



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
*Office of the Commissioner*

S. Duke Storen  
Commissioner

January 3, 2022

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** The Honorable Ralph S. Northam  
Governor of Virginia

Members, Virginia General Assembly

**FROM:** S. Duke Storen *S. Duke Storen*

**SUBJECT:** Annual Report on Two Generation/Whole Family Pilot

The attached report is submitted pursuant to Item 356 (4) of the 2020 Appropriation Act. Please contact me if you have questions. Thank you.

SDS:kc  
Attachment

Report to the  
Virginia General Assembly  
On the Two-Generation/Whole  
Family Pilot Project for 2020/21

**Report to the Virginia General Assembly on the  
Two-Generation/Whole Family Pilot Project for 2020/21**

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## **Report to the Virginia General Assembly**

### **On the Two-Generation/Whole**

### **Family Pilot Project for 2020/21**

## **Executive Summary**

The FY 2020 and FY2021 Virginia State Budget included provisions for the Community Action Agency (CAA) Two-Generation/Whole Family Pilot Project and provided \$1.125 million from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant. The goal of this pilot project is to test and evaluate concepts and specific interventions that represent two-generation or whole family approaches to move families out of poverty in a variety of communities throughout the Commonwealth. VDSS intends to evaluate the pilot program and disseminate information about the results and impact of this multi-generational approach over a five-year period, releasing information and progress on the pilot annually, with the hope that it will accelerate the development of two-generation or whole family strategies by increasing knowledge about what families need and what works.

In FY2020, VDSS developed a program design and Request for Applications built on supporting pilot projects in CAAs of varied size, capacity, and geographic locations. The program design set the following priorities/goals:

- Support selected families in achieving self-sufficiency;
- Utilize Family Coaching models and Family Coaches, to ensure that the pilot project receives dedicated support for families at each of the selected agencies throughout the project;
- Document and learn from activities and outcomes achieved by parents, children and families in different places around the state;
- Increase knowledge of the barriers families face and the cost of helping families overcome the barriers and achieve their goals; and
- Replicate, improve, or expand pilot activities that work in future years.

The beginning of the project focused on selecting six pilot sites through a competitive Request for Application (RFA) and developing a Virginia Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach Community of Practice (COP). The entire project involves the continuous support of all the selected agencies by the National Community Action Partnership. The first year of the project included hiring family coaches at each of the sites, developing agency-specific program designs, enrolling and serving families, beginning collection of data and tracking of outcomes, and development of comprehensive logic models and theories of change. Key tactics used to achieve the above outputs included providing intensive technical assistance on various aspects of designing and implementing a whole family approach, training related to intake and outcome tracking tools and best practices, and frequent peer sharing and learning meetings. Agencies began identifying and selecting families in early-to-mid 2020.

The first two years of the Virginia Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach Pilot Project implementation accomplishments include:

- Selection of six pilot sites through a competitive Request for Application (RFA);
- Hiring of family coaches at each site (by March 2020);
- Development and implementation of specific agency whole family program designs;
- Enrollment of families; and
- Data collection.

Just as the pilot sites began enrolling families in March 2020, Virginia communities began feeling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that many planned services such as continuing education efforts for parents and early childhood education for young children were delayed, scaled back, or paused – and remained so throughout 2021. Families with school-age children have experienced significant challenges including needing to delay employment and job searches due to lack of childcare. Each of the agencies have been engaged in providing supports as well as crisis services to families in response to these unprecedented conditions.

Essential supports such as food and other nutritional assistance were critical as food insecurity escalated with more family members at home for meals and incomes reduced or eliminated due to reduced hours or unemployment. The VDSS technical assistance provider, the National Community Action Partnership (Partnership) provided extensive support to assist the pilot sites in navigating through the shifts in service delivery and refinement of design plan elements brought about by the pandemic. Despite the unpredictability of the circumstances, each of the pilot sites engaged in several impressive innovations to continue support for their customers. In addition to leveraging technology to maintain engagement, sites have also found creative ways to use project funding to meet families' needs during the pandemic and recovery.

The support provided by the family coaches has helped families begin to get a foothold on more solid ground that positions them to move forward with sufficient time and continued support. Family progress does take time, and that is even truer during the unprecedented pandemic. Even with these challenges, the sites were able to complete their first-year plans and have retained and continued their work with the original families during the second year of the pilot project.

At the conclusion of the second year, 91 households and a total of 323 persons have been enrolled in the pilot project. In the second-year, sites collected data on family demographics, services, and outcomes. The Partnership collected customer satisfaction information from approximately 33% of participating families. This quantitative and qualitative data indicate that despite the pandemic, sites have been able to retain families and help them move forward as evidenced by the following results:

- Sixty-three percent of households participating are single-parent, female headed households. Forty-one percent of households enrolled in the pilot have incomes below 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG), and for a family of three; this is an annual income of \$10,980. Of the 91 households participating, 67 have employment income.
- Families complete a Life Cycle assessment that looks at functioning across 15 domains. The first assessment and last assessment were compared and initial analysis of progress to date indicates average scores have increased in every domain. The largest gains are seen in the employment/income, financial management, and community involvement domains. Many of the sites have provided employment related supports, financial empowerment training, and credit repair which may have contributed to the increases in the employment/income and financial management domains. Pilot sites have also provided social capital building opportunities and mental health supports which may have helped to increase families' feelings of connectedness to others in the community.
- Over the two-year period, income changes have been recorded for 41 of the 91 households enrolled. Of these 41 households, 26 households have increased income, 13 households decreased income, and 2 reported no change. The remaining households did not have an income change recorded which likely means there was no change in income over the two-year period. This data indicates 26 percent of the households enrolled have achieved an

- increase in earned income during the first two years, and during a worldwide pandemic and economic crisis.
- All six pilot sites have been recording outcomes for families. Additional data collection and analysis is needed, but it is clear families have secured living wage jobs, obtained certifications, secured reliable transportation, avoided eviction improved credit and financial well-being, improved mental health and family functioning, and prepared children for kindergarten (See Table 4. for details)
  - A customer satisfaction survey was completed by 33% of families. One question asked families to compare their feeling of empowerment to achieve personal goals when they started to their current feeling. The average response was 2.8 (Scale 1= not true, 2=somewhat true, and 3=very true) representing a strong feeling or belief that they can control the trajectory of their lives. This feeling of power and autonomy is a critical driver or component of economic mobility.
  - The customer satisfaction survey also asked families to use a sliding scale (0= unsatisfied, 100= extremely satisfied) to indicate their level of satisfaction of services received while participating in the pilot, respondents indicated a resounding 92.8% satisfaction rate.

Though challenged by COVID-19 related issues, the six Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach Pilot Project sites have established the conditions for families to advance and improve their well-being. As sites advance deeper into implementation of their whole family approach, data continues to be analyzed, and as families have more time to recover from the pandemic and pursue their goals, the pilot project will begin to reveal more answers about what works, where it works, who it works for and why.

