



## MOVING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

### OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AND THE TWO-GENERATION SERVICE MODEL

#### OVERVIEW

Research demonstrates that children born into poor families are more likely to experience poverty as adults and, in turn, raise their own children in poverty. Acknowledging these trends, programs have started serving parents and children through two-generation approaches designed to meet both the child development and parental economic security needs of a family to effectively mitigate challenges and support positive outcomes for all its members. Traditionally, the focus for alleviating generational poverty has been on either early childhood education or workforce education and training for parents, while two-generation approaches focus on both sets of needs. Research indicates that by investing in low-income children and parents, educational, financial, and social outcomes for both are improved. However, most two-generation approaches focus on parents and young children, leaving vulnerable adolescents – including the 6.7 million 16 to 24-year olds who are neither working nor in school<sup>1</sup> – without support.

These “Opportunity Youth” face many obstacles to employment and self-sufficiency and often come from backgrounds of entrenched poverty and instability. Yet, research shows that they represent a substantial economic opportunity. These youth overwhelmingly want to work, gain education and job skills, become economically mobile, and overcome the cycles of poverty that have historically entrenched them and their families. Opportunity youth are an important population to consider in the context of two-generation programming interventions because their abilities and opportunities can be strengthened through connection to their families and communities.

ICF has synthesized research and resources below from the field on two-generation approaches for opportunity youth, organized into four categories: Two-Generation Program Need, Opportunity Youth Program Need, Promising Practices for Implementation, and Example Programs.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Opportunity Youth.” (2014). The Corps Network. Retrieved from <http://www.corpsnetwork.org/advocacy/opportunity-youth>.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- |             |  |                    |
|-------------|--|--------------------|
| <b>I.</b>   | <b>Two-Generation Program Need</b>   | <b>Pages 3-4</b>   |
|             | Examines background research on the need for and efficacy of a two-generation approach to programming.   |                    |
| <b>II.</b>  | <b>Opportunity Youth Program Need</b>  | <b>Pages 5-6</b>   |
|             | Explores who opportunity youth are, the challenges they face, and opportunities for engaging this population.  |                    |
| <b>III.</b> | <b>Promising Practices for Implementation</b>  | <b>Pages 7-9</b>   |
|             | Compiles reports, briefs, and studies that offer research-based practices and policy considerations for opportunity youth focused two-generation programs. |                    |
| <b>IV.</b>  | <b>Existing Integrative Programs</b>   | <b>Pages 10-11</b> |
|             | Lists current nationwide projects taking an innovative two-generation approach to helping opportunity youth.   |                    |
| <b>V.</b>   | <b>Looking Forward</b>   | <b>Page 12</b>     |
|             | Provides resources to stay up-to-date with current research and projects from the field.   |                    |

## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>2</sup>

### I. Two-Generation Program Need

#### [A Two-Generation Human Capital Approach to Anti-Poverty Policy, 2018](#)

The authors of this brief propose a two-generation anti-poverty strategy to improve the economic fortunes of children in the United States. Our policy bridges two traditionally siloed interventions to boost their impacts: Head Start for children and career pathway training offered through community colleges for adults. We expect that an integrated two-generation human capital intervention will produce greater gains than either Head Start or community college alone for developmental and motivational, logistical and financial, social capital, and efficiency reasons. We suggest a competitive grant program to test and evaluate different models using federal dollars. We estimate average benefit-cost ratios across a range of promising career fields of 1.3 within five years and 7.9 within ten years if 10 percent of Head Start parents participate in two-generation programs. (edited author abstract)

#### [Exploration of Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development & Improving Family Economic Security, 2017](#)

The Exploration of Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security project investigated the design and evaluability of approaches to alleviating poverty that address the needs of low-income parents and children. The project examined programs that combine services intended to support both child development and parental economic security. Recent advances in implementation science and other fields of research provide key insights for new programs that may prove more effective than similar programs designed in the 1980s and 1990s. The project was funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and Northwestern University. (author abstract)

#### [Two Generation Approaches, 2016](#)

The purpose of this document is to provide local communities and practitioners with an overview of the research, best practices, and many resources available to stakeholders interested in two-generation approaches. As such, it is not an exhaustive survey of all the information in the field, but it will provide a portal and path to the knowledge that exists. This guide highlights critical strategies and practices, spotlights example programs, and identifies additional resources to inform and support local action on this issue. (author abstract)

---

<sup>2</sup> “Author abstract” refers to the summary provided by the resource’s writers.

