



Families Disrupting the Cycle of Poverty: Coaching with an Intergenerational Lens

Elisabeth Babcock, MCRP, PhD and Nicki Ruiz de Luzuriaga, MPA



EMPath
Economic Mobility Pathways

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FOREWORD

Spoiler alert—the work described in this report stakes out new territory in a field that is desperately searching for fresh thinking and breakthrough impacts. And if the architects of this new model are on the right track—as I suspect they are—this is simply a preview of a more promising future for millions of children and families facing the debilitating burdens of poverty.

The intergenerational transmission of significant economic insecurity and its adverse effects on educational achievement and lifelong health are well known and difficult to overcome. Moreover, two-generation strategies for reducing poverty are not a new idea, yet their effective implementation remains an enduring challenge across a multitude of policies and delivery systems. Most of these program models seek to coordinate services focused on the needs of children with those that are focused on the needs of their parents. In some cases this involves greater attention to inter-agency communication, planning, and data sharing. In other cases, it simply means the co-location of services.

EMPath is staking out a fundamentally different approach. Rather than trying to connect programs that work on parenting skills with services that target job training, the Intergen Project is pioneering an integrated strategy focused on strengthening the core capabilities (such as self-regulation and executive function skills) that are foundational to both. This highly innovative model is informed by credible scientific knowledge about how these capacities are built, how adversity disrupts their underlying neurocircuitry, and how effective scaffolding, coaching, and practice can get them back on track. It is grounded in a deep understanding of how children develop in an environment of relationships and how the ability of parents to meet their own life goals is inextricably intertwined with the well-being of their children.

Beth Babcock and Nicki Ruiz de Luzuriaga have produced a remarkably important report. It describes the work of a unique “action tank” that is delivering services and influencing policies informed by science and shaped by rigorous analysis. The authors and their colleagues are model builders and tool developers. Their vision is bold and their approach is thoughtful. They are incorporating insights from the biological and social sciences into an on-the-ground, collaborative process with the clients they serve. The pages that follow provide an opportunity to peer inside an organization that is leading the way in developing more effective approaches to moving adults from poverty to economic self-sufficiency. Even more exciting, the Intergen Project is testing the compelling hypothesis that the key to achieving breakthrough outcomes for children facing significant economic and social adversity is to support the adults who care for them to transform their own lives.

Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.
Julius B. Richmond FAMRI Professor of
Child Health and Development at the
Harvard School of Public Health and the
Harvard Graduate School of Education,
Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical
School and Boston Children’s Hospital,
and Director of the Center on the
Developing Child at Harvard University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the various ways in which poverty can affect families, and lays out the intergenerational model Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)ⁱ has developed to combat these effects.

The stresses of poverty affect families at three interacting levels:

- **The Outcomes Level:** Poverty affects families' educational, career, health, and financial outcomes. These effects are intergenerational: parents' and their children's outcomes impact each other.
- **The Inner-Self Level:** Poverty affects families' development of specific skills and mindsets necessary for navigating the complex path out of poverty: namely, self-regulation skills and the sense of self. These effects are also intergenerational: these skills and mindsets are developed in the context of the family, and each family member's skills and mindsets can impact others in the family.
- **The Family Level:** Poverty affects families' relationships, communication, and alignment (but not bonds). Poverty can be isolating for individuals, making it more difficult for them to consider themselves in the context of their families.

In order to disrupt the intergenerational effects of poverty, EMPath has developed a model for working with whole families in a way that addresses all three levels. An expansion of EMPath's successful Mobility Mentoring[®] model, the Intergenerational Mobility Project (The Intergen Project) incorporates assessment, goal-setting, coaching, and incentives for each individual in the family, as well as for the family as a whole. Incorporating years of experience working with low-income individuals with the foremost academic research on what moves people forward, and engaging the families themselves in the co-design of the tools and process, a suite of three Mobility Mentoring[®] tools has been developed that provide the basis for work with:

- Each adult in the family (the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency[®]),
- Each child in the family (the Child Bridge to a Brighter Future[™]), and
- The family as a whole (the Family Carpool Lane Tool[™]).

This suite of tools has been used with families at EMPath, and initial findings are promising. Although only a limited number of families have been involved with the project as of the publication of this report, preliminary outcomes and feedback from families were strong enough to warrant the sharing of the tools and description of their theoretical underpinnings.

Throughout the brief, findings from the academic literature are used alongside quotes from families participating in EMPath's programs, culled from interviews and focus groups. The authors have purposefully privileged these direct statements from families, as they provide some of the most important learning we have on the subject of poverty's effects on families.

The goal of this brief is to spark discussion in the field about the importance of working from an intergenerational lens. EMPath will continue to spread the Intergen Project to more families, both within EMPath and with selected partners. This work will provide important information about how and where the project can best be scaled.

ⁱ In July 2016, the Crittenton Women's Union was renamed Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath). For ease of use, all references to the organization, whether historic or current, will be to EMPath. Publications produced under the Crittenton Women's Union (CWU) copyright, will still carry that reference.

Made in collaboration with the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, this video profiles the Intergenerational Mobility Project and its use of a coaching framework to strengthen families' abilities to navigate the complexity of poverty.



[▶ WATCH VIDEO](#)

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Poverty is one of the society's most costly and enduring challenges. More than 50 years after the launch of the U.S.'s "War on Poverty," mobility for low-income individuals remains low. However, truly innovative strategies for creating new pathways out of poverty are beginning to emerge—and they are building on a scientific revolution.

EMPath'sⁱⁱ mission is to transform people's lives by helping them move out of poverty, and provide other institutions with the tools to systematically do the same. While for the past decade the organization has been primarily concerned with developing ways to transform individual adult's lives, the fact that people develop in the context of relationships has been a primary interest for some time.¹ All social networks in which a person operates are important, but the family contains the most important social bonds and shapes who an individual will become. While families exist in a context of multiple factors that are frequently beyond their control—including communities, labor markets, economies, schools, health care and family support systems, even criminal justice systems—it is within the family that there is opportunity to deal with the effects of these broader systems.

Poverty is fundamentally bad for families. In the 21st century in the United States, systemic oppression, racism, and lack of opportunity create an incredibly stressful and destabilizing environment for families. It's hard enough to navigate a way out of poverty on one's own, but juggling a whole family's needs can make it even more complex and difficult. Today, the intergenerational effects of living in poverty make it harder than ever for families to break the cycle. In order to more effectively break the cycle, EMPath has undertaken an effort to better understand the intergenerational effects of poverty, and to develop an intergenerational intervention strategy that aims to significantly transform families' abilities to move forward toward a brighter future together. The aim of this brief is to describe the intergenerational effects of poverty, and lay out the multi-faceted intervention that EMPath has developed to combat these effects and transform family outcomes. The first five sections of this brief are dedicated to laying

out the theories underpinning intergenerational antipoverty work. The sixth section will give some historical context of EMPath's work in moving adults toward economic independence, and the effects this has had on their children. The seventh section will lay out, in detail, how the Intergenerational Mobility Project ("The Intergen Project") has been implemented at EMPath, explicating new tools and ways of working with families. The eighth section provides some initial findings on the efficacy of the Intergen Project, with both promising quantitative data and strong positive qualitative feedback from families involved in the project. Finally, the ninth section will provide a conclusion and direction for future work.

HOW POVERTY AFFECTS FAMILIES

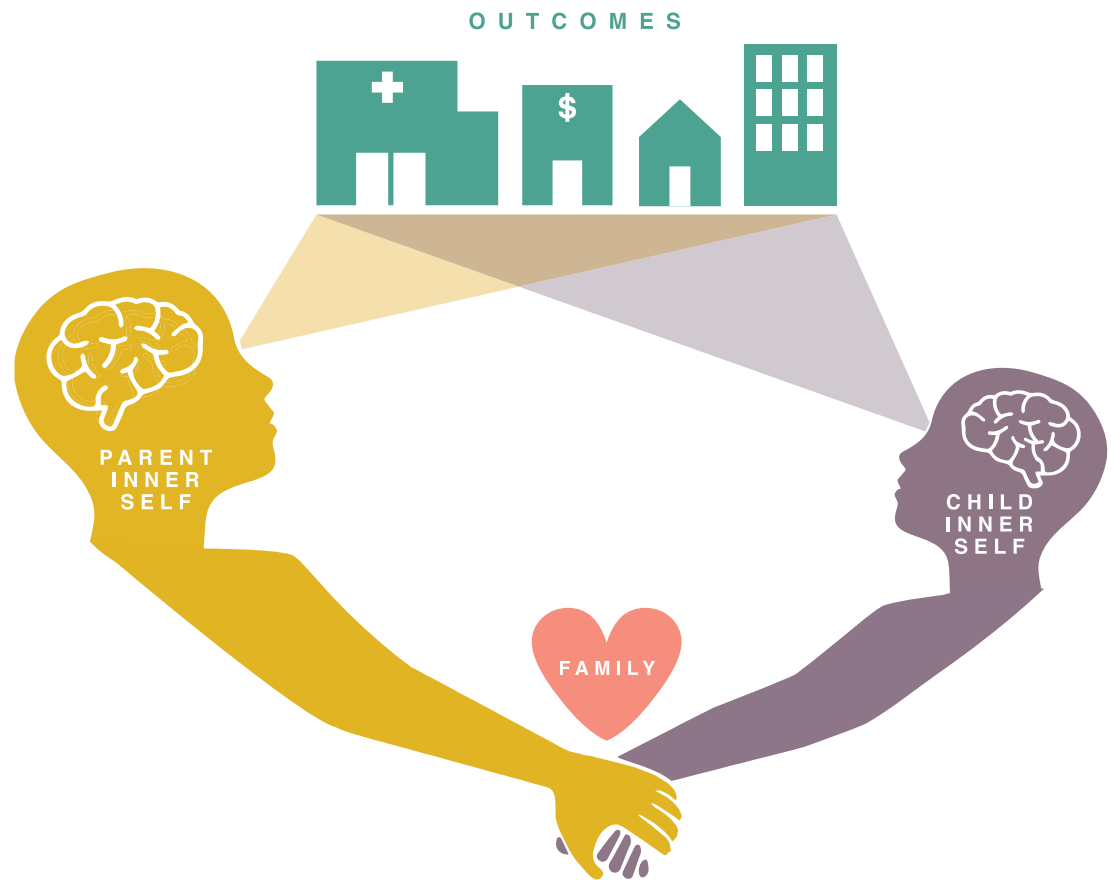
The stresses created by poverty, trauma and oppression affect adults and children in three key areas that are profoundly important in their lives: Outcomes; Inner-Self; and Family.

