

The Parenting Imperative: Investing in Parents so Children and Youth Succeed

Policy Brief No. 22

Parents are one of the most important influences in positive child and youth development, yet too many caregivers lack the support they need. By strengthening parents and their connections to resources, communities can help children thrive.

Overview

Unpaid position available: caring adult; child psychologist; maid, chef, and butler; teacher and coach; advocate; chauffeur; safety technician; nurse; playmate; cheerleader; CEO. Nonstop schedule in a demanding environment. Priceless rewards.

Parents matter because when parenting is at its best, children thrive. Indeed, the vast majority of children reach adulthood ready to make their way in the world. This is possible because of the strengths of their parent/caregivers and the support, helping hands, and guidance that families receive from their communities.¹ *(In this brief, a parent/caregiver is a biological or adoptive parent of a child, foster parent, person acting in the place of parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives), or any caregiver who has primary responsibility for the care and support of a child.²)*

Yet for too long, communities have overlooked the dramatic challenges facing modern parent/caregivers,

many of whom are struggling more and more to raise children while earning a living.¹ Parent/caregivers are the top investor in the next generation, but few communities have a solid understanding of parent/caregivers' needs, strengths, and aspirations for their families. They also may be missing the mark by not using evidence-based programs for supporting and enhancing parenting. Once communities deliberately focus on parenting success, their investments in children, youth, and families can achieve even better results.

Making a difference in the lives of children and youth requires a heightened focus on parenting in and across every community sector. Such a "parenting success" strategy would:

- Support parenting success by investing in three areas: strengthening community environments for families, supporting and enhancing parenting, and building child and family assets.

- Proactively connect higher risk families to community supports.
- Build the capacity of families to function effectively and carry out their responsibilities.

To succeed, parenting-success systems give parent/caregivers the RITE stuff.

Recognition that parent/caregivers are integral to child and neighborhood development. Recognition results in placing parent/caregivers and youth in decisionmaking roles, consulting them as stakeholders, and providing them with leadership opportunities.

Improvements in the economic and social conditions in which parent/caregivers are raising children.

Tailored services for higher risk families that reflect their unique situations and goals. (Higher risk families are those that encounter more numerous and disruptive challenges that interfere with family stability, parenting practices, and child wellbeing. Families can also be vulnerable when parent/caregivers have less exposure to information, insufficient family supports, or few positive role models.)

Evidence-based and coordinated investments that meet the challenges facing parent/caregivers, reduce service fragmentation, and boost child, family, and neighborhood outcomes.

By building up parent/caregivers, successful-parenting systems can improve the wellbeing of all family members. In turn, strong families are the backbone of communities where all children can thrive. The long-term return on investment will be healthy, productive citizens who eventually become effective parent/caregivers themselves.

Definitions for Key Terms Used in this Policy Brief

Family – A supportive group of people who are committed to each other and may include, though is not limited to, nuclear, extended, foster care, adoptive, and step or blended families. (Family Strengthening Policy Center²)

Family Strengthening – “A deliberate and sustained effort to ensure that parents have the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully, which includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs.” (Annie E. Casey Foundation)

Family-Centered Care – “A system of care which supports all family members involved in the child’s care or involves all family members in all aspects of planning, implementing, and evaluating the service delivery system (including services for themselves and the services for their families).” (Annie E. Casey Foundation⁵⁷)

Family Support Programs – Efforts that “offer services to all families in a given community,” while **Family Preservation Services** “by contract, seek to assist families that are already manifesting problems or who are in crisis.” (Abt Associates³²)

Higher Risk Families – Families that encounter more numerous and disruptive challenges that interfere with family stability, parenting practices, and child wellbeing. Families can also be vulnerable when parent/caregivers have less exposure to information, insufficient family supports, or few positive role models.

Parent/Caregiver – A biological or “adoptive” parent of a child, foster parent, person acting in the place of parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives), or any caregiver who has primary responsibility for the

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This brief will help policy makers, practitioners, and citizen groups understand what a “parenting success” strategy looks like and how it can strengthen families and communities. Community groups will find best practices and recommendations (beginning on pages 16 and 18) for how to maximize impact. For funding agencies and policy makers (beginning on page 19), this brief focuses on creating conditions for communities to respond to the parenting imperative.

Guiding Principles and Definitions

The Family Strengthening Policy Center developed this framework for parenting success through a collaborative process involving researchers and professionals (see Appendix C). The following principles guided this work.

Improving child development and outcomes requires parent/caregiver involvement. A vast literature has documented the enormous impact that parent/caregivers have on children. To succeed, child-focused services need a clear strategy for strengthening parent/caregivers. Dual-generation approaches that strengthen both children/youth and parent/caregivers produce the best results.

Many different family structures and situations exist in most communities. Delivering effective family-centered services means enabling clients to define the group of individuals that comprises family. For example, a primary caregiver may not be a biological parent, but could be an older sibling, another relative, a teacher, neighbor, or even an agency and its staff. (See Definitions for Key Terms textbox on page 2.)

All parent/caregivers have inherent strengths, or the raw materials, to raise children. Well-designed parenting programs bolster this natural capacity of parent/caregivers.³

care and support of a child. (Family Strengthening Policy Center²) In non-traditional families, the primary caregiver may not be a biological parent, but could be an older sibling, another relative, a teacher, neighbor, or even an agency and its staff.

Parent Education – “Activities that strengthen parent knowledge about child development, build parent skills to strengthen relationships between parent and child, and promote age appropriate care and activities to promote a child’s health, development, and social emotional skills.” (Annie E. Casey Foundation⁵⁷)

Parenting – “The experiences, skills, qualities, and responsibilities involved in being a parent and in teaching and caring for a child.” (Encarta® World English Dictionary)

Parenting Success – A strategy for strengthening families by 1) developing a coordinated system of high-quality investments in caregivers; 2) proactively connecting families to that system; and 3) building the capacity of families to function effectively and carry out their responsibilities.

Parenting Supports – “Activities that strengthen parents’ capacity to draw upon available resources for their own well-being and the well-being of their children.”(Annie E. Casey Foundation⁵⁷) Supports may be directed to enhancing parenting matters (e.g., parenting education); child and family resources (e.g., building family assets in literacy, finances, youth development); and community sectors that regularly interact with children and their families (e.g., pre-K-12 education, Temporary Assistance for Need Families).

Supportive environments are crucial to parenting success. On a weekly, if not daily basis, many parent/caregivers rely on support, helping hands, and guidance from family, friends, and professional and community services.¹ Further, internal family dynamics affect how well families function as do external circumstances (such as employers' paid-leave policies, the quality of the neighborhood environment, and the availability of affordable, high quality child care).^{4,5}

Parents Matter

Parent/caregivers matter because a caring, strong parent-child relationship is an essential ingredient in development. Parent/caregivers also matter because they not only manage the household, but also contribute to civic life—a key parenting practice.

