



Evanston Two-Generation Initiative Pilot Report:

Lessons learned and recommendations moving forward

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Appendix A: Parent Voices

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Overview

In 2010, the Aspen Institute created an initiative called Ascend to serve as a “hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success and economic security.” In 2013, Ascend partnered with Northwestern University (NU) and the Evanston Community Foundation (ECF) to create a three-way partnership to design and pilot a two-generation initiative in Evanston, IL. The planning effort ran from July 2013 through June 2014 and was supported by a \$100,000 grant award from Ascend. During this time, the first Cohort of *Career Explorations* worked with 13 families and culminated in a graduation ceremony held on Northwestern’s campus with many community partners in attendance. In April of 2014, Northwestern University, Institute for Policy and Research hosted an event at Evanston Township High School that drew approximately 200 interested community members. Ascend was invited to present on two-generation strategies.

When the original Ascend grant award came to an end, the CommunityWorks committee of ECF raised and contributed another \$131,000 to add a second (and then third) Cohort of participants and to continue follow-up work with participants through the end of 2015. The partners continued to participate in the national two-generation community, with Program Director Artishia Hunter speaking at the Aspen Institute’s ThinkXChange conference in September 2014 and a visit to Evanston by Ascend Fellow Andrea Levere in November 2014 who catalyzed energy for Children’s Savings Accounts and her organization, the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED).

In the end, the pilot program served 32 families across the three Cohorts, with a total of 24 parents completing the pilot.

Two-Generation Initiative Pilot

The Evanston Two-Generation pilot program, *Career Explorations*, began in 2013 with the assembly of a working group to design the program and advise on program logistics and impact.

Once designed, the *Career Explorations* program operated through five key elements:

- (1) Partnerships with local Early Childhood Education Programs
- (2) *Career Explorations* curriculum
- (3) Parent eligibility
- (3) Coaching and peer support for participants
- (4) Financial incentives for attendance
- (5) Links with employers

Partnerships with Local Early Childhood Education Programs

The first stage of program implementation was recruitment. In the first year of the program, participants were recruited from three early education partners: District 65 Family Center (D65) (serves approximately 400 families), Infant Welfare Society of Evanston (serves approximately 90 families), and Child Care Center of Evanston (serves approximately 100 families). These early education partners were already providing high-quality services to the pilot program’s target parent population, had existing relationships with the Evanston Community Foundation, and understood the potential

impact of two-generation strategies, so they were willing to partner. In year two, the early education partnership was extended to include families served by Reba Early Learning Center (serves approximately 80 families). There was a mix of recruitment efforts to enroll parents for each Cohort. Early childhood programs disseminated flyers to all parents enrolled in their programs, early childhood staff connected with specific families they believed could benefit from participation, and the two-generation director did some on-site recruitment.

Career Explorations Curriculum

Career Explorations started by helping parents identify their priorities and goals for themselves, their careers, and their families. The program then partnered with community organizations to help parents strengthen their financial literacy and identify educational opportunities that would help to better position them for the types of careers they wanted.

Several organizations focused on improving individuals' and families' economic security were identified as having relevant and effective curriculum components to consider when developing *Career Explorations*. These included Year Up, Jeremiah Program, CAP Tulsa, Women Employed, and National Able.

Curriculum developed for the three Cohorts included:

- Goal-setting & hands-on career exploration
- Financial strategies & literacy
- Educational testing (only Cohort 1)
- Personal & professional development
- Work & family values and planning
- Health and wellness (only Cohorts 2 and 3)

Coaching and peer support

The development of *Career Explorations* emphasized the promotion of social capital and peer support among parents. Parents met weekly in small peer Cohorts led by the two-generation director in her role as career coach. Each parent also received monthly coaching during and for six months post *Career Explorations* to guide career decision-making, develop and achieve educational and employment objectives, identify strengths and values, and work through challenges and barriers.

Financial Incentives

Financial incentives were provided in order to facilitate and encourage program participation. Parents earned incentives in the form of gift cards for monthly participation and achievement of key milestones.

Links with Employers

The overarching program objective for each participant was to gain employment that would result in increasing wages over time and the ability to build assets. To this end, parents set their own goals and identified the information and services they needed to achieve these career and family goals. Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership provided labor market data that was used to support parents' career exploration process. Employers played various roles supporting *Career Explorations*, such as providing tours and discussing the work environment and culture of their organizations. One employer (Mather LifeWays) hired a participant from Cohort 1 and offered another participant

employment. While there were a number of parents in each Cohort interested in careers in healthcare, parents' career interests varied.

