

ISSUE BRIEF



# Defining Two-Generation Programming in a Family Stability Context

September 2017



In the context of stabilizing vulnerable families, engagement strategies can be arrayed along a continuum according to their “whole family” focus. At one end of this continuum are programmatic approaches that focus only on the needs of children or adults. At the other end of this continuum are Two-Generation (2-Gen) approaches, which consider and serve the needs of both adults and children in a family.



Over the past few years, a number of non-profit organizations and governmental offices have published briefs and reports focusing on Two-Generation approaches to program funding, design, and delivery. Most of these publications communicate the need to ensure that services are available for all members of the family unit served by a social service agency, either directly by that agency or via referral to partners. Indeed, being aware of the need to offer and provide multi-generational support is necessary to a 2-Gen approach.

Beyond determining **who** should be served by programs using a 2-Gen approach, though, we argue that 2-Gen programming should have clear implications for **how** the whole family is served and **what impact** agencies hope to have. Ideally, 2-Gen programming would emphasize a coordinated approach to program delivery that ensures that as many program components as possible are delivered simultaneously to all members of the family.

Recent work on this topic suggests the next development in effective Two-Generation programming should feature a highly customized, “whole family” focused strategy. Such an approach

would be less about coordinating discrete services offered to different family members and more about a mindful consideration of the family as a unit, one that can thrive with the right social, emotional, financial, educational and other supports.

For example, Smith & Coffey (2015) write, “The conceptual framework behind two-generation approaches posits that the thoughtful combination of services for multiple generations within a family leads to improved, even synergistic, outcomes over time.” Babcock and Ruiz De Luzuriaga (2016) recommend the use of a programmatic model that encourages the family to work together towards goals that help each family member move toward self-sufficiency.

This approach can sometimes lead to families making changes that would not be identified under traditional case management models that focus on securing outside assistance to stabilize families.<sup>i</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation advises the adoption of a coaching model, working together with families, as opposed to a case management model that is more focused on doing things for a family to increase stability (Lehoullier & Murrell (2017)).<sup>ii</sup>

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To contribute to the evolving discussion of this concept, the Siemer Institute suggests the following operational definition for Two-Generation approaches to serving families who are at risk of homelessness.

**Two-Generation approaches require programs to design and deliver services that intentionally strengthen the whole family, so that all generations within the family can experience improved economic, housing, and educational outcomes.**

**As a result, the whole family becomes more resilient to future disruptive events.**

This definition—and the Siemer Institute’s underlying point-of-view—is rooted in the belief that the most effective way to help individual family members thrive is to strengthen the entire family. Transitioning from a traditional case management model to one that focuses more on partnering with families to help develop their skills and resources is central to this approach.

We hypothesize that programs that deliver Two-Generation programming in the manner described above are more likely than other programs to increase familial resilience, as measured by the following primary outcomes:

- » The family’s economic self-sufficiency is increased or stabilized;
- » The family’s housing situation is improved or stabilized; and
- » Family members’ educational situation is improved or stabilized.

We also expect that programs employing Two-Generation approach like the one described above are more likely than other programs to observe the following secondary outcomes:

- » Improved physical and mental health; and
- » Increased feelings of family cohesion.

Siemer Institute funded programs (SIFPs) are well positioned to advance the work on 2-Gen programming to prevent family homelessness and improve academic performance.

- » SIFPs already provide strong case management and wrap-around services, a necessary ingredient for the 2-Gen approach. And some SIFPs employ more of a collaborative or coaching approach, which enables staff to earn a family’s trust and to gain an in-depth understanding of each family member’s needs and goals.<sup>1</sup> These programs can serve as role models and advisors for other programs within the Siemer network.
- » Financial support provided by the Siemer Institute allows case managers to be creative in the services they offer families. Individualized programming and goal-setting can require case managers to be nimble and implement solutions that would not necessarily fall under the rubric of traditional case management.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Babcock and De Luzuriaga (2016) noted one family realized their messy environment was detrimental to their son’s ability to concentrate and complete academic tasks. This kind of insight resulted from in-depth, family-level processing and goal-setting activities.