The Influence of Parenting on Positive Child/Youth Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist, helped establish that a strong mutual attachment with one or more caring adults is essential to the socio-emotional, physical, and mental development of children.⁶ Other scholars, practitioners, and child and youth advocates have confirmed the centrality of parents and other caring adults as a foremost developmental asset.^{1, 7-11} As described by the multi-disciplinary panel of experts that developed the joint National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's (NRC/IOM) report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*: "Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration."¹

Indeed, nurturing relationships with parents and other caring adults, including those outside the home, have a significant positive impact.¹ The converse, or lack of such beneficial relationships, can impede healthy development. For example, in *Ghosts from the Nursery: The Roots of Violence*, Robin Karr-Morse and Meredith

Wiley summarize research findings that neglect and child abuse during the first two years of life are associated with violent behavior in older children and adults.¹²

When parenting is at its best, children thrive. Based on their evidence review, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Lisa Markman, experts in child development and education, concluded that differences in parenting practices might account for 25-50 percent of gaps in school readiness among population groups.³ Other studies have found parenting practices and skills have a greater effect on child outcomes than income, except when families had unmet material needs.¹³

How Parent/Caregivers Matter

Parenting comes with a myriad of roles, often performed with no or little formal training.¹⁴ Their primary caregiving roles are providing sustenance, stimulation, support, structure, and surveillance. At a minimum, these functions assure basic survival. When parent/caregivers are proficient in these five areas, children and youth thrive.^{4,15}

Although researchers have examined correlations between specific parenting behaviors with child wellbeing and positive development, the field recognizes how practices may be protective in some circumstances and yet place children at risk in other contexts. Thus, there is no single "right way" to parent, as generations of grown-up children attest.^{1, 3, 4, 16, 17}

Civic Engagement and Successful Parenting

Involvement in community life—such as by volunteering, participating in civic groups, being active in schools, and voting—is one important parenting practice. Research indicates that when parent/caregivers participate in civic life, children fare better, volunteer more as a youth, and are more likely to succeed as adults than children whose parent/caregivers are uninvolved. Civic engagement enables parent/caregivers to serve as role models, learn how to advocate for their children and families, develop

new skills, improve local conditions, and expand their social networks and connections to opportunities.¹⁸⁻²⁰

The last item—connectedness—increases family resiliency, that is, the capacity to deal with challenges and crises, according to University of Missouri Extension.²¹ An evidence review by the Annie E. Casey Foundation reached a similar conclusion: “Parental involvement with neighborhood social institutions, neighbor-to-neighbor relations and community resources for families can have positive effects on parenting and early child development.”^{22, 23}

An Ecological Model of Parenting

External environments influence child development, according to Bronfenbrenner, originator of the Ecological Systems Theory.⁵ This ecological perspective is key to understanding the parenting context and opportunities to help families thrive.

Applying this theory, Ariel Kalil and Thomas DeLeire of the University of Chicago, respectively from the fields of developmental psychology and economics, have synthesized the research to show that:

- Family demographics affect parent/caregivers’ practices and decisions.
- Child characteristics influence parenting.
- External environments influence parenting practices.⁴

In addition to an extensive literature,^{1, 3, 4, 24-28} professionals confirm that multiple external forces affect parenting, family dynamics, and child development and wellbeing. Thus, parenting assessments must consider the ecological context. For example, when work and neighborhood conditions impart multiple, persistent difficulties, these daily stresses on parent/caregivers over time can wear down mental health and reduce parenting effectiveness.¹ Children from such families

are more likely to start kindergarten with underdeveloped skills, have ill health or behavioral problems, or eventually become pregnant or drop out of school.²⁵ However, providing mental health services and parent training to individuals is only a partial solution; to sustain gains in child development and wellbeing, the adverse conditions must be altered.

The dynamic nature of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model reveals that families and their children also affect their environments, especially those most immediate to them such as the home, classroom environment, and the neighborhood.⁵ (See preceding section on Civic Engagement and Successful Parenting for one example of this dynamic.)

Because parenting is a “complex interplay between the child, the family, and the broader social environment,” as described by Kalil and DeLeire,⁴ investments in parenting success must be multi-level and tailored to different cultures and environments. To help communities understand the parenting context and opportunities to help families thrive, the Family Strengthening Policy Center developed Figure 1. This is a parenting-focused model based on Bronfenbrenner’s child-centric ecosystems theory.

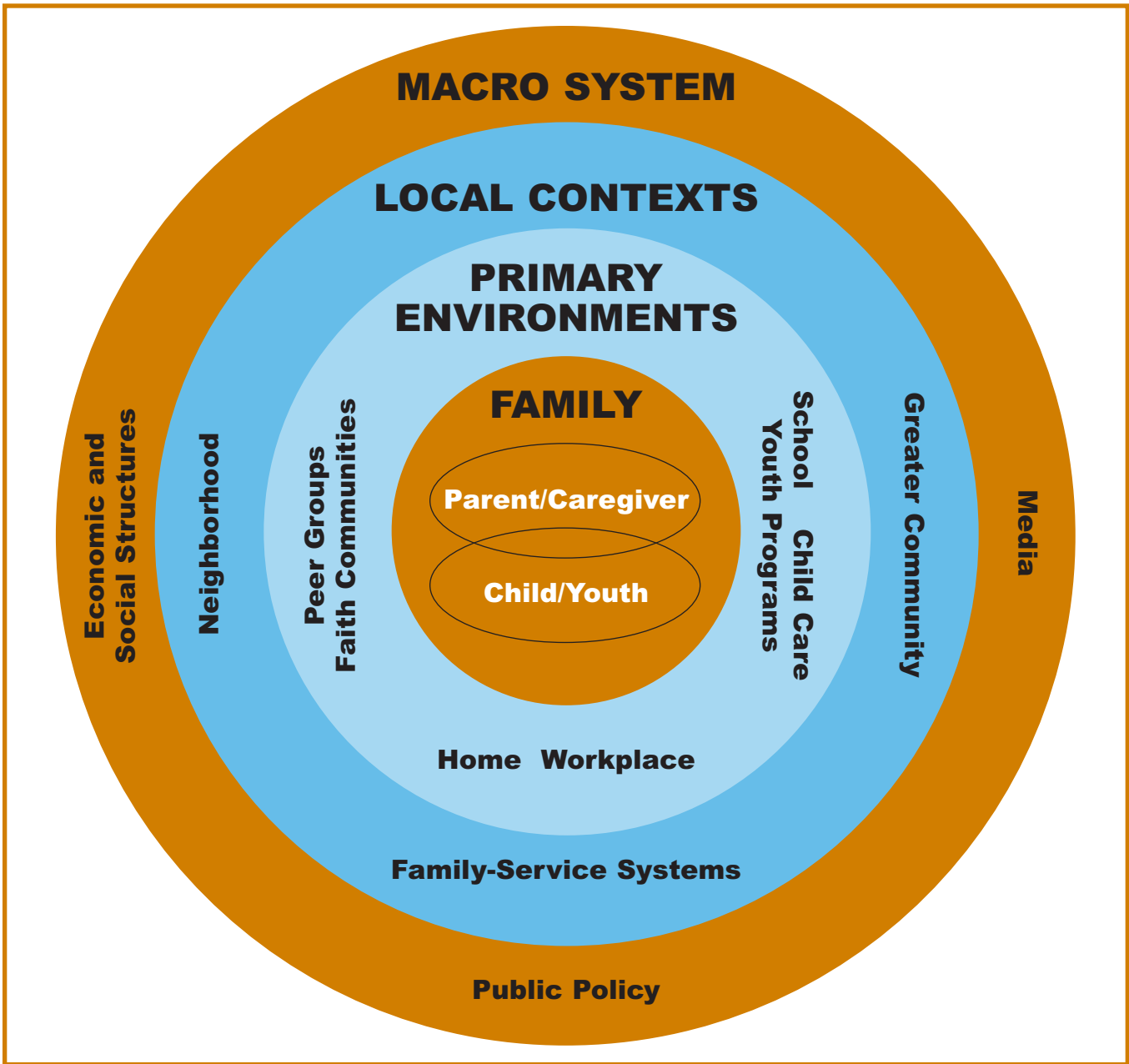
This ecological model has four levels of environments, each of which has direct and indirect effects on parenting.