Career Explorations Implementation and Lessons Learned: An in-depth look

Cohort 1

With intensive recruitment efforts, 13 Evanston Two-Generation program participants engaged in a 13-week (February 18 – May 20, 2014) *Career Explorations* curriculum as a group of peers. Career Coach and Evanston Two-Generation Director Artishia Hunter developed the curriculum in consultation with Dr. Terese Sommer, Research Associate Professor at Northwestern's Institute for Policy Research and Ms. Marybeth Schroeder, Vice President for Programs, Evanston Community Foundation. Ms. Hunter guided participants with the support of outside experts in financial goal setting and planning (YWCA Evanston/North Shore) and postsecondary education, training, and financing (Oakton Community College, National Able, and Women Employed). The curriculum included site visits and tours of local businesses to explore career opportunities in local employment sectors (IRMCO Manufacturing Company and Mather LifeWays). Each weekly session was two hours long and offered in the afternoon. Evanston Public Library provided meeting space and computer lab access. *Career Explorations* also included individual coaching at least once per month. Participants in all three Cohorts were eligible to receive a \$100 monthly incentive for consistent weekly meeting participation, with a \$100 bonus for perfect attendance. Food was also provided.

Nine of the parents had children enrolled in D65 programming, two parents were engaged in home visiting with Infant Welfare Society of Evanston (IWSE), one parent was engaged in home visiting services with the Family Center (D65), and one parent had a child enrolled at Childcare Center of Evanston (CCCE). Parents who were enrolled in early childhood programs had fewer attendance challenges than those parents who were engaged in home visiting services.

Out of the thirteen women enrolled in Cohort 1, six parents were married. With the exception of one out of the six married participants, parents were not aggressively pursuing immediate next steps towards post-secondary and employment for various reasons. Some parents were home with young children because high quality childcare was unaffordable and another parent was home with a child with health issues. Five of the single parents were working during Cohort 1 and two were unemployed. These parents faced a unique set of challenges being the primary breadwinner for the family, and a majority was looking to increase wages either by going back to school and or work. One single mother at the start of the program was working three jobs.

The theme that emerged from working with Cohort 1 was readiness. Some parents were not ready to go back to work or pursue post-secondary training, for various reasons, and others were ready to make next steps.

One-year post Career Explorations interview

One year follow-up interviews were conducted with eight out of the thirteen parents from Cohort 1 to learn the impact *Career Explorations* may or may not have had on parents and learn about the progress parents have made toward reaching their personal and career goals. Many parents reiterated the benefits of goal setting, financial literacy, learning about community resources, and "being in a group of women that are passionate about being successful and providing for their families," as one parent stated.

For many, *Career Explorations* started or rebooted motivation for parents to move closer to their goals. However, many barriers remained for parents in Cohort 1.

We learned that while some parents have accomplished some of their shorter-term goals, roadblocks persist for others. One of the parents enrolled in Cohort 1 was two semesters away from completing her BA degree. She is currently working for a non-profit in Evanston. She specifically mentioned goal setting and accountability as key curriculum components contributing towards getting her closer to her long term goal. Another parent in the program actually applied the tools she learned from the financial literacy sessions and increased her credit scores. She was recently hired at a hospital, which was one of her short term goals.

While these two parents were able to make considerable progress toward reaching their long term goals, barriers including financial need, access to social supports, consistent employment, and family needs and dynamics have slowed or stagnated progress for others. One parent needs a car to work and attend school but due to \$6000 in parking violations, accrued by someone else, she does not have the funds to pay the debt and purchase a car. While participating in *Career Explorations*, another parent started the enrollment process to go back to school but was unaware that she still had debt from another post-secondary institution, where she was previously enrolled, blocking access to financial aid and even to ordering transcripts. Another parent reported that she was let go from a job after working seven months. The parent was attracted to this job because it provided some financial benefits for employees who wanted to go back to school. When the parent was asked the question “what or who has gotten in their way and made reaching their goal’s harder”, this parent stated, “Not having consistent income.” Two of the parents who were interviewed have children with identified special needs and their children receive services in the middle of the day making it difficult to work, particularly for one of the mothers who mentioned having limited support from family.

Cohort 2

The second Cohort participated in a 15-week *Career Explorations* program (November 18, 2014 through March 10, 2015). ECF and NU worked with the initial three early childhood partners to recruit families, as well as families served by Reba Early Learning Center. Career Exploration’s location, two-hour session length, and afternoon start time remained the same as in Cohort 1. We used feedback from parents in Cohort 1 to inform planning for Cohort 2. The curriculum was repeated with the exception of adding an additional two weeks of programming to provide more time for discussion and a health and wellness session presented by the McGaw YMCA. Nine parents were initially recruited to participate in Cohort 2. Five out of the nine parents were involved in home visiting services at Infant Welfare Society of Evanston, three participants were recruited from D65 early childhood programs, and one from Reba Early Learning Center (RELC). Based on the attendance of home visiting parents in Cohort 1, we were concerned with enrolling a high number of parents from home visiting programming. We did not recruit as many parents from D65 early childhood programming as we did in Cohort 1.