Of all the three levels, poverty's impact on the **Outcomes Level** is the best documented. These outcomes include school achievement, physical and mental health, career and earnings, and finances. Poverty impacts these outcomes in an intergenerational way. Parent income, education, mental health, and finances all have been shown to have measurable impacts on a variety of children's outcomes. And children affect parental outcomes too: children's difficulties in school and their physical or mental health affect their parents' ability to move forward. Section Two of this brief describes in greater detail the intergenerational effects of poverty on the Outcomes Level and some two-generational ("Two-Gen") efforts to combat these effects.

At the **Inner-Self Level**, poverty impacts the skills and mindsets necessary to move toward economic independence, including self-regulation skills and the sense of self. Poverty creates an environment in which these skills and mindsets are regularly challenged. The stresses of poverty leave low-income people feeling less in control and able to plan for their futures. Poverty has intergenerational effects on the Inner-Self Level because these skills and mindsets are built through co-regulation in the family and are highly

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FIGURE 1: KEY LEVELS OF POVERTY'S IMPACT ON FAMILIES—
AND POTENTIAL TARGETS FOR INTERVENTION



Simply defined

- The **Outcomes Level** includes the things adults and children try to accomplish such as obtaining education, improving earnings, managing money, and staying healthy;
- The **Inner-Self Level** encompasses their sense of who they are, how they think, feel, and manage their own behavior; and
- The **Family Level** consists of interpersonal communication, alignment, and relationships.

dependent on the stability and regulation of the environment. Section Four describes how poverty affects the development of these skills and mindsets.

Through working with families in an intentionally intergenerational way, staff at EMPATH have learned about a third level at which poverty can impact adults and children: the **Family Level**. At this level poverty impacts family relationships. The unending stresses of poverty can create an environment in which individuals have to be concerned primarily with survival, and with dealing with the crises that come at them each day. Excessive stress can make it very difficult for

people to focus outside of themselves, to consider the emotional needs of others, and to have regular, meaningful back-and-forth interaction. Even if family members' basic needs are technically met, something deeper and more fundamental can still be missing. Reflecting on her relationship with her children before she came into the Intergen Project, one EMPATH participant said, "My kids were in every afterschool program, every organized sport...but at the end of the day, *our relationship was broken*. I could have them occupied from one in the afternoon (when they get out of school) until 8pm at night (when they go to bed), but at the end of the day when we're at home, our home was broken."

To be clear, poverty does *not* impact the strong *bonds* between family members. Low-income parents will endure a multitude of hardships and discomforts for their children: working multiple jobs to make enough to support the family, skipping meals to ensure their children have enough to eat, and quitting work or school if their child gets very sick and needs their attention. Children, too, will put aside their own desires to help out a parent.

Such bonds are vitally important because family members can be the biggest motivators and supports for each other. A lot has been written about the importance of social networks, and families are a fundamentally important social network: the primary one in which people grow. However, without a strong relationship and strong alignment toward shared goals, the strength of family bonds can also work against individuals' own economic mobility. Sections Three and Five will dive more deeply into the importance of family bonds, alignment, communication and relationships.

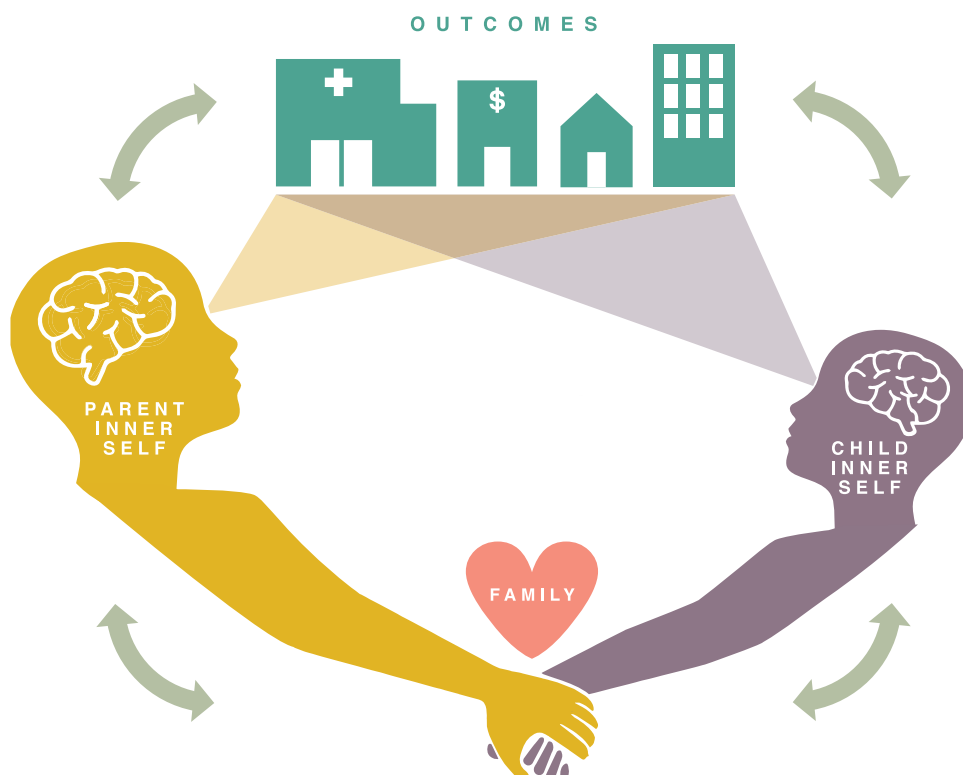
The three levels described above all impact each other. Improvements in family relationships can aid in improving self-regulation, because improving family relationships can increase the back-and-forth interactions that build

self-regulation and positive sense of self. Improvements in self-regulation and positive sense of self can improve external outcomes, such as school achievement. It works the other way too: a parent's improvements at the Outcomes Level, such as getting a raise, can decrease her stress and lead to improvements in both self-regulation and sense of self. It can also free her up to improve her family relationships.

EMPath's intention, in creating the Intergenerational Mobility Project ("the Intergen Project"), was to harness what is known about intergenerational bonds and the impacts of poverty to better help families to create new cycles: virtuous cycles that will lead them to brighter futures. The Intergen Project works on all three of the levels described above. As will be described in Sections Six and beyond, the project is a logical outgrowth of EMPATH's previous work with individuals. The Intergen Project helps families to set specific individual goals for both adults and children to improve Outcomes Level achievements. The individual tools and coaching model work intentionally on building Inner-Self Level skills and mindsets, and finally, the family coaching model works on improving Family Level relationships by providing a structure for the family to better work together to help each other get ahead.

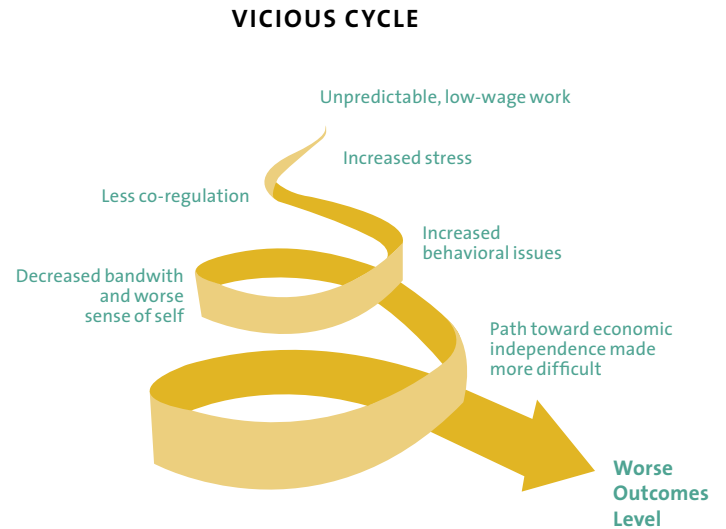
Poverty does not affect how much family members love each other or the strong bonds between them, but it often can and does affect how effectively family members are able to help each other get ahead.

