generations at once, using the equation of Education + Economic Supports + Social Capital (see earlier section on Components) to form a new architecture of action. This equation can shape solutions at an individual, institutional, community, and policy level for millions of parents and children. Ascend's blueprint helps parents pursue skills and complete education to improve their own economic security and stability, while simultaneously ensuring their children are on a path from the earliest age to engage in lifelong learning.

Elements of Ascend's five-year plan for working with the emerging network of two-generation innovators are outlined below.



Ascend is a hub for breakthrough ideas and proven strategies that move parents, especially women, and their children beyond poverty toward educational success and economic security.

WHO IS THE FOCUS OF ASCEND'S WORK?

Ascend puts both children and parents together at the center of solutions. Parents across economic status, gender, family structure, race/ethnicity, geography, and political affiliation have a deep desire for their children's educational and economic success. However, education policies and economic support programs often have a "blind spot" in understanding people's needs and challenges. They are rarely designed to tap the resiliency and tenacity of both parents and children. Ascend will expand the work we have begun of listening to and documenting the voices of low-income parents and children. This work is critical to ensure that policies and programs are rooted in a deep awareness of the behaviors, essential needs, cultural dynamics, and self-determination of families.



HOW WILL ASCEND WORK?

Build on Established Work and Learning:

Tapping insights from prior research and work at both policy and program levels is critical to developing a two-generation approach that is effective and sustainable. Initiatives such as New Hope, Head Start, Early Head Start, the family literacy movement, and other community-level efforts provide important lessons about what has worked and what has not in sustainability; in consistency, quality, type, and intensity of services; and in outcomes.⁴⁸

Link, Streamline, and Connect: Budget deficits at all levels of government are likely to remain a reality for several years. Within this crisis is an opportunity to streamline and link programs with “blended” and “braided” funding that intentionally integrates resources from disparate agencies and programs. Developing such new systems requires a coordinated focus on the parent and child, a shift from the traditional model that is territorial or focused on the funding source. *Ascend* will examine new efforts that bring together early care and education with postsecondary education and workforce development. This approach holds promise for both increased efficiency and better results for families.

Foster Innovation and Collaboration:

Consistent with a commitment to innovation and a “networked” way of working, *Ascend* will establish a \$1 million Innovation Fund to provide flexible capital to fuel breakthrough ideas and support leaders in the field. Innovation Fund grants will spur cross-sector collaborations, promote promising practices, and support leaders in leveraging additional resources.

WHAT WILL ASCEND DO?

Spark a New Conversation: Listening to and amplifying the voices of low-income families in the public and policy arenas is essential to developing two-generation approaches. The resilience, insights, and realities of parents and children are under-represented in media and policy debates. Yet the American public is hungry for a solution-focused conversation – one that focuses on specific steps forward, rather than belaboring the problem. We see an urgent need to develop fresh language and messages that resonate across gender, race, ethnicity, generation, and class. *Ascend*’s work will include publications,

products, and tools that partners from across sectors can use to inform and expand their work on two-generation approaches.

Develop an Economic Case with Solid Metrics:

Defining the metrics and the economics of a two-generation approach that can be applied across programs, policy, systems, and research is vital to the goals of replication, scale, and adaptability. While “silver bullet” answers are too simplistic to address the complex reality of families’ lives, investment in an evaluation strategy to identify the core effective elements of two-generation approaches is critical. Ascend will convene leading researchers to help determine a solid methodology.

Build and Expand a Network of Leaders:

Recognizing that breakthrough ideas come from different sectors and communities, Ascend will unveil the Aspen Institute’s newest fellowship program, targeting exceptional leaders who are pioneering and paving new pathways that break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Ascend will create a network of leaders from across the country to share knowledge, develop and test ideas, and coordinate their efforts. Ascend will support the network with resources and a platform to accelerate the creation, amplification, and expansion of proven and promising two-generation strategies.

Elevate Promising Practices and Policy Ideas to Build Political Will:

Ascend fully embraces the research and development phase of the emerging two-generation network. To equip and empower the network, Ascend will launch an online hub and convene national forums and roundtables that highlight promising programs and policies for leaders in positions to make decisions that can shift practice, policy, and resources.



At the Aspen Institute we respect the traditions of our values and ideals, but we are also looking to the future for how we can be more imaginative in a wide variety of fields... We are trying to find the most creative thinking and translate that into leadership.