After learning about parents’ various levels of readiness in Cohort 1, we were able to get a better understanding of parents’ readiness in Cohort 2 by asking more specific questions on our parent questionnaire.

This Cohort was significantly different than the first. Due to a series of life circumstances, education, job changes, and a lack of stable childcare, especially for parents who were

engaged in home visiting services, only two participants completed the full fifteen-week *Career Explorations* curriculum. Of the nine parents who started with the program, eight were single. Many were working at a low-wage job and or actively seeking employment at the time they enrolled in *Career Explorations*. Cohort 2 participants reported vulnerable social support structures. Several parents were not United States citizens, making it difficult to access various educational and training resources in the Evanston community.

The theme that emerged from Cohort 2 was urgency. Many of these parents did not have extensive social supports and therefore there was an urgency to meet financial needs. Several mothers did not complete the program because of training and employment opportunities that became available during Cohort 2.

Cohort 3

Lessons learned from Cohorts 1 and 2 helped inform changes that were made with Cohort 3. A relationship with D65 was deepened, and an agreement was put in place to host *Career Explorations* at D65 where childcare would be provided and sessions could be held in the evening. Additionally, *Career Explorations* needed a home. We believed there were a number of advantages with D65 adopting *Career Explorations*. We learned that D65 early childhood programs, as well as others, struggled with getting parents connected and involved. We believed *Career Explorations* could be a motivator and attract parents by working in even greater coordination with the district to engage families.

Ten parents enrolled in an eight-week *Career Explorations* curriculum. The curriculum was reduced to accommodate District 65's early childhood program calendar. A partnership with all four early education partners continued to support parent recruitment efforts. Feedback from parents in Cohorts 1 and 2 was used to identify the most effective *Career Explorations* curriculum to implement with Cohort 3. Sessions led by Ms. Hunter, again with support from community partners, covered the career exploration process, financial literacy (YWCA Evanston/North Shore), health and wellness (McGaw YMCA), educational training (Oakton Community College) and workforce development training (National Able). Nine out of the ten parents completed the program. In the last session, an opportunity to integrate a lesson working with parents and children together, creating vision boards, demonstrated the essence of two-generation strategies by parents and children learning and exploring simultaneously.

Of the nine parents enrolled, four were married. While a couple of parents were looking into a flexible work situation, all of their spouses were the primary breadwinners. A consistent message heard from the married women was a desire to work or go to school, increasing their own autonomy. The single parents were facing many challenges. One participant was pregnant and had recently lost a job, another parent was working and raising four children, another parent was recently separated and going through a custody battle, and another parent was living in an apartment with two other families and three children. Six of the nine parents were from countries other than the United States presenting challenges, especially for a couple of undocumented parents. Transferring coursework for parents who received post-secondary education obtained in their native countries can be problematic when parents are trying to further education and training in the U.S.

The theme emerging from this Cohort was individuality. Six different countries were

represented in a group of nine women. Each participant's living situation and cultural background added another layer to setting goals and making progress towards achieving them.

After the Cohort ended, we met with D65 to discuss options for the district to absorb some staffing cost to run *Career Explorations*, but because of funding reduction in education at the state level, D65 did not have the resources to support staffing and programmatic cost.

Two-Generation Initiative Pilot Summary

There were many high points implementing *Career Explorations* including partnering with local organizations, sharing expertise and resources, and working with a diverse group of parents as they set goals to move closer towards economic self-sufficiency, for most, making small increments. There were also the lessons learned. While parents are highly motivated to do and be their best for their children, barriers are real. Financial strains and fragile social and family supports slowed down and at times stagnated progress. Parents needed direct connections and financial supports to access post-secondary education and training. While *Career Explorations* provided some support with goals setting, financial literacy, and set measures for accountability, the pilot lacked direct employer connections to move parents to the next level.

We experienced great difficulty in recruiting parents who met our basic requirement of a high school degree and then later learned that they are in various stages in their lives, some needing different interventions and program strategies beyond what *Career Explorations* offered. We increased our recruiting efforts but attracted smaller numbers. We shifted the time and location to accommodate parents who worked and or were in school in hopes to increase interests and enrollment. We actually hoped these changes would increase demand, giving us a wider audience of targeted parents to invite into the pilot. We provided childcare by professional early childhood staff at D65, a light dinner for families, and weekly gift cards for parent participation. With these critical changes designed to better accommodate and attract families, we were still only able to recruit ten parents. Additionally, exceptions were made for parents with moderate incomes to create a robust Cohort, due to a lack of response from low income parents.