FIGURE 2: THREE LEVELS ALL IMPACT EACH OTHER

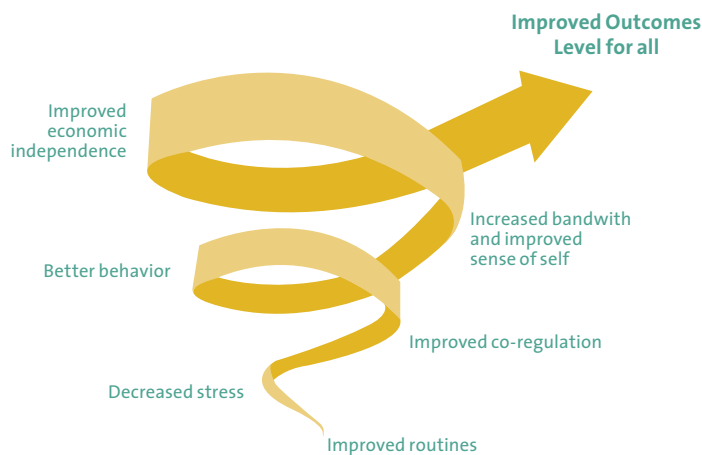


EXAMPLES OF OBSERVED VICIOUS AND VIRTUOUS CYCLES

Structural inequality can set off a vicious cycle of effects for families. For example, in many families unpredictable, low-wage work causes an incredible amount of stress for the parent. Because of this stress, there are fewer opportunities for co-regulation between family members, which leads to poorer self-regulation skills in the child and an increase in behavior issues. These issues require the attention of the parent, thereby decreasing his/her bandwidth. Child behavior issues may also cause the parent to doubt his or her abilities, leading to a diminished sense of self. Decreased bandwidth and a diminished sense of self make the path toward economic independence much more difficult: a stressed parent in this situation would have more trouble making a plan to go back to school to train for a better-paying career, for example, and would have less capacity to succeed in such a program if they did attend. This leads in turn to worse Outcomes Level gains for all.



VIRTUOUS CYCLE



However, when a family starts to work intentionally together, they can trigger a virtuous cycle whereby all family members see better Outcomes Level achievements. An example of this situation is a family who improves their daily routines. Improved routines can lead to decreased stress for all family members. Decreased stress creates more opportunities for co-regulation, which will improve self-regulation skills in the children. Improved self-regulation means improved behavior, which in turn frees up parent bandwidth. It also improves the parent's sense of self: he or she will feel more able to take things on and confident in the ability to succeed. This improves the chances that the parent will be able to make significant steps toward economic independence: applying to post-secondary school, for example, and having the capacity to succeed after they enroll. This can end up improving all Outcomes Level gains for the family.

SECTION 2: INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY AT THE OUTCOMES LEVEL, AND TWO-GENERATION SOLUTIONS



The intergenerational effects of poverty at the Outcomes Level are relatively easy to see and to measure. For example, being raised in a household with low income is linked to lower rates of school readiness², lower rates of kindergarten proficiency³, lower test scores⁴, and higher rates of mental health complications⁵ for children. These effects continue into adulthood, as lower income and fewer work hours⁶ have been linked to having grown up in poverty. Children's social and health outcomes are worst in the poorest families, and studies have shown that simply increasing family income, without any other changes, improves children's outcomes. For example, a 2011 meta-analysis showed that an increase of \$3,000 in family income was associated with one-fifth of a standard deviation increase in children's test scores⁷. Recent research suggests that increasing family income could improve child educational outcomes even more than investments in early childhood education (per dollar spent). A 2016 study comparing the impact of increasing family income versus spending on early education programs found that "putting more money into the pockets of low-income parents produces substantially larger gains in children's school achievement per dollar of expenditure than a year of preschool, participation in Head Start, or class size reduction in the early grades."⁸ Parent education⁹, health¹⁰, and financial situation¹¹ also measurably affect child outcomes.

Though most of the research has focused on ways that parents affect their children, children affect their parents at the Outcomes Level as well. A doctoral dissertation completed on this topic by a former EMPATH staff member found that for parents, "caring for children, arranging childcare and attending school meetings all take time away from school and work."¹² Because of the strong bonds between parents and children, a parent will put everything else on hold if their child has a need. Because low-income children tend to have

more complicated needs than their higher-income peers—when compared with their peers, poor children are much more likely to be in suboptimal health¹³, more likely to have mental health issues (and less likely to get treatment),¹⁴ and more likely to have behavior issues stemming from a lack of executive functioning skills¹⁵—parents must regularly put aside their own priorities to address these problems. The realities of low-wage work mean that there is very little flexibility for parents: in many situations parents will simply be fired for not being at work while they are dealing with their child's needs.

In recent years, leaders seeking to improve economic outcomes for low-income families have become increasingly aware of ways in which parent and child outcomes are linked. In an attempt to better address these dynamics, Two-Generation (2-gen) approaches have proliferated¹⁶, seeking to deal with the intergenerational impacts of poverty on the Outcomes Level. Prominent foundations have hosted convenings¹⁷, published research¹⁸, and provided funding¹⁹ for 2-gen efforts, and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families has shown increased interest in 2-gen research²⁰ and in working from a 2-gen lens.^{21,22} Compared to programs or approaches that serve the needs of either children *or* their parents, "Two-generation approaches focus on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both vulnerable parents and children together."²³ While there is a spectrum of these 2-gen approaches, some more focused on adults or children, and some more focused on the family as a whole, most program designs tend to provide services (usually high-quality early education and care) for a child while at the same time engaging the parent in job training or higher education²⁴. Thus 2-gen programs tend to be largely focused on the Outcomes Level: they identify a given service need and fill it for each generation.

Staff at EMPath have learned much from these 2-gen programs, and believe strongly in their value delivering Outcomes Level services for families in a more coordinated way. However, because EMPath operates programs that serve entire families at this level, and also has had many years' experience coaching adults at Inner-Self Level, the organization has had rich opportunities to explore the nature of families' intergenerational dynamics and to think about the additional value that

might be created in working with families in an intergenerational way at all three levels: Outcomes Level goals, Inner-Self Level skills and mindsets, and Family Level alignments.

For EMPath, an intergenerational focus is defined as one which expands the lens to evaluate more than each generation's resource and service needs, and intentionally focuses on the innate interdependence of family members—especially parent and child, but also partners and co-parents, siblings, and other individuals who define themselves as “family.”ⁱⁱⁱ An intergenerational program actively involves parents in the Outcomes Level service connections and goal-setting for their children, and involves children in the same way for parents. It facilitates Inner-Self Level skills and mindset-focused coaching for all family members, and Family Level alignment around shared goals and desires. In short, an intergenerational focus moves beyond the Outcomes Level's focus on purely external achievements, to consider skills, mindsets, and relationship factors that will aid a family in moving forward together.

“In my mind, we (the moms) are like water...and if the kids were just on their own in a program, they're like oil...and to try to mix the two it just doesn't blend like it should...so yes it's important to have our own program, and it's important for them to have their own focus, but it is equally important for us to work together in a program.”

– Intergen Participant



ⁱⁱⁱNote: EMPath has no prescriptive definition of “family” for the intergenerational work: in the first meetings with potential participants, staff ask them to define their own family, and work with whomever they describe as being a part of the family. This includes parent(s) and child(ren) at minimum, but can also include partners (cohabitating or not), other biological or non-biological parents, grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, close friends, or whomever else is integral to the family's day-to-day functioning.

SECTION 3: INTERDEPENDENCE OF FAMILY MEMBERS

As useful as it is to improve coordination between services for parents and their children, something is missed when addressing only the service needs for each of the generations and not also on the ways in which poverty uniquely shapes human thinking, behavior, and, in particular, family relationships. At the most fundamental level, an intergenerational focus is powerful because family members—and especially parents and children—are extremely interdependent.

Human beings take many years to reach the point that they can fully care for themselves. Because of this, strong parent-child bonds are absolutely necessary for survival. Human adults have evolved with biology and instincts that generally make them want to have children, love them, and care for them. One of the universal traits of parents is that, barring severe mental health or substance abuse issues, they truly want and seek to do what is best for their children. And because of their long period of dependency, children have evolved to seek the attention and love of their parents and to maintain it. One of the universal traits of children is that, barring severe clinical challenges, they strongly desire their parents' attention and love. Scientists debate the degree to which the behaviors and skills parents and children deploy to maintain their attachment bonds are inherited or learned, but what is not debated is how very powerful and necessary for survival they are.²⁵

Parent and child bonds are strengthened and maintained through constant interaction. From birth, parents and children send signals to each other and cue-in to each other's reactions. Children automatically cry when they are hungry or in pain and, "This means that in the ordinary course of events the parent of a baby experiences a strong urge to behave in a typical sorts (sic) of way, for example, to cradle the infant, to soothe him when he cries, to keep him warm, protected, and fed."²⁶ The bonds and signals between parent and child not only ensure survival, but also the learning and development of the child. The back and forth interaction of parent and child is what builds the baby's developing brain:

What scientists refer to as interaction, mutuality, and reciprocity can be understood as comparable to the process of "serve and return" in games such as tennis and volleyball. In early childhood development, serve and return happens when young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions, words, gestures, and cries, and adults respond by getting in sync and doing the same kind of vocalizing and gesturing back at them, and the process continues back and forth. Another important aspect of the serve and return notion of interaction is that it works best when it is embedded in an ongoing relationship between a child and an adult who is responsive to the child's own unique individuality.

