



JOHN T. GORMAN  
FOUNDATION

*The*  
**Two-Generation  
Approach**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRIDGING  
PRACTICE AND POLICY IN MAINE



### **About the John T. Gorman Foundation**

The John T. Gorman Foundation advances ideas and opportunities to improve the lives of disadvantaged people in Maine. To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation has a special interest in improving the educational achievement of young children, promoting successful transitions to adulthood for vulnerable older youth, helping parents support their families, and enabling low-income seniors to age in place.

### **About the Author**

Sarah Griffen is a national consultant with expertise in two-generation and whole-family policies and practices. Her work supports philanthropic, government, and intermediary efforts to improve outcomes for families by knitting together services and funding, as well as placing families at the center of the work through policy changes, learning communities, strategic planning, and program design. Her expertise is also anchored in workforce development and career pathway strategies. She has worked in Maine in a variety of contexts for the past seven years.

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## Thoughts from the John T. Gorman Foundation

Children do well when families do well. This maxim, reinforced by research and common sense, fuels a growing body of work taking root in organizations, systems, and communities in Maine. Called Two-Generation or Whole Family Strategies, these efforts are driven by data that repeatedly confirms what most of us intuitively know: that children's success is inextricably connected to the success of their parents. This is why, for the last six years, the John T. Gorman Foundation has made two-generation strategies one of our core priorities as we work with partners across the state to improve the lives of disadvantaged Mainers.

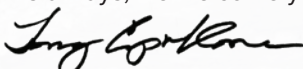
At a basic level, two-generation strategies seek to improve results for children and adults in the same family simultaneously. These efforts put families at the center of the work. They recognize and build from family strengths and, in doing so, look to simultaneously meet a family's needs and support their aspirations. The best two-generation strategies help families set goals, engage them as peers and, importantly, recognize that simultaneously supporting both children and parents more likely than not requires new partnerships with other community programs and resources. In short, successful two-generation strategies require practitioners, policy makers, and funders to think about their work in a fundamentally different way.

If ever an event could reinforce the importance of a two-generation focus, it has been the COVID-19 pandemic, which has upended every aspect of our lives in recent months. Record unemployment, closed schools, diminished social interaction, and mounting stress and uncertainty have strained entire families. Nearly everyone has been susceptible to its challenges – whether related to economics, health, education, child development, mental health or sparse social capital – though our most vulnerable have suffered its effects most acutely. Affecting parents and their children alike, these challenges only reinforce the deep interdependence of their success and the value of employing a whole-family focus. It has been heartening to see service providers throughout our state creatively adjust their service delivery models to continue their two-generation work at such a critical time.

The inherent potential of two-generation work to make a significant positive difference in the economic, educational, health, social, and emotional well-being of Maine families has fueled the John T. Gorman Foundation's goal of seeing such strategies become a more normative way of helping kids and parents succeed. To achieve this goal, we support promising and successful two-generation demonstrations across Maine; provide significant technical assistance through national and local experts who can help programs and systems build and hone the capacity to do this work successfully; and promote and engage in advocacy that can advance important policy reforms to reduce barriers to success and help two-generation efforts go to scale.

In this John T. Gorman Foundation policy brief, we unpack the various components that define successful two-generation strategies and describe examples of several efforts nationally and in Maine. We also summarize the lessons these programs have learned and offer a series of policy-focused recommendations that we believe can increase the scale of two-generation work and help even more Maine children and families succeed today and in the future – an especially important goal as the state moves forward during these challenging times.

As always, we welcome your thoughts, reactions and questions.



Tony Cipollone  
President and CEO

# Executive Summary

## The Two-Generation Approach: Recommendations For Bridging Practice and Policy in Maine

Communities and states across the country are adopting a new way to help low-income families thrive — known as “two-generation” approaches. **The fundamental goal of two-generation work is to build family well-being by intentionally working with children and the adults in their lives simultaneously.**

The approach weaves together critical supports and strategies, including quality developmental opportunities for children, educational and employment pathways for parents, economic asset building, health and well-being support, and opportunities to build social capital. But the two-generation approach is more than the delivery of comprehensive services. It represents a fundamentally different way of working with families — by placing them at the center, building on their strengths, and dismantling the structural barriers that create obstacles for them.

Several organizations across Maine are using the two-generation approach to see better results for the families they serve. In Washington County, Family Futures Downeast is helping parents gain post-secondary credentials while their children receive early childhood education. Bangor Housing’s Families Forward offers comprehensive services for both parents and children. Community Action Programs in Cumberland, Aroostook and Kennebec counties are applying two-generation practices in their work with families. And McAuley Residence in Portland is finding ways to integrate services for mothers in recovery and their children.

