

BUILDING A THRIVING TENNESSEE

A 2GEN APPROACH



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
BUILDING A THRIVING TENNESSEE: A 2GEN APPROACH	4
Many journeys of transformation begin with a question	5
Engagement and Learning	6
TDHS Engaged the Voices of Families Served	8
Transformational Ideas	8
2Gen Actions	13
Passing the Baton	16
Onward!	16
Lessons Learned for Embracing the 2Gen Approach	17
ENDNOTES	18

INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) continues to promote the two-generation (2Gen) approach to creating cycles of success for children and their families. Poverty can impact a family's overall well-being and its ability to thrive economically, educationally, and socially. Roughly 18 percent of Tennesseans are living in poverty, and, of that group, nearly 26 percent are children. Through our programs and services, TDHS directly impacts millions of Tennesseans from birth through the golden years with a myriad of services intended to help meet their essential needs and to improve overall well-being. We are committed to addressing intergenerational poverty in a manner that allows all partners to align their services with an effective strategy. Adopting the 2Gen strategy has allowed us to further build on families' strengths and focus on providing intentional whole-family supports, services, and opportunities in the areas of education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being.

Each day, TDHS employees and partners work toward the collective goal of *Building a Thriving Tennessee*. Our foundation is made up of four essential areas of focus: 1) improving internal and external communications, 2) effective and efficient processes in operations, 3) building a culture of trust and collaboration, and 4) employee talent management. Operationally, TDHS is committed to improving the customer experience, replacing or improving legacy systems through enterprise system modernization, and building better connections with TDHS customers and partners. Strategically, TDHS is aligned with statewide efforts to advance literacy education for Tennessee's children. We believe that when we have an intentional focus on meaningfully improving the lives of each and every customer we interact with, we are helping to build a stronger household, neighborhood, community, and state ... a stronger and more thriving Tennessee.

This report, prepared by our partners at Ascend at the Aspen Institute, provides key elements of Tennessee's transformational 2Gen journey — details about the department's engagement and learning processes, ideas around social innovation and public-private partnerships, insights into lessons learned, and a plan for Building a Thriving Tennessee. We hope that the information and insights included in this report will be useful to public and private agencies that also seek to innovate, collaborate, and work generatively to provide paths to upward economic mobility and to promote whole-family success.

Sincerely,

Danielle Whitworth Barnes
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Human Services

BUILDING A THRIVING TENNESSEE: A 2GEN APPROACH

Danielle Barnes was a few months into her new job as head of Tennessee’s Department of Human Services (TDHS) when she attended a low-income housing community event that vividly called to mind her agency’s purpose. “It was a back-to-school fair,” she recalls. “You could see all the support that was being provided to people, to their families. You could see how the Department played an integral role in helping people become stronger and better members of the community. It was a beautiful 2Gen experience.”

Tennessee DHS by the Numbers (2017)	
6.6 million	State population
15.8%	Poverty rate (% of people below poverty line)
4,400	TDHS Employees
\$2.9 billion	TDHS Total Revenue
91%	Federal portion of TDHS Revenue
58,000	TANF caseload, annual
1 million	SNAP participants, annual

By “2Gen,” Commissioner Barnes means the two-generation approach the Department has been developing and piloting for several years — a radically different way of serving low-income families that began in Tennessee in 2014. Barnes had worked inside TDHS years earlier, and when she came back she immediately saw the difference 2Gen had made. “What we learned from 2Gen is that you have to focus on the whole family, not just the individual adult or child,” she says. “This was not something the Department focused on before.”

The change, Barnes says, has transformed TDHS. “We are no longer just checking the boxes when an applicant comes into the office to see if they meet our program criteria for benefits. We are absolutely figuring out how to meet their needs. We are transforming lives.”

The Department itself has changed from the inside. “There has been a tremendous culture change,” Barnes says. “Our employees have been actively involved in the transformation.” At the same time, TDHS is relying heavily on public and private partnerships to deliver 2Gen services — a big change for the Department and the partners it selected. “It’s highly unusual for government to work this way,” Barnes notes. “We have some great partnerships in play.”

Many journeys of transformation begin with a question

TDHS' transformational journey started in 2011 with a question that had not been asked in a long time. The state's newly elected governor, Bill Haslam, a businessman, Republican, and former mayor of Knoxville, had ordered each of the state's 23 departments and agencies to conduct a top-to-bottom review of its mission and programs. The human services commissioner at the time, Raquel Hatter, and top Department leadership established an internal taskforce to conduct a 360-degree examination of TDHS divisions and services. The process focused on answering this question: Are the people we serve better off because we have been a part of their lives?