# Report on Two Generation/Whole Family Pilot

November 2021

## **Background & Report Mandate**

The Virginia Community Action network has worked to identify and incorporate evolving practices for providing services and achieving substantive outcomes for families. One of the most promising and expanding approaches nationally is the Whole Family (or Two-Generation) Approach. The Whole Family approach seeks to use comprehensive case management and coordinated, focused agency service delivery to address the needs of the entire family, rather than individual members of the family. In FY 2020 and 2021, the Virginia General Assembly provided funding for a pilot project for the Whole Family approach.

Item 356 (4) of the 2020 Appropriation Act states:

*"Out of this appropriation, \$1,125,000 the second year from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant shall be provided for competitive grants to Community Action Agencies for a Two-Generation/Whole Family Pilot Project and for evaluation of the pilot project. Applicants selected for the pilot project shall provide a match of no less than 20 percent of the grant, including in-kind services. The Department of Social Services shall report to the General Assembly annually on the progress of the pilot project and shall complete a final report on the project no later than six years after the commencement of the project."*

## **Pilot Overview**

The Virginia Whole Family Pilot Project was created to test and evaluate child, parent, and family-focused strategies to alleviate multi-generational poverty in a variety of communities throughout the Commonwealth.

Supporting pilot projects in Community Action Agencies (CAAs) of varied size, capacity, and geographic locations, VDSS seeks to achieve the following results:

- Support selected families in achieving self-sufficiency;
- Utilize family coaching models and family coaches to ensure that the pilot project receives dedicated support for families at each of the selected agencies throughout the project;
- Document and learn from activities and outcomes achieved by parents, children, and families in different places around the state;
- Increase knowledge of the barriers families face and the cost of helping families overcome the barriers and achieve their goals; and
- Replicate, improve, or expand pilot activities that work in future years.

During the first two years, the six pilot sites participating in the Virginia Whole Family Approach Pilot Project have focused on, hiring family coaches at each site, developing and implementing agency-specific program designs, enrolling and serving families, collecting data, and tracking outcomes. VDSS and the Partnership have used key tactics, include providing intensive technical assistance on various aspects of designing and implementing a whole family approach, training related to intake and outcome tracking tools and best practices, and frequent coaching calls and peer sharing and learning meetings.

From mid-February to March 30, 2020, the CAAs worked diligently to enroll families and begin providing supports. Enrollment level results are as follows:

- September 30, 2020, 61 families enrolled, representing 81 adults and 131 children under the age of 18.
- September 30, 2021, 91 families enrolled, representing 123 adults and 200 children under the age of 18.

### **Pilot Implementation Timeline**

To assist the selected pilot sites in their capacity-building and implementation efforts, the implementation team developed a multi-pronged system of learning and support to resource the pilot sites over the course of the project. This peer learning model leverages ongoing research, training, and technical assistance rooted in service integration and key elements of a whole family approach—such as education, economic mobility, health, housing, mental health, and social capital.

Through this framework, the sites have achieved the following milestones in Years 1 and 2 of the project:

- Hiring and training at least one coach at each pilot site and 3 agencies have added a second part time or full-time coach position;
- Participation in an extensive training and T/TA engagement schedule, including monthly cohort meetings, weekly and monthly coaching calls, EmpowOR trainings, and knowledge building webinars;
- Development of individual agency design plan theories of change and logic models for all six sites;
- Development of the tools for sites to use to measure family progress, including the Life Scale and Family Success Plan;
- Administering the Life Scale and Family Success Plan on a regular basis (projected target is quarterly for each family);
- Development and deployment of a whole family approach database, with all six sites making progress on tracking family data through the EmpowOR system; and
- Initiation of data walks to assess family progress and project results.

### **Program Design**

The pilot sites are strategically leveraging program designs that are informed by the [Ascend at the Aspen Institute Two-Generation Approach](#) model and the [Community Action Economic Mobility Building Blocks](#) framework. Both emphasize building family well-being by working with children and the adults in their lives together. The result of these interventions is improved outcomes for parents, children, families, and communities.

The agencies selected to participate in the pilot (to date) include:



Agency	Central Office Location	Localities Served
Hampton Roads Community Action Program	Newport News	Chesapeake, Newport News, Hampton, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Suffolk
The Improvement Association	Emporia	Sussex County, Surry County, Greensville County, Brunswick County, Dinwiddie County
People Inc.	Abingdon	Buchanan County, Dickenson County, Russell County, Washington County, Shenandoah County, Clarke County, Warren County, Page County, Frederick County, Culpeper County, Fauquier County, Rappahannock County, Prince William County, Bristol, Manassas, Manassas Park
Thrive Virginia	New Kent	Caroline County, Charles City County, Hanover County, King and Queen County, King George County, King William County, Spotsylvania County, Stafford County, Fredericksburg
STEPS, Inc.	Farmville	Amelia County, Buckingham County, Cumberland County, Lunenburg County, Nottoway County, Prince Edward County
New River Community Action	Radford	Floyd County, Giles County, Montgomery County, Pulaski County, Radford

## Pilot Site Profiles

### Hampton Roads Community Action Program

Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) is a non-profit Community Action Agency that has been serving the residents of Southeastern Virginia for over 50 years. HRCAP is a key contributor to the economic stability of individuals, families, and the community of the greater Hampton Roads area. Guided by their mission “to improve lives by providing optimum services and mobilizing resources that strengthen our communities”, HRCAP’s primary goal is to disrupt the conditions and causes of poverty in the service area by providing education, employment, emergency assistance, health and housing programs that enable low-income

individuals and families to escape the grip of generational poverty and find a path to self-sufficiency and prosperity.

HRCAP serves the following cities: Chesapeake, Newport News, Hampton, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Suffolk.

#### *HRCAP's Whole Family Approach Design*

Serving a largely urban and industrial area of the state, HRCAP came to the pilot with a wealth of experience in providing robust educational, workforce development, and housing supports for their community. They also facilitate the largest Head Start program in Virginia. Through doing this work, they realized that investing in a whole family approach posed a unique opportunity to streamline services and increase impact for families.

HRCAP's whole family approach vision is to create pathways of change for families by setting life goals; generating an individualized household plan of action to achieve goals. HRCAP achieves this vision through coordinated intake processes and family assessments to get a better look at the interconnected needs of families. Engaging in this process supports families on their path to family stability.

After completing a family assessment, pilot participants are engaged through the coordinated provision of over 23+ programs and services.

In 2020-2021, HRCAP has expanded coaching staff, engaged in financial literacy programs, and expanded whole family approach in core programs and services.