Decades of research tell us that mutually rewarding interactions are essential prerequisites for the development of healthy brain circuits and increasingly complex skills.²⁷

The phrase *mutually rewarding interactions* in the quotation above is important to emphasize, because when parents and children experience their interactions in a positive way, it reinforces the learning, development, and the well-being of both.

Serve and return doesn't stop in early childhood. The back and forth interaction between parents and children continues as the child grows. Parents act as role models for their children throughout their lives teaching them behaviors, skills, and attitudes that ready them to thrive in adulthood. And parents are continuously impacted by their children, thereby growing important skills, motivation, and aspects of identity.

When parents and children experience their interactions in a positive way, it reinforces the learning, development, and the well-being of both.

Environmental conditions that are highly stressful make it harder for parent-child bonds to be properly nurtured and built.²⁸

IMPACTS OF POVERTY AND STRESS

The quality of parent-child interactions is inevitably influenced by the external circumstances in which the parents and children find themselves. Poverty creates a particularly difficult environment in which to foster strong family interactions because of the constant and unending stress it creates. It is hard for anyone to pay close attention to others, learn to understand their cues, satisfy the others' needs, and align to form strong bonds in the middle of environmental circumstances that are distracting, unstable, or unsafe. Environmental conditions that are highly stressful make it harder for parent-child bonds to be properly nurtured and built.²⁸

Behavioral economists use the metaphor of bandwidth to describe the ways in which stress can impact many aspects of behavior and decision-making, including parenting. Just as a computer will slow down when trying to download too many large files at once, our brains do not function well when overly stressed. When stressed, it is difficult to control impulses, delay gratification and focus on the long-term implications of our actions. Thus stress inevitably impacts parenting. As Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir write in their book *Scarcity*,

*Good parenting generally requires bandwidth. It requires complex decisions and sacrifice. Children need to be motivated to do things they dislike, appointments have to be kept, activities planned, teachers met and their feedback processed, tutoring or extra help provided or procured and then monitored. This is hard for anyone, whatever his resources. It is doubly hard when your bandwidth is reduced. At the moment, you do not have the freedom of mind needed to exercise patience, to do the things you know to be right.*²⁹

Many researchers have noted differences in the parenting styles of rich and poor parents, especially in the quality of the back-and-forth interactions they have with their children.³⁰ On the whole, richer parents speak with their children more often and are more likely to promote interchange in their conversations, as opposed to poorer parents who use more directive speech. This does not mean that any group of parents is "better" than the other. It simply means that poverty, and the stress associated with it, imposes a tax upon people which impacts individuals' abilities to engage optimally with those around them.

EMPath parents often talk about the ways that poverty affects their parenting. As one mother involved in EMPATH's Intergen Project said in a focus group, "I try to put aside a little money so we can do things together...but I got this job now, I'm getting paid more...and they cut my food stamps. And now I'm panicking. This is something else for me to stress about...I'm always sitting there planning...and I feel like this is a mental disability, to be honest...This (worrying about money) is taking time I could be spending with my kids...I think I do a budget every week..." For this parent, and many others, poverty creates a constant feeling of stress and crisis which takes attention away from the needs of children.

For parents who have been involved in EMPATH's Mobility Mentoring® programs and have started to move forward, it can be difficult to juggle all of the steps necessary to get ahead along with the obligations of parenting. As one mother enrolled in the Intergen Project said, "When you're a parent... it's like you got to take care of yourself. But then if you're taking care of yourself, then somewhere, the baby or the kid's missing out." This parent knew that, while she was focused on "taking care of" herself, pursuing higher education and a higher wage job, that her children were potentially "missing out" on spending quality time with her. Another mother talked about her new focus on her own self-sufficiency, and said, "I feel like I'm overwhelmed a lot and I'm not living in the moment with my kids. And that's part of the reason why I'm lacking the relationship with the kids. I'm always thinking about tomorrow and what I have to do, I live by this planner: I gotta do this, and cross this off, and 'not today son because I gotta do this'... There's always something..."

Virtually all parents who have come into the Intergen Project have articulated that they wished they had stronger relationships with their children, felt isolated from their children, or felt the relationship was lacking. This is the articulation of poverty's effects on the Family Level.

SECTION 4: INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON THE INNER-SELF LEVEL: SELF-REGULATION AND SENSE OF SELF



Because of the impacts on back-and-forth interaction described in Section 3, the stress of poverty has particularly noted effects on two domains considered critical for successfully undertaking the kind of complex, goal-oriented work necessary for exiting poverty: self-regulation skills and the sense of self. Understanding the importance of these two domains underscores the need for strengthening intergenerational bonds because the family plays a pivotal role in the development of both.

SELF-REGULATION

One of the most important sets of skills for people of all ages, self-regulation (also known as executive functioning) includes our ability to control impulses, solve problems, and maintain focus despite distraction. As researchers have noted, “self-regulation serves as the foundation for lifelong functioning across a wide range of domains, from mental health and emotional well-being to academic achievement, physical health, and socioeconomic success.”³¹

The stresses of poverty powerfully affect the development of self-regulation skills, both over the life course and in the moment. The chronic stresses of growing up in adversity can impact the development of important self-regulation skills in young children.³² If children’s lives are full of stress, stress hormones are constantly flooding the brain. While a small amount of stress is good for

children—more challenging learning opportunities, for example, can cause good stress—excessive amounts of stress, without regular or predictable relief, impacts the brain’s architecture and makes developing self-regulation more difficult. Further, day-to-day stresses of life can hijack anyone’s self-regulation skills in the moment.³³ Everyone, rich or poor, has snapped at a loved one after a long day of work, or made unhealthy food choices when family stresses become overwhelming. Because poverty today brings constant, overpowering stress, self-regulation skills of those living in poverty can be challenged. It is important to note the cause and effect here: People are not poor because they lack self-regulation skills. **Poverty itself causes the challenges to these skills.** Anyone would have similar challenges to their self-regulation skills when presented with similar stresses.

People are not poor because they lack self-regulation skills. Poverty itself causes the challenges to these skills.



Self-regulation skills are built through interaction with others, over time, making the family an ideal place to focus intervention. Children's self-regulation—their ability to analyze or interpret a threat, think about how to respond, and then govern their emotions and actions accordingly (also referred to as executive function and self-regulation skills)—is built through watching and interacting with caregivers who have well-developed capabilities in these areas.

Development of self-regulation is dependent on “co-regulation” provided by the parents or other caregiving adults through warm and responsive interactions in which support, coaching, and modeling is provided to facilitate a child’s ability to understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings and behavior.³⁴

Co-regulation doesn't stop in early childhood. Throughout childhood and into early adulthood, parents play a very important role in supporting their children's regulation.³⁵ Thus if parents are themselves poorly regulated—because of the stresses of living in poverty, for example—they will be less able to engage in co-regulation with their children, at any age. Scientists at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University now suggest that the best way to improve child outcomes may be through building the core capabilities, such as self-regulation, of their parents.³⁶

Parents' self-regulation is also affected by their children. When children exhibit behaviors that are different from what parents want, expect, or are trying to achieve, it can tax parent bandwidth and impact parents' decision-making skills and self-regulation. One need only think of the way parents are impacted by the behavior of a child who cannot be soothed, is behaviorally out of control, or is experiencing a crisis, to understand how significantly children's behavior and their ability to positively engage with their parents impacts parental functioning.

SENSE OF SELF

In order to navigate the complicated path out of poverty, a person needs more than just good self-regulation skills. They need to *believe* that change is possible, that they have the power to make that change, and that they deserve a better life. The phrase *sense of self* is used to describe the interacting concepts of self-efficacy, identity and understanding of one's place in the social world, that fundamentally impact a person's ability to move forward.

The sense of self is important because human beings are not unemotional, always-rational actors. Rather, our decision-making is “influenced by contextual cues, local social networks and social norms, and shared mental models. All of these play a role in determining what individuals perceive as desirable, possible, or even ‘thinkable’ for their lives.”³⁷

Poverty in the United States in the 21st century strongly impacts a person's sense of what is possible or thinkable in their lives. Oppression, in the form of class structure, systemic racism, and sexism, gives poor people (and especially low-income people of color) strong cues as to what is possible for them and their families. These cues can be so powerful that they alter personal outcomes. One study of the effects of race and gender stereotypes presented Asian women with a math test. When primed to think about their race right before the test, they did better than when they were primed to think about their gender. Behavioral economists who study this kind of phenomenon note the impact of individuals living up to stereotypes: Asians are stereotyped to be good at math, while women are portrayed as being worse at math.³⁸ Children in elementary school already have internalized stereotypes about race, class, and academic performance³⁹, and having these stereotypes primed before a test can affect performance.⁴⁰ A lifetime of dealing with structural oppression can take its toll on the sense of self. The family, however, is an important place where society's effects on the sense of self can be moderated. Families create their own social norms and shared mental models, which are reinforced through daily interaction.