"In most cases, we were not able to definitely say yes," recalls Tiffany Day, a new employee at the time and now a 2Gen consultant for TDHS. This answer prompted new questions, she says. "To increase impact, what could we do better? What could we do more of? What should we stop doing?" The first steps in the Department's journey had been taken.

Moving forward, though, required a commitment to pursue an honest, unflinching inquiry that would not paper over problems or just dish out blame. Otherwise, it would not be possible to engage the authentic participation of TDHS's then 5,400 employees — and without that, how could the Department reinvent itself? "We had to take a deep-dive look at ourselves," says then-Commissioner Hatter. "This required a level of honesty and courage for true organization introspection."

For Hatter, "we" meant every TDHS employee, not just the Department's leadership and managers. They all had to be a part of the change process. "I made positive

**The Tennessee
Department of
Human Services
Adheres to
the Disciplines
of a Learning
Organization**

Shared Vision: A common purpose and atmosphere of excitement and enthusiasm regarding the vision and direction of the organization. The organization provides mechanisms for people to connect their personal vision to the organizational vision.

Systems Thinking: A smooth and open flow of information which sends a message of inter-relatedness between all parts of the organization and how each part has an impact on the other parts of the organization.

Mental Models: The organization provides a supportive environment, which encourages people to think about, interpret, and characterize situations and circumstances. People then review and revise appropriately their own views, beliefs, values, and biases in a "critical thinking" and more creative fashion.

Team Learning: Based on the foundation of Personal Mastery and Shared Vision, this component focuses a great deal on interpersonal skills and effective communication. People learn from and teach each other in an atmosphere of open dialogue, flexible mental models, and conflict resolution.

Personal Mastery: Every member of the organization operates as a continual learner. Staff members are empowered to stretch and broaden their comfort zones to realize their potential.

assumptions about why people came to work in TDHS, that they wanted to make a positive difference in the lives of the people they were privileged to serve. Overall, I was right about this; people came to TDHS to do a good thing. But it didn't take long for employees to figure out that the system, by virtue of its design, didn't create the opportunity or enough space to focus on making a positive difference. The culture of the organization — the compliance environment of state and federal governments — didn't fit this aspiration."

"We" also meant the people the Department was serving. "We needed their voices," Hatter explains. "We're not an authority on anybody's story. You have to be in the room face-to-face with the people you're serving — at every level of the Department. I'm not just talking about customer satisfaction with the Department's processes. It's more than that. I am talking about asking, how well is the system serving you? Is what we're doing helping you and your family move forward? This kind of authentic engagement with the people served reflects the fact that we honor their struggle. It requires a belief that they have value to add to improving the system."

The Department adopted several principles that would guide the journey over the longer term. It embraced the five disciplines of a "learning organization" — shared vision, systems thinking, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery. It committed to engaging all of its employees in the change process — and also to go outside the Department to engage other state agencies, service delivery partners, and the people the Department served. And it committed to a strength perspective in its approach to people, instead of focusing on people's deficits. "Every individual, group, family, and community has strengths," reads a part of the TDHS Strength Perspective. "Assume that you don't know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change, and take individual, group, and community aspirations seriously."

What unfolded beginning in 2011 and continues to this day has made TDHS a national 2Gen leader. A state department with a nearly \$3 billion annual budget has incorporated the 2Gen approach into a broad range of human services for Tennessee families and has initiated large-scale 2Gen demonstration programs within the Department and with an array of service delivery partners.

The change effort braided three major strands: engagement and learning, adoption of transformational ideas about poverty and poverty reduction, and 2Gen program design and action.

Engagement and Learning

TDHS spent portions of 2011 and 2012 in extensive learning processes, education, and dialogue: conference calls with hundreds of staff members, tours of TDHS offices around the state, and strategic planning processes with different divisions and partners — Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Adult Protective Services, Community Service Block Grant agencies, Employment and Case Management Services, and

others — with a strong emphasis on how to improve outcomes for families. The Department hosted its first Resilient Families Forum in 2012, focused on how to help families reposition themselves for more promising futures. It also designated November as TDHS Employee Appreciation Month, issuing awards as tokens of appreciation and holding a department-wide celebration. These and other efforts consistently brought together the Department's various staffing levels and functions: its frontline workers, managers, and executives, along with its policymakers and practitioners.

