

A WHOLE-FAMILY APPROACH TO WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT BY KERRY DESJARDINS.

An argument for a multi-generational approach to human service agency work to include families and children. This will require coordination across agencies to best serve the whole family.

The writer, a Policy Associate for the Center for Employment and Economic Well-Being at the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), makes the case for moving from the frequent practice of human services agencies which focus on the needs of either, but not both, adults and children. Many have now moved to a two-generation approach, but she argues for an expansion to a multi-generation approach.

This practice involves not only resident and custodial parents but also nonresident and non-custodial parents, adult siblings, extended family members, and kin—all those who play a role in the functioning of the entire family unit. This is especially important when parents and other adults must work, especially those who must work long hours or multiple jobs in order for them and their children to survive. These situations often result in stress at work which translates into stress at home, affecting the children as well.

Workforce programs, typically focused on individual eligibility and individual outcomes, often ignore larger family needs. For example, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program places strong emphasis on work activities that count toward work participation rates rather than those which lead to meaningful outcomes that strengthen each unique family.

A whole family approach to workforce engagement not only engages the parent and caregiver needs, but also considers the needs, challenges, and resources of family members outside those traditionally considered part of the family unit. A key element is engaging noncustodial parents (NCPs), both economically and socially, where possible, in their children's lives. However, many noncustodial parents have low incomes and are often handicapped in making child support payments and are driven away from their children's lives.

She points to exceptions, including in Maryland where the statewide Noncustodial Parent Employment Program, funded using TANF dollars, links NCPs, who cannot afford to pay child support, to job training, educational opportunities, and work experiences. There has been significant success in enrolling these parents in job training and job readiness programs which helped them become stable contributors to the well-being of their children. Texas also has had great success working with this population—71% of participants between 2005 and 2015 entered employment and 77% retained employment for at least six months. Also, New York's Earned Income Tax Credit has provided significant support to low-income NCPs.

Implementing a whole-family approach to workforce engagement requires cooperation among multiple funding sources and regulatory agencies, leading to important support toward the success of low-income working families, empowering them to achieve self-sufficiency, economic well-being, and broader family well-being.

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Thanks to generous support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Our Neighborhood*, is a compilation of stories and research from the family engagement field. It is intended to be a living repository and guide for STEM Learning Ecosystems and other communities interested in cultivating strong community partnerships to prepare the next generation.

This annotated bibliography was compiled by TIES for *Our Neighborhood*.