2Gen Cuyahoga

A Community Call to Action to Address Our Economic and Social Gaps

In 2018, more than 30 stakeholders volunteered to create a working committee to promote Two-Generation (2Gen) policies, practices, and programs in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. 2Gen approaches offer whole-family interventions that meet the needs of children, their caregivers, and the family as a unit and operate from the understanding that adults want to help their children succeed, and want opportunities for success in their work and lives as well. This committee, comprised of parents, concerned citizens, and staff from human service, educational, and funding organizations, has been working to outline next steps to achieve those ends.

The working committee requested that The Literacy Cooperative:

1) Lead the development of a broad and clear statement for the community, in essence "A Call for Action that articulates the components of a 2Gen approach,
2) Research the effectiveness of 2Gen approaches, and
3) Outline the economic and social outcomes Cuyahoga County can anticipate if the use of such an approach is expanded.

Why is this important?

2Gen is a family-centered, highly positive service delivery mechanism that seeks to reorder traditional ways that programs serve families. It addresses some of the common issues faced by early education, adult literacy, and workforce development programs and the clients they serve. For example, early education and student academic progress are negatively impacted if caregivers are unable to read to their children due to low literacy. Similarly, adults who are enrolled in workforce training programs face real barriers to successfully completing programs if they are unable to access affordable childcare. As a result of these kinds of issues many of these partners have seen reduced enrollment in the last few years resulting in many slots going unfilled. They have exhausted traditional methods of recruitment. 2Gen partnerships are a way to explore additional recruitment opportunities. Through this Call to Action, we seek to outline a new standard for service delivery and program effectiveness that can successfully and efficiently challenge the complex problems of social and economic inequality that threaten the future of both our city and county.

Community Action Plan

Community change requires shared will. In Cuyahoga County, 2Gen approaches needs a strong network of community organizations that are committed to changing the landscape of economic and social inequalities. This can be achieved through the following actions:

1. Involving parents and family members to be part of our planning process.[1]
2. Expanding inter-agency knowledge among all service providers (site visits and sharing).
3. Implementing formal referral strategies and shared databases among all organizations providing services to children, adults, or families.
4. Incubating a 2Gen programming pilot and tracking results, scalability, and sustainability.

These strategies will yield 2Gen implementation to benefit Cuyahoga County families and offer a framework for the working committee's actions.

The 2Gen Approach – from the Ascend Project at the Aspen Institute[2]

Executing the strategies outlined above requires a shared understanding of what 2Gen approaches include and we are relying heavily upon the work of The Aspen Institute and their Ascent Project. According to the *Ascend* Project at the Aspen Institute, "**two-generation approaches** focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both children and the adults in their lives **together**."

The 2Gen approach recognizes, for instance, that 30 percent of students at community colleges are parents/caregivers with dependent children and therefore have to balance the competing demands of family, work, and education. It recognizes that millions of children in child care centers have parents/caregivers who are seeking to improve their families' economic security by working, training for better jobs, and/or going to school to get a high school equivalency credential (HSE), English language competence, or a certificate or degree from a 2- or 4-year college.

2Gen also recognizes that children with a savings account designated to pay for college are more likely to end up enrolling and graduating from college—even if the account has less than $500 in it. When parents save money for their children's college, it can result in increased trust in traditional financial institutions and less reliance on alternative financial services and predatory lending institutions while increasing their financial capability and helping them set and achieve their own long-term financial goals. A similar effect holds true for health insurance: parents with health insurance are more likely to seek regular care for themselves and their children.

Dual outcomes are at the heart of true 2Gen programs. Outcomes for both children and their parents/caregivers must be embedded in policies and programs that use two-generation approaches to improve family economic security and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

In both of these examples, organizations implementing 2Gen find ways to support the parents/caregivers of children in child care and the children of parents/caregivers in post-secondary education. The 2Gen idea has been embedded in diverse cultures for centuries, and 2Gen programs can be found in the early settlement house movement and in the Head Start program launched in

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[1] The parent engagement survey is available online at http://www.literacycooperative.org/.
[2] 2 Aspen Ascend: http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen/

1965. But a 21st century version of the 2Gen approach has emerged in response to contemporary conditions and insights. According to Aspen Ascend: more than two in five children in the U.S. live in low-income families; one in four children grow up in a single-parent family, many headed by women; and children and parents of color are disproportionately low-income.[3]

Despite these challenges, opportunity exists: the return on investment in children and their parents is high: every $1 invested in early childhood education saves at least $57 in social costs later. Many

EXAMPLE 1: A 2Gen approach at a community college, adult education program, or workforce development program can include providing student-parents/caregivers with childcare and family-support services, designing academic and college life and career pathways for their unique needs, and offering them a "family friendly" campus. These innovations help student-parents/caregivers to improve their education and economic achievement while simultaneously enhancing their children's development and opportunities. And they help adult programming to improve their own high-priority outcomes: increased access to higher education, student retention, and completion of degrees and certificates, particularly by low-income students.