The inclusive learning approach has been sustained throughout the six-year journey. In 2013, TDHS's first Child Care Strategy Session focused on child outcomes and parental engagement. The Department brought together local and national human services partners for a session on public-private partnerships in human services. In 2014, TDHS studied strength-based approaches to moving families forward. It created an internal Change Agent Institute, with a new cohort of participants every year. The charge to each annual cohort of 30-50 employees in the Institute's program: "Develop a new service delivery model that is consistent with the TDHS strength-based service philosophy." The first year, more than 200 employees worked on designing a 21st century model for human services delivery. The curriculum for change agents is based on five books about organizational leadership and the dynamics that facilitate or hinder change (see below).

TDHS's Organizational Leadership Reading List

- *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee
- *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald A. Heifetz
- *Leading Change*, John Kotter
- *Breaking Free: A Prescription for Personal and Organizational Change*, David Noer
- *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge

In 2014, TDHS also joined the Governor's Workforce Subcabinet and held its 3rd Resilient Families Forum to explore promising practices for moving families forward. In 2015, at the 4th Resilient Families Forum, Anne Mosle from Ascend at the Aspen Institute and Antonio Oftelie from Harvard University highlighted how the state's work aligned with growing national movements for 2Gen approaches and transformational human services. That year, TDHS also conducted an employee engagement survey, the results of which were used by its five divisions and many programs to develop improvements. In 2016, employees elected Employee Champions to lead and represent teams involved in the Department's change process.

The employees' engagement in the change process, says TDHS Commissioner Danielle Barnes, was "the most noticeable difference in the Department" when she returned as

its head in February 2017 after a 10-year absence. “There has been a huge change in the organization’s culture.”

TDHS Engaged the Voices of Families Served

The Department had several ways to bring the experiences, knowledge, and thoughts of families it served into the change process — creating access to every level of the organization and seeking to convey the Department’s genuine interest in being a partner, not just a regulator. Among the methods:

- The Commissioner’s office hosted “Customer Connection” activities that included lunch-and-listen and dinner-and-dialogue sessions with the commissioner, telephone calls from the commissioner in response to letters or emails, one-on-one meetings with a customer or advocate about a specific concern, informal county office drop-ins during which the commissioner would meet with customers in the office, joint customer focus groups with programs such as child support services, and participation in back-to-school community fairs.
- Letters of support and congratulations were sent to families who partnered with the Department to enroll their children in the Tennessee Promise and the Imagination Library. An invitation to participate in a Customer Connection was included in the letters.
- Targeted customer surveys were used to get specific feedback on how the Department could better support families in creating a better quality of life and to understand the vision families had for themselves.
- Evening sessions of Customer Connection involved multiple families, with activities for the children. Discussions were free flowing, with the TDHS focus on listening, understanding, and getting families’ practical ideas about support that would help them move forward.
- The Department started a Family Recognition Program for families participating in TANF to celebrate families on a path to realizing their vision of success. Frontline staff and community partners generated nominations. Recognition involved a letter and certification of congratulations, a personal telephone call from the Commissioner, and a token of recognition.

Transformational Ideas

Early on, TDHS introduced two key frameworks into the Department’s thinking about poverty. The Human Services Value Curve, developed by Leadership for a Networked World and introduced in TDHS in 2013, describes a four-level evolutionary progression for

a human services organization in which increasing orientation toward outcomes drives innovation in the organization.¹ The levels in the progression are:

- **Regulatory** — a focus on serving people who are eligible for services while complying with policy and program regulations.
- **Collaborative** — a focus on supporting people in receiving the best combination of services for which they are eligible by working across agency and programmatic boundaries.
- **Integrative** — a focus on addressing the root causes of individual and family needs and problems by coordinating and integrating services.
- **Generative** — a focus on generating healthy communities by creating solutions for multidimensional family and socioeconomic challenges and opportunities.

This framework contributed to the way the Department, as a result of its engagement processes, redefined its vision and mission in 2014:

- **Our Mission:** To offer temporary economic assistance, work opportunities, and protective services to improve the lives of Tennesseans.
- **Our Vision:** To be a leader in effectively partnering with human service customers in establishing or re-establishing self-sufficiency to create a better quality of life.