### [SSRC Selections: Two-Generation Strategies, 2016](#)

For further resources on the importance and efficacy of two-generation strategies, as well as effective practices and strategies for implementation, visit this compilation of reports, research, and publications provided by the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse.

### [Mother's Education and Children's Outcomes: How Dual-Generation Programs Offer Increased Opportunities for America's Families, 2014](#)

This report from the Foundation for Child Development highlights the benefits of dual-generation programs in terms of children's outcomes. Specifically, research shows the many disparities between children whose mothers had not graduated from high school and children whose mothers had obtained a bachelor's degree. Children whose mothers had not graduated from high school experience higher rates of poverty, lower rates of mathematics and reading proficiencies, a lower likelihood of graduating high school on time, and poorer overall health. The report also spotlights dual-generation programs in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Los Angeles, California. Finally, the authors offer policy options for all levels of government to develop and implement successful dual-generation programs.

### [Helping Parents, Helping Children: Two-Generation Mechanisms, 2014](#)

This issue of *Future of Children* assesses past and current two-generation programs. But it goes much further than that. The editors identified six widely acknowledged mechanisms or pathways through which parents, and the home environment they create, are thought to influence children's development: stress, education, health, income, employment, and assets. Understanding how these mechanisms of development work—and when, where, and how they harm or help—should aid us in designing interventions that boost children's intellectual and socioemotional development, strengthen families, and help close academic gaps between students from poor and more affluent families.

### [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach, 2014](#)

This policy report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation draws upon data from the KIDS COUNT project, which provides yearly indicators of child well-being from a variety of available data. It highlights the need for programs and services that meet the needs of both parents and children experiencing poverty to ensure an improved economic future for children born into poverty. The report highlights promising program examples and provides policy recommendations to encourage two-generation approaches.

### [Toward a Two-Generation Strategy: Voices of American Families, 2011](#)

A critical aspect of Ascend's work is listening to, learning from, and lifting up the voices of the most vulnerable families in the United States. Ascend commissioned this bipartisan series of focus groups to examine the experiences, perspectives, and needs of low-income families. By listening to the perspectives of families across demographics - race, gender, and family structure - Ascend aims to elevate their voices and use these findings to inform programmatic and policy work, in particular two-generation strategies to improve educational and economic outcomes for both parents and children. (author abstract)

## II. Opportunity Youth Program Need

### [SSRC Selections: Disconnected Youth and Self-Sufficiency, 2016](#)

For further resources on the state of youth outside the economic system and strategies to integrate them back into productive work and school life, visit this research compilation by the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse. It covers a range of populations, including foster children and minorities, and offers statistics, policy suggestions, and example projects on reconnecting opportunity youth.

### [SSRC Selections: Transitions to Adulthood, 2015](#)

For further resources on the challenges that impoverished youth face as they move through their teenage years, visit the Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse for an extensive and far-reaching list. Some topics include state-of-the-industry employment figures, current institutional barriers to success, moving youth into the labor force, and programs to ease the transition.

### [Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16 to 24 Year Olds Who are Not Working or in School, 2015](#)

This report used data from the 2014 Current Population Survey to analyze the characteristics of disconnected youth with the goal of providing policy-makers with recommendations for reconnecting these young people. The report defined disconnected youth as 16 to 24 years old who were unemployed or not attending school in the previous year. The report found that between 1999 and 2010, the rate of disconnection fluctuated between 3.9% and 7.5% of the entire youth population depending on economic cycles. In 2014, disconnected youth made up 6.1% of the 2.4-million-person total youth population, with minority youth having consistently higher rates of disconnection. Estimates on the prevalence of disconnected youth varied across reports depending on how authors defined this population; though the age range given in this report was consistent with other studies. Compared to connected youth, the study found that disconnected young people were twice as likely to be poor, have parents with low educational attainment or chronic unemployment, have fewer years of education themselves, and were more likely to have children. The report recommended a number of programmatic approaches, including reconnection to employment and school, early intervention to counteract adverse outcomes, and family and community development programs. (author abstract)