Family: the system involving individuals in the family (as defined by its members).

Primary Environments: the principal domains in which parent/caregivers, children, and other family members live, such as the home, child care settings, schools, youth development programs, worksites, peer groups, and communities of faith.

Local Contexts: the core circumstances in which the family functions. Some important contexts are

FIGURE 1.
Ecological Model of Parenting



the availability of affordable housing and child care, local job market, and visibility of parenting-success resources.

Macro System: forces affecting families over which parent/caregivers have limited influence, such as gasoline prices, advertising targeting children, taxes, public education financing, and corporate

decisions that affect employment and the community environment.

Figure 2 illustrates the types of influences each level can have on parenting, but it is not an exhaustive list. Notably, both Figure 1 and 2 simplify a complex web of interrelationships and influences on parenting and families.^{4, 5, 10}

FIGURE 2. Ecological Environment and Selected Influences on Parenting

| Environments | Selected Types of Influences on Parenting |
|--|--|
| Family | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviors of individuals in family or household • Overall family dynamics |
| Primary Environments | |
| Home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical environment where family resides |
| Peer groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends, neighbors, extended family members |
| Workplace | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule and leave policies • Employment stability, conditions, and benefits • Physical, mental, and emotional stress |
| Child care; child/youth development centers or programs Schools Religious and community groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence on child and youth development and behaviors • Involvement of and supports for parent/caregivers • Expansion of family support networks • Enhancement of parent/caregivers' skills and knowledge • Provision of family recreational settings |
| Local Contexts | |
| Neighborhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of community and personal safety • Healthful living environments • Presence of family support services • Ready access to quality and affordable services frequently needed: nourishing foods, safe play spaces, and transportation options |
| Greater Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social norms about parenting and concern for child wellbeing • Community infrastructure and local economy • Availability of information and family supports • Government structures that engage parent/caregivers as decision makers, stakeholders, and leaders |
| Macro System | |
| Economic and Social Structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing markets and availability of affordable units • Social norms about family and parent/caregiver practices |
| Media (all forms) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on children's values and behaviors • Transmission of helpful information • Influence on social norms |
| Public Policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies promoting equity • Public policy and appropriations for education and youth development systems • Tax policy for individuals, employers, providers of affordable housing |

Families at Risk

The challenges facing modern families are numerous and consequential. In recent decades, the “American family” has undergone many changes in part due to social and political forces in the macro system. The NRC/IOM panel described the following far-reaching shifts as “serious challenges” to parent/caregivers’ ability to raise children while earning a living.¹

- Difficulties in juggling family and employment responsibilities.
- Persistent economic hardships that undermine health and thwart child and youth development.
- The cumulative impact of multi-generational health and developmental disparities for some racial and ethnic minority groups.
- Increases in parent/caregivers’ employment resulting in greater use of child care, including substandard providers.
- A significant decline in children living in two-parent families, who tend to have better health and school outcomes than peers in single-parent families (in part due to differences in family economic resources²⁹).

Unless mitigated by community strategic investments in families, these changes can lead to a rising number of children and youth who have suboptimal development and outcomes.

When Are Children and Families At Risk?

Strong families can be found in all economic classes. America’s Promise Alliance reports that across all income groups the vast majority of children (80 percent or more) report receiving support from caring adults and experiencing a safe family. Rates of effective parental monitoring of youth ages 12-17 years are also comparable in higher and lower income families.³⁰

Likewise, families in all social classes have periodic challenges that disrupt family life. One example is teen parenthood; its associated difficulties affect multiple generations, regardless of income.

This section looks at three groups of risk factors: parent/caregivers’ individual attributes, insufficient family resources, and limited community support systems. Although some risks for poor child outcomes are more common in lower income families, it is primarily because of resource disparities rather than character weakness. For example, compared to higher income families, lower income families tend to:

- Have social networks that are less helpful in connecting parent/caregivers to community resources that can build family assets.³¹
- Experience higher stress levels about meeting basic needs.
- Live, learn, and work in environments that have fewer family supports.¹

Family Risk and Parent/Caregivers’ Attributes. Parent/caregiver attributes comprise one set of risk factors for families, because parent/caregivers’ health, wellbeing, and readiness can reduce parenting effectiveness, with secondary effects on children and youth. Risk increases for families when parent/caregivers:

- Are adolescents or are otherwise immature or inexperienced.^{1, 32, 33}
- Are parenting without a partner, lack a support network with extended family, or have a significant change in their major adult relationship (such as divorce or remarriage).¹⁴

- Suffer from depression, psychological distress, or substance abuse.^{1, 34}
- Have limited literacy skills or low educational attainment.^{1, 35}
- Experience social isolation.^{1, 23}
- Have unrealistic expectations of their children's capabilities or unproductive beliefs about childrearing.¹

Communities can use these and other parent/caregiver attributes to identify higher risk families. Each risk factor is also an opportunity to strengthen families whether by connecting parent/caregivers to community services or developing their assets.

“Children’s early development depends on the health and wellbeing of their parents.”
 -National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Neurons to Neighborhoods* 1

Insufficient Family Resources and Risk. Despite hard labor, many lower-income parent/caregivers have limited economic and social resources to meet basic needs, much less have the means to get ahead. Difficulties—even a flat tire, an unexpected expense, or an ill child—can easily disrupt the families’ delicate balance because there is no cushion or surplus.

In a series of focus groups conducted for Casey Family Programs, more than 500 low-income parents described multiple, serious difficulties that impede parenting. Specifically, they struggled with financial problems, social isolation, inadequate peer support, and a lack of respite services.³⁶ These focus groups echo other studies that identified the following family-level risk factors.