This newly refined purpose — to improve lives and create self-sufficiency — was quite different from what TDHS would have identified as its purpose back in 2011. It is the stark difference between being transactional and being transformational, according to TDHS leaders. “Transactional” means administering programs for people living in poverty and making sure they get the benefits they are qualified for. At the end of the day, a transactional department asks whether the eligible people got the authorized benefits. This is the regulatory level in the Human Services Value Curve. “Transformational” means leveraging an integrated service model by providing those same people with social support that improves social and economic mobility. A transformational department asks whether people are getting the services they need to move out of poverty. This suggests an integrative level and perhaps a generative level — although the organization would first evolve through the collaborative level.

A second key framework focused on the emerging research into how the stresses that poverty inflicts upon people hinder the development of brains and “executive functioning,” the skill sets that rely on memory, mental flexibility, and self-control — which are essential for making plans, keeping track of time, retrieving past information, and other abilities needed to maintain personal relationships, care for children, manage money, obtain an education, and more. Understanding more about the causes and impacts of poverty was a part of the Department’s learning trajectory toward an integrative level focused on root causes and how to address them.

In 2014, the Department's emerging framework received a new boost. In May, the new TDHS mission and vision were rolled out across the organization, and the Department organized a symposium on poverty in November of that year. Speakers from around the country were invited to describe promising practices. More than 100 TDHS staff and partners attended the daylong session. The symposium served as a sounding board for shared learning in best and promising practices, and it was then that the 2Gen approach began to gain traction in Tennessee.

The symposium, called "Transformational Pathways Out of Poverty," featured four outside speakers, with small and large group discussions following each presentation:

- **Wanda Walker** — director of program excellence for Jeremiah Program, a national nonprofit program with a proven 2Gen approach that provides single mothers and their children with support for a college-track education, quality early childhood education, a safe and affordable place to live, and empowerment and life-skills training.
- **Dr. Ruby Payne** — founder of Bridges Out of Poverty and Aha! Process, an expert on helping students and adults of all economic backgrounds achieve academic, professional, and personal success.
- **Dr. David Olds** — professor of pediatrics and director of prevention research for family and child health at the University of Colorado, discussed the Nurse-Family Partnership model, a leading example of a 2Gen program that serves socially disadvantaged mothers bearing their first children.
- **Marjorie Sims** — managing director of Ascend at the Aspen Institute, a national promoter of the 2Gen Approach formed in 2011 to spark and elevate conversations around low-income families, build a network of leaders around 2Gen strategies, and elevate promising 2Gen policies and community solutions.

Although a majority of symposium participants said they were unfamiliar with 2Gen and the promising practices, TDHS reported a key conclusion that reflects its learning and shift toward being an integrative-level organization: "A basic premise is that the services are not a destination. Instead, they are the tools available to assist individuals when they are experiencing vulnerable circumstances. An approach that doesn't account for this premise is likely unsustainable and may not result in improved outcomes."²

"The symposium showed that the Tennessee DHS people were looking seriously and carefully for new ways to address poverty," says Sims. "They had brought together some of the most promising innovators in the country — and the discussions were in-depth and probing. From the response, I could tell they were excited about what 2Gen had to offer."

The Department's trajectory of change was ready to meet the transformative ideas of the 2Gen approach. "We had redefined the mission and vision of the Department and were asking ourselves deeper questions about poverty," says TDHS's Tiffany Day. "We were beginning to make interdepartmental linkages and make efforts to cross-pollinate,

but we hadn't taken a deeper look at how programs and services could be integrated to meet people's needs. We needed to better understand the real barriers to getting out of poverty. We needed to connect the dots. That's what 2Gen did for us." In short, the Department's next step depended on answering a question at the integrative level: What were the root causes of poverty and what could TDHS do that would reduce poverty?