#### **Key outcomes for the pilot include:**

- Living wage employment
- Post-secondary educational attainment
- Increased family financial stability
- Establishing a Savings Account
- Strengthened family connections
- Increased capacity to handle stress/trauma
- Improved health and wellness
- Housing stability
- Increased planned births
- Increased language, literacy, & mathematics for children (0-18 ages)
- Increased school readiness and achievement
- Debt reduction

#### **The Improvement Association**

The Improvement Association (TIA) is a non-profit Community Action Agency that mobilizes community resources to provide comprehensive initiatives and services in several localities in rural Southside Virginia including Sussex County, Surry County, Greensville County, Brunswick County, and Dinwiddie County. Since its creation in 1968, TIA has served as the catalyst that enhances the quality of life in communities through comprehensive initiatives, advocating change, and empowering people to become self-sufficient. TIA comes to the Virginia whole

family approach pilot with 50+ years of experiences in facilitating change for residents in their community from prenatal through adulthood.

### *TIA's Whole Family Approach Design*

Leveraging over 80 years of experience with family supportive services across the members of their guiding coalition, TIA is primed for the opportunity to direct more resources and attention to families within their service area that require an intentional level of coaching and support to break the cycles of poverty within their community. Serving families in a largely rural area means that resources are oftentimes quite few and far between, so supports need to be robust, coordinated, and intentional to give families the best chance to access opportunities for economic mobility in their community.

TIA's whole family approach vision is families are empowered to achieve their dreams as they ascend out of poverty on the stairway of success. TIA's pilot prioritizes families living at or below 200% FPL in the Greenville/Emporia area. Pilot participants have access to a network of 12 wraparound services and supports, grounded in workforce development, postsecondary education, and Head Start.

In 2020-2021 The Improvement Association has engaged in education, coaching, generational wealth-building, and parenting enhancement programs for families so they can strengthen family finances, and relationships with others in their family.

### **Key outcomes for the pilot include:**

- Increased self-sufficiency, power, and autonomy
- Increased educational attainment
- Improved school readiness
- Access to quality and affordable childcare
- Increased certifications/specialized fields
- More positive parenting behaviors
- Job readiness
- Access to living wage employment
- Access to safe and affordable housing
- Increased economic mobility
- Access to reliable transportation
- Improved physical, social, and emotional well-being
- Improved parent/child interactions

### **People Inc.**

People Incorporated has one of the largest Community Action Agency service areas in the state of Virginia, providing supports to the Counties of Buchanan, Clarke, Culpeper, Dickenson, Fauquier, Frederick, Page, Prince William, Rappahannock, Russell, Shenandoah, Warren, and Washington, and the Cities of Bristol, Manassas, and Manassas Park. Established in 1964, the mission is to provide opportunities for economically disadvantaged people to reach their goals to enhance their lives, their families, and their communities.

### *People, Inc. 's Whole Family Approach Design*

People, Inc. came to this pilot project with the unique experience of having participated in a prior whole family approach cohort funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that was facilitated by the National Community Action Partnership. Through that 2-year initiative, People, Inc. developed a framework to support children and parents together. As they continued along the journey of organizational culture shift towards more intentional and coordinated services for families, People, Inc. committed to continuing their efforts to break down programmatic silos to more effectively serve families using the no-wrong-door approach. Utilizing the wide array of services that the organization currently provides to families, their extensive capacity building efforts to optimize impact, and their strong network of community partners, People, Inc. is well positioned to engage in intensive work to improve the lives of families in their community through a whole family approach.

People, Inc.'s whole family approach vision is to help families live with dignity and a true sense of belonging, building futures and realizing their hopes and dreams for themselves, their families and their communities. Their pilot project seeks to prioritize the needs of young families, targeting families with parents aged 28 or younger with children 0-7 living at or below 200% FPL. Families are assessed and develop a personalized Empowerment Plan that assist them in achieving self-identified goals.

In 2020-2021, People, Inc. has been engaging in expanding the whole family approach coaching team and continuing to work with families on transportation and education program support. People Inc. has trained 85 staff in family-centered coaching practices so that a wide range of customers are provided person-centered, integrated services and supports.

#### **Key outcomes for the pilot include:**

- Improved school readiness
- Increased economic stability
- Increased income
- Increased assets
- Increased education level
- Increased resiliency
- Improved parent/child relations
- Increased social capital and community engagement

### **Thrive Virginia**

Thrive Virginia is a private Community Action Agency with a service area encompassing over 2,000 square miles including the counties of Caroline, Charles City, Hanover, King George, King & Queen, King William, New Kent, Spotsylvania, Stafford, the City of Fredericksburg, and the Town of West Point. Their work is anchored in collaboration - working with community-based partners to create pathways to self-sufficiency for individuals and families within the agency's diverse service area.

### *Thrive Virginia's Whole Family Approach Design*

In 2019, Thrive Virginia (formerly known as Quinn River Community Action) engaged in a major reorganization of their work and presence in the community. In addition to their rebranding, Thrive Virginia also committed to transform their service delivery model from one

that approaches services through a siloed approach to one that is integrated, and customer centered. Engaging in a whole family approach provides Thrive with a roadmap to help families overcome the economic and social barriers to success that often accompany rural areas.

The central goal in Thrive Virginia's whole family approach is to revitalize the Charles City community by supporting the well-being of families so that they can reach their fullest potential. They seek to provide a more intentional system of wrap-around supports for TANF eligible families in Charles City County with young children (ages 0-5). Working in close collaboration with community partners, such as Rappahannock Community College, services for families centered around improving post-secondary and childhood education outcomes to build families' resiliency for success. Families also receive access to transportation support, housing assistance, financial empowerment in coordination with 10 other services and programs that will be provided through a "no wrong door" approach.

In 2020-2021, Thrive Virginia has been actively restructuring their guiding coalition to ensure it embodies the community and all levels of staff and is comprehensively able to address service delivery and family engagement. The agency has also developed wellness programs for staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Key outcomes for the pilot include:**

- Increased income/job stability
- Economic stability/emotional well-being
- Less psychological distress/enhanced home learning environment
- Employability and access to community resources
- Children will meet developmental milestones & see improved social adjustments in school and community
- Financial stability and basic needs met continuously.
- Safe, stable, and affordable housing
- Increased ability to build financial assets and increased self-confidence
- Enhanced physical and mental well-being and parent-child interaction
- Increased involvement in community activities and connection to other families.
- Gain/sustain maternal employment and reduced economic hardships
- Increased budgeting skills and financial stability

**STEPS, Inc.**

STEPS, Inc. is the Community Action Agency serving six rural counties - Amelia, Buckingham, Cumberland, Lunenburg, Nottoway, and Prince Edward - in south central Virginia. STEPS has served the community since 1976, providing job training and employment to persons with disabilities. The organization was designated as a Community Action Agency in 2014 and remains dedicated to creating a stronger community through housing, education, workforce, and economic development for individuals and families in their community.

STEPS is dedicated to “Moving Lives Forward” and fulfilling their mission to truly impact their clients; to do this most effectively, they committed to undertaking the systemic improvements needed to ensure that their service delivery model places whole families along the best pathway for success. Over the course of 2020-2021, STEPS leadership and coaching team continued their whole family approach journey by helping families continue to readjust to returning to work and school due to COVID-19 closures. STEPS’ guiding coalition has grown to prioritize the agency’s workforce development and early childhood education programming to map out goals, outcomes, and capacity needs for a full shift to a whole family approach. The STEPS team plans to combine this roadmap with their reputation in the community as a human service organization that “thinks outside the box” to convene new programs, provided either in-house or in collaboration with one of their over 120 partner organizations, to provide a full set of supports for parents and children. STEPS has strengthened programs and provided workshops such as Mental Health Awareness, Vision Boards, and discussing the Child Tax Credit benefit for families.