- Inadequate resources to assure basic survival.¹

- Low-wage jobs with limited or no paid leave, health insurance, or other benefits.³⁷
- Unstable or low-wage employment that fails to pay the bills and provide health insurance.^{35, 37, 38}
- Language barriers.³⁸
- A lack of legal relationship to the child, as is often the case for grandfamilies or when fathers have yet to establish paternity.^{39, 40}
- Limited access to individual development accounts and other asset-building opportunities.^{41, 42}
- Problems accessing affordable health care.⁴³

A family’s social networks are important, too. Families rely on outside support both for everyday needs (child care while working) and for problems that crop up or persist. The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that lower-income groups tend to rely on informal networks, especially family and friends.²³ When network members are in similar disadvantaged circumstances, they tend to be more helpful with “getting by” than with connecting families to resources for “getting ahead.”^{23, 33} Enriching connections to formal networks builds on existing support systems and can open doors.²³

Community Support Difficulties. Growing evidence suggests neighborhood characteristics influence:

- Parenting practices (such as when peer leaders model positive parenting practices).
- Health, wellbeing, and development of family members (such as when poor air quality triggers asthma attacks).
- Parent/caregiver’s ability to move the family towards self-sufficiency (such as when limited public transportation reduces the geographic area in which a parent/caregiver can find employment).^{1, 20, 27, 38, 44-46}

Common problems in disadvantaged neighborhoods that affect family functioning are insufficient access to safe places, quality child care, and youth development programs. According to America's Promise Alliance, slightly more than 50 percent of low-income children report having safe schools and neighborhoods; in contrast about 80 percent of high-income children indicate they have these safe places. Low-income children also appear to have less access to affordable, high-quality afterschool activities.³⁰

Yet even the toughest neighborhoods have assets that can be leveraged to better support parent/caregivers and families. A research summary for the Annie E. Casey Foundation indicates that communities that invest in quality child care reap multiple dividends: growth in neighborhood assets; expanded connections between families, their neighbors, and community resources; increases in positive interactions between children and parent/caregivers; and improved child outcomes.³¹

What Are Parents' Top Concerns?

In the 2002 Building Strong Families national poll of parents, conducted by the Search Institute and YMCA of the USA, nearly all parents (88 percent) said they feel successful as parents almost every day or most days. Nearly all (97 percent) find ways each day to nurture their child. Yet, they also identified external challenges that can interfere with parenting. Job demands topped the list of reasons that parents said make parenting hard. Among low-income parents (an annual income of less than \$35,000), 62 percent said family finances make raising children more difficult.⁴⁷

In the next Building Strong Families survey in 2004, this one with African-American and Latino parents, respondents attributed problems with parenting to challenges such as job loss, negative societal values, difficulty making connections with others in their community, and having too little family time.⁴⁸

The Opportunity

Well-designed parenting and family-support approaches benefit children, parent/caregivers, and the family and should be considered a core investment in community vitality. The Brooks-Gunn and Markman review of evaluations of parenting programs serving low-income families concluded that high-quality programs were the ones that improved both parenting skills and practices. Enhancements in parenting practices in some programs appeared to have a secondary impact of improving young children's school readiness.³

Additional benefits from well-designed parenting and family-support initiatives include the following.

Child wellbeing and outcomes: improvements in cognitive and social development; reductions in maltreatment; and prevention of delinquency, risky behaviors, pregnancy, and school failure.

Home environment and family dynamics: improvements in parent-child relationships and in environments that are safe and promote learning.

Family resources: enhanced access to needed resources, gains in economic self-sufficiency, and reductions in isolation.^{1, 4, 25, 49}

The Challenge

Despite the evidence that well-designed parenting interventions have a positive effect on parenting and school readiness, professionals report that parenting supports are fragmented and may diverge from actual parent/caregiver concerns. Few communities coordinate resources in a way that strengthens parent/caregivers across the multiple responsibilities that accompany childrearing.

The Center's interviews with family-strengthening professionals produced these insights on why

some community programs for parent/caregivers may be ineffectual.

- Community initiatives and services often focus on children's needs or outcomes. They may have a parent-engagement strategy or have a supplemental program for parent/caregivers, but operate without a full understanding of who is raising children, what are their situations and needs, and how to effectively strengthen these parent/caregivers.
- Programs may not match parent/caregivers' actual roles and needs. Critical gaps may also exist, such as services to help fathers establish paternity or overcome legal barriers to employment.
- Schools, communities of faith, youth development programs, and service agencies may compete for parent/caregivers' time and involvement. Commercial sectors, too, contend for parent/caregivers' attention. These demands overwhelm instead of support parent/caregivers.
- Without a community system for strengthening families, service providers may have trouble helping parent/caregivers gain access to needed supports.
- At the federal and state level, categorical programs with different requirements and program outcomes obstruct the ability of communities to coordinate supports for parent/caregivers and families.
- Some funding programs require parent engagement and leadership, but provide insufficient time, financial support, and technical assistance for these efforts to succeed.

A foremost challenge, according to Rhode Island Kids Count, is funding that:

- Is structured in ways that impede service coordination or alignment.

- Targets families and children with severe problems; resources are particularly inadequate for working with at-risk families to avert crises.
- Sets a time limit on services even if families need continued support to stabilize.²⁵

Adequate financing for parenting-success investments is necessary, but not sufficient, for strengthening families. In *Rebuilding the Nest*, Bronfenbrenner elegantly portrayed the opportunity: "The effective functioning of child-rearing processes in the family and other child settings requires public policies and practices that provide place, time, stability, status, recognition, belief systems, customs, and actions in support of child-rearing activities not only on the part of parent/caregivers, teachers, and other professional personnel, but also relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, communities, and the major economic, social, and political institutions of the entire society."⁶ Although written in 1990, Bronfenbrenner's call for public policies that support families is still timely today.

To enhance the impact of their investments in children and families, parenting-success initiatives must surmount many of these obstacles. The Recommendations for Communities section (on page 18) outlines key steps. However, without policy

"The effective functioning of child-rearing processes in the family and other child settings requires public policies and practices that provide place, time, stability, status, recognition, belief systems, customs, and actions in support of child-rearing activities not only on the part of parent/caregivers, teachers, and other professional personnel, but also relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, communities, and the major economic, social, and political institutions of the entire society.

– Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Rebuilding the Nest*

support, communities will struggle to achieve lasting impact. State and federal governments, along with private grantmakers, must eliminate service-coordination barriers, such as inadequate funding levels, narrow program structures, and regulatory impediments (see Recommendations for Funders section on page 16).

What Do Parenting-Success Systems Look Like?

The goal of a parenting-success system is to strengthen parent/caregivers across the spectrum of their responsibilities. Because parent/caregivers are responsible for children, parenting-success systems include child- and youth-focused services.

What would a parenting-success system look like? It would:

- Offer high-quality services (see Best Practices section on page 19) that build on parent/caregivers' capacities and are tailored to families' unique circumstances.¹
- Use media and other communications strategies to help connect parent/caregivers to community resources.⁵⁰
- Locate higher risk families and tailor supports to their unique situations and preferences.²⁵
- Embed parenting resources within systems that regularly interact with children and families. These resources would enhance families' existing support networks.²⁵
- Empower parent/caregivers as leaders, decisionmakers, and stakeholders in the design and delivery of services.⁵¹
- Invest in parent/caregivers and families in ways that build on the strengths they already have and that move them from support to self-sufficiency.⁵¹

Keeping Parenting-Success Investments Family-Centered

For 30 years, Baltimore agencies have used a unique approach—Enriched Structural Family Therapy (ESFT)—that strengthens parents and caregivers in the context of family and community. As described by Ross Ford, then-CEO of the Martin Pollak Project, ESFT is a “strengths-oriented, solution-focused, skills based and culturally sensitive [approach that] encourages a systemic perspective of families and helps child welfare workers to focus on solutions, not problems and pathology.”⁵²

The origins of the community-based ESFT approach are in the Structural Family Therapy model (connected with Salvador Minuchin and Jay Haley). Adapting the clinical model for widespread use with inner-city families, Ford and colleagues identified specific principles, skills, tools, and practices that both licensed counselors and trained peer leaders, such as “natural helpers,” can deliver effectively. For example, the My Baby's Father Family Charting exercise captures family dynamics and motivates family members to participate in the strengthening process. ESFT validates and builds on existing strengths of primary caregivers; community wraparound enables families to access the services they need to achieve their goals.⁵²

Today, the ESFT cultural framework and practices can be found in father-involvement programs, foster care services, recidivism prevention programs, and in the Baltimore Rising Family Strengthening Initiative, which Ford now leads. For more information, see Ford (2002).