These practitioners have shared several lessons that are useful to policy makers and administrators who are looking for ways to help Maine families succeed. Drawing from these lessons, national innovations, and best practices, this brief offers four recommendations and accompanying strategies for expanding the core elements of two-generation approaches in policies and systems:

### **1. Expand parents’ ability to work by helping them develop new skills and clearing common obstacles on career pathways.**

Two-generation programs in Maine offer good examples for how wraparound supports and coaching can support success in education and job training. At the same time, other states have developed innovative tools to help working families overcome barriers — such as childcare, transportation, and benefit reductions — on their path to increased economic security.

### **2. Ensure healthy development of children by bringing a two-generation lens to childcare, early education, and supports for school-age children.**

In addition to helping parents bring in more economic resources for their families, two-generation strategies can further benefit children by directly supporting their

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health and development. There are several opportunities to bring these benefits to more children and families in Maine.

**3. Change how government works to help families more efficiently and comprehensively access the resources available to them.**

Government initiatives meant to support families' trajectory towards greater economic stability can create more obstacles than intended if they are made without their end users – parents and children – in mind, if they are accessed in a fractured manner, or if they are administered in silos. Maine's policymakers and administrators can reorient their thinking and programs by putting the aspirations and needs of families at the center.

**4. Increase the value of public investments by leveraging outside resources and incentivizing best practices.**

Two-generation practices require innovative approaches to funding if they are to be effective and successfully scaled. This includes creative use of existing revenue streams, identifying leverage opportunities, building two-generation components into the procurement process, and incentivizing new partnerships and practices.



## The Two-Generation Approach: Meeting a Whole Family's Needs

For many families, the path out of poverty is steep and circuitous. Practitioners and policymakers have sought for decades to help low-income families move forward, with limited results. Complex systems, a lack of supports for families, and new programs implemented with the best of intentions — but in a siloed manner — have unintentionally hampered families in their quest for economic stability and prosperity.

In response, communities and states across the country are adopting a new way to help families thrive — known as “two-generation” or “whole family” approaches. The fundamental goal of two-generation work is to build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives.

The approach weaves together critical supports and strategies to offer families a path forward to success, such as:



- Quality developmental opportunities for children from birth to 18, including home visiting, early childhood education, afterschool and summer programming, and parent education and support;



- Educational and employment pathways, from literacy through post-secondary education, and from job readiness to skilled occupational training, enabling parents to build skills and increase income;



- Economic asset-building strategies, including matched savings programs, assets to cover unexpected emergencies, and work supports such as transportation;



- Health and well-being services to promote individual and family health, including mental health services and use of resiliency approaches to address adverse childhood experiences (ACES); and



- Social capital opportunities that enable families to support one another, build community, and connect to new resources.

When implemented together, the results are healthy parents with family-supporting jobs, healthy children meeting developmental milestones, and better-connected individuals able to participate in civic and family life. By producing a legacy of family well-being that passes from one generation to the next, two-generation approaches help communities become stronger and more vibrant, both socially and economically.



But the two-generation approach is more than a comprehensive delivery of services. It represents a fundamentally different way of working with families. Hallmarks of this shift include:

- **Placing the family at the center**, building on parents' strengths, individualizing work with families, and enabling families to set their own goals;
- **Engaging parents as peers** – both in decisions about the services they receive and in programmatic and policy design at the community and state levels;
- **Tearing down structural barriers** that limit families and working to address obstacles through policy and practice change;
- **Utilizing the strength of partnerships** at the community and state level to coordinate and knit services together, maximizing the strengths of government and freeing parents to focus on caring for their children and improving their earnings by reaching their career goals; and
- **Supporting families over time** with careful, targeted and well-timed supports, working with all members of the family to fulfill their potential.

At the practitioner level, several early two-generation innovators – like the [Community Action Program in Tulsa, Oklahoma](#) – have now operated long enough to demonstrate positive long-term impacts for both parents and children served. The success of others, including the [housing-based initiative Jeremiah Program](#), has led to their replication in other states. Ascend at the Aspen Institute, which facilitates a nation-wide two-generation network, now has over 300 members from 46 states.

At the policy level, two-generation work is gaining significant traction nationally as well. Over a dozen state governments – as politically and economically diverse as Connecticut and Mississippi – are implementing new legislation and strategies to integrate their approaches to working with families. At the federal level, the Administration for Children and Families is seeking to undo the fragmentation created by regulations and rules that inadvertently limit opportunity, with a focus on [family economic mobility](#).