The 37-page report that TDHS issued in January 2015, *Moving Families Forward: Transformational Pathways Out of Poverty*,³ leaned on the strength-based principles the Department had adopted and lessons learned about brain science and poverty. And it dedicated a long section to 2Gen approaches and the 2Gen programs that had been explored, noting what was new about the approach:

The traditional one-generation approach presented a dichotomy between support for parents or a focus on the child. Scientific evidence shows that connected and supportive families have greater positive outcomes, especially for children. This evidence has led to a progressive shift towards a family focus rather than a traditional fragmented focus. There is a clear distinction between the two approaches. The traditional system has been a one-generational approach, which serves the child or parent, emphasizes care or education, and provides transactional services including paperwork, information, participation, referrals, and use data for compliance (Lombardi, 2014). However, the two-generation approach encourages serving two or more generations simultaneously.⁴

The report was also informed by the families served by TDHS. A consistent theme was related to the fiscal cliffs parents experience as they make progress. For example, a parent's small raise (10 cents) can lead to a greater loss in support or benefits related to food or child care. Overall, it seemed that parents were being penalized for progress. This resulted in the Department initiating a review of the factors contributing to the fiscal cliffs. In 2016, TDHS determined the need to identify possible solutions to address this issue. TANF cash assistance was identified as the place to start.

Within a few months, TDHS was tapping into learning and innovating assets that Ascend was offering. It joined Ascend's national network of then about 60 2Gen public and nonprofit practitioners and policymakers, researchers, and philanthropists. Then-TDHS Commissioner Raquel Hatter became an Ascend Fellow, studying for 18 months with a cohort of 20 other human service sector leaders committed to a 2Gen approach. And TDHS staff began to contribute to Ascend's efforts — making presentations at annual gatherings and conferences, participating in working groups developing new tools and in national strategy sessions, and sharing its 2Gen experiences and lessons with other state human services agencies also developing 2Gen strategies.

A year later, TDHS; Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), a national nonprofit delivering services in 42 states; and the nursing program at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) launched a three-year pilot of a nurse home-visiting program to support first-time expectant mothers. The pilot was funded with \$3.4 million in TANF funds from TDHS.

The 2Gen Approach in Brief

The 2Gen approach is both common sense and rooted in evidence: changing the odds for families experiencing poverty by working with both children and parents together. There are quality programs, services, and supports for children across the US, from Head Start to many others. Likewise, there are proven programs—such as community colleges, home visiting, and job training—through which adults can seek to move toward prosperity. But most of even the best programs treat those they serve as single entities, not as members of a family. Narrowly focused programs tend to produce limited and less synergistic results.

2Gen approaches work with children and their parents simultaneously to harness the family's full potential and put the whole family on a path to permanent economic security. The core components of 2Gen strategies are early care and education, postsecondary and employment pathways, economic assets, health and well-being, and social capital.

Advancing a more holistic, family-centered human services approach at the state level includes adopting some of the following 2Gen strategies:

- Integration of human services delivery between state and local systems.
- Cross-agency collaborations that promote 2Gen partnerships and systems change at the state level.
- Data systems that capture child, adult, and whole family outcomes.
- Agency budgets that reflect 2Gen priorities and allow for braided funding streams.
- Agency-wide staff training models that promote a 2Gen approach and help human services staff at all levels of the organization serve families more effectively and efficiently.
- Utilization of strength-based and dynamic family engagement, which starts with a shared goal process and family feedback loops.
- Ensuring system accountability to families.

Ascend's Innovation Fund provided \$15,000 to NFP for start-up model fidelity and client recruitment costs. It was the beginning of a successful relationship, says Roxanne White, then-CEO of the Nurse-Family Partnership, and also an Ascend Fellow. "We worked with the Department to put together an implementation plan and to get approval to use federal funds." With guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2015 and 2017, TDHS confirmed income eligibility for TANF participants in the NFP program as based on whether the individual is eligible for TANF once the child is born,

if the individual is currently receiving (or is eligible to receive) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits based on the individual's personal income if living alone or household income if living with other adults, or if the individual's income falls 200 percent below the federal poverty level guidelines based on the household size. Pregnant women who are minors and in the state's custody — residing in a foster home or group placement — are also eligible for enrollment in the pilot.

In addition, enrolled mothers are linked to the Tennessee Promise and/or the Tennessee Reconnect programs. Both state-funded programs run under the auspices of ETSU and enable clients to return to school by providing assistance with planning, managing costs, and navigating resources. Furthermore, families in the NFP program are connected to Tennessee Early Head Start programs in their area and have access to the Child Care Certificate program to receive child care assistance.

At the end of 2015, the Department officially adopted the 2Gen approach as the basis for developing a new service delivery model in which all programs were aligned and using the approach for working with all customers.