### [Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth, 2012](#)

This Civic Enterprises summary provides a direct and comprehensive overview of opportunity youth: their demographics, their challenges, and their potential. They performed a cross-sectional analysis of nationwide opportunity youth in 2011 and found the salient characteristics of optimism, motivation, and a desire for support across their interviews which showcases that the time for intervention is ripe. Education and work experience are the largest obstacles facing this population, so simultaneously providing income, skills training, community connection, and consistent measurement standards can work together to help opportunity youth overcome such hurdles. The report also offers

paths forward for policymakers to incorporate effective support strategies based on the overall demographics of opportunity youth.

### [The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, 2012](#)

In their early adult years, it is important for youth to gain additional skills through further educational, training, and work experience. Yet, many of America's youth are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market – they are not investing in their human capital or earning income. Their disconnection represents a significant loss of economic opportunity for the nation. This report examines the status of these 'opportunity youth'. (author abstract)

### [Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth, 2012](#)

A national survey and research report released by America's Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates shows that nearly three in four (73 percent) of youth ages 16-24 who are not enrolled in school, are unemployed and do not have a college degree are confident and hopeful that they will be able to achieve their goals in life. This survey sought to better understand how these youth, often referred to as "disconnected youth" or "opportunity youth," became detached from school and work and the challenges they face trying to reconnect to society. Based on the findings from this survey, this report provides a glimpse of the enormous benefits to the nation if we could re-engage these young people and what would be most helpful in getting them back on track. (author abstract)

### [Vulnerable Populations and the Transition to Adulthood, 2010](#)

This report details the current challenges faced by vulnerable youth, defined as those in institutions like the mental or physical health system, juvenile justice system, foster care, and special education, or outside the system like runaway or homeless youth. Barriers that these populations face include exclusionary eligibility criteria, inadequate funding, disjointed implementation systems across many different programs, ill-equipped staff, and an abrupt end to services upon entering adulthood. After reviewing the obstacles that current policies face, the authors suggest policies and reforms that could be made to help these youth overcome barriers to schooling or employment and ease the transition to adulthood. Specifically, the authors call for a family focused approach to engage the people closest to and most central in youth's lives: their families.

### III. Promising Practices for Implementation

#### [Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program, 2018](#)

This report documents the implementation and early impacts of Year Up—a national sectoral training program for urban young adults aged 18-24. Operated by an organization of the same name, Year Up provides six months of full-time training in the IT and financial service sectors followed by six-month internships at major firms. The full-time program provides extensive supports—including weekly stipends—and puts a heavy emphasis on the development of professional and technical skills. Findings show that Year Up implemented its program with high fidelity to its design and substantially increased the training, support, and employment services young adults received. (author abstract)

#### [States Leading the Way: Practical Solutions the Lift Up Children and Families, 2018](#)

*Practical State Solutions* outlines successful state strategies and solutions that place families at the center of the work, support families as they exit the cycle of intergenerational poverty and enter a path of economic stability and are designed to help states replicate and scale successful solutions. (author abstract)

#### [Creating Paths to Employment for Opportunity Youth, 2017](#)

This toolkit is designed to help community partners, such as community-based organizations and employers, work together to support youth on a path to careers. (author abstract)

#### [A Theoretical Framework for Two-Generation Models, 2016](#)

Drawing on lessons from the Housing Opportunity and Services Together program (HOST), this framework synthesizes and broadens the intervention's lessons to offer suggestions for setting family and individual goals for opportunity youth within two-generation models. The caution against setting the same goal for all families and instead suggest tailoring goals to different categories of families based on their resources. Similarly, individual goals should be tailored within families to either give parent and child goals equal weight or emphasize one party as needed. In the case of opportunity youth, they may need more individualized coaching than younger children. Overall, they recommend first developing relationships with families as a whole, then customizing evaluations to address specific intrafamily need and goals.