## What makes a family?

Families come in many shapes and sizes today: two-parent, single-parent, grandparent-led, and even sometimes best-friend led. Two-generation approaches support a broad definition of family, and one that is best defined by the person in charge of the household. This report uses “parent” throughout as a proxy for the adult leading the family.



## Two-Generation Practice in Maine

Maine, too, has been a part of the two-generation movement. Many local organizations have sought to implement elements of the two-generation approach in recent years. One of the first to create a comprehensive program to serve parents and their children together was **Family Futures Downeast** in 2013.

The story of this two-generation initiative begins with the annual visioning meeting of the Community Caring Collaborative (CCC) in Machias in 2011, where local parents voiced the need for a combination of both economic mobility resources and wrap-around social services. With a planning grant from the Great Bay Foundation, CCC explored how to widen its services to include employment and higher education support. The result of that planning effort led to Family Futures Downeast, which today is working with its fourth cohort of families.

“We realized that while we were offering a range of supports for parents related to their children, we were missing what parents said they needed,” said Charley Martin-Berry, Executive Director of CCC. “Our work today reflects parent priorities, and requires us to stretch toward partners and services we hadn’t engaged.”

Family Futures Downeast gained access to important technical assistance in 2015 when the White House Rural Policy Council selected it as one of 10 Rural IMPACT sites – an initiative to demonstrate two-generation approaches in rural communities. “Rural IMPACT came at a perfect time,” said Marsha Sloan, Director of Family Futures Downeast. “It offered us national technical assistance to take our plans and operationalize them, especially related to public funding, and also gave us a national platform of recognition.” The designation was also instrumental in securing



“After attending multiple **Families Forward** classes, both my son and I have become much more involved in our community. I now have a great job I love as a behavioral health professional and I am currently working on bachelor’s degrees in psychology and criminal justice. My son loves attending the program’s events and classes as well – I am grateful that he is benefiting at such a young age.”

– Destyni Dumas, *Families Forward*

significant funds from the John T. Gorman Foundation and Annie E. Casey Foundation to support implementation.

The program offers preparatory and post-secondary classes for parents, putting them on track to earn an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. Their first five credit-bearing classes are contextualized to develop family and life skills that are both helpful to parents and highly marketable in the local workforce. While parents are in class, their children receive high-quality early childhood education on campus. Throughout, families receive wraparound services to overcome barriers, as well as the support of a coach and tutors to support their path. Parents who need to earn an income while in school are linked to employment. And the cohort model fosters social connections across families, creating a supportive network that lasts beyond the program.

In September 2019, Family Futures Downeast enrolled its fourth cohort of 20 families, bringing the total number of families served to 89 adults and 135 children. Of the 69 families who enrolled in the first three cohorts, 77% successfully completed the program. Additionally, 77% of these parents have

continued their post-secondary education beyond Family Futures Downeast by matriculating into associate’s or bachelor’s degree programs. Finally, more than half of the children who participated in early education programming demonstrated improved language and self-regulation skills.

Several other two-generation efforts have emerged throughout Maine more recently and show great promise. Their work offers important insights on how the two-generation model can be applied in a number of different settings, including housing authorities, community action programs, and substance use treatment programs.

**Families Forward** in Bangor is pioneering two-generation approaches in public housing. Building on the Bangor Housing Authority’s successful Enhanced Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) and in partnership with the Bangor Boys and Girls Club, Families Forward helps families improve earnings, build assets, and ensure children are school ready. A strong network of partners provide wraparound services to enrolled parents and children. At the core of Families Forward’s approach are family coaches who implement the Family-Centered Coaching



model to build relationships with each family, collect information around their strengths and needs, facilitate family goal setting, and develop action plans. Families have access to a comprehensive set of services, including activities to build community and social capital, early childhood education, Strengthening Families (a 14-week parenting series), post-secondary education and career pathway development, asset building, financial coaching, and mental health counseling.

The first two cohorts of Families Forward showed promising results. After the first year in the program, these 34 families increased their annual incomes, on average, from \$11,220 to

\$19,106. Eleven parents are enrolled in college preparing for careers in health care, culinary arts, law enforcement, and social work. Other parents are working with state agencies toward job placement. Ninety percent of parents reported parenting classes helped them significantly, and 86% reported better parent-child relationships.