2Gen Actions

Just months after adopting a 2Gen approach, TDHS launched a statewide 2Gen awareness campaign. The campaign started with an informational webpage, "2G for Tennessee" (<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/featured-initiatives/2g-for-tennessee.html>), which spelled out the Department's commitment to using the approach to "develop a new service delivery model." Using materials developed by Ascend, it described the 2Gen approach and the Department's first 2Gen pilots: partnering with Families First (TANF) parents to register more than 700 high school seniors in the Tennessee Promise, a scholarship that provides two years of tuition-free attendance at a community or technical college in Tennessee, and enrolling more than 1,600 children receiving Department-administered child care assistance in the Governor's Books from Birth Foundation's Imagination Library.⁵ Later, Governor Haslam proclaimed August 30, 2016, "2G for Tennessee Day."

To help fund these new 2Gen partnerships and others that were being developed, the Department realized it could tap the federal TANF funding stream. Two of TANF's allowable uses of funding were to "provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes" and to "reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage." As long as funds were used for these purposes, the Department detailed in its "Pathways Out of Poverty" report, they could be used in a multigenerational approach. They could provide adults with transportation, child care assistance, education, and other services to support and prepare them for jobs and to find employment. They could provide child care assistance because this would support parents in achieving and maintaining employment with less chance of diminished productivity due to worries about the child's well-being. Funds could be used to help families build social capital — networks of people and institutions on which to rely for support and assistance.

In the summer of 2016, TDHS established the 2Gen for Tennessee Consortium, which included representatives from the local, state, and national public and private sectors and thought partners across a variety of areas. The consortium was charged with “constantly searching, identifying, and highlighting promising practices focused on creating cycles of success in Tennessee, nationally, and internationally” with a special focus on “practices that adhere to a multigenerational approach, strength-based practices, brain science, informed practices and results.” At the inaugural meeting, consortium members were introduced to the 2Gen approach and briefed on practices within TDHS designed to advance 2Gen approaches.

At about the same time, TDHS began to roll out 2Gen demonstration projects with outside partners. “Relying on public-private partnerships acknowledged that no one entity like the Department can do this multigenerational work in isolation,” says Hatter.

In September 2016, a major partnership began when the Department's 2Gen outreach efforts struck a chord with Agape, a faith-based provider of pregnancy and family counseling, adoption, and foster care services. “We hosted a symposium with the Assisi Foundation of Memphis, and they invited some of their partners. Ascend and a few others shared what 2Gen was about, and we shared that this was the direction the Department was going in,” Day recalls. “A number of partners approached the Department with ideas for expanding their work.” David Jordan, executive director of Agape, developed a proposal that the Department supported with a three-year, \$12.1 million initiative to provide families in selected at-risk neighborhoods with wraparound services and resources to put them on paths toward economic stability. “What's so beautiful about their program is the staff of Agape reside in the communities with the people. They don't spend the day and leave. They set up in the communities, walk kids to school, serve dinners and have community cafés. These connectors link people to resources and support,” says Commissioner Barnes.

Among the TDHS partnerships are:

- **Smart Steps.** In 2016, TDHS announced a new child care payment assistance program to partner with parents who are working or pursuing postsecondary education and need affordable child care. Income-eligible parents with children from 6 weeks to 5 years old would receive financial support for a portion of child care costs and could select from 2,400 department-licensed child care facilities in the state.
- **Families First/SNAP/Tennessee Promise.** TDHS announced an effort by SNAP, Families First, and family partners to register more than 5,000 high school seniors for the Tennessee Promise, building on the earlier pilot.
- **Read to be Ready.** In January 2017, the Department invested \$30 million in a three-year initiative with the state Department of Education's Read to Be Ready summer program, providing summer reading camps for children. This effort also built on an earlier pilot.

- **United Way of Metropolitan Nashville (UWMN).** In 2016, TDHS approached United Way of Metropolitan Nashville to partner in the use of a 2Gen framework to provide families with “wraparound services,” including education, health, job readiness, and financial literacy. The partnership was co-designed by UWMN and a TDHS team from multiple levels of the Department. United Way officials emphasized the power of the 2Gen approach. It “provides an opportunity for transformational life change across multiple generations for the community’s most vulnerable,” said then-CEO Eric Dewey. With this initiative in place, TDHS had established 2Gen efforts in eastern, middle, and western Tennessee.
- **Leg Up.** In 2016, the Department partnered with Pellissippi State Community College to offer child care payment assistance and mentoring to single parents while they continue their education or training in order to reach independence and self-