STEPS’ whole family approach vision is passionate, dedicated staff working in collaboration with families and communities to move lives forward. STEPS is looking to break down department silos and shift to a more transformative model of service provision that will result in a more inclusive, individualized, quality experience to clients that produces measurable results and moves the whole family toward sustainable self-sufficiency. The target population for this effort was identified as Head Start families within their 8-county service area. Following an intake assessment and family goal setting, pilot participants have access to a set 15 wraparound programs and services to help move parents and children forward together.

**Key outcomes for the pilot include:**

- Financial stability
- Increased education level
- Increased work/trade skills
- Work readiness (resume, interview, dress)
- Increase independence
- Gain/sustain employment
- Obtain necessary insurances
- Legal compliance
- Improved living environment
- Increase connection to community
- Medical & dental care/preventative
- Mental health – self regulation,
- Improve parent child interactions
- School success/attendance
- Childcare
- Healthy baby
- Improved parent child interactions

Serving four counties in rural southwestern Virginia, New River Community Action (NRCA) is a private Community Action Agency with over 50 years of presence in the community. NRCA's mission is to promote and support the well-being and self-reliance of individuals, families, and communities. To do this work, NRCA works with some of the most vulnerable populations within their community to improve lives through emergency assistance, Head Start, Virginia CARES, CHIP, housing and homelessness, and VITA programming. NRCA services the following localities: Floyd County, Giles County, Montgomery County, Pulaski County, and Radford.

### *NRCA's Whole Family Approach Design*

NRCA joined the pilot project with previous experience in connecting early childhood education and workforce development services for parents and children. Their goal for participating in the project is to build their organizational capacity to remove program silos and create a customizable set of services for each family. NRCA has invested in a robust inter-departmental referral system to help ensure that clients are comprehensively connected to services across the agency.

NRCA's whole family approach vision focuses on families in Giles and Pulaski Counties that are enrolled in either CHIP or Head Start. After meeting with the Family Navigator and developing a set of personalized parent, child, and family goals, pilot participants can be connected to almost 20 programs and services to ensure that their families have opportunities to reach their full social, health, educational, and economic potential as they work to achieve their goals. In 2020-2021, New River has been working through some agency transitions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued to support family goals through training for peer support specialist certification and additional education and employment supports.

### **Key outcomes for the pilot include:**

- Increased family income
- Family financial stability
- Education level
- Diploma, degree, or certification
- School readiness
- Rewarding career
- Positive parenting behaviors
- Medical and dental coverage
- Mental health and social-emotional well-being
- Housing stability
- Transportation stability

### **Creating Conditions for Family Well-Being**

During year one, the pilot sites used the Virginia Two-Generation/Whole Family Pilot project resources to begin to create conditions for families to achieve well-being. All six sites designed and launched whole family approaches, recruited families, and helped them create plans to move toward economic security. The family plans and initial services have helped families begin to get a foothold on more solid ground that positions them to move forward with sufficient time and continued support. Family progress does take time, and that is even more true during the unprecedented health pandemic that hit in early 2020 just as the pilot sites were starting their

work with families. Even with a health and economic crisis raging, the sites were able to complete the key activities outlined below in the first year and continue supporting families and helping them advance in year two.

### **Launching Family Coaching Practices**

A central component of the pilot project was providing resources to the pilot sites to hire a full-time family coach. All six sites hired a coach to work intensively with families enrolled in the whole family approach pilot project. VDSS required that the family coaches work only with families enrolled in the pilot project.

The coaches received training and support from the National Community Action Partnership, the technical assistance provider. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were two in-person trainings held and all other training and technical assistance was conducted virtually. The Prosperity Agenda's tools for [Family-Centered Coaching](#) were provided to the coaches. This open-source training was developed with the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Family-Centered Coaching is a set of strategies, tools, and resources that help coaches and their organizations shift how they engage with, and help, families. Family-centered coaching is a coaching practice that starts with the belief that every family knows what it needs best. Techniques from goal setting, motivational interviewing, and strength-based case-management are used to help coaches work with the whole family. Family coaching practice puts families in the driver's seat, includes the entire family, and seeks to help families call on their own strengths to build capabilities that will carry them forward throughout their life span.

In year two of the pilot several agencies took steps to expand coaching by training more staff and/or hiring additional coaches.

- Thrive Virginia has been actively searching for a second full-time family coach in 2021. Seven team specialists also plan to receive training in coaching methods in the upcoming months.
- HRCAP has added two additional coaching staff and created a whole family approach team with a total of six staff positions. HRCAP is training 32 staff on family-centered coaching practices.
- STEPS Inc. has hired a Program Assistant to support the whole family approach project.
- People Inc. has added a second part-time coaching position and trained 85 staff on family-centered coaching practices.
- New River Community Action has trained eight staff on family-centered coaching practices.

### **Deploying a Life Scale Assessment**

Assessing parent, child, and family strengths and challenges is critical to helping families identify goals and their path to improved economic stability and security. The National Community Action Partnership worked with the pilot sites to consider existing assessment tools being used by the agencies and other two-generation/whole family approach experts. The pilot sites agreed to adopt a family assessment scale used by Garrett County Community Action Committee (GCCAC), Inc., one of the pilot project's subject matter experts who has been engaged in the Two-Generation approach for several years. The Life Scale assessment is a critical tool that informed a large portion of program design efforts that took place with the pilot sites in the first year of the project. Drawing on GCCAC's extensive experience in whole family



approach efforts, the Life Scale highlights several key domains for children, parents, and families. In addition to serving as an intake tool for the family coaches, the Life Scale also supports aspects of evaluation and the performance management framework. Development of this tool began in March 2020, as the pilot sites began to define their desired project outcomes and enroll families. Intensive technical assistance calls and virtual site visits that were conducted in April 2020 helped to refine a set of core parent, child, and family outcomes that will be used to track family success across the cohort.

In year two, the pilot sites continued to work with families and assess their progress each quarter using the Life Scale Assessment. At the time the assessment is conducted, coaches also work with families to update and adjust their goals based on the results and progress from the assessment. Additional quality control procedures are being formulated to make sure that quarterly assessments are completed.

### **Engaging Families**

Two-generation/whole family approaches are anchored in equity, rooted in community, and fueled by the lived experience of those engaged in services. Families are the experts in their own lives and elevating and incorporating their experiences, dreams, and desires in program and policy design demonstrates a commitment to honoring this truth. Authentic engagement of families can take place through a multitude of methods, and pilot agencies have devised various mechanisms for ascertaining family voice. One example of this is Head Start's Parent Policy Councils, whereby parents are invited to provide feedback and recommendations to improve program structure and service provision. While most of these engagements to date have taken place through surveys, formal and informal conversations, namely due to limitations presented by COVID-19, VDSS and the National Community Action Partnership are actively working with pilot sites to strengthen and standardize formal engagement strategies to ensure fidelity to the whole family approach.