The **Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP)** in rural northern Maine was an early adopter of a whole family approach and has championed two-generation work among other community action programs in the state. ACAP provides a comprehensive and integrated set of services for families and individuals, ranging from early childhood education, workforce development, energy assistance and housing, to youth engagement services and an Affordable Care Act health navigator program. Using a whole family approach, coaches work with families to address specific needs and identify pathways to success.

Coaching work with parents has been one of the most effective strategies for helping families get and keep jobs. “First, we helped families in crisis become eligible for heating and food assistance, and after they were no longer struggling with basic needs, parents were able to consider work and employment. Relationship building and goal setting helps move parents from crisis to stability to thriving,” noted Jason Parent, ACAP’s Executive Director. Whole family coaching at ACAP supports a family’s access to early childhood education services at Head Start, affordable health care, and a range of other services.

A new ACAP whole family innovation is the recently opened Hope and Prosperity Resource Center in Presque Isle for homeless families, which is providing four coaches through a mix of Medicaid funds and private support from a local philanthropist.



**“Family Futures Downeast** was exactly what I needed. For the first time, working with a social service organization felt like someone was in my corner. My coach understood my struggles and didn’t make me feel terrible for asking for help. On top of getting a Certificate in Family Studies, I was also connected to financial resources to help me and my family. With my coach, I explored starting my own business. And my daughter benefited from the high-quality childcare she received.”

— Rhiannon Sawyer, *Family Futures Downeast*

In Portland, **The Opportunity Alliance’s (TOA)** two-generation work grew from a need in 2014 for intensive services for 35 families in a pre-K/elementary school partnership. The addition of a coach to support families produced strong results, and a two-generation prototype was created. Today, TOA has partnerships with several local providers – including community colleges, housing authorities, and state and federal agencies – to support families with post-secondary education, safe and affordable housing, childcare subsidies, and health care. TOA has also excelled at designing its programs to specifically consider the rich array of languages and ethnicities of the families they serve. Now, promising results are emerging – 67% of parents in 2018 and 87% of parents in 2019 who participated in two-generation programming were on an employment pathway, and 100% of their children were ready for school.

**Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP)** in central Maine has developed a multi-generational, multi-tiered,

and family-driven two-generation approach. As an agency long committed to “creating sustainable solutions to poverty,” adopting a two-generation approach was a natural evolution. “Our decision to adopt a whole family approach was driven by the needs of our families – both children and parents needed a more intensive, whole family focus,” said Tracye Fortin, Director of Child & Family Services. KVCAP operates Head Start and Early Head Start programs in four rural Maine counties and is a nationally recognized Educare program. KVCAP has recently launched an intensive two-generation pilot funded by the Somerset Economic Development Corporation. Partnerships across education, career and technical education programs, higher education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and local social service agencies support families. An innovative career pathway for parents has also been created in partnership with Thomas College. Parents are recruited for substitute teacher training which can lead to a “badging credential,” an accepted credential for

childcare centers, and ultimately to a post-secondary pathway for an early childhood education degree.

**McAuley Residence** in Portland, a comprehensive program that provides housing and intensive services with evidence-based interventions for both mother and child(ren), is a somewhat recent entry in Maine's two-generation field. Recognizing the increasing needs of children who have been impacted by the state's opioid crisis, the program sought a more intensive approach to supporting the children of mothers served there.

At the heart of the McAuley model are intense, highly structured phases for the whole family, coordinated to ensure individual and group progress, with family reunification, independence, housing, education, and sobriety as outcomes. Phase One focuses on developing an external team of clinicians

who work in concert with the team of clinicians at McAuley, working with Child Protective Services for reunification of children who have been removed, and working intensely on effective, evidence-based interventions for the whole family. Phase Two allows for the aspirational focus to begin, and women engage in focused career development, employment, education, and financial planning with a bank manager at Key Bank. Phase Three is the transition phase and shifts the focus on the external treatment team, housing transition, and aftercare at McAuley Residence. Throughout the process, The Opportunity Alliance provides parent coaching to mothers in the program. Children have access to quality childcare, family and play therapy, mental health services, and participate in a weekly trauma-informed social group led by a highly skilled pediatric licensed clinical social worker.





## Two-Generation Practice: Lessons Learned

The two-generation practitioners interviewed for this report had much to share about what they had learned through their experiences applying and administering the approach for Maine families. While these lessons are helpful to other practitioners across the state, many are just as beneficial to policy makers, state administrators, and other decision makers. We hope the lessons below offer insights on taking the benefits of two-generation practice to scale in a policy setting.