Milestones in the 2Gen Timeline for Tennessee DHS	
2012	TDHS hosts first Resilient Families Forum
2013	TDHS adopts the Human Services Value Curve
2014	May: TDHS adopts revised Mission, Vision, and Values November: TDHS holds symposium, “Transformational Pathways Out of Poverty,” which introduces 2Gen approach and demonstration programs
2015	January: TDHS issues “Pathways Out of Poverty Report” to state General Assembly December: TDHS officially adopts the 2Gen approach
2016	January: TDHS partners with United Way of Metropolitan Nashville to design 2Gen “wrap around” services to families March: TDHS launches statewide 2Gen awareness campaign June: First meeting of Tennessee 2Gen Consortium June: TDHS launches new child care payment assistance program, “Smart Steps,” designed to address the needs of parents who are working or pursuing postsecondary education leading to self-sufficiency June: TDHS partners with Pellissippi State Community College on a 2Gen child care payment assistance pilot for students who are parents September: TDHS initiates legislation November: TDHS partners with SNAP on 2Gen program to register high school seniors for Tennessee Promise scholarships for community college
2017	January: TDHS makes \$30 million 2Gen grant to Tennessee’s “Read to Be Ready” program, providing summer reading camps for children for 3 years January: TDHS partners with United Way of Metropolitan Nashville to design 2Gen “wrap around” services to families September: TDHS initiates legislation to address the fiscal cliff and increase the monthly amount of the TANF benefit on a recurring basis October: TDHS launches training for TN Reconnect, allowing staff to connect customers to free higher education and technical training

sufficiency. The idea was generated by a community supporter and volunteer working with Pellissippi. The program's goal is for 80 percent of participants to complete their education and training objectives through a combination of intensive case management and supportive services provided by a dedicated case manager from the college.

The Department's multiyear initiatives have been operating for a year or less, so their successes and challenges will become more evident as time passes. But TDHS inserted outcomes language in contracts with its partners, drawing on Ascend's online 2Gen Outcomes Bank and the detailed report on 2Gen outcomes, *Making Tomorrow Better Together*. "I've been focused on how we can prove that these programs are working," Barnes says, "When someone comes in and sees the large amount of money being spent, they're going to want to know, does it work?" The Department will make "performance-based contracting," with 2Gen outcomes, a part of its regular operations.

Passing the Baton

In January 2017, when it was time for Commissioner Hatter to pass the baton, she invited the incoming commissioner, Barnes, to join her at a national 2Gen convening, The Aspen Forum on Children and Families, hosted by Ascend. It is rare for an outgoing and an incoming commissioner to get an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and continuity of goals at a national convening during a time of transition. In a show of unity, they attended, along with DHS Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel Gena Lewis, and Tiffany Day, to share their 2Gen strategies and learn about other 2Gen efforts across the country.

Onward!

As Danielle Barnes embraced the 2Gen approach, she also recognized it was at a fairly early stage of development in the Department. "We're in the toddler stage. My goal is to get as much of the 2Gen work operationalized as I can, so that it's not an initiative, so it becomes the way the Department does business." She continues to talk with the TDHS team at all levels, hosting "Coffee with the Commissioner" meetings to ensure that all voices are being heard.

Although the Department's journey to a 21st century service delivery model is not complete, says Tiffany Day, TDHS is applying a 2Gen approach to all of its poverty-related, eligibility-based services. "We're a different organization now. I think the DHS team has a bigger-picture view about our work and how their everyday effort, their role, connects to moving our mission forward. We are very passionate about the mission. People are reinvigorated about the work that is being done. We've all adopted this lifelong learning mindset and philosophy that we can always be better. We hold ourselves accountable. We see ourselves as partners of children and families. We are not paternalistic, but work to engage those we serve."

Barnes says that when she took the helm at the Department, her main question was how to make the changes sustainable. She has until the end of 2018, when the governor who appointed her must leave office due to term limitations. “We have a lot of work to do,” she reflects, “but I think we are on the right path.” She is focused on building a thriving Tennessee by engaging all citizens and all communities. “We are all Tennesseans first. We must support each other at all levels.”

Lessons Learned for Embracing the 2Gen Approach

“The landscape’s different in every state,” says Hatter. “You have to know what you need to get permission to do and what you don’t need permission to do. You have to determine how to be innovative within the parameters that exist. You should determine what parameters serve as barriers and need to be addressed. You have to be honest about what you can affect.” TDHS’s focus on helping people get out of poverty “was highly congruent with the governor’s priorities.”