### **Integrated Services for Parents, Children, and Family**

Research on integrated programs that combine services that intend to support both child development and parental economic security indicates for services to be successfully integrated, they need to be intentionally aligned and coordinated, high quality and intensive, and built on parents' and children's mutual motivation.<sup>1</sup> High quality can be distinguished by the use of curriculums, research or evidence informed practices. Intensity may be defined as dosage, duration, and range of services. Services with a higher dosage and longer duration may be more likely to help families achieve positive outcomes. The six pilot sites continue to work on integrating a range of high-quality services with a mix of intensity levels. The design and flexibility of the Virginia Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach Pilot Project helps to ensure the duration needed to achieve successful outcomes. High quality and longer duration services for parents such as Head Start, Early Head Start and Healthy families create the core of many child-focused services. Skill training, housing supports, mental health counseling, and coaching are common parent focused services for the six pilot sites. Family coaching and parenting training are common family supporting services. Family coaching, supported at all six pilot sites provides the vehicle to coordinate a powerful, customized mix of integrated services that builds

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<sup>1</sup> Sama-Miller, Emily Christine Ross, Teresa Eckrich Sommer, Scott Baumgartner, Lily Roberts, and P. Lindsay Chase-Landsdale (2017). Exploration of Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security. OPRE Report # 2017-84. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Page xxii.

on the strengths and capabilities of each family and delivers just the right mix of services to all members of the family.

### **Management Information System**

To have an efficient and effective system to manage client data the pilot sites worked together and with the technical assistance provider to create a Virginia Whole Family Pilot Project management information system solution. EmpowOR Outcomes & Results developed by CSST Software, LLC in collaboration with Garrett County Community, a Maryland CAA is a database that has been designed for and used by organizations providing comprehensive services. Four of the six pilot agencies were existing users of EmpowOR. A whole family approach “plug-in” was added to track the families served in the VA pilot project. Two sites that were not already using EmpowOR had a steeper learning curve to entering client data.

The database provides a tool for the sites to collect and manage client demographic, service, and outcome information. Agencies use the database to manage case notes, family goals and quarterly Life Scale assessments that help the families and coaches identify progress and areas for future growth.

The establishment of this database in year one created critical infrastructure essential to the implementation, effectiveness, and growth of the pilot in the six agencies and beyond. Considering the challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, the agencies made great progress in setting up the whole family approach “plug-in” and beginning to enter client level data.

In year two, the sites, VDSS, and the technical assistance provider have focused on using the data for management decisions and to improve services for customers. Data walks with individual sites, VDSS and the Partnership were held in Spring 2021 to check the quality of the data, its completeness, and begin to make meaning of the data. All parties learned a great deal and agencies worked on improving data quality after the data walks. However, there is much more data analysis needed at the site level to understand more fully what is working for families and what program conditions may need adapting, abandoning, or adding.

### **Pilot Site Peer Learning and Technical Assistance**

During the first project year, the pilot sites had 31 training and engagement opportunities facilitated through a combination of virtual and in-person convenings. Efforts during the first half of the project prioritized developing participant understanding of whole family approach model program design, individual/family assessment tools, and building a shared vision of the design plan amongst each site’s guiding coalition.

Training and technical assistance that was provided during the second half of year one prioritized outcome tracking, data collection, and assessment of the levels of support that families might need in response to the prolonged nature of the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, pilot sites were forced to not only adapt their originally proposed service delivery strategies but also to consider ways to deepen engagement with enrolled families. As a result, coaching call discussions highlighted strategies and service delivery areas such as trauma-informed care and navigating the back-to-school transition for families. Coaches were also engaged in additional consideration on intake, outcome tracking, and coaching practices with best practices and lessons learned from subject matter experts from Garrett County Community Action Committee (GCCAC). Sites had the opportunity to learn from Aroostook County Community Action Program (ACAP), a CAA

with a well-established whole family approach. In addition to these technical assistance meetings, project participants were also engaged via 13 knowledge-building webinars that were facilitated as part of the Partnership's National Webinar series.

In Year 2, pilot sites had 27 virtual engagement opportunities with peers, Partnership staff, and peer experts. Pilot sites also received multiple individual training and technical assistance calls and data walk discussions. Virtual training topics included engaging family voice, equity, organizing data and outcomes, peer support groups, and benefit cliff resources. Virtual data walk meetings were held with each agency to review reports on demographics, Life Scale assessment results, goal planning and outcomes. These meetings identified areas for project improvement. Virtual technical assistance meetings were also conducted to discuss pilot implementation, and highlighted topics such as organizational culture change, increasing community-based partnerships with institutions like community colleges, equity, and additional training needs.

Sites also received technical support through a Virtual Whole Family Approach Institute, which covered whole family approach building blocks, understanding racialized trauma, considering systemic racial inequities, engaging family voice, family assessments and goal setting, organizational culture and systems change, and building leadership. Some agencies were connected to members of a new Peer Expert Corp and were provided additional resources on agency-specific topics of interest. Agencies were provided access to additional conference trainings and webinars on Family-Centered Community Change, Homelessness, and Child Tax Credit.

### **Pilot Site COVID-19 Informed Responses and Innovations**

A key takeaway from the continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of the systems and structures that are needed to move our communities and our society forward. In the last 16 months, Community Action Agencies across the nation have gone beyond to ensure that the needs of families and individuals are being met in a safe and inclusive setting. Yet despite the nimble response of service providers, the increased level of need because of the pandemic has unearthed gaps in many of systems and practices that potentially prevent families from achieving their version of success.

Despite the uncertainties of the pandemic, all six pilot sites have maintained a high level of participation and engagement with their enrolled families. Across the pilot, investments in technology and other supports were possible due to the flexibility built into the original design of the Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach Pilot Project. The pilot project resources provided sites with the means to quickly respond to the needs of their families. Nearly all sites used funds to purchase laptops, tablets, and internet services for families to keep them connected with coaching and educational services via virtual platforms.

Below are examples of innovations that pilot sites deployed over the course of years one and two of the pilot, leveraging a combination of funding from the pilot and existing agency resources, to meet the needs of families during this extended period of uncertainty.

In response to needs observed with their families, HRCAP determined a need to provide mental and behavioral supports and counseling to families. HRCAP rapidly contracted with a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) to provide virtual mental health sessions to the families enrolled in their whole family approach pilot. Parents have the ability to participate in peer support groups as well as individual counseling via Zoom. Head Start offices began virtually in September 2020. In 2021, HRCAP staff also partnered with community healthcare providers to provide education on vaccinations for the community. Staff have also been making plans to update policies regarding staff vaccinations and identify locations for children who may need to quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

***People Inc.***

In March 2021, People Incorporated offered free virtual income tax preparation to individuals who fall within a certain income/tax bracket. Staff and volunteers helped clients set up virtual appointments and guide them through the process of submitting documents. People Inc. also helped to address the digital divide by helping their community access internet services. The agency set up accounts and paid for six months of internet service for clients who had been impacted by the pandemic through the loss of a job, reduction of hours, and other demands brought on by young and school aged children in virtual learning, etc.