The family can be an especially important place to develop self-efficacy. The two most important ways of building self-efficacy are through experiences of success (successfully completing something makes you believe you can complete others) and through vicarious experience (seeing

A lifetime of dealing with structural oppression can take its toll on the sense of self.

others like you achieve something makes you believe you can do it too)⁴¹ The home environment is a good place to set up opportunities for experiencing success, as it is the environment over which individuals have the most control. Parents are well-poised to give their children small opportunities to succeed at tasks, which they can build up to bigger successes to grow their child's sense of self-efficacy. The feeling of success is important for parents as well: when they feel they are succeeding as parents it can give them a greater overall feeling of self-efficacy.

Further, the family is the most powerful place to have vicarious experience. Observed experiences are most impactful when the person being observed is considered to be similar to the observer. Because the closest bonds are often within family—family members are the people that individuals consider most “like them”—observations of family members' behavior and outcomes are especially important. This is one of the reasons that having educated parents is so important in determining whether young people themselves graduate from higher education: knowing that someone “like you” has done it builds the sense that you can too.

EMPath parents often share how their striving towards goals impacts their children's. As one mother said of her daughter:

I was sitting there and she's like, “Oh, are you doing your homework?” She's like, “You're such a good doobie.” She's like, “Look at you.” She's like, “I'm so proud of you.” Like so she'll tease me like that.

So I think that it's not, you know, just the schoolwork or whatever but, I mean, I'm sure that she notices in general that I'm happier when I'm working towards something and have something to look forward to and a goal and a purpose and ...I think that (It affects her goals)... How can it not?⁴²

As another parent noted about the impact of her schooling on her son,

He knows what I'm going to school for. Then we compare report cards. I'm like; I'm striving for all A's, what are you striving for? Then when I got all A's and I showed him. He was like; oh I can't do that. I was like; why not you see mommy put time and effort into her homework so it's just the same for you, put time and effort into it. It becomes a competition between the two of us.⁴³



SECTION 5: INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF POVERTY AT THE FAMILY LEVEL



Beyond the important work of developing Inner-Self Level skills and mindsets that happens through interaction in the parent-child relationship, there are other things at work at the Family Level.

“My kids are my motivation to keep struggling.”

BONDS AND MOTIVATION

The bonds between family members create some of the strongest motivation for individuals. As noted above, the deep biological and social bonds between family members create an impetus for individuals to do things they simply wouldn't do otherwise.

Children serve as primary motivation for parental empowerment and achievement. The academic literature supports that parents do things in order to support and protect their children that they would not otherwise accomplish. Parents are more successful at making difficult life changes such as stopping smoking, saving money, and completing education, because of their children.⁴⁴ They will even fight to overcome trauma and intentionally change their parenting styles in order to improve their children's outcomes.⁴⁵

EMPath participants regularly describe the positive effects parenthood has on their own goals. Most participants speak passionately about being motivated to improve their lives and finding the will to persist in the face of huge obstacles, because of their children. As one EMPath mother shared:

My kids are my motivation to keep struggling. I will do whatever it takes me to give them what I didn't have as a child. My main interest in becoming a professional is to be a role model for my children. I want to be able to teach them about life and support them financially. I want them to see that it takes perseverance and diligence to succeed.⁴⁶

Another stated,

My largest motivating factor is my children. To be someone that they can be proud of and look up to means the world to me. I would like to show my daughter the importance of being a strong and independent woman by actually being one myself...I want to show them that self-worth and happiness come from within by taking charge of your own destiny.⁴⁷

These women show the importance of intergenerational bonds: parenting is a primary identity for them. They want to do better financially to give their children a better future. At the same time, they understand the impact of their actions and behaviors on their children; they know that they are role models.



FAMILIES AND STRESS

At the core, the functioning of the family impacts everyone in it. The family can cause stress, and it can protect against it. When a family is well-aligned, things just work better: everyone knows their role and helps contribute toward the greater good. When a family is poorly aligned, however, it can hold individuals in the family back. Poverty itself can make alignment harder. The most basic needs for food, shelter, sleep, safety and security are expected to be met within the family. The stresses that poverty places on satisfying these basic needs can drive family members apart.

Evidence suggests that when dealing with stress, the normal human reaction is to focus narrowly on one immediate problem at a time. When individuals do this, it can be harder to consider the needs of others, keep multiple competing priorities in mind, or to make decisions designed to optimize the longer term needs of the family as a whole. Behavioral scientists refer to this experience as “tunneling”⁴⁸ and it can cause family members to feel isolated and to act at cross-purposes to one another. It also makes it very hard for individual family members to focus on higher order goals such as success in work, school, or long-term financial stability.

In addition to providing basic needs, the family is integral in the organization and efficient use of personal time, money, space and networks. Families must figure out how to meet all members’ needs with limited resources. For low-income families, the process of moving out of poverty requires increasing resources (time, money, and the things that time and money can buy), and/or deploying existing resources more efficiently so that they can be better used to meet family needs. Increasing net resources, or creating more efficient resource use, requires optimization of trade-offs, but such optimization can only happen when there is a clear goal to be achieved with the resources. In order to know how to best spend time and money, one needs to know the answer to the question “toward what end?” When family members agree on the best use of family resources, those resources are more likely to be optimized. Families need to be aligned around shared priorities in order to most efficiently optimize trade-offs.

Moreover, the interpersonal dynamics of a household can work to move individuals forward or hold them back. Individuals’ ability to cope with anger and stress, their abilities to solve problems and to support others, all impact their family members’ stress and well-being.

“I feel different than before I started InterGen. I feel like I have a more clear mind of what goals I would want to set. Because it’s all about the goals, but before I was in the program, it was just jumbled.”

–InterGen Participant

CREATING VIRTUOUS CYCLES

The family is a place where virtuous cycles can start to occur. When small improvements are made in one area, they reverberate in other areas. If a family starts a new routine, it can have impacts on children’s behavior, which will then impact parents’ stress, which will then impact their ability to provide nurturing parenting. All of these successes can build off of each other. And this is what contributes to family alignment. As one parent described the improvements in her own family’s dynamics: “Now there’s more things they [the children] can do for themselves... **It’s like we all share in trying to keep the household moving forward.**”⁴⁹

The sections that follow will move from the theoretical understanding outlined above to a more practical description of what’s been done at EMPATH to combat the intergenerational effects of poverty. The work that has been done historically at EMPATH will be described first, followed by a detailed description of the InterGen Project tools and processes.

Parents struggling to improve their skills and build a better life must continue, at the same time, to support and care for their children.

SECTION 6: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EMPATH'S WORK

The Intergen Project was a logical outgrowth of the work EMPATH had been doing for years with low-income adults. EMPATH has always worked primarily with adults who have children. For this reason, in 2007, when staff began designing new ways to help adults move out of poverty, all of the tools and approaches included working with the participants within their family context. The reasons for this seemed self-evident: adults with children do not move out of poverty alone; their families come with them. The earnings parenting adults need in order to be economically stable depend entirely upon the size and needs of their families. Parents struggling to improve their skills and build a better life must continue, at the same time, to support and care for their children. So the job of becoming economically independent is inherently more complex for parents than it is for single adults. The process of moving out of poverty is very different for the single parent of three children or for a parent of a child with special needs, than it is for a single adult.

Therefore EMPATH included, from the very beginning, frameworks for Family Stability assessment and goal-setting in both our theory of change, The Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®, and in our Mobility Mentoring® coaching approach.⁵⁰ From its first deployment in 2009, adults participating in EMPATH Mobility Mentoring® programs were asked to assess the special family challenges they needed to resolve as they worked to improve their skills, manage their money, and get ahead in the workplace. If their children were not enrolled in childcare, or had health issues that routinely called the parents to leave the workplace, the parents would set goals to resolve these barriers.

Mobility Mentoring® was designed to help adults get to a family sustaining wage (not just a job) through a realistic family-informed goal-setting process (not just a one-size-fits-all training program) and from the moment it was deployed, EMPATH began to see improvements in participant outcomes. In the first five years (2009-2014) that Mobility Mentoring® was first deployed at EMPATH, overall new annual job starts increased from 3% to 23% of all unemployed participants; new education/training starts went from 1% to 45% of all participants; participants with family budgets went from 20% to 70% and the number

of participants with savings rose from 1% to 57%. For those participants who were mentored for 3-5 years, their average earnings increased by 71% to an average of over \$22/hour.⁵¹

Interestingly, participants were not just achieving their individual goals at high rates, but their family goals as well. In FY'14, of the 730 goals that participants completed for everything from finishing training programs and getting new jobs, to helping their children get into better schools or improve health outcomes, approximately 75% of all goals were successfully completed. But the highest rates of successful goals completion were for the particular goals participants set for their families (85% successfully completed).⁵²

While the rates of goal attainment showed that dependents and families were progressing, these gains were being measured and understood purely as secondary outcomes of parent achievement. In other words, parents were only setting goals for their children around issues affecting the parents' own abilities to succeed. EMPATH was not independently setting goals for the children themselves or setting goals explicitly designed to align family collaboration toward achieving each other's goals.

Although during the period from 2009-2014, staff had only been directly coaching adults, the goals participants set and achieved for their dependents indicated that their children were also experiencing positive impacts from parental coaching. And this data was supported by parental interviews and staff observations which described many positive intergenerational gains including improvements in family routines, child health and behavior, and school performance.