There is no single model for parenting-success systems. Instead, resources offered to parent/caregivers must correspond with local parent/caregivers' strengths, needs, and aspirations for their families. Public-private partnerships can leverage existing resources for greater impact by:

- Improving access to services (such as through transportation, convenient hours and locations, child care, service in multiple languages, and programs).
- Designating one or more groups to reach out to isolated families and those with multiple risks.
- Enabling case managers to efficiently and effectively coordinate services from different sources.
- Using technologies and creating forums to strengthen existing or establish new networks of parenting resources.

An Investment Portfolio for Parenting Success

Figure 3 shows how parenting-success systems invest in three areas: strengthening community environments, supporting and enhancing parenting, and building child and family assets.

Strengthening Community Environments are investments that improve the local contexts, primary environments, and macro system (see Figure 1) so as to strengthen parent/caregivers and families. Community-level initiatives could focus on boosting outcomes for disadvantaged students in public

schools, expanding affordable and high-quality child care options for low-income families, creating a local earned income tax credit, or organizing a multi-faceted campaign promoting “quality time” between parent/caregivers and children.

Supporting and Enhancing Parenting are investments that shape positive parenting practices and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Beyond developing parent/caregivers' knowledge and skills, these investments also link parent/caregivers to role models and community resources.

Building Child and Family Assets are investments that build the family's assets and address family needs with goals of eventual self-sufficiency and stability. Investments can be in the family's resources for basic survival (e.g., food and housing); economic assets (e.g., savings accounts); intangible assets (e.g., child and youth development, literacy, post-secondary education, job skills); and primary support systems (e.g., child care, social networks). The goal is to integrate parenting resources – such as parenting education or opportunities for parent/caregiver leadership—into each sector that affects families on a daily basis.

Coordinating resources among the investment areas helps reduce fragmentation and maximize benefits. (Appendix A offers alternate models of how communities can organize these supports.)

FIGURE 3.
Framework for Parenting Success

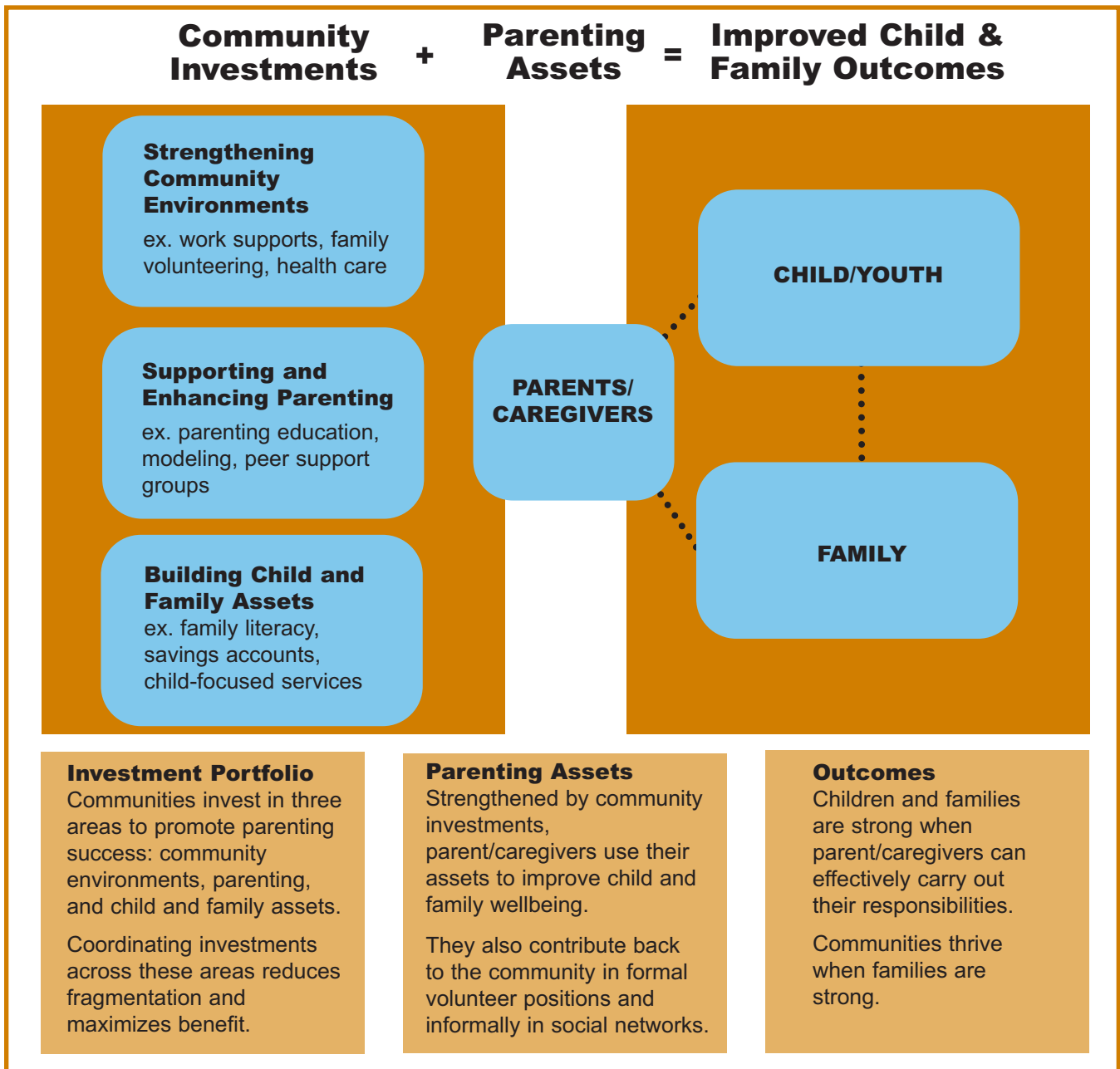


Figure 4 offers concrete examples of investments in the three areas, along with efforts to improve the macro system. It illustrates only a portion of the many ways communities can strengthen children and youth by building up parent/caregivers and families. Notably, investments in one area can have secondary effects in others, and some strategies span multiple investment areas.