### **Engaging parents' voices makes for better program and policy work**

Too often policy makers and program designers have great ideas for improvement – but haven't tested those ideas with parents and families that are most affected by potential changes. Practitioners reported that engaging parents routinely and systematically in program design and policy change helps ensure that the most important needs for parents, children, and families are correctly identified and met.

### **Collaboration – including among unlikely stakeholders – is at the core of successful two-generation approaches**

Strengthening and building partnerships to serve the whole family is both critical and essential for effective two-generation work. Successful practitioners in Maine have brought together wide and diverse partnerships to offer suites of services that can be then customized to the needs of individual families. In the policy space, these partnerships offer a model for collaboration not only across government agencies, but among legislators, non-profits, and others with a range of political perspectives.

### **Being open to organizational culture change allows for shifts to more effective approaches**

Many organizations reported that applying the two-generation approach had changed their internal cultures in important ways.

Often, it served to refocus their efforts on the success of the entire families they partner with, rather than the “head of the household” alone. Others have shifted from a top-down perspective to a strengths-based approach, viewing families not as problems to be solved or individuals receiving services, but as peer partners in building on existing assets. Remaining flexible to change can allow organizations, agencies, and policy makers to shift their approaches to the most effective ways to support families.

### **Respond accordingly to what's working and what isn't**

Similarly, practitioners have improved their approaches by being mindful of what has worked and what hasn't. Many have adjusted their expectations, priorities, and practices to reflect the reality of their work and keep families at the center. Some of these lessons have included the need to hire the right staff and train them appropriately to build trust with families and respond to what they need; the effectiveness of building social capital among families (especially those living in isolated rural areas); the importance of using trauma-informed practices; and the realization that transformational work with families takes time.

### **Build on what is already working, community by community**

In many cases, two-generation practitioners have had success not by creating new programs, but by making current offerings more collaborative, more closely coordinated, and engaging new partners. For example, the impressive results of Family Futures Downeast were only made possible when the Community Caring Collaborative listened to the feedback of parents, then expanded its partnerships in the community so that higher education, workforce supports, and quality early childhood education could be offered simultaneously to families.

## Recent Two-Generation Policy Developments

In Maine, several policy changes have already followed the growth of two-generation approaches, creating the opportunity to bring innovations to scale and break down silos in state government that can unintentionally place barriers in the way of families.

Notably, Maine has been active in “A Whole Family Approach to Jobs: Helping Parents Work and Children Thrive.” Headed by the federal government’s Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Region 1, this cross-sector effort among New England states focuses on how systems and policies might be improved with a two-generation lens. In particular, teams from each New England state are examining how the difficulties parents face in satisfying the often conflicting needs of work and family have contributed to a regional workforce shortage — and how parent employment could be supported by strengthening supports for their families.

Maine’s team focused on the challenges caused by benefits cliffs, the reduction of public assistance benefits often triggered by increases in family income. Enlisting Stepwise Research, it conducted [an analysis of benefits cliffs across 13 state and federal programs](#). The report illustrated how families seeking economic mobility often saw increases in their wages significantly offset by decreases in supports they needed to stay in the workforce — such as childcare, food assistance, and health care. The study sparked significant interest, as it demonstrated key challenges to economic growth for families and the workforce overall.

Building on previous legislative efforts, new legislation emerged in 2019 to address these benefit cliffs and offer greater supports for families in Maine — the bipartisan [Invest in Tomorrow](#) package. The enacted legislation included significant income disregards for TANF parents moving into employment, eliminated the gross income test for TANF, provided \$2 million to support whole family pilot programs in communities, and established a working group to align programs and improve accountability for better outcomes for families. Another bill increased the Earned Income Tax Credit for workers from 5% to 12%, recognizing how the tax credit can make the effects of benefit cliffs less severe.

In its own effort to address benefits cliffs, the [Maine Department of Health and Human Services](#) has increased its monthly food supplement for working families from \$15 per month to \$50 per month by using \$5.7 million in surplus Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to supplement SNAP benefits. The department is also increasing access to transitional Medicaid for families entering the workforce. Both policy changes are helping smooth the path to work for low-income parents.

Finally, as the Mills Administration took office, Governor Mills re-invigorated the Children’s Cabinet — comprised of commissioners from five different agencies and their staffs — with the goal of supporting Maine children by emphasizing the well-being of whole families. The Cabinet offers significant opportunities for moving both practice and policy work forward in Maine to benefit families.