***New River Community Action***

Through their Head Start and CHIP program, NRCA staff worked during a large portion of the pandemic to provide door-to-door drop-offs of learning resources, including, but not limited to, laptops, printers, and curated engagement activities for children. In addition to technology and educational materials, NRCA tapped their stock of diapers and wipes from their multiple Head Start sites to distribute to families in need. NRCA has remained open and has met with families with limited access to internet services in rural areas. In 2021, the agency has also assisted families with school supplies and other educational materials.

***The Improvement Association***

The TIA whole family approach team has partnered with a clinician to support families in developing coping practices, tools, and resources during the pandemic. TIA has maintained virtual engagements and continued to leverage virtual platforms throughout the pandemic. TIA managed to maintain a high level of family engagement due to their intentionality around leveraging virtual platforms and scheduling flexibility to meet the needs of their families in the context of COVID.

***STEPS, Inc.***

Most families in the STEPS pilot program have been engaging virtually, although some meet in-person for housing support or to utilize available office space. The STEPS team has succeeded in maintaining and moving the program forward despite COVID-19 challenges and continues to brainstorm ways to meet with families face-to-face outside of the traditional office setting.

***Thrive Virginia***

Thrive Virginia has transitioned to a hybrid model of meeting with families in 2021.

### ***Family Demographics***

The design of Virginia's pilot project emphasizes quality over quantity and directed the agencies to work comprehensively with a small number of families to maximize learning and results. VDSS indicated they expected each agency to work with 5 to 15 families in the first year. Pilot sites recruited families from programs across their agencies such as Head Start, Early Head Start, Healthy Families, and crisis assistance. Agency enrollment numbers range from 11-20 households. CAAs started engaging and enrolling families in late February 2020 and in most cases met their target goals in a couple of months. To date the pilot sites have enrolled 91 households representing 323 individuals. Average household size ranges from 3 at Thrive Virginia to 3.7 at Hampton Roads Community Action Program. Out of the individuals served, 62 percent of the people served are female, 36 percent are male, and 7 percent are unknown or not reported at this time. Of individuals participating, 31 percent are adults ages 25-60 and only 7 percent of individuals are adults ages 18-25.

Based on the data available, 63 percent of families are represented by single parent-female households and 22 percent of families are two-parent families. Sixty-one percent of the people served are persons of color and 5 percent of individuals reports Hispanic or Latino for ethnicity.

### **Opportunities Going Forward**

One of the main challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has been a compounded lack of access to critical supports as a result of both public safety measures and an overwhelming surge in need. Not just parents or children but families *as a whole* need to be met in this time with access to reliable, safe, and effective services that will build their resiliency for the near future and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved a critical challenge for the first and second years of the pilot. It is important to note that some planned services such as education and training efforts for parents and early childhood education for young children have been delayed, scaled back, or paused. Families with school-age children have experienced significant challenges including needing to delay job searches until childcare can be arranged. All the agencies have been engaged in providing supports as well as crisis services to families during these very challenging conditions. Essential supports such as food have been critical as food insecurity escalated with more family members' home for meals and incomes reduced or eliminated due to reduced hours or unemployment.

The COVID-19 pandemic also required notable revisions to the initially proposed learning agenda for the pilot sites, with key engagements like in-person technical assistance visits being re-designed or postponed. Extensive effort was provided by the Partnership to assist the pilot sites in navigating through both the shifts in service delivery and refinement of design plan elements that were brought about by the pandemic

In April 2020, the implementation team began convening weekly calls with the family coaches from each of the agencies to conduct joint problem solving on how to continue service provision as the COVID-19 pandemic restricted sites' ability to provide physical services for families. These calls served to provide up-to-date research and information, resources, and tools for family

coaches to use to continue supporting families, and a forum for support and collaboration across the members of the pilot.

In September 2021, the implementation team conducted an anonymous customer satisfaction survey. In response to the survey, respondents shared how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted themselves and their families related to employment, income, internet accessibility, virtual learning, health and wellbeing, and the pursuit of educational goals. When asked if the pandemic impacted household employment, 74% of respondents responded “Yes”, while 25.9% of respondents answered “No”. Respondents cited a lack of childcare, facilitating virtual learning for school-aged children, job loss, fatalities resulting from COVID, caring for household members infected with COVID, mental health needs, etc.

Similarly, families’ income was also impacted because of the pandemic, whereas 15.4% of families indicated they experienced an increase, 53.9% of families experienced a decrease, and 30.8% experienced no change in their income during the pandemic. Families who suffered from income loss resorted to alternative means to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Others were not as fortunate and shared experiences where their hours were cut back due to low demand and closures, childcare needs, geographic locations, etc. Supports like stimulus payments and the childcare tax credit were a tremendous financial support and helped to supplement many of the services provided through the pilot project.

Access to reliable broadband services has proven to be the key to productivity and continuity in the wake of the pandemic; however, equitable accessibility of internet services has proven disparate for families in rural communities and for those with low to moderate incomes. Pilot agencies, as described in the Innovations section of this report, stepped in to bridge the gap when physically possible.

By assisting with broadband accessibility, pilot agencies were not only able to help families access virtual learning for school-age children, telehealth visits and attending to other personal matters, but families were also positioned to access services offered through the pilot project. These services included, but were not limited to, credit/financial coaching courses, relationship courses, home budgeting, mental health classes, renter’s courses, parenting courses, health and fitness courses, and home ownership courses. Coaches have also leveraged text messages and emails as methods to maintaining effective communication with families throughout the pandemic. The pandemic has had major implications for health and wellbeing across the country. This is especially true for families with low incomes, as data has consistently demonstrated. The mental and emotional wellbeing of families participating in the pilot program is no exception. When asked if respondents or their children have received counseling or mental health supports during the pandemic, 55.5% expressed some level of need for supports. Of this number, 33% were offered services with the remaining 22% having been unable to access services due to limitations and other barriers. Pilot sites have prioritized mental health by arranging for families to connect to virtual mental health services. The same remains true for physical health, as 22% of respondents expressed having experienced some level of health-related issue resulting from the pandemic. These mitigating factors present additional barriers to families’ ability to stabilize and advance socially and economically.

The pandemic has slowed and even halted some norms across the country; however, families are resilient and have remained steadfast in pursuit of their personal and professional goals. When asked if they, themselves, or other adults in their family pursued educational goals during the pandemic, 50% of respondents answered “Yes”, 27% of families were offered educational supports but chose not to participate, and 23% of families were not able to access services due to availability. Educational pursuits noted by respondents included GED attainment, homebuyer’s courses, and other upskill training programs.