#### [Crossing the Divide: An Emerging Typology of Postsecondary Bridging for Opportunity Youth, 2016](#)

This issue brief offers a typology of evidence-informed bridge programming drawing on frontrunner programs that have designed their strategies specifically for this population and that have attained early indicators of success. By highlighting core components of bridging, along with options for approaches and specific features, we hope to inform the design and support the scale of bridging programs that provide a critical leg up for

vulnerable segments of the opportunity youth population to earn the postsecondary credentials that are so essential to thriving in today's economy. (author abstract)

#### [What Works for Disconnected Young People, 2016](#)

The Youth Transition Funders Group commissioned this MDRC paper to provide a better understanding of what does and does not work in helping disconnected youth. A comprehensive literature review highlighted findings of relevant program and policy evaluations as well as interviews conducted with various representatives from foundations, coalitions, and research organizations dealing with disconnected youth. A number of programs struggled with outreach and enrollment, committed engagement from participants, frequent staff turnover, and external barriers to program participation such as lack of child care or transportation. One common factor that limited the impact of programs was the lack of coordination among education, juvenile justice, foster, and mental health systems, leading to fragmentation of services and funding as well as redundancy. There were three common components of successful programs: they provided financial incentives, opportunities for paid work, and support services that continued even after program completion.(author abstract)

#### [Opportunity Youth Playbook: A Guide to Reconnecting Boys and Young Men of Color to Education and Employment, 2016](#)

This comprehensive guide by the Opportunity Youth Network compiles strategies, practices, and resources to reconnect male youth of color with the labor market, their communities, and their peers. Organized into distinct sections focused on elementary school, high school, postsecondary education or job training, and the workforce transition, there are specific resources and directives for implementing two-generation approaches. These recommendations include fostering connections with community, state, and federal organizations to lead change and increase resource access, coordinating service provision and evaluation into integrated systems, using existing government programs like TANF or WIOA, supporting young fathers, and creatively blending funding streams designed for existing one- or two-generation programs.

#### [Breaking the Cycle of Poverty in Young Families: Two-Generation Policy Recommendations, 2015](#)

The National Human Services Assembly (NHSA) together with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Aspen Institute interviewed NHSA member organizations focused on opportunity youth to create a report of challenges and strategies for creating two-generation solutions within this demographic. They find that Positive Youth Development frameworks, timely services and education for children, family development initiatives like adopting a "family mindset," and social connections are effective to provide successful service. They also emphasize that programs need to be multi-faceted for prevention and intervention, intensive, long-term, and collaborative. Lastly, they suggest federal, state, and local policy enhancements around funding, social safety nets, job training, caseworker expectations, child support policies, and alternative punitive programming to bolster the stability and opportunity for opportunity youth. Separately, they highlight states doing

groundbreaking work on the intersection of two-generation programming and opportunity youth programming.

#### [Two-Generation Playbook, 2014](#)

This guide from the *Ascend* project at The Aspen Institute combines infographics, data, and information to explain the operation of two-generation approaches, their core components, and areas of emerging opportunities for implementation. Specific projects are highlighted within each of the core components to show readers the types of real-world work that occur within two-generation approaches.

#### [Top Ten for 2Gen: Policies and Principles to Advance Two-Generation Efforts, 2014](#)

This paper from the *Ascend* project at The Aspen Institute provides federal and state policymakers with six principles and ten specific policies from across human service disciplines to foster and guide two-generation approaches. Recommendations and tips for implementing these policies are also provided, and real-world examples of policies are given. (author abstract)

#### [Promoting Two-Generation Strategies: A Getting Started Guide for State and Local Policy Makers, 2013](#)

This report is the latest Dual-Generation publication from The Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, in the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. The paper is intended to serve as a getting-started guide to state and local policymakers as they begin to develop and implement two-generation strategies in their respective areas. The paper provides several examples of existing programs, along with a discussion of facilitating factors that appear to be linked to the success of two-generation programs. (author abstract)