— Walter Isaacson,
The Aspen Institute

Concluding Thoughts

The United States in 2012 is at a crossroads about ways to ensure that *all its people* fuel progress in the 21st century. By creating partnerships across programs, policies, and systems that are now focused separately on children and parents, we can create an America in which a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next. We believe this vision shows a way forward. New two-generation strategies can help parents and children achieve their dreams together.

TWO-GENERATION STRATEGIES 101: STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Below is a checklist of questions that can guide partners as they start the conversation to connect programs and policies for parents to those for their children, and vice-versa.

FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- ✓ **Does your program focus on** educational success for children, for their parents, or for both?
- ✓ **If you focus on children's education,** how do you engage parents about their own educational success? What would be your next best step to do so?
- ✓ **If you focus on parents' educational success,** how do you engage them about their children's educational success? What would be your next best step to do so?
- ✓ **What economic and social supports** do you provide for both parents and children within the context of their educational success?

FOR POLICYMAKERS AND POLICY EXPERTS:

- ✓ **How might postsecondary education** and workforce development policies connect with early childhood education policies, and vice-versa?
- ✓ **Are there any sources of flexible** funding (federal, state, or local; public or private) to further two-generation strategies?
- ✓ **Are any federal legislative** reauthorizations likely to be an opportunity for promoting two-generation strategies?
- ✓ **What state or local policy structures** support two-generation strategies?
- ✓ **Do any funding streams, policy** structures, or regulations inhibit simultaneous services for parent and child?

FOR RESEARCHERS:

- ✓ **If you are studying parents in** postsecondary education, is there a metric about their children's education that you can examine simultaneously?
- ✓ **If you are studying children's progress** in early learning environments, is there a metric about their parents' pursuit of postsecondary skills that you can examine simultaneously?
- ✓ **How does your two-generation** research translate into evidence-based practice?
- ✓ **How might you examine the** mechanisms supporting two-generation strategies and document its joint outcomes and impacts for parents and children?
- ✓ **How might you analyze the benefits** and costs of two-generation strategies in varying operating environments, such as public housing or in community colleges?

FOR PHILANTHROPY:

- ✓ **How might you align your grantmaking** along a two-generation continuum for greater impact?
- ✓ **In funding programs and initiatives** around children's educational success, how might you also support strategies around their parents' success, and vice-versa?
- ✓ **How can the intermediaries you** support and fund be more intentional in creating and fostering two-generation strategies?

FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR:

- ✓ **When you support skills training for** your employees, how might you simultaneously add incentives for their greater engagement in their children's education?
- ✓ **How might you partner with community** colleges or other training programs that engage parents and their children in activities that reinforce learning for both?
- ✓ **How might you leverage your influence** as a good corporate citizen to encourage innovative two-generation initiatives in the communities where you do business?

WHAT CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DO?

Double-bottom-line investing, which focuses on achieving both social and financial returns, is gathering momentum. It offers potential new models, resources, and solutions by engaging the power of the market in addressing social issues, especially improving the lives of low-income families. From employment and workforce policies to product development, companies have many opportunities to affect the well-being of families. Increasingly, business schools are exploring new approaches to both “doing good” and “doing well.” Buoyed by the growing fields of impact and mission-driven investing, new leaders and businesses are surfacing with unexpected insights and partnerships. One such example is American MoJo.

AMERICAN MOJO

Raised by a single mother, the Alely siblings – Tom, Darr, and Cara – set out in 2010 to create a for-profit venture that would also be a vehicle for social good: a company that would provide quality living-wage jobs for single mothers in tandem with on-site quality child care for their kids. Already successful entrepreneurs in technology, the Alely siblings developed American MoJo, an apparel manufacturing company based in Boston, that is staffed – from stitchers to equipment operators to saleswomen – by single mothers.

American MoJo provides an on-site child care center to eliminate child care costs for its employees. It also aims to provide above-minimum-wage salaries, comprehensive health care, and soft-skills training, lowering the number of women relying on government assistance. So far, American MoJo clients include Accenture, Staples, Syracuse University, and the Dave Matthews Band; the company plans to expand to Oakland and Chicago in 2012.

“One of the biggest challenges single mothers face is the crippling cost of quality child care. By providing freedom from this expense, MoJo enables a new career path for this incredibly capable and motivated demographic, and the wraparound support to help them succeed outside of the workplace,” says President and Chief Operating Officer Cara Alely. “With budget management, parenting, GED, and nutrition classes available to employees, we are equipping these parents and ultimately their families with tools critical for breaking the cycle of poverty.”

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