From interviews with the coaches and the responses from the customer survey, the following challenges, barriers, and opportunities have emerged for the pilot sites and families during the first two years of the pilot that have corresponded with the pandemic.

- *Delays in pilot site family enrollment efforts due to family coach recruitment and hiring and COVID-19.*

Due to delays in the onboarding of their family coaches, a few pilot sites were delayed in getting families enrolled before stay-at-home orders were issued for the state. While the sites have overcome this hurdle, maintaining intensive engagement and enrollment continues to require focused attention for all the agencies.

- *Lack of broadband access in more rural service areas limited opportunities for intensive engagement.*

Several of the pilot sites serve particularly remote and rural areas. Existing issues around technology and internet access were exacerbated for some sites as public safety measures required the vast majority of services to be conducted virtually. Thrive Virginia in particular faced significant challenges providing virtual services during the pandemic as a lack of broadband access in St. Charles County prevented them from connecting to families via virtual meeting solutions. Thrive Virginia has continued to work to stay connected to families through phone calls and has been largely successful, but lack of adequate broadband services continues to place limits on engagement and services for families.

- *The economic impacts of the pandemic exacerbated existing issues with affordable housing.*

The coaches have continued to report families experiencing significant and ongoing difficulties locating affordable housing. This appears to be a greater issue in agencies that serve rural places. Several coaches reported having to place families in hotels while housing was located; some families even reported being pressured by their landlord to purchase the home they were renting or vacate. In several cases the families had difficulties finding housing in rural places near work or training opportunities.

- *Increased need for behavioral health services.*

Family coaches reported that families needed support from a mental health professional to address behavioral health issues. In response to these needs several sites contracted with a LCSW to provide counseling for families. Agencies innovated and partnered with behavioral health providers and arranged virtual services to be provided to families in-group and individual settings.

- *Delays in building agency guiding coalitions.*

Remote operations and responding to immediate COVID-19 situations prevented pilot site leadership from strengthening and advancing their guiding coalitions. A guiding coalition is important to helping an organization make changes to integrate services and pursue a whole family approach.

- *Delays in maintaining engagement with local partners*  
Shutdowns of all non-essential businesses and ongoing business disruptions have posed challenges for pilot sites that were relying on services from community partners as a key piece of their whole family approach offerings. Several pilot sites were planning on partnering with community colleges or Head Start agencies, which had to be delayed if not paused entirely as organizations and businesses continue to adjust in response to the pandemic.

### **Other Operational Challenges and Barriers**

Pilot sites also experienced a few operational challenges as they launched their whole family approaches in years one and two. For the most part their challenges were common to any new project or organizational change, and considering they were launching during a pandemic they did very well in overcoming the challenges. The following issues emerged for the sites during year one.

- *Adjustments in the timeline for hiring family coaches.*  
A couple of agencies had a bit of delay or hired and did not retain their initial coach. This resulted in a little slower enrollment, but these challenges have been overcome.
- *Getting accustomed to data entry through the EmpowOR platform and building capacity to analyze the data.*  
All the sites had a learning curve with the new whole family approach plug-in. Agencies are still adjusting to the process of entering data and using it to manage and improve. Two agencies were new to EmpowOR and needed additional time to begin to enter client data in the system. Agencies are becoming familiar with the reporting capacity of EmpowOR and gaining experience on how to produce and analyze the data. Some agencies are struggling with staffing capacity related to data entry and data analysis.
- *Issues with family enrollment, intake, and assessment.*  
Certain practices like the Life Scale assessment took time to develop and agencies missed issuing the assessment at initial enrollment. Coaches have been working with families to complete assessments for all families to establish a baseline. Data quality and completeness still needs improvement and additional attention in certain instances so that a complete understanding and analysis can be completed.
- *Access to affordable, quality childcare.*  
Childcare access is an ongoing challenge for families. Families in rural areas seem to experience difficulties finding childcare near work and home. COVID-19 has only exacerbated existing childcare difficulties. Agencies report that parents are relying more on kinship care during the pandemic.
- *Difficulties with maintaining safe, reliable transportation.*



People living with low incomes have great difficulty affording and maintaining private transportation; therefore, access to an efficient, affordable, and safe public transportation system is a key factor in their transition out of poverty. However, in many of the pilot site communities, public transportation is either not available where the jobs are or not available at all; therefore, access to a car is paramount for retaining employment, food security, and other essential goods and services. Even when public transportation exists, moms with multiple children have difficulty getting children to care and themselves to work using public transportation. In a few of the pilot sites, some remote and mountainous areas create significant challenges for families with no private car. Because transportation is such a critical need, the coaches sought many different types of solutions and were extremely creative in their joint problem solving with families.

- *Challenges with power and autonomy.*

Family coaches indicate that some parent's sense of their ability to influence their environment and act on their own decisions was potentially blocking them from achieving their goals and making progress. Family coaches have worked to help folks increase and adopt a mindset that they can change and grow. Based on results from the customer satisfaction survey it appears family's belief in their ability to achieve their goals has greatly increased as they have continued participating in the pilot project.

### **Creating Conditions for Evaluation Accountability**

Disseminating information about successful models so they may be replicated and adopted across the Commonwealth requires outcomes be identified, tracked, and reported. Pilot sites also need data on progress, so they know what is working and where they need to improve. The evaluation and accountability approach utilized for the pilot project is a results-based performance management framework. This framework will provide actionable information for the pilot sites as they seek to pursue continuous improvement and for VDSS to use as they consider replication of the pilot.

Effective evaluation methods begin with a clear and concise design plan that incorporates a theory of change (TOC) and a logic model(s). Agencies were assigned the task of creating a whole family approach theory of change. They were asked to identify elements such as what their vision was for families they serve and what assumptions they had about the circumstances the families face and what could be done to improve those circumstances. This process inspired pilot sites thinking about "big picture" ideas, not just about what service they would offer to families. Sites were challenged to consider what they felt could change (both short term and long term). Once they started identifying the unique outcomes they could see happening with the families – then they were asked to consider services, activities, steps in the process to achieving the outcomes. They were asked to consider the connections.

Using the theory of change format, connections were made between participation in a service or activity and the relationship to improved family well-being.

### **Future Considerations and Actions for Remaining Project Timeframe**

The first and second years of the pilot project have produced many learnings that will be examined and analyzed as the pilot moves forward. Key observations are outlined below.

**1. *When the pilot started severe poverty (income below 50% FPG) and the material hardship that comes with it was present for fifty-two percent of families in the pilot.***

Poverty can cause negative child outcomes, especially when it begins in early childhood and continues for a large share of the child's life. The importance of supporting parents in their efforts to create safe environments and nurturing relationships cannot be overstated.

Material hardship in a family may create stress that negatively impacts future child outcomes. Strategic investments in young children and the adults who care for them affect long-term physical and mental health as much as they affect early learning. When access to essential resources and supportive relationships is secure, the building blocks of both resilience (e.g., self-regulation and adaptive skills) and wellness (e.g., well-regulated stress response systems) are strengthened.