A “Fourth” Domain: The Macro System

Figure 4 includes the macro system because sustaining improvements in child, youth, and family wellbeing requires changing the cultural context in which families live, work, learn, and strive to succeed.^{6, 24, 53} When local and national cultures highly value the contributions of families raising children and youth, changes will occur in social

FIGURE 4. Examples of Investments in Parenting Success by Area

| Area | Strategies (Examples) |
|---|--|
| <p>Strengthening Community Environments</p> | <p>Ideally, each segment of society offers resources for families as part of a comprehensive system to strengthen parent/caregivers. Further, each segment specifically reaches out to higher-risk families and participates in service coordination with other sectors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safety net to help parent/caregivers meet their families’ basic needs: food, housing, child care, health care, and transportation; accessibility, affordability, and quality matter • Family-supporting jobs and paid leave policies • Opportunities and structures for families to be involved in community building, including, but not limited to family volunteering, parent/caregiver engagement in schools, and neighborhood revitalization • Youth development programs • Integration of parenting education into communications for parent/caregivers, programs for families, and both sectarian and nonsectarian settings • Safe public spaces and venues for families to have fun together, connect with families from other neighborhoods, and learn about resources in the community |
| <p>Supporting and Enhancing Parenting</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting education and training • Parent/caregiver support groups • Modeling (informal and formal) • Public education campaigns that promote positive parenting practices (such as reading to children every day, making family dinners a routine practice) |
| <p>Building Child and Family Assets</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic asset-building (savings, homeownership, individual development accounts) • Programs focused on developing a specific asset, such as family literacy programs, employment services and training, father involvement, afterschool programs • Services to help one of more family members with a challenging situation such as disability, domestic violence, substance abuse, asset forfeiture/loss, incarceration, divorce • Child-focused investments • Hotlines, 2-1-1, and Web sites to connect with existing community resources • Efforts to enrich social networks • Family resource centers, family support centers, and community schools • Case management and the provision of family-focused services |
| <p>Macro System</p> | <p>Improve the macro system in which parent/caregivers are raising children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media campaigns to change social norms and build support for family-friendly policies • Economic revitalization initiatives that give priority to neighborhoods where families with children live <p>For additional investments, please see the Center’s forthcoming policy brief with a macro policy agenda for strengthening low-income families with children. (http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/practice/practices.html)</p> |
| <p>Cross-Cutting</p> | <p>These examples cut across at least two domains. Initiatives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create parenting-rich communities (see textbox on page 16) • Reduce teen pregnancy rates in all parts of the community • Increase homeownership rates among lower-income families with children |

structures. Namely, conditions should improve so that low-income families can achieve economic self-sufficiency and so that supports abound that reinforce nurturing, caring relationships in families.

In this sense, the macro system is an additional domain of parenting success. Community leaders must assist in this cultural transformation. Relationship education can be integrated into the pre-K through 12 education system and youth development programs; policy makers and clergy can articulate the necessity of affirming positive family relationships and investing in family financial stability. In late 2007, the Center will publish a policy brief with a macro policy agenda for strengthening low-income families with children.

Best Practices

As discussed in The Opportunity section, well-designed parenting programs can benefit both parent/caregivers and children. Other parent-focused investments may produce few positive effects if they do not adhere to best practices and evidence-based programs that correspond with parent/caregivers' needs and interests.^{1, 3, 4, 32}

Having a peer-support component and targeting families that have children with special needs are two practices associated with effective programs, according to a 2001 Abt Associates review of family-support programs. Programs that have both of these elements have, on average, a large effect on parent attitudes and knowledge (0.65), more than triple the effect of programs with neither (0.17). Parent self-development, defined as "parents' skills as effective adults—their self-confidence, self-empowerment, family management and parenting," is another component that doubled the effect size (0.49) on parenting behaviors compared to programs without this goal (0.26).³²

Creating Parenting-Rich Communities (CPRC)

<http://www.cwla.org/parenting>

With support from the Prudential Foundation, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has been building the capacity of communities to engage parent/caregivers and other community leaders in the process of making their community a place that values and supports families. Characteristics of parenting-rich communities are that they support parents and caregivers from all backgrounds; resources, information, and supports are abundant, readily available, and extend from infancy through young adulthood; and a comprehensive support network nurtures all parent/caregivers and helps all children thrive.⁵⁴

The CPRC communities, family-serving agencies, and parent/caregivers are focusing on eight key supports that parent/caregivers need: childcare and afterschool activities; education; employment; family structure and support; financial security; health (physical health, mental health, and substance abuse); housing; safe neighborhoods and environments.²⁶

The process and structure of each CPRC is unique because each community finds its own path.⁵⁴ To assist in this process, CWLA created "design guides" or comprehensive databases that link users to reliable sources of online information as well as evaluated programs and policies. This fall CWLA will release its CPRC Process Guide, which will be available on its Web site.

The literature and family-strengthening professionals indicate that high-quality initiatives—which have the following features—are those that produce the strongest, most enduring results from investments.

- Use evidence-based practices.¹ Peer support, targeting services to families with children with special needs, and parent self-development are three such practices indicated in the Abt Associates review.³²
- Involve parent/caregivers, youth, and service providers as decision-makers in how communities strengthen families.^{1, 51}
- Generate synergy among multiple initiatives to create a critical mass of supports necessary to produce the intended benefits. Studies indicate a dual-generation approach that combines child- and parent-focused investments can produce statistically significant positive effects in both populations.^{1, 4, 25, 34, 53, 55}
- Secure and sustain adequate program resources. Otherwise, program resource limitations can be a real barrier to helping families stabilize and progress towards their goals.¹
- Assure service professionals have the requisite knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality and culturally relevant services and to establish positive relationships with families.^{1, 25, 32, 56, 57}
- Start services at the right time, before a crisis occurs or major problem takes root, and continue for a sufficient time to produce the intended benefits.^{24, 25, 53}
- Tailor supports for the specific strengths, priorities, and needs of the family as a whole.^{1, 51} Case management can assure that families both receive the right supports and actively participate in setting goals and implementing plans.⁵⁶

An additional evidence-based practice from the Triple P Positive Parenting model is offering a menu of supports to families because parent/caregivers have differing needs, preferences, and availabilities.¹⁴ The menu could include the following.

- Short-term, low-intensity, or self-help programs for families with few risks, such as parenting education programs and family fun nights.^{14, 24}
- Intensive and longer-lasting supports for families with multiple risks. For this population, what works are intensive approaches that attend to adult-life issues affecting parent/caregivers.^{1, 14, 24, 25}
- Specialized programming for adolescent parent/caregivers, grandfamilies, families with one or both parent/caregivers deployed for military service, families with an incarcerated parent or partner, blended families, and other groups of families with distinct needs. The development of mutual support networks is a highly promising approach.^{1, 24, 32}

The Triple P model also includes wrap-around media and promotional campaigns. Using multiple communication modes, campaigns direct parent/caregivers to supports, promote positive-parenting practices for common behavioral issues, and build community awareness about the pivotal role of parent/caregivers in child development.¹⁴ Such campaigns could be mobilized around the issue of “quality time” between parent/caregivers and children or other themes that speak to universal parenting challenges and can attract new investments in parenting success.

Recommendations for Communities

Summary of Findings

Few communities have an effective parenting-success system. As a result, too many families, especially those with multiple risks, fail to receive supports that would enhance their capacity to function.

By mobilizing public and private sectors for parenting success, communities can improve outcomes for children, families, and neighborhoods. The literature and the experience of professionals in the field strongly point to dual-generation approaches—those that combine child-focused services with investments that build parent/caregivers' assets across their multiple roles—as having the most impact. Effective parenting-success systems also proactively connect higher risk families to community resources.