The TDHS journey suggests several useful lessons for other state agencies and nonprofit organizations seeking to transform their capacity for greater impact in reducing poverty.

1. Include and Engage Everyone. The 2Gen approach is not just another program to operate; it is an overall approach for changing the way an organization meets the needs of families living in poverty. In the TDHS journey, 2Gen approaches helped evolve the organization from a regulatory model to an integrative model and beyond. Using the 2Gen lens in this way will not work if it is just mandated from on high. It is a capacity-building approach that needs everyone’s capacity to be tapped and developed: frontline service providers, families being served, partners in government and the nonprofit sector, and budget and procurement administrators within the organization. The approach has to be pressure-tested, validated, and refined to fit specific contexts as it is applied. Deep, sustained engagement takes time, of course, but going slow early to develop buy-in and refinements will mean going faster later.

2. Prepare for the Radical Change of the 2Gen Approach. Invest in learning — surfacing, testing, and revising assumptions about the causes of poverty and the barriers to moving out of poverty, as well as what works to help people move out of poverty. Invest in efforts, like the TDHS symposiums and the 2Gen Consortium, to understand what others are trying and learning. Disciplined processes of learning set the stage for embracing the 2Gen approach.

3. Be Rigorous About Evidence of 2Gen Impact. Loving the 2Gen approach is no substitute for being able to show that it produces desirable results, especially if the organization is a steward of tax dollars or donations. Applying the 2Gen lens, designing and implementing pilots, and implementing full-scale 2Gen initiatives will take years, but paying attention to performance is essential. This means being clear and specific about what the organization seeks to achieve through 2Gen approaches and how it will be measured, monitored, and assessed. Accountability of this sort has to be embedded in what the organization does and what its partners do — and reporting and transparency

about results should be a part of the standard operating procedure. Measuring 2Gen outcomes requires paying attention to results for both children and the adults in their lives.

4. Partner for Innovation. TDHS decided that partnering with other government agencies and outside organizations — nonprofits, colleges, foundations — was key to being able to implement a 2Gen approach quickly and effectively. With these entities, it played the roles of broker, co-designer, funder, and performance assessor. This was a smart decision for an entity that had an entire state to serve comprehensively and was rooted in the regulatory level of the Human Services Value Curve. Partnering with other organizations is common when implementing the 2Gen approach. Such partnerships integrate and coordinate services that have traditionally been siloed and take advantage of each partner's areas of expertise — without one organization trying to do everything and potentially doing it poorly.

Therefore, to advance a 2Gen approach, organizations need to know how to be a good partner, which starts with building a solid, trusting relationship. “What was great about partnering with Tennessee DHS,” says Roxanne White, former Nurse-Family Partnership CEO, “was its flexibility, its willingness to think differently. One of the first things that happened was they brought their team to meet our team and work on aligning our cultures. How will we do this together? Who are the players? What are we trying to accomplish together?”

5. Institutionalize the 2Gen Way. The 2Gen approach is not just a way of thinking about poverty or a program to try. It is the basis for reinventing the purpose and design of services for families living in poverty. That is the destination for a state human services department or a mission-driven nonprofit organization — and it is a journey to get there. Another organization's path may not be the same one that TDHS ended up taking, although there will likely be similarities. The destination, however, should be the same — institutionalization of a 2Gen approach.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Human Services Value Curve by Antonio M. Offelie and Leadership for a Networked World at Harvard University is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution–Noncommercial 4.0 International License. It is based on a work at <https://lnwprogram.org/frameworks/human-services-value-curve>. Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <https://lnwprogram.org/>.

² Tennessee Department of Human Services. (2015). *Moving Families Forward: Transformational Pathways out of Poverty*, 36. Available at <http://www.knoxcac.org/newweb/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/TN%20PC%20934%20-%20Pathways%20Out%20of%20Poverty%20Report.pdf>.

³ Tennessee Department of Human Services. (2015). *Moving Families Forward: Transformational Pathways Out of Poverty*.

⁴ Tennessee Department of Human Services. (2015). *Moving Families Forward: Transformational Pathways Out of Poverty*, 17.

⁵ <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/featured-initiatives/2g-for-tennessee.html>



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners.

2300 N Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20037

ascend.aspeninstitute.org

 [@aspenascend](https://twitter.com/aspenascend)