## Bridging Practice and Policy: Recommendations

Maine policymakers can continue learning from practice at the community level and build on their recent efforts to offer greater opportunity to significant numbers of Maine's families. The lessons learned by the state's two-generation pioneers offer a way forward in organizing and offering family-centered program administration and policies. As Maine Department of Health and Human Services Deputy Commissioner Bethany Hamm noted, "We have to keep the family at the center and be nimble around our policy paths to accommodate families and give them the opportunity to decide what is best for them."

The crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is one that has strained parents and children alike, only accentuating the importance of taking a two-generation approach. Without whole-family supports – including quality childcare – parents will be unable to work or recover fully from the economic hardships that the pandemic has created. Similarly, children have lost ground in social-emotional learning and academics with the closure of schools and early learning centers, an issue that demands the state's full attention. Moreover, the challenges faced by parents and their children in this situation are intertwined. They do not exist in isolation – nor should we respond to them in such a way.

This time has also shown that significant change is possible, and can transpire faster than ever imagined. During the initial months of COVID-19, extraordinary changes took place at the state and local level to support families. Program flexibilities granted by the federal government enable state agencies to coordinate and streamline operations. Innovation has occurred in food and

income security, service delivery, and policy improvements. The state has the opportunity to continue that innovation cycle moving forward, continuing to place family at the center, and improving opportunity and well-being for parents and children.

The four recommendations outlined here emerge primarily from those offered by practitioners and policymakers in Maine; a few are gleaned from state policy innovations around the country. Taken together, they offer a path forward for communities and the state to incorporate and expand the core elements of two-generation approaches:

1. Expand parents' ability to work by helping them develop new skills and clearing common obstacles on career pathways.
2. Ensure healthy development of children by bringing a two-generation lens to childcare, early education, and supports for school-age children.
3. Change how government works to help families more efficiently and comprehensively access the resources available to them.
4. Increase the value of public investments by leveraging outside resources and incentivizing best practices.

These recommendations deal with complicated, interconnected challenges with no simple solutions. As such, the charts on the following pages seek to comprehensively identify policy goals for each recommendation, explain their relevance, and offer existing models and prospective strategies that can be used to achieve them.

## 1. Expand parents' ability to work by helping them develop new skills and clearing common obstacles on career pathways.

Maine has a worker shortage at every level of the labor market, and parents who are not currently working because of a lack of supports or skills are an untapped source of talent for the state's growing labor needs. The strategies below draw on the work of two-generation practitioners and other states to clear those obstacles, strengthening the workforce and families in the process.

Goal	Why It Matters	Possible Models & Strategies
Expand training and education opportunities and offer support along career pathways	Providing expanded work readiness, technical and post-secondary education are crucial to support parents to fill labor shortages and reach their full potential. Work-based learning opportunities can help parents earn, learn and support their families while moving ahead. Supports for working families – including childcare, transportation, transitional income supports, and coaching – are critical to successful employment and education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family Futures Downeast demonstrates the results that can be achieved by combining education with comprehensive coaching and supports.</li> <li>Maine has recently launched the Higher Opportunity Pathways for Employment (HOPE), which provides educational opportunities for high-demand occupations, college navigators/case managers, educational supports, emergency supports and childcare supports.</li> </ul>
Improve childcare access and flexibility	Lack of access to quality childcare is a major problem for many parents across the state, but especially for those living in rural areas or working non-standard hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State policy could incentivize the development of quality early childhood centers and family-based care to offer second and third shift solutions, flexible-hour care for the gig and on-demand economy, and creative approaches to rural care.</li> <li>For those relying on family, friend, and neighbor care, <a href="#">Bridgeport Basics</a> in Connecticut offers a model for helping caregivers support young children's development.</li> </ul>
Tackle the transportation challenge	Lack of transportation lies at the heart of many families' challenges, especially in a rural state like Maine, where individuals typically rely on personal vehicles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Still in development, Maine's Working Cars for Working Families program presents an opportunity to address some of these challenges.</li> <li>Adapting New Hampshire's low-cost loan program or Vermont's car ownership program with Good News Garage to provide cars to TANF families would enable families to own cars and manage daily commutes to childcare, work, and school.</li> </ul>
Provide a tool to help families navigate their pathway to increased economic security	As they seek greater economic security, parents need to be able to make informed decisions about how the relationship between employment, wage increases, and public benefits affects their family's financial standing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a benefits calculator tied to education and job training programs can help families see the way forward and take risks in temporary benefit reductions for the longer-term goal of career advancement.</li> <li>Minnesota and Georgia have calculators that could be adapted for use in Maine.</li> </ul>
Make broadband a basic right to ensure access to services, jobs, training, and education	Though broadband has proved to be essential for parents and children to work, learn, and access services during the pandemic, access to it is unequal across the state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue investing in and working toward the State Economic Development Strategy goal of bringing broadband to 95% of Maine by 2025.</li> </ul>






## 2. Ensure healthy development of children by bringing a two-generation lens to childcare, early education, and supports for school-age children.