For nearly five decades, The Centers for Families and Children (The Centers) has provided comprehensive services to pregnant women and families with children (birth to age 5) focusing on high-quality early childhood education as a gateway to provide services that combine interventions with a 2Gen approach to achieve family stability. Comprehensive services focus on the parent/caregiver as the child's first teacher, physical and emotional well-being, education for both parent and child, and connections to supportive services including employment, food, and housing. The Centers maintains seven early learning campuses across Greater Cleveland, including a unique preschool, co-located within the Maple Heights Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library (where adult literacy services are also provided). All centers have earned a five-star Step Up to Quality rating. For families not accessing a center, education and supports are provided through the home-based program allowing weekly home visits that can begin with pregnancy. During the prenatal period, support is provided to the Mother and Father and focuses on education and well-being of both the developing child and parents. Once the child is born, home-based services continue each week and include a home-based educational curriculum, case management, and health and well-being supports for both parent(s) and children up to age five. The Centers continues to enhance its 2Gen approach through special projects such as a collaboration with El Barrio Workforce and Early Learning which provides parents with the opportunity to receive a Child Development Associate credential to become a Teacher Assistant while their child is learning at one of the early learning centers. Once the parent completes the program, they can be hired into full time employment as a classroom teacher.

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[3] Aspen Ascend: http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen/

current funding streams and policies do not reflect the demographic realities of 21st century American families—i.e. the need for 2Gen programming—but the emergence of more 2Gen partnerships will continue to grow the impact of that $1.[4]

In Cuyahoga County, most human service, workforce preparation, and educational policies and programs fall somewhere along a service continuum between child-focused and caregiver focused, best illustrated by Figure 1. It is tempting to consider a program 2Gen if it focuses on parent/caregivers or children and offers some sort of support to others in the family, but we aspire to a 2Gen approach that begins with the whole family and recognizes the needs of the unit and the interrelated nature of those in it.

Not all programs will, or can be, 2Gen programs. Some are intended to be limited in scope and duration. Yet, many of our programs and agencies start at one end of the continuum, or the other, and often over time move towards a whole-family approach. Agencies often have both policies and programs at various places along the continuum, though program typically exceeds policy in these areas, and members of the working committee are not waiting on policy to implement program.

> EXAMPLE 2: A 2Gen approach for early childhood providers and educators provides the parents/caregivers of children that these organizations serve with adult education and training for jobs and careers and other support to improve their economic self-sufficiency. These innovations help parents/caregivers to enhance and protect their children(s)'s gains from participating in early care and education programs and as a result, help these programs to improve their outcomes for children.
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> Kindergarten Clubs are a 2Gen approach offered by the Cleveland Public Library (CPL) and Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL). The clubs are designed to work directly with children and families to develop and support kindergarten readiness skills via direct instruction, modelling, parent education, and linkage to library and community resources. Children experience a group setting and learn how to self-regulate without their parents/caregivers while doing fun activities. The program fosters strong relationships with other club members and with the library. The clubs are hosted bi-monthly (CPL) and monthly (CCPL). A meal is provided at all club meetings, and the entire family is welcome to attend. After the meal, parents/caregivers and children both attend their own education sessions. Over the course of nine club meetings, parents/caregivers learn skills to manage their child's transition to kindergarten and explore topics related to Kindergarten Readiness. Families are provided many extension ideas for home and community learning. They participate in "make it, take it" crafts, experiments and educational games and are given books, school supplies, bookbags and other educational materials.