#### [Advancing the Self-Sufficiency and Well-Being of At-Risk Youth: A Conceptual Framework, 2013](#)

The authors of this article conducted a literature review and evaluated programs that provide transitional services for at-risk youth in order to develop and present a conceptual framework aimed at helping programs that promote economic self-sufficiency. The report used two theories of youth development, the theory of risk and resiliency and the theory of capital development, to inform the conceptual framework as a means to identify a holistic approach to transitional services for at-risk youth. The conceptual framework made the following recommendations for creating evidence-based programs: recognizing both the youth's underlying risk as well as protective factors, stabilizing youth in crisis, engaging youth in on-going assessments and services, focusing on increasing human capital to prepare youth for economic self-sufficiency, and rigorously evaluating program impacts. (author abstract)

#### IV. Existing Integrative Programs

##### [Housing, Opportunity, and Services Together \(HOST\)](#)

The HOST initiative, created and piloted by the Urban Institute, sought to use public housing as a platform to employ two-generation programs that addressed the economic and social challenges faced by vulnerable families. Two-generation services like joint workforce and educational support and mental health services for all family members were combined with strength-based coaching and community collaboration to create a robust program. One key finding relevant to opportunity youth was the need for tailored programming for adolescents and parental engagement in their children's futures. For example, holding family meetings rather than only parent or only youth meetings was effective in uncovering hidden issues and helping opportunity youth and parents feel more invested in each other's lives. This case study highlights important lessons relevant to opportunity youth in both program development and implementation such as staff collaboration and bolstering existing youth services rather than immediately creating new programs.

##### [AVANCE-Houston, Inc.](#)

Opportunity youth may not look like "youth;" in fact, they may often be the household heads. AVANCE-Houston recognizes this fact and, in 2009, began working with teenage mothers to provide high-quality child care for children via Early Head Start while their mothers finished high school. The organization has expanded to provide caseworkers to discuss family goals and career opportunities and offer job training, further education programs, transitional help, language classes, and other services for these opportunity youth. By combining Head Start programs with fatherhood and healthy marriage initiatives, adult education, and workforce training for young parents, AVANCE-Houston has seen measured effects on children's graduation rates, parental employment rates, and parental confidence in their parenting skills. Work is under way to measure more indicators of family self-sufficiency and to expand their Parent Child Education Program into other venues.

##### [Resource Mothers Program](#)

The Virginia Department of Health sponsors a program designed to support teen mothers and their children during pregnancy and for up to a year after birth. A community health worker, called a resource mother, mentors women on constructive decision-making and life planning, encourages healthy practices, demonstrates mothering skills, and connects women to existing resources that they can use after the resource mother period ends. The program also enrolls mothers in prenatal care and returns to properly immunize the mother and child. Furthermore, they incorporate the women's family and the baby's father to establish a stable home for the mother and baby after birth.

##### [San Diego Workforce Partnership](#)

San Diego County is pioneering a new initiative based on two-generation programming after releasing a 2017 [report](#) on the state of opportunity youth in this area. Because 25.6%

of female opportunity youth in San Diego are mothers, the Center for Local Income Mobility is developing new programming to work with both these mothers and their children to improve their well-being and mobility. Although the project is still in development, they have already interviewed case managers and young adults to inform their service provision prototypes. This model utilizes stakeholder knowledge and needs to create an intentional and engaging two-generation intervention geared toward teenage mothers to help them overcome intergenerational poverty.

### [Springboard to Opportunities](#)

Springboard to Opportunities is a “radically resident driven” program based in affordable housing communities in Maryland, Washington D.C., Alabama, and Mississippi that provides holistic services for economic advancement. They focus on the areas of community, learning, and empowerment for success at both the youth and adult level and recognize that services must be engaging to be effective. Their human-centered, whole-community approach serves opportunity youth through deliberate goal planning, academic and life skill education, and safety net provision.

## LOOKING FORWARD

We encourage you to stay up-to-date with the current literature by utilizing the following online resource libraries:

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation's [Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse \(SSRC\)](#), which is an ever growing virtual portal of research on low-income and TANF families and an online hub for professional networking among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who serve these populations.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance's [Peer Technical Assistance Network](#), which is a targeted peer-to-peer model of information sharing, technical assistance, and training between and among States, Counties, Tribes, and community-based organizations.