In addition to helping parents bring in more economic resources for their families, two-generation strategies can further benefit children by directly supporting their health and development. The policy goals below center on bringing these benefits to more children and their families.

Goal	Why It Matters	Possible Models & Strategies
Expand quality childcare	Maine's focus on quality childcare in both center and family-based care and the recognition that providers need increased rates to maintain their businesses are critical. Both quality and adequate compensation are critical to maintaining a stable and accessible early childhood education system that benefits children and their parents.	💡 Partnering with employers to find solutions, including establishing tax credits for employers offering a childcare benefit to employees or purchasing slots in a family childcare setting or center.
Optimize early childhood systems as two-generation platforms	Effective programs like Head Start, Early Head Start, home visiting, and WIC could be utilized as entry points to two-generation services, leveraging existing relationships between parents and early childhood providers.	💡 Equipping early childhood providers with knowledge of and connections to parent programs and supports. 💡 Connecticut's home visiting program financially incentivizes providers to link parents to employment and education and other services.
Widen two-generation scope to include children of all ages	Two-generation work has primarily focused on children 0-8, yet families come in all sizes and ages.	💡 Expanding the focus of two-generation initiatives to include pre-teens and teenagers through K-12 school systems, after-school programs and summer programs can help whole families move through what are often difficult years. Families Forward in Bangor offers a positive example of this inclusiveness.
Build in best practices for working with children and families	Recent years have seen significant expansion of our understanding of the stages of growth and development for children, and of the importance of addressing the trauma that implicitly comes with the stress of poverty, including the need to connect families to mental health supports.	💡 Trauma-informed care practices can be embedded in organizations and systems, and staff can be trained in recognizing trauma and delivering resiliency-building practices. 💡 Recognizing that executive skills develop in two main phases – from ages 0-2 and again from 14-25 – can help state and community agencies identify best practices to incorporate and inform decisions about where to target resources.



“The support given to me as a single mom was so important – having resources at our fingertips, making connections with other families, making some lasting friendships, help with childcare, and always being available for trouble shooting. I know I can call anyone at any time.”

— Sarah Fitzgerald, *Families Forward*

### 3. Change how government works to help families more efficiently and comprehensively access the resources available to them.

Government initiatives meant to support families' trajectory toward greater economic stability can create more obstacles than assistance if they are made without their end users – parents and children – in mind, if they are accessed in a fractured manner, or if they are administered in silos. Maine's policymakers and administrators can reorient their thinking by putting the aspirations and needs of families at the center, rather than simply adhering to historical constraints of particular programs or policies. Outlined below are possible strategies to build a more integrated and accessible system that reflects this new way of thinking.