Over time, EMPATH staff became more interested in investigating the interdependence of parent and child participants. The interest was first piqued in family homeless transitional shelters operated by EMPATH, where the interdependence of family members was clearly apparent. Later, a doctoral dissertation was completed on the topic,⁵³ which included hours of discussion with participants about their experience in Mobility Mentoring® programs (some of which has been quoted here). Staff also familiarized themselves

more with the academic literature around human development and the factors that most impact a child's opportunity to find success later in life. All this led staff to become convinced that an intergenerational lens had powerful potential for transforming the lives of families.

Given all that staff at EMPATH had learned about the powerful nature of the intergenerational bonds—the ability of children to motivate and support their parents, as well as tax and encumber them; the ways in which parental emotions, behaviors, and skill-building impacted their children—it seemed remiss not to explicitly harness this power to try and create stronger outcomes. It seemed a missed opportunity not to

think about parent and child development through a shared lens where both sets of needs were explicitly assessed, each had individual goals, and where the family's intergenerational bonds were used to catalyze the family dynamics necessary to help all members succeed.

In other words, if child outcomes were improved merely as a by-product of working with their parents, how would outcomes be affected by focusing directly on children as well? Could outcomes be further improved by helping families create a home environment and intergenerational dynamics that were supportive of the goals each member was trying to achieve? The Intergenerational Mobility Project was developed to begin to answer these questions.



SECTION 7: THE INTERGEN PROJECT

Understanding the potential power of intergenerational dynamics, EMPATH created the Intergenerational Mobility Project (the Intergen Project) to intentionally work in a whole-family way. In the Intergen Project, the family itself is the unit of focus. Integral to the Intergen Project is a belief that the family is the key unit for human development, and that it is the most promising place to focus attention for sustained change.

Incorporating years of experience working with low-income individuals with the foremost academic research on what moves people forward, and engaging the families themselves in the co-design of the tools and process, a suite of three tools was developed that provide the basis for work with:

1. Each adult in the family (the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®)
2. Each child in the family (the Child Bridge to a Brighter Future™), and
3. The family as a whole (the Family Carpool Lane Tool™).

While each of the tools can be used on its own for work with a certain population (adults, children, or families), it is hypothesized that when used together in an integrated, intergenerational model (see below), the common involvement and understanding of all family members with the tools and approach should create even stronger outcomes.

Together the tools are designed to create a common language and framework that allows each family member to pursue his or her own goals more effectively and to align family resources, routines, and problem-solving in the shared pursuit of those goals. The metaphor of the Family Carpool Lane is used to describe this shared framework because participants quickly grasp the idea that when several riders know where they are going (clear individual goals and priorities) and all agree to the same route for getting there, they can ride together and reach their destination faster and with fewer obstacles. As our participants say, they get on “the fast lane” to achievement.

THE BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY®

The Bridge to Self-Sufficiency® (see Illustration A on page 19) is the theory of change for all of EMPATH’s adult-focused work. It also functions as a self-assessment tool and a framework for goal-setting in all programs. The metaphor of a Bridge is used to highlight the fact that there are many different domains, or “pillars,” which all must be optimized in order to move from poverty to economic independence. These include: Family Stability, Well-Being, Financial Management, Education and Training, and Employment and Career Management. If any of the pillars is weak, the whole bridge is at risk of collapsing.

The layout of the Bridge serves as a brain-science-informed scaffold for building key self-regulation skills, including inhibitory control, working memory, and mental flexibility. Along the vertical axis, the Bridge supports future-oriented decision-making, allowing the participant to compare where he is today against where he would like to get in the future. The Bridge breaks up the big tasks of becoming economically independent into smaller benchmarks, which help the participant to see a clear path forward. Along the horizontal axis, the Bridge supports contextualized decision-making, helping the participant to weigh various priorities and see how different domains impact each other. For example, an unemployed participant may come to a program with a strong desire to start working. However, by using the Bridge, he might realize that he needs to first figure out a safe childcare arrangement for his child, or deal with an untreated mental health issue, before being able to successfully maintain a job. Or, he could realize that he’s never going to be able to attain a high-paying job without further education. The Bridge helps the individual to weigh all these variables to make a plan for the future.

ILLUSTRATION A: BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY®

BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY®



Mobility Mentoring®

FUTURE ORIENTED DECISION MAKING

FAMILY STABILITY		WELL-BEING		FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT		EDUCATION AND TRAINING	EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER MANAGEMENT
Housing	Family	Physical and Mental Health	Networks	Debts	Savings	Educational Attainment	Earnings Levels (Suffolk County, MA)
No subsidy, housing costs 1/3 or less of household gross pay	Fully able to engage in work, school, & family life; children or family needs don't get in the way (OR) No children or dependent family members	Fully able to engage in work, school, and family life; health and mental health needs don't get in the way	Can always rely on networks to provide useful advice, guidance, and support; advocates for others	No debt other than mortgage, education, and/or car loans, and current in all debts	Savings of 3 months' expenses or more	Bachelor's degree or higher complete	Job with earnings equal to or greater than MIT's Living Wage* [income > \$66,465]
No subsidy, housing costs exceed 1/3 household gross pay	Mostly able to engage in work, school, and family life; children or family needs rarely get in the way	Mostly able to engage in work, school, and family life; health or mental health needs rarely get in the way	Can often rely on networks to provide useful advice, guidance, and support	Current in all debts and making more than minimum payments on one or more debts	Savings of more than 2 months' expenses but less than three months' expenses	Associate's degree or professional certification complete	Job with earnings 66-99% of MIT's Living Wage* [income = \$43,867 - \$66,464]
Subsidized Housing – pays \$300+ towards rent	Somewhat able to engage in work, school, and family life because of children or family needs	Somewhat able to engage in work, school, and family life because of health or mental health needs	Can sometimes rely on networks to provide useful advice, guidance, and support	Making minimum payments on all debts	Savings of at least one month and up to 2 months' expenses	Job training or certificate complete (beyond high school)	Job with earnings 33-65% of MIT's Living Wage* [income = \$21,933 - \$43,866]
Subsidized Housing – pays \$0 - \$299 towards rent	Barely able to engage in work, school, and family life because of children or family needs	Barely able to engage in work, school, and family life because of health or mental health needs	Can rarely rely on networks to provide useful advice, guidance, and support	Behind in payments of one or more debts and making payments on at least one	Savings of less than one month's expenses	High School Diploma or GED/HiSET complete	Job with earnings less than 33% of MIT's Living Wage* [income < \$21,933]
Not permanently housed	Not able to engage in work, school, and family life because of children or family needs	Not able to engage in work, school, and family life because of health or mental health needs	Can never rely on networks to provide useful advice, guidance, and support	Has debts; currently not making any payments	No savings	Less than High School Diploma or GED/HiSET	Not currently employed *Calculation based on 1 adult, 2 children in Suffolk County, MA. See MIT's Living Wage for further information: www.livingwage.mit.edu

CONTEXTUALIZED DECISION MAKING

The concept of the Bridge was developed in 2006-2008, and it began to be used in 2009. Today the Bridge is used not only throughout EMPATH's programs but also in dozens of organizations and government programs across the country.⁵⁴ Thousands of individuals have used the Bridge to chart a course to economic independence.

CHILD BRIDGE TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE™

Building on the success of the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®, EMPath created the Child Bridge to a Brighter Future (Illustration B on page 21) to serve as a theory of change for all work done with children in the organization, and to form the basis for assessment and goal-setting in intergenerational programs. Work on the Child Bridge started in 2010, and was influenced strongly by research coming out of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (“The Center”). In 2014, EMPath and the Center formalized a relationship, through which the Center provides scientific counsel and evaluation support to EMPath’s intergenerational efforts through its Frontiers of Innovation initiative. The Child Bridge was formalized and co-designed with participants, incorporating the Center’s scientific research.

Like the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®, the Child Bridge has five pillars that must all be strong in order to ensure optimal child development. These include Health and Well-being, Social-Emotional Development, Self-Regulation, Preparing for Independence, and Educational Progress. Research shows that these five domains are linked to success later in life, and that deficiencies in any one of these domains can put children at risk for poorer outcomes:

- **Health and Well-being:** Children need to remain healthy, physically and mentally throughout childhood, because physical and mental health form the foundation for success in all other domains.^{55,56}
- **Social-Emotional Development:** Social development is one of the key tasks of childhood. Children must learn to interact with others in order to be successful at home, in school, and later in life;^{57,58} indeed, social-emotional learning has been identified as a key area for development within the education system.⁵⁹
- **Self-Regulation:** Children must develop key self-regulation skills, including the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behavior, because these skills directly enable success across multiple domains throughout life.^{60,61,62}

- **Preparing for Independence:** Children are born completely dependent on their adult caregivers, and must develop increasing independence throughout childhood. Important aspects of this are identity, aspiration, and habit development⁶³. Children’s development of financial literacy⁶⁴ and building of savings for the future⁶⁵ have meaningful impacts on future outcomes.
- **Education Progress:** In today’s knowledge economy, post-secondary school is a must for jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. Higher education has grown in importance over the past few decades and is projected to continue doing so in the future⁶⁶. Thus education for children is an absolutely integral part of attaining a brighter future.⁶⁷