While policy change isn't stopping the working committee, separate policies, different funding streams, and lack of connections between agencies providing educational, workforce and human
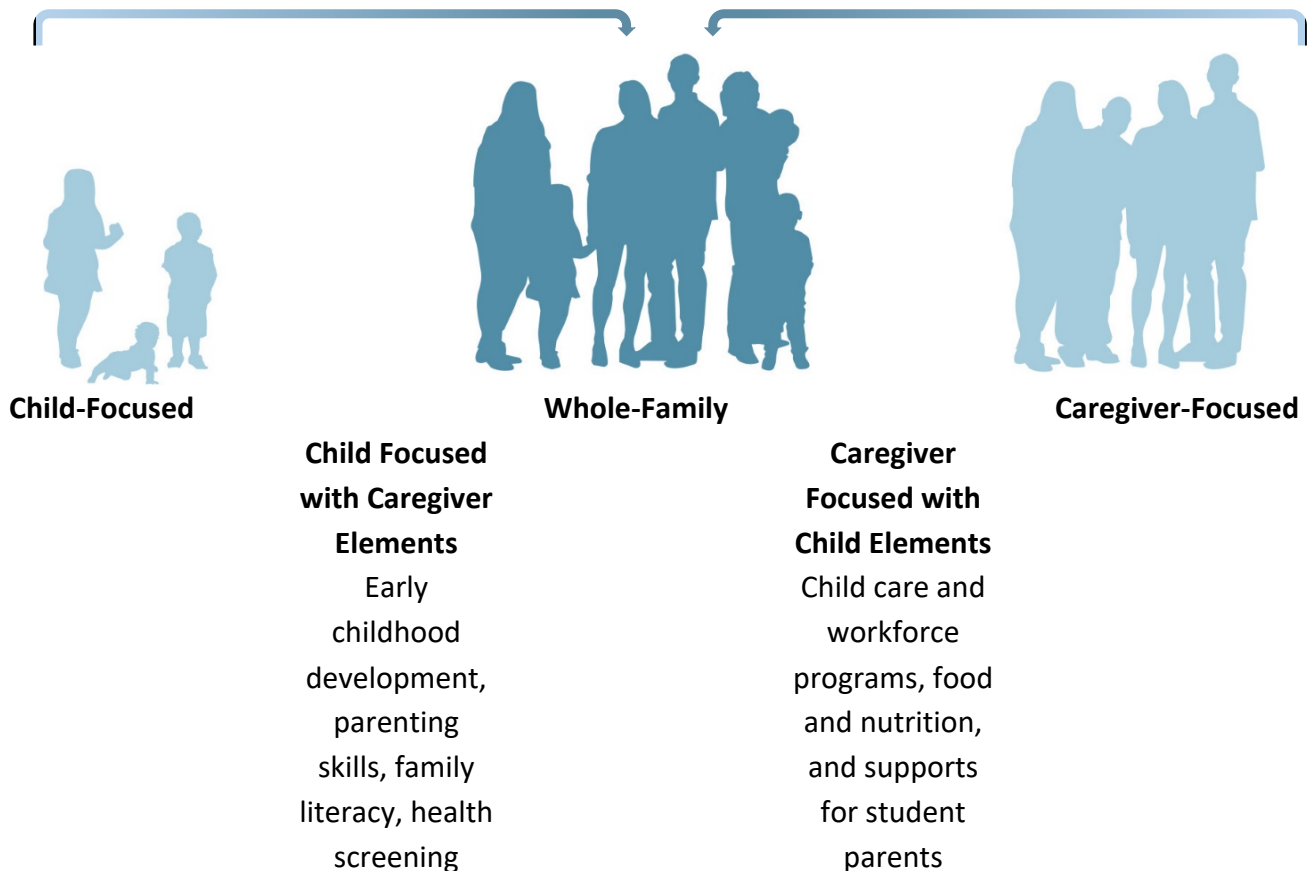
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[4] Aspen Ascend: http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen/

services often do hinder achieving 2Gen programs. Enlightened and supportive policies must be in place to support effective programs, and a balance must be achieved between the two. This can only happen if **whole-family approaches** are implemented that focus equally and intentionally on services and opportunities for the child and the adults in their lives. As Aspen Ascend notes, approaches must "articulate and track outcomes for both children and adults simultaneously."

In addition to the concept of the 2Gen Continuum, there are also five key components that need to be addressed in 2Gen policies and programs. These are: 1) Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways; 2) Early Childhood Education and Development; 3) Economic Assets; 4) Health and Well-Being; and 5) Social Capital. Each is important to a whole family approach.[5]

Figure 1: Potential Elements of a Whole-Family Continuum

Child-Focused

Whole-Family

Caregiver-Focused

Child Focused with Caregiver Elements
Early childhood development, parenting skills, family literacy, health screening

Caregiver Focused with Child Elements
Child care and workforce programs, food and nutrition, and supports for student parents

Source: Dave Lash & Company

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[5] Aspen Ascend: http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen/

Many communities like Cuyahoga County have rich service delivery in each of these areas. However, a community can be service-rich and connection poor. Such "poor connectivity" is not the fault of individual organizations or leaders. Program design, policies, accountability, and funding structures have created systems that are designed to exist separately, with little incentive to combine or network between services. We become experts in our own areas with poor knowledge of what exists in other service domains. At both the 2Gen Literacy Summit in 2018 and the working committee meetings, the call was clearly present to know more about what services are available and to understand where our service "gaps" are the greatest.