Goal	Why It Matters	Possible Models & Strategies
Focus on the family, not the program or policy	Shifting away from a sole focus on the requirements of a particular funding stream or program can help agencies construct programs and policies based on a family's needs.	💡 Massachusetts TANF case managers have been directed to focus less on compliance paperwork and more on goal-setting with families to support long-term success.
Engage parents in program design and decision-making	Engaging parents routinely in both input and decision-making helps ensure a greater alignment with what families actually need to thrive, while helping them develop leadership skills, build social capital, and increase their civic engagement.	💡 Parents could be engaged in program design through regular meetings of parent advisors, as modeled by the <a href="#">Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance Works Internship Program</a> , and partnering with community organizations who actively work with parents. 💡 State-level Advisory Boards would benefit from parent representation – supported with stipends and training. The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) provides a possible national model for preparing parents to be involved.
Streamline intake and application processes	Multiple applications for assistance can result in redundant paperwork and unnecessary barriers for families.	💡 Maine's state agencies could create a universal application for core services that could be filled out at any point of programmatic entry, similar to Texas and Mississippi. 💡 Families could complete an accompanying checklist of services they are interested in, helping direct their information to the right agencies.
Reduce multiple agency contacts and place families at center	For some families, interacting with multiple state agencies means continually managing multiple relationships with contracted community and state staff, detracting from care for children and pursuit of career goals.	💡 Establish a single point of contact for families to work with. 💡 Examine programmatic case management/coaching functions across multiple agencies and programs and identify where those functions might be combined.
Expand strength-based approaches	How families experience contact with programs matters greatly. Because of patchworked programs and benefits, front-line staff often focus first on whether a family is eligible and has the right paperwork. The unintended consequence is a focus on compliance, rather than on the family's goals and what they need to move ahead.	💡 Two-generation programs are utilizing family-centered coaching strategies that integrate a range of emerging science-based practices and strength-based coaching methodologies. 💡 Testing new approaches through a pilot with a limited number of staff would help state agencies assess how to implement strengths-based approaches. Metrics on staff time, customer satisfaction, and eventual outcomes for families would inform how to change culture over time.
Develop integrated data systems	Streamlined processes necessitate a focus on integrated data systems, through which state agencies can share data on families, strengthen coordination, and create whole-family snapshots that include childcare, K-12, workforce development, housing, food stamps, health care, and other programs.	💡 As an initial step, agencies could work with 2-3 local communities to identify low-cost ways to share data across child and adult systems, while beginning a framework for data-sharing agreements that comply with regulations and allow families to decide where their information is shared. Once tested, these initiatives could increase in scale. 💡 The <a href="#">Family Independence Initiative</a> , which works with communities across the country, builds stronger community relationships through which parents can enter their own data, which some communities are now testing as a more efficient method for long-term engagement with families, including a Boston pilot in partnership with Massachusetts' TANF program.



#### 4. Increase the value of public investment by leveraging outside resources and incentivizing best practices.

Two-generation practices require innovative approaches to funding if they are to be effective and successfully scaled. This includes creative use of existing revenue streams, identifying leverage opportunities, building two-generation components into the procurement process and incentivizing new partnerships and practices.

Goal	Why It Matters	Possible Models & Strategies
Expand use of the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Program	SNAP E&T offers a key leveraging opportunity. For every dollar of private or state investment in training and other supports for low-income individuals receiving SNAP, the state can draw down equal matching dollars from the federal government (known as the 50/50 program).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maine has used the 50/50 program with Family Futures Downeast and is now expanding to three new programs. Growth could continue by expanding eligible uses of funds to coaching, and by comprehensively identifying matching private and state funds that could leverage additional federal dollars.</li> <li>Oregon has grown its program from \$250,000 to \$30 million in just six years, and now is able to offer far more support to families.</li> </ul>
Support Enhanced Family Self Sufficiency programming	The Family-Self Sufficiency (FSS) program supports working families living in public housing by enabling them to maintain current rent levels as their income increases, and to escrow the otherwise increased rental fee into a savings account for up to five years. Enhanced programming allows for coaches and case managers to work with the parent to provide employment opportunities and linkages to other services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bangor Housing has leveraged public and private funds to run an extremely successful Enhanced FSS program to help residents advance their careers/education while building savings. It is now being replicated to other parts of the state.</li> <li>The current state plan sets minimal goals for state participation; expanding this program through investing in additional Family Self-Sufficiency coordinators and outreach to families would support some of Maine's lowest-income families.</li> </ul>
Build social capital in communities	Building social capital for families is an often overlooked but critical component of two-generation work that can be woven into practice and policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the policy level, state agencies could require social capital strategies within competitive procurements, and offer funds to support evaluation of such efforts.</li> </ul>
Incentivize best practice	New collaborations and linkages can be fostered through incentives from state government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requiring two-generation collaborations, or incentivizing with bonus points in competitive procurements, can help maximize state investments in case management and services.</li> <li>Incentives could also encourage parent participation in program design and oversight.</li> <li>State policy could incentivize business to invest in creating family-friendly workplaces through business tax breaks or other incentives for offering childcare support, transportation solutions, employee training, or more standard employee scheduling.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

The Two-Generation programs and recommendations described in this John T. Gorman Foundation policy brief are intended to showcase a growing body of innovative work taking place across Maine and to stimulate new thinking about how we can best support and grow such efforts in the future. As Maine works to move through and recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on families and the economy, these efforts can and should be seen as critical to our future, for they represent a new way of building and advancing the state's most essential asset: our human capital.

With their focus on improving results for whole families, two-generation strategies can potentially interrupt the cycle of generational poverty that has hampered too many Mainers for far too long – and help to ensure that families are not left behind as the economy eventually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. As Maine celebrates its 200th year of statehood, there may be no more appropriate time to summon the will and the resources to ensure that all of our parents and their children possess the skills, tools and opportunities to prosper in the next century.



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