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## Prominent Definitions For Two-Generation Approaches To Program Delivery

We reviewed more than 20 publications from 7 leading foundations and governmental entities that sought to define key aspects of Two-Generation programming. Exemplar definitions from these publications are included below.

ORGANIZATION	BRIEF DEFINITION
<i>Annie E. Casey Foundation</i> <sup>iii</sup>	<p>“[A 2-Gen approach] aims to create opportunities for families by simultaneously equipping parents and kids with the tools they need to thrive while removing the obstacles in their way.” This requires us to... “bring together programs for children and adults and take an intentional, coordinated approach.”</p> <p>AECF lists three key components: “1. Provide parents with multiple pathways to get family-supporting jobs and achieve financial stability; 2. Ensure access to high-quality early childhood education and enriching elementary school experiences; and 3. Equip parents to better support their children socially and emotionally and to advocate for their kids’ education.”</p>
<i>Ascend: The Aspen Institute</i> <sup>iv</sup>	<p>“[2-Gen programming] is about a commitment to better outcomes for children and parents at the same time, outcomes that must be measured together. Ascend cites early childhood education, postsecondary and employment pathways, economic assets, health and well-being and social capital as core components.”</p>
<i>National Human Services Assembly</i>	<p>[2-Gen programs are] programs that intentionally serve parents and children individually and together as a family unit. At a minimum, these approaches seek to re-engage young parents in education and / or work; nurture parent-child bonds; improve children’s well-being; and connect families with economic, social, and other supports.</p>
<i>Office of Family Assistance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)</i> <sup>vi</sup>	<p>“Two-generation, or whole family, approaches meet the needs of children and their parents together... ACF encourages grantees, including TANF agencies, to promote and support: linkages</p>

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between high quality educational services for children and workforce development services for their parents; programmatic efforts to help parents gain the skills, knowledge, and resources to support their child's development; ensuring that families have access to the economic and social supports needed for stability and resilience and healthy child development; and helping families build social capital that can support both resilience and upward mobility."

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**Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources/ Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs**<sup>vii</sup>

"Two-generation strategies intentionally and systematically connect adult/child investments for larger, longer lasting impacts on family economic success."

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**W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research**<sup>viii</sup>

"Two-generation strategies share an explicit focus on families, bridging the needs of children and their parents... the conceptual framework behind two-generation approaches posits that the thoughtful combination of services for multiple generations within a family leads to improved, even synergistic, outcomes over time."

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**U.S. Departments of: Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education**<sup>ix</sup>

"[A 2-Gen approach] aims to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by addressing the needs of both children and parents. This requires aligning and coordinating the design and delivery of services for the whole family, so both generations can experience improved physical and mental health, safety, educational, and economic outcomes..."

"Core components common to two-generation approaches may include education (including early childhood systems for children and adult education or training for the parents), economic support (including housing, employment, and food and nutrition), health and well-being (including physical and mental health services for parents and children), and social capital (including friends, extended relatives, and other natural supports and networks). While one single program often cannot encompass all of these components, housing and early childhood providers can jointly coordinate with community partners to meet the needs of families with young children experiencing homelessness through a two-generation approach."

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## References

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- ix Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk for Homelessness. (2016) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Education. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/echomelessnesspolicystatement.pdf>

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## Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and completed on behalf of the Siemer Institute. This document articulates the Siemer Institute's definition of two-generation (i.e., whole family) programming, and not necessarily the definition(s) held by The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The generous funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation to support this work should not be interpreted as an endorsement by The Annie E. Casey Foundation of the Siemer Institute's definition of two-generation programming.

A preliminary version of the two-generation definition featured in this issue brief was shared with those attending the 2017 Siemer Institute Summit. The Siemer Institute thanks all of those professionals for sharing their constructive feedback.

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