Work has been done to better understand these gaps. Invest in Children conducted a survey of 67 universal pre-k sites in Cuyahoga County to identify family needs and interests. The Literacy Cooperative used the results of the survey as an environmental scan of 2Gen partnership opportunities: 46/67 sites or 69% report that families rated job training/placement as a high need. The type and scope of their 2GEN activity or event varies by site, but the need is clear. Our research also indicates a need for early literacy interventions in many of the communities (Clark/Fulton, Broadway/Slavic Village, Buckeye/Woodhill) that have limited or no high quality universal pre-k sites.

<u>The Difference between Policies and Programs</u>

While providing critical help to many, federal and state programs designed to help low-income families overcome their daily challenges often operate in isolation from one another. Moreover, many of these programs were not designed for interagency collaboration. This rigidity filters down to the nonprofit, faith-based, and community-based organizations working with low-income families. Different funding sources, distinct definitions of success and narrow guidelines impede these organizations' ability to respond to the needs of children and parents/caregivers in tandem.[6]

The Annie E. Casey Foundation illustrates one of the greatest hurdles to achieving a 2Gen approach: a lack of sufficient policies to support programs. It can be argued that we know how to design successful programs and that we have been doing that for years. Yet, regardless of their success, programs tend not to persist unless they are supported by meaningful local, state, and national policies. In the absence of broader policy changes, success is best obtained by those organizations who find creative ways to partner together locally, to braid or blend together often disparate programs and funding streams. A 2017 Policy Brief by the Annie E. Casey Foundation illustrates several examples of this.[7] Despite the success of local groups in doing this, the Foundation also strongly noted that "...policymakers and funders also have a role to play: They can help remove the common obstacles and challenges that prevent organizations

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[6] See: *Creating Opportunities for Families a Two-Generation Approach*, p. 10, The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-CreatingOpportunityforFamilies-2014.pdf
[7] (2017) Advancing Two-Generation Approaches: Funding to Help Families Succeed. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: http://www.aecf.org/m/keys/AECF_PracticeBrief1_Advancing2GenApproaches-2017.pdf

from fully realizing an approach that takes the whole family into account."[8] Our Call to Action in Cuyahoga County seeks to partner with local policymakers and funders in achieving this goal.

Figure 2: Interrelationship of 2Gen Components, Aspen Ascend
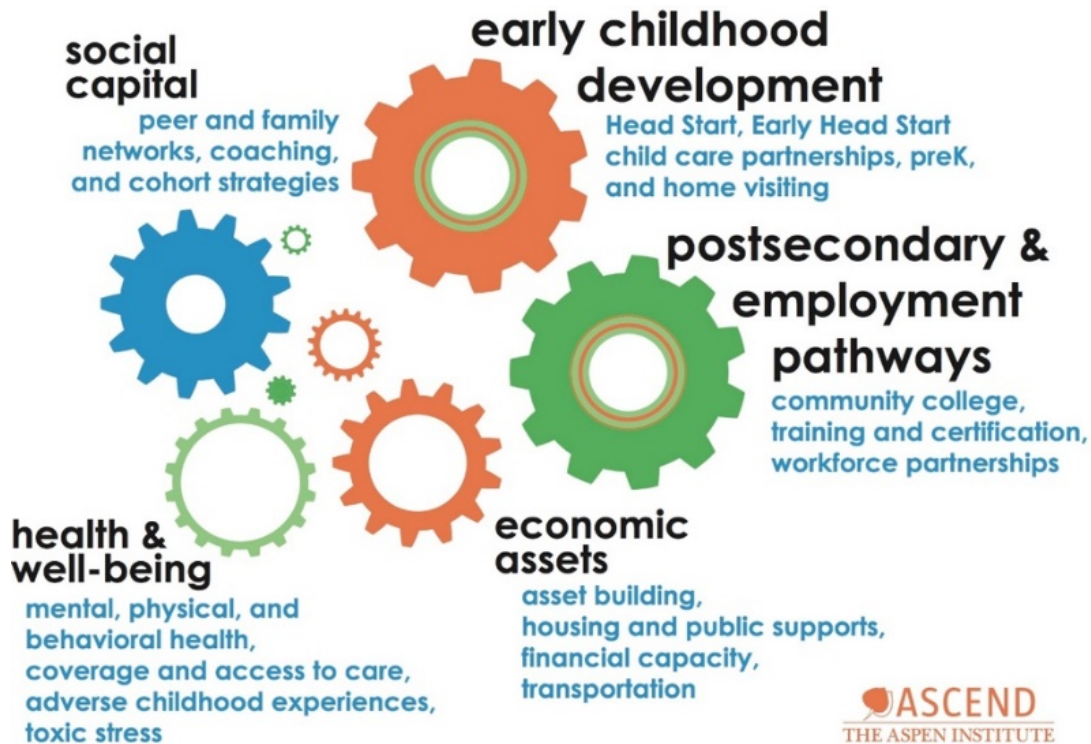
Conclusion and Next Steps