Mobilizing Communities for Parenting Success

Parenting success calls for an unparalleled mobilization. Because each community sector has a stake in improving child and family outcomes, each has responsibility to contribute.

This mobilization would not be typical. Instead, it should focus on families with the greatest challenges and use proven strategies. The seven primary steps are:

- Identifying families in the community that have significant risks.
- Understanding the challenges that most affect parent/caregivers in these higher risk families.
- Developing goals and benchmarks to measure progress in strengthening higher risk families.
- Focusing on areas where strategic investments can have the most impact.

- Investing in policies, programs, and services that directly address the challenges facing parent/caregivers in higher risk families and that correspond with the areas mostly likely to produce a positive impact. (See also Best Practices section on page 16.)
- Developing specific strategies for identifying and connecting with higher risk families that, because of frequent moves, language barriers, or other, fall through the cracks. For example, door-to-door outreach along with community-wide protocols for referral and case management can raise the odds that isolated families become connected to a single agency that serves as a case manager.
- Advocating for state and federal policy changes that will enable communities to effectively coordinate parenting-success investments.

Following the above steps, community partnerships would develop a plan of specific tactics and a vision of parenting success. The resulting plan would specify prevention investments, interventions, and policy changes necessary to achieve goals. Appendix B lists useful community mobilization guidance and tools.

Community mobilization means giving parent/caregivers significant roles in the partnership. Over time, each community sector and each level of government would institutionalize opportunities for parent/caregivers to serve as decision-makers, stakeholders, and leaders. To engage parent/caregivers from disadvantaged neighborhoods, communities will need to go the extra mile with outreach, leadership or advocacy training, mentoring, development of culturally appropriate forums, and incentives for participation.

Recommendations for Funders of Children, Youth, Parents, and Family Services

Bold action by policy makers and private funding agencies is needed to position communities to build effective parenting-success systems.

An important, low-cost step would be *reducing fragmentation in policies and programs* that serve children, youth, parent/caregivers, and families.^{1, 25} Governments and funders can give community-based agencies flexible parameters for serving families in line with performance benchmarks. Waivers or other authorizations can enable service providers or community partnerships to blend multiple funding streams to meet local priorities. Streamlining administrative processes and rules is another way to encourage the delivery of family-centered supports.^{25, 58} These types of changes will ensure communities can weave together programs to strengthen higher risk families.

Other steps for governments and funders aim to *improve the quality of existing parenting and family resources* by:

- Convening community-based agencies to develop referral networks and case management systems.¹
- Supporting research that examines the costs and benefits of different combinations and intensities of programs and services and that establishes additional evidence-based models.¹
- Offering consultation and planning grants to help community partnerships map existing parenting resources; examine parent/caregivers' strengths, needs, and priorities; develop community implementation plans; and secure contributions for executing the plans.

- Identifying evidence-based practices and encouraging uptake among the many sectors that serve families. For example, technical assistance and training can increase the capacity of community groups to deliver family-centered care.

A third key step is for public agencies to *involve parent/caregivers as decision makers and stakeholders* in policy development and program reviews. Such action raises the odds that initiatives will be effective because they match parent/caregivers' actual needs and preferences.⁴⁹ In a similar way, funders should alter grantmaking and contracting systems to give preference to programs that use evidence-based practices and give parent/caregivers significant roles in service design and monitoring.^{25, 51, 58} Such parent engagement and leadership efforts require sufficient time and funding to succeed.

Additional Ways to Strengthen Parent/Caregivers and Families

Prior briefs from the Family Strengthening Policy Center present leading strategies for strengthening families and its individual members, along with their communities. The Center will publish additional policy briefs this year on promising strategies that promote parenting success.

Resources

Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF)

www.aecf.org

Making Connections is AECF's decade-long, flagship initiative to demonstrate that the best way to improve outcomes for vulnerable children living in tough neighborhoods is to strengthen their families' connections to economic opportunity, positive social networks, and effective services and supports. Making Connections advances a dual-generation approach. First, parents need connections to good jobs and asset-building opportunities. Second, children benefit from better health care, quality early childhood services, and more intensive supports. The foundation's Knowledge Center connects visitors with proven and promising practices. The AECF Family Strengthening Awards Web site features exemplary local programs (<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/RelatedInitiative/FAMILYESCOUNT/FamilyStrengtheningAwards.aspx>).

Casey Family Programs

www.casey.org

www.powerfulfamilies.org

With 40 years of experience in providing direct services and serving as a national advocate for change, Casey Family Programs is the largest foundation focused solely on improving the lives of children and youth in foster care. Its mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care. The foundation is the source of Powerful Families, which seeks to empower parents through tools to advocate for the material and psychological needs of their families.

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)

www.cwla.org/parenting

CWLA is an association of nearly 800 public and private nonprofit agencies that assist more than 3.5 million abused and neglected children and their families each year with a range of services. Creating Parenting-Rich Communities is CWLA's national initiative to strengthen parents, children, and

communities. Design guides, or comprehensive databases on parent supports, are on this Web site and a process guide is forthcoming.

Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, USDA (CSREES)

CYFERnet (Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network)

www.CYFERnet.org

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) is an agency within the US Department of Agriculture. The agency works closely with a great network of state, regional, and county extension offices in every state and territory. This Cooperative Extension System is one of the principal providers of parent education programs in the US.

Administered by CSREES, CYFERnet brings together the best information resources on children, youth, and families from the nation's land-grant universities and their partners. Visitors can find program, evaluation, and technology resources to inform community-based programs for at-risk children and families. Two particularly useful resources in CYFERnet are:

- National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework (http://cyfernet.org/ncsu_fcs/NEPEF)
- National Extension Parent Education Model of Critical Parenting Practices (http://www.cyfernet.org/parenting_practices/preface.html)

The Finance Project

www.financeproject.org

As a specialized nonprofit firm, The Finance Project helps public and private sector leaders make smart investment decisions, develop sound financing strategies, and build solid partnerships that benefit children, families and communities. Its Web site is home to several information clearinghouses that offer information on a wide range of family-strengthening opportunities. The firm's publications are another useful resource.

FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP)

www.friendsnrc.org

FRIENDS is an acronym for Family Resource Information, Education, and Network Development Service. With funding from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, FRIENDS provides services to the CBCAP community through targeted training and technical assistance efforts.

Healthy Teen Network

www.healthyteennetwork.org

Devoted to making a difference in the lives of teens and young families, HTN is a national organization focused on adolescent health and wellbeing with an emphasis on teen pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy, and teen parenting.

National Human Services Assembly

Family Strengthening Policy Center

www.nassembly.org/fspc

The National Human Services Assembly's Family Strengthening Policy Center identifies practice-based approaches to strengthening families raising children in low-income communities and explores policy implications. The Center's policy briefs cover the three core areas essential to strengthening families: family economic success, family support systems, and thriving and nurturing communities.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)

www.ncpie.org

NCPIE's mission is to advocate the involvement of parents and families in their children's education and to foster relationships between home, school, and community to enhance the education of all our nation's young people. Its Web site offers a wide-ranging list of parenting organizations, publications, and online resources.

National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY)

www.ncfy.com

Established by the Family and Youth Services Bureau in the US Department of Health and Human Services, NCFY links those interested in youth issues with the resources they need to better serve young people, families, and communities.