The Child Bridge to a Brighter Future™, like the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®, was designed to serve as a scaffold for self-regulation. Along the horizontal axis the Child Bridge supports contextualized decision-making, highlighting how different domains of the child’s life interact with and affect each other. For example, a child’s bad grades in school may be due to her not studying, but they could also be linked to a health issue causing absences, social issues at school, or problems with self-regulation. Along the vertical axis, the Child Bridge encourages future-oriented decision-making: it shows a path to success in the future. In childhood, different periods of time are marked by different developmental stages, so the vertical axis of the Child Bridge is split into three distinct age groups: early childhood (birth to age 5), middle childhood (age 6 to 11), and adolescence (ages 12 and up). Each age group has its own benchmarks that should be reached by the end of the age group. This format follows the work of the Brookings Institution’s Social Genome Project, which showed that success at meeting particular benchmarks at specified ages is predictive of success in subsequent stages of development, and of success in adulthood.⁶⁸

ILLUSTRATION B: CHILD BRIDGE TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE™



Developmental Stage	Health and Well-Being	Social-Emotional	Self-Regulation	Preparing for Independence	Educational Progress
Adolescence By age 18	Generally healthy. Physical health concerns do not pose a barrier to educational progress. Mental health concerns do not pose a barrier to educational progress.	Generally gets along with adults and peers. School behavior does not pose a barrier to academic progress. Social behaviors do not threaten to derail youth's goals: they do not put youth at risk for alcohol/drug abuse, crime, or pregnancy.	Thinks before acting. Delays gratification for long-term goals Remembers multiple tasks, and applies diverse rules and strategies in different situations. Can easily revise plans when circumstances change.	Identify a career track that will lead to self-sufficiency. Specific plans for post secondary education in place. Building work, volunteer, and/or extracurricular experience related to post-secondary goals. Actively saving money and building financial literacy: bills, budgeting, credit/debit, financial aid.	<u>College & Career readiness:</u> Consistent school attendance. C+ or better in every class. On-track to graduate high school. School meets the needs of the youth.
Middle Childhood By age 11	Generally healthy. Physical health concerns do not pose a barrier to educational progress. Mental health concerns do not pose a barrier to educational progress.	Generally gets along with adults and peers. School behavior does not pose a barrier to academic progress. Understands risky social behaviors and how to avoid	Thinks before acting. Ignores distractions while focused on a task. Follows complex directions. Adapts to changing situations and/or rules, in school and at	Has dreams of "what I want to be when I grow up," and knows what it takes to get there. Understands the difference between "wants" and "needs." Has savings account.	<u>Basic Skill Acquisition:</u> Consistent school attendance. Meets grade expectations for Reading and Math. C+ or better in every class.
Early Childhood By age 5	Generally healthy. Physical health does not impact child's or parent's daily lives. Mental health does not impact child's or parent's daily lives.	Interested in appropriate social interactions with other children or adults. Developing ability to understand and communicate feelings, and to share. Looks to others for help.	Follows 2-step directions. Can delay eating a treat. Adapts to changing situations and/or rules, in school and at home.	Learning about different jobs, and how money is earned. Learning about the difference between "wants" and "needs." Has a savings account. Can sleep, eat, and play on own. Practices self-soothing.	<u>School Readiness:</u> Consistent preschool/daycare attendance. Preschool/daycare meets child's and parent's needs. Developing pre-literacy skills.

FUTURE ORIENTED DECISION MAKING

CONTEXTUALIZED DECISION MAKING

© 2016 Economic Mobility Pathways, All Rights Reserved. Updated May 2016 Please circle each benchmark in GREEN for "on track," ORANGE for "some concern," or RED for "high priority."

It should be noted that although the Child Bridge to a Brighter Future™ was designed with low-income children in mind, in principle it should work with any child regardless of socioeconomic status. The five domains, and the associated benchmarks, are consistent across family background. Below there will be more detail on how the Child Bridge has been used within EMPATH's Intergen Project, but it is hypothesized that it could be a useful tool for any program wanting to work with children in a more holistic, integrated way.

FAMILY CARPOOL LANE™

To explain the power of family-focused work, staff developed a metaphor of a carpool lane running parallel, in-between the Adult Bridge to Self-Sufficiency® and the Child Bridge to a Brighter Future (Illustration C). It is possible to cross either of these bridges alone. With hard work and commitment, children enrolled in a very good school can attain a brighter future even without the full support of their parents, and adults can think about how to help themselves get ahead without necessarily involving their children in that work. However, individual progress is hard, and there are many roadblocks that can get in the way. For children, these roadblocks can

be things like crisis in the family, lack of resources for certain activities, and a shortage of parent bandwidth. For adults, the roadblocks can include children's needs, not having enough time, or having large amounts of stress. Any one of these roadblocks can derail an individual's plans to move forward.

However, by traveling together on the Family Carpool Lane, the family can avoid these roadblocks and move more efficiently toward a better future. Bringing the entire family together allows them to align their efforts toward shared goals, and work in a way that will move them all forward, together.

ILLUSTRATION C: THE FAMILY CARPOOL LANE™

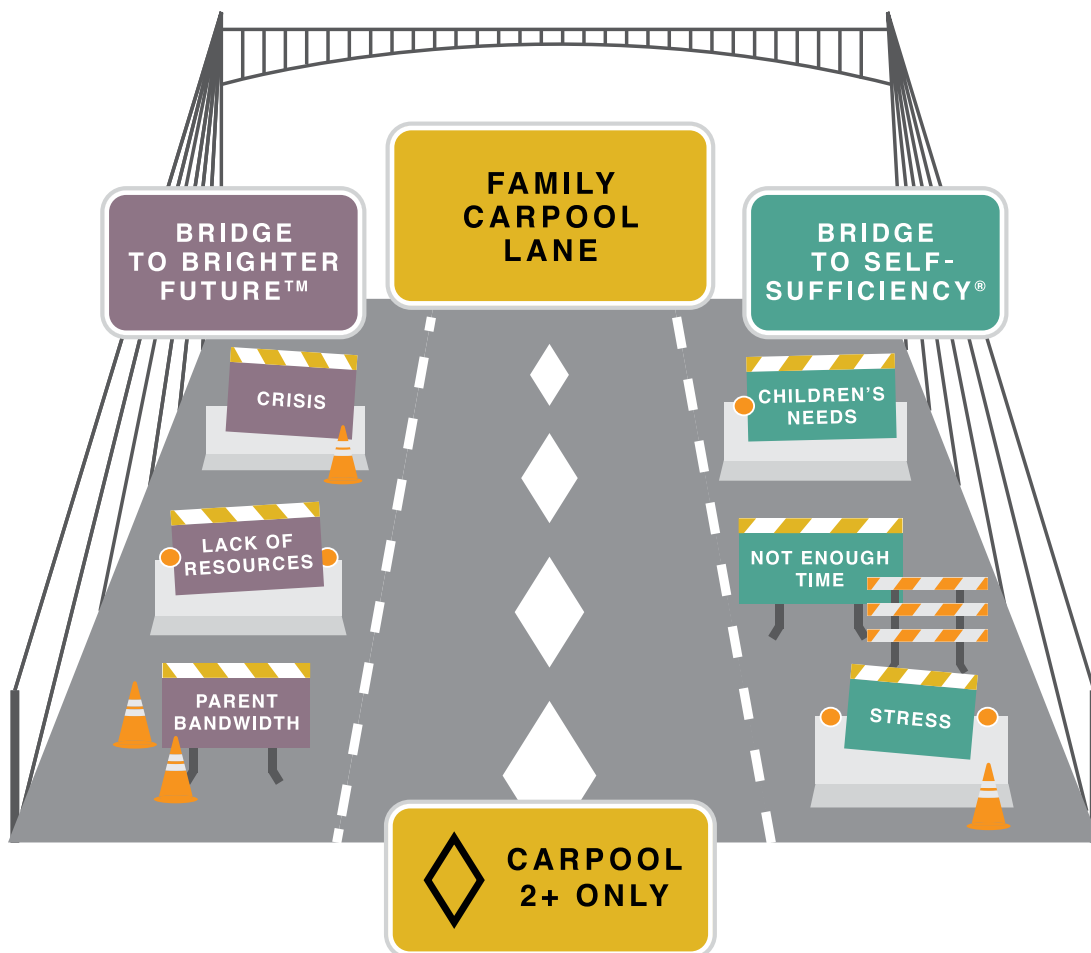


ILLUSTRATION D: FAMILY CARPOOL LANE TOOL™

THE WAY OUR FAMILY WORKS MOVES US FORWARD TOWARD OUR GOALS									
We feel safe and secure at home.	We get enough sleep and food, and have adequate clothing and shelter.	We have healthy ways to deal with stress and anger. We take care of ourselves.	We use our resources (money, computers, cars, etc.) according to a plan to achieve everyone's goals.	We use time according to a plan to achieve everyone's goals.	Our home is organized and everyone's needs for space are met.	We have a network of reliable supports we can call on in times of need, who help us keep moving forward.	When problems come up, we quickly and effectively deal with them.	We have consistent routines. Everyone feels they know what to expect.	We help each other, support each other, and contribute to each other's growth.
Safety	Basic Needs	Coping	Resources	Time	Space	Networks	Problem-Solving	Consistency	Mutual Support
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
One or more people in the family does not feel safe at home.	Lack of basic needs, or worry about basic needs, affects one or more people in the family in their day-to-day life.	One or more people in the family does not have ways to deal with stress or anger, or has unhealthy ways of dealing with these things.	We use our resources "in the moment" instead of following a plan.	We "waste" a lot of time, and always feel like we are behind.	The space in our home is disorganized, or one or more people feel like their space needs are not met.	We have no network of supports, or have people in our network who take more than they give.	When problems come up, it is really hard for us to get them under control.	We don't have regular routines. It's hard to expect on a day-to-day basis.	We don't really support each other, and may sometimes hold each other back.