As noted at the outset, stakeholders across Cuyahoga County are looking to build 2Gen approaches and offer services, support, and help to whole families. The models highlighted in our examples offer evidence that a 2Gen approach can begin to work in our community and our next steps include:

Step 1 to advancing this work is to involve parents/caregivers and we have made progress in this area. The 2Gen Working Committee developed a survey to gather feedback from parents/caregivers engaged in programming across a sample of partners. The survey was piloted with four partners from the working group and it asked about parents'/caregivers' experience with available services and support as well as their exposure to 2Gen programming. The four organizations (The Centers, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Neighborhood Connections, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited) fielded the survey with a total of 40 parents/caregivers and collected results in several ways—in a group setting, through 1:1 interviews, and as handouts.

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[8] Ibid, p. 6.

A majority of respondents indicated that they had been asked their opinion about the services and supports they receive and that they feel listened to and heard. One parent noted that recommended changes aren't always adopted but s/he knows the input has been reviewed. Parents/caregivers cited the libraries, schools, The Centers, and 123 Read as positive resources they depend upon and they spoke of their strong relationships with staff. When asked why these programs were the most helpful, respondents gave examples that included both themselves and their child such as: "They do a great job w/ my child and ensure I have supports needed; My child has been learning a lot and this has encouraged me to finish my degree." And: "Because they support the *children and parents* with referrals, one on one, parent meetings [and] trainings." This interest in multi-solution programming isn't always articulated as '2Gen' but when asked what else they'd like to see, it is clear that parents/caregivers value 2Gen approaches. Several respondents offered key characteristics of 2Gen programming when asked what they would design if they could: a one stop shop, flexible weekday/evening/weekend hours, something that engaged young children with adults in a play and learning environment; and a large game room lounge area for adults and children.

Despite the positive comments, parents/caregivers—including those well connected to current agencies—flagged services they/their children need that they are unable to access. These included disability support, emotional regulation/counseling, the math equivalent of 123 Read, counseling, grandparent support groups, and more off-hour programming in general. However, even while wanting more services, respondents generally reported that staff engage with them and offer empathy, flexibility, and support. All of this feedback offers us parental validation of the need and desire for quality 2Gen programming in Cuyahoga County. We appreciate those who responded during the survey pilot. Since this was a pilot, staff offered feedback that the survey was too long, written at a higher than ideal literacy level, and not flexible between 1:1 and group administration. We will be making adjustments before deploying it to a wider audience to gather even more input in early 2019.

Step 2 to build inter-agency knowledge among providers, has started in our working group meetings as participation grows and organizations and individuals have the opportunity to share more about their work, their goals, and their journey with 2Gen programming. We plan to continue this relationship building throughout 2019 by offering at least 6-8 site visits to partner organizations.

Step 3 will grow as Step 2 does. The more our partners and stakeholders are able to learn about each other and develop relationships with each other, the easier it will be to build cross agency referrals and share data across partners. This is a long-term vision, but we hope to have new formal partner referral relationships in 2019 and we will start with what we saw in the Invest in Children work. The 2Gen Committee will examine which Universal Pre-K sites can be targeted by adult education and workforce development partners to provide on-site or structured referral to programming for parents'/caregivers' educational and career advancements. As

indicated earlier, not all neighborhoods have a strong UPK presence, so we will work with our other partners to assure we explore all options for more integrated programming.

Step 4 is to raise funding for 2Gen programming. While this is a complex undertaking, there have been initial meetings among several partners to look at opportunities for funding and we will continue to support such discussions. In addition, we are exploring national funding opportunities with the support of the National Center for Families Learning.

Each of these steps represent progress over the course of 2018 and offer a roadmap for where we our working committee will focus efforts in 2019. Members of the committee will work in each of these areas to advance 2Gen programming in Cuyahoga County and we welcome the engagement of other partners to help us do so.