Earlier in our planning, we engaged Oakton Community College to discuss enrolling our parents in courses that would give them the training needed to obtain careers with family supporting earnings. Oakton was not interested in that arrangement and recommended that we connect parents to credentialing and certification programs. We learned that the funding that was available for parents to access workforce training has stringent eligibility requirements. One of our underemployed parents went through the orientation only to be told that she would be on a wait list because while she was not making sustainable wages, those who were unemployed were at the top of the list for program enrollment.

As it relates to employer links, we were able to make a promising connection with one employer; however, many of the available jobs were entry level and not paying family supporting wages. One of our participants accepted a job offer, but continued working a second job. We met with another large Evanston employer only to learn they were not interested in partnering.

We conclude that a larger population base is necessary for a *Career Explorations* program to generate the numbers of participants with similar educational/training backgrounds, needs, and career interests to make career connections both viable for the participants and economically worthwhile for prospective employers. Finally, a sustainable funding plan is needed to run a program.

Evanston Community Foundation’s Recommendations

The primary goal for piloting a two-generation initiative in Evanston was to learn. We wanted to learn about and from parents, learn programmatic components that could be responsive to parents, and learn if there is a demand for this particular two-generation strategy.

What we have learned from these three *Career Explorations* Cohorts has given the Foundation new insights into the challenges and barriers that these mothers and many other low-income parents surely face, as well as the opportunity to see firsthand the hopes and ambitions they nurture for themselves and for their young children.

Our Northwestern colleagues and partners are drawing different conclusions from the work we have done together since 2012. We are grateful for the collaboration that Professor Chase-Lansdale initiated with the Foundation: it opened doors into the national two generation conversation and gave us the opportunity to explore a new approach to meeting the two goals of our local *Every child ready for kindergarten Every youth ready for work* impact plan. Even while our conclusions differ, we especially want to acknowledge the review of the pilot project done this fall by consultant Rachel Klein.

Given what we’ve learned from implementing *Career Explorations*, from our recruitment struggles, the complex needs of families, and from launching a pilot that lacked both direct connections to post-secondary education and to employment offering family-supporting wages, ECF recommends the following as potential next steps, especially in light of the lack of a sustainable funding plan.

(1) Asset Development: Child Savings Accounts

- Andrea Levere, President, Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) visited Evanston in November 2014 to discuss the impact of children savings accounts. The presentation resonated with many community stakeholders including banks, community organizations, local philanthropists, and interested community members. Furthering a discussion and gathering ideas to carry out a child savings account strategy is one of the ripest next steps to move forward a two-generation strategy.

Pros	Cons
Build upon the momentum from community stakeholders.	Staffing is needed to lead, coordinate, and convene stakeholders to strategize.
Not direct conflict or competition with social service or early childhood programs.	

Research shows that children who have even a small savings account designated specifically for college are more likely to attend college.	
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(2) Multiple Organizations Developing a Two-Generation Framework

- Two-generation strategies can include efforts that focus on education, including both early childhood and postsecondary, economic supports, social capital, and health. Organizations working in one or more of these areas can work together to develop a two-generation framework, and integrate strategies into their respective delivery models. Evanston Community Foundation can encourage the development of such two-generation efforts through its leadership and grantmaking.

Pros	Cons
Organizations could potentially increase the impact of their work by identifying, refining and incorporating two-gen strategies into other work.	Does not have direct program responsibility. Organizations may lack the capacity to maintain momentum due to core funding obligations.
Strong case could potentially increase funding opportunities for organizations.	Could potentially detract from other funding absent a strong story in donor outreach

Appendix A: Parent Voices

Participant Reports from Focus Groups

Because of the small sample size and the pilot nature of the program, qualitative feedback is especially helpful at this stage. Focus groups were conducted with participants by Northwestern researchers after the conclusion of the program. The following are the central themes:

(1) A primary benefit of the program as noted by participants was a time for the mothers to focus on themselves, yet many parents also developed a deeper understanding for how advancing their education benefits their children.

- “Sometimes...you forget that you can be a mom and have a good education, too. And that is one of the things that I learned in this program. That you have the possibility to change your life and when you change your life, you give the best opportunity for your kids...I need to think then, it's, ‘I have a career.’”

(2) Participants noted several ways that a mother serves as an important role model for her children.