National Parenting Education Network (NPEN)

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/npen/>

National Parenting Education Network is a national umbrella organization that encourages information sharing, professional development, and networking opportunities for the 250,000 professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers who serve as parent educators.

National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI)

www.fcnetwork.org/

Hosted by the Family and Correction Network, the resource center offers information about and technical assistance to programs, agencies, and organizations working with children and families of the incarcerated. It also serves as a connection between and among programs and services and produces materials that aid in advocacy and service delivery initiatives.

Parents Anonymous® Inc.

www.parentsanonymous.org

Parents Anonymous is a community of parents, organizations, and volunteers committed to strengthening families and building strong communities; achieving meaningful parent leadership and shared leadership; and leading the field of child abuse and neglect. In independent evaluations, Parents Anonymous programs for adults and children both reduced risk factors and enhanced protective factors.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. Online resources include a database of model programs, statistics, and analyses relating to positive youth development and strengthening families and communities. The office also sponsors technical assistance and training for public agencies.

Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI)SM

www.PLTI-CT.org

PLTI enables parents to become leading advocates for children. PLTI offers a 20-week structured course in which parents develop skills and gain experience in being community change agents. An independent evaluation demonstrated its effectiveness in boosting parent engagement.

Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars

www.familyimpactseminars.org/index.asp

A resource for state-based family policy, the institute's Web site offers up-to-date, policy relevant information on family issues being debated in state legislatures across the country. Visitors can also learn more about teaching family policy, find out how to analyze programs and policies for their impact on families, and access family data and policy reports on families published by other organizations. The institute is an initiative of the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension.

APPENDIX A. Alternate Models for Organizing Parenting-Success Resources

Two Models for Organizing a Comprehensive Continuum of Parenting Services

The following two service models have elements in common, yet provide different ways to structure a system of supports for parents, caregivers, and families. In using either model, community networks must also review services from the lens of different family types (such as single parents, grandparents raising children, teen parent/caregivers, expectant parents) and situations (such as incarceration, immigration status) to assure community supports meet a wide span of family needs.²⁵

A. Service Intensity Model: service intensity increases in tandem with family risks.^{24, 25, 59}

| <i>Service Intensity</i> | | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Low</i> | | | | <i>High</i> |
| Basic Information, Support | Screenings, Assessments, Referrals | Parent Education, Peer Support, Family Skills Training | Intensive, Individualized Family Support | Family Preservation Services, Family Therapy |

B. Prevention Model: communities provide services for each level of prevention.^{14, 24, 60}

| <i>Primary Prevention (Universal)</i> | <i>Secondary Prevention (Selective)</i> | <i>Tertiary Prevention (Indicated)</i> |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Population: entire or general population</p> <p>Typical Goals: preventing problems before they occur; sustaining or enhancing wellbeing and positive outcomes</p> | <p>Population: families or neighborhoods with increased risks</p> <p>Typical Goals: mitigating risks, providing supports</p> | <p>Population: families with prior child maltreatment or the highest-risk families</p> <p>Typical Goals: minimize negative effects and prevent recurrence</p> |

APPENDIX B.

Key Resources on Mobilizing Communities

Many resources are available on community mobilization. Readers may find the tools and guides on the following Web sites particularly useful because they address engaging low-income and other disadvantaged populations in community building.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

<http://www.aecf.org/Home/KnowledgeCenter/CommunityChange.aspx>

Making Connections is one several investments by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improve the outcomes for families and children in tough or isolated neighborhoods. The foundation's KnowledgeCenter offers some useful resources on family-centered community building, including: *Not Quite Chaos*, *Residents Engaged in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods* and *A Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage in Making Connections Communities*.

Assets Based Community Development Institute

<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>

Based on the noteworthy research by John Kretzmann and John L. McKnight at Northwestern University, the institute's Web site offers outstanding resources and tools for building communities by mobilizing neighborhood assets. A key resource is the Kretzmann and McKnight 1993 book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Another is the Hidden Treasures report and toolbox that focus on engaging marginalized populations.

Child Welfare League of America

<http://www.cwla.org/parenting>

This fall, CWLA will post online a process guide for creating parenting-rich communities. It will offer tools and resources whether a community is planning a major initiative or enhancing its existing investments in parent support and family strengthening.

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/index.jsp>

The Tool Box provides practical guidance for the different tasks necessary to promote community health and development. For

instance, there are sections on leadership, strategic planning, community assessment, grant writing, and evaluation to give just a few examples. Each section includes a description of the task, advantages of doing it, step-by-step guidelines, examples, checklists of points to review, and training materials.

Fieldstone Alliance

http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/client_pages/index_publishing.cfm

Wilder Publishing Center and Wilder National Consulting Services are now Fieldstone Alliance, which promotes tried-and-true community-building practices. Although some publications must be purchased, the alliance also offers several free resources (see Free Resources in the main menu).

Inventing Civic Solutions: A How-to Guide on Launching and Sustaining Successful Community Programs

www.pew-partnership.org/resources/index.html

The Pew Partnership for Civic Change presents eight case studies of civic efforts to overcome tough issues at the community level. The report analyzes factors for success and offers guidance for others who may want to replicate the initiatives.

NeighborWorks® America

<http://www.nw.org/network/home.asp>

Created by Congress, this national nonprofit organization provides financial support, technical assistance, and training for community-based revitalization efforts. Two key programs are: Community Building, and Organizing and Youth in Community Development. Community Organizing in NeighborWorks® Organizations reports on a three-year study of 18 NeighborWorks® groups and their community-organizing efforts.

Points of Light Foundation

<http://www.pointsoflight.org/neighbor>

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Points of Light Foundation developed and promotes neighboring, which is an empowerment and assessment-based approach to volunteer engagement in under-resourced communities. A Neighboring Action Kit is available for free downloads.

APPENDIX C.

What We Did to Develop this Framework

To identify principles and practices for parenting success as a strategy for strengthening families, the Family Strengthening Policy Center conducted a literature review and key informant interviews. The informants represent 27 national and local organizations. Additionally, Center staff made a site visit in Baltimore to understand how the City of Baltimore and its partners are creating community-based family-strengthening systems that directly invest in parenting success.

The Center established an ad hoc working group of members and experts to further build consensus on principles and practices. This group reviewed two drafts of the framework. The Center deeply appreciates the many contributions of the working group as well as the individuals who participated in interviews.

The views and findings expressed in this policy brief are solely the responsibility of the Family Strengthening Policy Center and do not necessarily reflect the views of the working group members or their organizations.

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This series of policy briefs produced by the Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC) seeks to describe a new way of thinking about how to strengthen families raising children in low-income communities and how this approach can and should influence policy. The premise of “family strengthening” in this context, and as championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is that children do well when cared for by supportive families, which, in turn, do better when they live in vital and supportive communities. The series describes ways in which enhancing connections within families and between families and the institutions that affect them result in better outcomes for children and their families.

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The Center benefits from the guidance and involvement of the Family Strengthening Peer Network, which provides opportunities for its members to share knowledge on family strengthening strategies, learn what other organizations are doing, and find synergies and potential areas of collaboration.

This brief reflects the findings and views of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, which is solely responsible for its content. For more information or to access other family strengthening policy briefs, visit www.nassembly.org/fspc.

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