Poor outcomes are not inevitable but are more likely if we do not adequately support children and families experiencing persistent hardships or challenges. We must consider how support and resources can best be utilized to help families create home environments and relationships that are stable and nurturing.

Pursuit of educational opportunities and advancement for children and parents can be significantly challenging when basic needs are not met, and hardship creates long-term stress. These realities and possible remediation efforts warrant further consideration for the pilot families.

**2. *Most parents are working, and skill and educational training must adapt to their needs.***

In year one and year two approximately 60 percent of families are working or have recently worked and are attached to the labor force. Most of the families participating in the whole family approach pilot are working to make ends meet so education and skill training need to be structured to adapt to the constraints and realities of working families. Parents need training and educational schedules that work with work schedules. Parents may also need training opportunities that are high value, but shorter term so they can move into jobs with family supporting wages more quickly.

**3. *Family coaching and flexible funding supports provide a vital role in meeting families where they dream, not just where they are.***

Families have unique and varied strengths and areas for improvement where they can benefit from support and assistance. The pilot project's provision of family coaching along with the flexible use of financial assistance has helped support families in ways that has increased family stability and created conditions for families to advance and to continue to plan into the future. Flexibility to address family needs like assisting with the purchase of a washer and dryer can go a long way to reducing stress and giving families peace. Assisting with a rental payment, gas for an automobile, repairing a front door, clothes or other work necessities can be a pivotal factor in securing or maintain a job or persevering in a training or education program. Prioritizing family engagement activities and family support services help to build social capital and motivate children and parents to dream beyond their current conditions.

It is difficult to measure in a quantitative manner, but initial observations indicate the family coaches have provided person-centered services that have observed individual family needs

and responded to them. Family coaching and a range of flexible financial assistance appear to have helped the pilot families navigate the initial months of the pandemic and perhaps prevented families from falling into deeper crisis and poverty. Pilot sites feel they have served as a backstop for families during this unprecedented health, social, and economic crisis. Customer survey feedback affirms how strongly families feel about the support they have received from their coach.

**4. *Virtual service delivery is possible, but extensive support is needed to remove barriers.***

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, all six sites shifted to a virtual service delivery model. Virtual services continue at varying levels. In addition, two sites provided behavioral health services in a virtual format provided by a Licensed Child Social Worker (LCSW). Virtual peer meetings have also been hosted to connect families and reduce social isolation during the pandemic. The sites have reported that families have mostly responded positively to the virtual service delivery when connectivity was not a barrier.

The sites went to extensive effort and cost to reduce any technology or internet access issues. It appears the sites were able to maintain relationships and retain families during this first year even through the pandemic. Sites have reported that virtual service delivery can reduce transportation barriers and travel costs for families as well as save the agency time and travel costs. Coaches have reported that due to reduced time traveling to home visits (especially in the very rural and/or mountainous locations) they have more time to plan and provide support to families. Less travel does save time, but there are concerns about potential loss with no face-to-face interaction.

The agencies have indicated some concern about the future success of virtual service delivery. Most of the families the sites worked with during the pandemic were families they had engaged with pre-pandemic. There had been initial face-to-face contact in the early days of the relationship. Sites have indicated concerns about recruiting or delivering services to families if face-to-face opportunities are not available, especially at the beginning when family coaches and families are building a relationship.

Agencies have been grappling with how to continue successfully supporting families through discussions regarding masking, vaccinations, and remaining physically distanced when meeting in-person. Some services are more beneficial in-person while other services can remain in a virtual setting. Agencies and whole family approach teams are in the process of staff transitions, policy changes, and necessary adjustments as the communities move into COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

## **Future Actions**

1. Further identification and refinement of measurement tools and assessments is needed to make sure that reliable and valid tools are being used to measure outcomes and results outlined in the theories of change and logic models.

2. Data analysis capacity is needed at the site level to inform what is working and to help sites use and understand their data so decisions can be made to continue improving the interventions and document learning for future replication.
3. Provide training and tools for benefit cliff planning.
4. Support pilot site efforts to collaborate with local DSS agencies.
5. Support pilot site efforts to scale whole family approach across organizations and externally with others in the pilot site communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The accomplishments of the first and second years of the Whole Family Pilot, which were challenged by COVID related issues, have set the conditions for families to advance and improve their well-being.

The goal of this pilot project is to test and evaluate concepts and specific interventions that represent two-generation or whole family approaches that move families out of poverty in a variety of communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. With the support of VDSS and the Partnership, the six pilot sites engaged in various tactics to develop their Two-Generation/Whole Family Approach design plans and to begin to test them with children, parents, and families.

At the conclusion of the second year, 91 households and a total of 323 persons have been enrolled in the pilot project. In the second-year sites collected data on family demographics, services, and outcomes. The Partnership collected customer satisfaction information from approximately 33% of participating families. This quantitative and qualitative data indicate that despite the pandemic sites have been able to retain families and help them move forward as evidenced by the following results:

- 63 percent of households participating are single-parent, female headed households. Forty-one percent of households enrolled in the pilot have incomes below 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG), and for a family of three, this is an annual income of \$10,980. 67 of the 91 households participating have employment income.
- Families complete a Life Cycle assessment that looks at functioning across 15 domains. The first assessment and last assessment were compared and initial analysis of progress to date indicates average scores have increased in every domain. The largest gains are seen in the employment/income, financial management, and community involvement domains. Many of the sites have provided employment related supports, financial empowerment training, and credit repair which may have contributed to the increases in the employment/income and financial management domains. Pilot sites have also provided social capital building opportunities and mental health supports which may have helped to increase families' feelings of connectedness to others in the community.
- Over the two-year period income changes have been recorded for 41 of the 91 households enrolled. Of these 41 households, 26 households have increased income, 13 households decreased income, and two reported no change. The remaining households did not have an income change recorded which likely means there was no change in income over the two-year period. This data indicates 26 percent of the households enrolled have achieved an increase in earned income during the first two years, and during a worldwide pandemic and economic crisis.

- All six pilot sites have been recording outcomes for families. Additional data collection and analysis is needed, but it is clear families have secured living wage jobs, obtained certifications, secured reliable transportation, avoided eviction improved credit and financial well-being, improved mental health and family functioning, and prepared children for kindergarten (See Table 4. For details)
- A customer satisfaction survey was completed by 33% of families. One question asked families to compare their feeling of empowerment to achieve personal goals when they started to their current feeling. The average response was 2.8 (Scale 1= not true, 2=somewhat true, and 3=very true) representing a strong feeling or belief that they can control the trajectory of their lives. This feeling of power and autonomy is a critical driver or component of economic mobility.
- The customer satisfaction survey also asked families to use a sliding scale (0= unsatisfied, 100= extremely satisfied) to indicate their level of satisfaction of services received while participating in the pilot, respondents indicated a resounding 92.8% satisfaction rate.

As sites advance deeper into implementation of their whole family approach and more data becomes available, the project will begin to reveal more answers about what works, where it works, whom it works for and why.