- We're already moms and we want to work. We don't just want a job anymore, we want a career, and we want our kids to see that...to show them that there's more, even more, that they can do beyond us.
- To invest in myself. To invest in my education, and not just for me but for my daughter, and for her to see me going...or hear me talking about going to class. That is what I tell her I'm at. Just...it makes me feel a lot better because she's like, she'll ask me sometimes, ‘So, how is class?’ ‘What did you do at class?’ or ‘What are you doing today?’ And for her to get a chance to see me be celebrated publicly for accomplishing something has meant a lot for me.

(3) Other benefits noted by the parents include learning to identify and value the skills they already possess that may help in finding employment, learning about new opportunities, services and resources for their own education and their child's, building confidence, and improving time management skills.

- That was also a big step for me in applying for a job, because usually I wouldn't have applied for half the jobs that I am now because I would just say, ‘I can't get out there,’ you know.

(4) Budgeting skills and other financial knowledge (e.g., credit scores) were especially important to almost all participants.

- I really like all of the financial planning stuff a lot. She gave us, like, this tip of how for starting for one whole month to save like every single receipt for all of your transactions...I'm in the process of going through [the receipts] now. I'm like, ‘I spend a lot more money than I thought I did.’

(5) Goal setting and following through has been a central success reported by participants.

- Having a plan in your head is a lot different than having it written down in your face and having steps to follow and people to hold you accountable. And those were some things that I had never had...It helped me just organize what my thoughts are...and lead me to a career path that I could actually see, like, the light at the end of the tunnel.
- I feel like I have set clear goals in mind and I feel like I have the steps and the help really to move towards that, the end result, and that's a nice feeling.
- I just started setting goals for everything then. So, many, like, mini-goals or I can't do it. When you have smaller goals, which I learned from this class, you know, you feel a sense of accomplishment once you achieve them. So, this is something very big that I got out of this class.

(6) Mentorship through one-on-one coaching has been key.

- I've never had a mentor. I've never had someone hold me accountable. It was always me. I had to do it...This was like something, definitely an eye-opener this... 'Someone does care about me,' that kind of feeling.
- I feel like I can email [my coach] and, like, ask her when I have questions about something, and I feel like she has good insight into, you know. Like I said, I really like the whole mentorship one-on-one things, like, personally, because that's not something—like, it's not easy for me culturally to, like, have these conversations with my mom, because that's not what we do...because we don't talk about emotions. We don't talk about personal problems.

(7) Building skills and knowledge through the program builds confidence.

- I think the class has...given me a little bit more confidence to know that I do have all these skills that I've learned from previous work experience or volunteer work or whatever that will help me sort of have more...more confidence to apply for careers. Like if I didn't have, you know, interview skills...
- That was also a big step for me in applying for a job, because usually I wouldn't have applied for half the jobs that I am now because I would just say, 'I can't get out there,' you know.

Participant reports from one year follow-up interview

One year follow-up interviews were conducted with eight out of the thirteen parents from Cohort 1 to learn the impact *Career Explorations* may or may not have had on parents and learn about the progress parents have made toward reaching their personal and career goals. Many parents reiterated the benefits of goal setting and accountability as being helpful components in *Career Explorations*, however barriers to reach career goals, hence moving families towards economic self sufficiency, persist.

(1) Parents were asked to discuss where they are currently in terms of reaching their goals and who are what have supported them:

- I have fulfilled my personal goal. My career goals were put on hold because of the transcript, because of that I've decided to take a different route and I will reduce my student loans. I have made arrangements to pay on my student loans.
- Having coaching meetings I knew I had to give account to what I've done. A friend who has been an accountability partner to make sure I'm getting things done. The time and the season is what caused me to feel like the goals have to happen. I have goals for my kids and my goals are connected to my kids.
- Myself. Knowing that those are the goals that I set for myself. I have not met the goals but working towards them. There is someone helping me get a car and clean up my credit.
- Attempted in March to go back to school, but it just didn't work with how my life was going at the time, so I put it off.

(2) Parents were asked who or what may have happened or gotten in their way and made reaching their goals harder. Here are some of the responses:

- Not having consistent income. I was working for seven months and got laid off. It's been distracting.
- My son (receiving development support services throughout the week), my mom with all of her health problems – now the dog is sick.
- Lack of support from children's father, debt from school and couldn't get transcripts released, and getting my son to therapy.
- Life. The way life goes. When you have kids you can't just do what you want to do. Creating a support system was the hardest thing to do.
- Working two jobs, moving, putting son in school, grandmother passing, it was a lot going on. Helping my mom with my grandmother. When I wasn't working I was with my mom and then I got another job helping my mother with bills. I have \$6000 in car tickets racked up by my child's father.