THE WAY OUR FAMILY WORKS HOLDS SOME OF US BACK FROM OUR GOALS

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The FCLT is a theory of change that describes the key domains of family alignment. It is not meant to be used by an outsider to evaluate a family; rather it is intended to aid the family in starting a conversation about their own alignment. Families use this framework as a way of uncovering their own dynamics: the ways in which life at home works as they all feel it should and the areas where changes might help family members better support each other. While the tool is particularly helpful for low-income families, whose challenges with things like safety, basic needs, resources, and time tend to be more pressing, it is hypothesized that the tool would work equally well with families who are not low-income. All families have things they can work on, and ways they could better align toward shared goals.

In order to reach alignment, the family must first think about the ways in which family dynamics are helping and hindering their individual journeys, and then must agree on how to remove the roadblocks that get in their way. The Family Carpool Lane Tool (FCLT; Illustration D on page 23) is a tool EMPATH developed in 2014 to facilitate this kind of investigation. It was created in response to participants who specifically requested a more formalized assessment process for family-focused work. Using their input, along with research on family dynamics, ten important domains were identified which are assessed on the tool:

- **Safety:** In order for individuals to work to their potential, they must feel (and be) safe at home. Lacking a feeling of safety leads to toxic levels of stress, which in turn leads to self-regulation difficulties, compromises in decision-making, increased health complications, and more.⁶⁹
- **Basic Needs:** In order for individuals to be able to perform optimally, they must have adequate food, shelter, sleep, and clothing. Lack of food and sleep directly impact brain function, and a persistent lack of any basic need can create toxic stress.⁷⁰
- **Coping:** Every family experiences difficulties; it is important for each individual to have healthy ways of coping with the stress and anger caused by such difficulties. One family member's lack of coping skills—demonstrated in angry outbursts, abusive language, isolation, or drug/alcohol abuse⁷¹—can cause excessive stress for the rest of the family and lead to family breakdown.⁷²
- **Resources:** Most families have to figure out how to get by with finite resources. Cash, cars, computers, and other material goods must be shared among family members. Because of low minimum wages, insufficient social supports, and policies that work against families, families living in poverty today are forced to figure out how to get by with fewer resources than they really need. Figuring out how to meet every family member's needs with limited resources can be difficult, adding a lot of stress to the household. Insufficient resources can prevent individuals from attaining their goals.⁷³
- **Time:** Families have to budget their time, just as they do their resources. Time is a limited resource for everyone, and a family's use of time can greatly impact individual family members' outcomes.⁷⁴ Sub-optimal allocation of time, or inadequate planning, causes numerous problems including tardiness, absences, and poor goals completion.
- **Space:** The home environment itself, its physical space, can promote or impede goal achievement⁷⁵ and can even impact health and well-being.⁷⁶ The organization of the home, and the amount of chaos or order, can facilitate or discourage work on goals.
- **Networks:** As is true with individuals, no family can succeed in isolation. Families get by through use of extensive networks including extended family, friends, neighbors, schools, community organizations, religious institutions, and other formal and informal networks.⁷⁷ Having strong networks, and knowing how and when to deploy them, can make the difference between attaining a goal and not attaining it.⁷⁸
- **Problem-Solving:** When problems come up—whether major or minor—they can derail an entire family. Families need to have good problem-solving skills to efficiently deal with issues as they arise and remain focused on goals.⁷⁹
- **Consistency:** Individuals—especially children—thrive in predictable environments.⁸⁰ A family without predictable routines can cause added stress to the individuals in it, as no one knows what to expect day to day. Indeed, predictability in the home has been shown to moderate the effects of poverty on children.⁸¹
- **Mutual Support:** All human beings crave connection to and support from family: there are biologically-driven connections of parents and children, and the more social connections of broader family. It is the mutuality of the family, the deeply rooted experience of shared support, that makes it strong and helps propel family members forward in the face of adversity.⁸²

USING THE TOOLS: THE INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY PROJECT AT EMPATH

While each of the tools can be used on its own for work with a certain population (adults, children, or families), it is hypothesized that when used together, the common involvement and understanding of all family members with the tools and approach would create even stronger outcomes. Building on the success of our adult-serving programs, EMPATH created and piloted an intergenerational model that incorporates the four fundamental components of Mobility Mentoring®: self-assessment, goal-setting and outcomes measurement, coaching, and incentives. Parallel processes have been created for children and for families, so that each member of the family, and the family as a whole, engages in the practice of Mobility Mentoring®. Key principles³³ of the Mobility Mentoring® approach include the following, which apply across the work with adults, children and families:

- **Individualization.** There is no “one size fits all” path to economic independence; each individual brings their own needs and strengths to the journey. Thus, services must be individualized within the framework of Mobility Mentoring® to best support the individual.
- **Horizontality.** The path to economic independence cannot be found in any one “silo,” effective service delivery must bridge various domains.
- **Time.** There is no quick journey from poverty to economic independence; effective interventions must provide for continuity of support over time.

- **Partnership and Co-investment.** Goals attainment cannot be externally directed. It must come from internal motivation and investment. Effective interventions match the participant’s degree of investment with equal investment.

Using a parallel process with each member of the family has created new language and habits for the families. They also have greater understanding of each other’s needs and goals, thereby enhancing their individual gains. Hypothetically, each of the gains generated from each of the tools serves to enhance other family members’ outcomes at all three levels described above: a parent’s increase in income will improve her child’s test scores; a child’s improved self-regulation will decrease his mother’s stress, thereby improving her ability to maintain employment; a family’s improved routines will aid a mother’s and son’s ability to get to work and school on time and thus improve chances of success. Below each main facet of the Intergen Project’s process is detailed, followed by a case example. The definition of “family” is key to the Intergen Project. In the Project, families are asked to define themselves. In other words, EMPATH recognizes that there is no pre-established definition of the family unit. Staff instead ask participants to talk about who is in their family, who is important to their day-to-day functioning, and who they would like to include in the coaching process. Mobility Mentoring® is provided to any individual that is named as integral to the family unit.

ADULT-FOCUSED MOBILITY MENTORING® USING THE BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY®

The Mobility Mentoring® tools and approach is most developed for adults, as EMPATH has been creating and refining this model since 2006. Using the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency® as the basis for all work with adults, a Mobility Mentor helps the participant to chart her own unique course to economic independence. Mobility Mentoring® includes four fundamental components: self-assessment, goal-setting and outcomes measurement, coaching, and incentives. The Bridge provides a roadmap for self-assessment with concrete benchmarks, which then allows the participant to identify meaningful goals across multiple domains. Participants get targeted support and coaching from their Mobility

Mentor every step of the way; mentors help participants strategize when things get tough and help redirect them if they get off-track. Incentives provide short-term payoff for longer-term goals, and build accountability on all sides. The Mobility Mentoring approach was developed as a way to help participants move out of poverty, recognizing poverty’s effects on key skills and mindsets necessary to move forward. In the Intergen Project, a Mobility Mentor works with each adult in the family. Much of this work is done one-to-one in program offices, so that children are not exposed to potentially stressful conversations (for example, discussions of debt or mental health).^{iv}

^{iv} For a more thorough explanation of the Mobility Mentoring® model, please see Babcock, E. (2012). Mobility Mentoring. Boston: Crittenton Women’s Union. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/empath-website/pdf/Research-MobilityMentoring-0512.pdf>

The goal is to build the coaching, mentoring, and advocacy capacities of the parent/caregiver

CHILD-FOCUSED MOBILITY MENTORING® USING THE CHILD BRIDGE TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE™

The Intergen Project utilizes the same four fundamental components of Mobility Mentoring®—self-assessment, goal-setting, coaching, and incentives—applied in an age-appropriate way for children. An important difference between child-focused Mobility Mentoring® and adult-focused work is that, in the Intergen Project at least, the staff person—called the Child and Family Mentor (CFM)—does not work directly with the child alone^v. All work is done with at least one parent/caregiver present, as the goal is to build the coaching, mentoring, and advocacy capacities of the parent/caregiver. All child and family-focused work was done in home visits, to facilitate all family members' involvement.

In the Intergen Project, parents provide support during the Child Bridge assessment in a scaffolded way. In early childhood, the parent does the assessment for the child, but as the child grows, learns to read, and is able to engage in self-reflection, he increasingly participates in his own self-assessment. Most children in middle childhood complete the Child Bridge themselves with parental support, using a simplified version of the tool that is at a lower reading level. Most adolescents self-assess, with the parent sitting by and listening. Of course, developmental differences and literacy levels are factors in a child's ability to self-assess; an adolescent may need their parent to complete the assessment for them if she is unable to complete it herself.

The Child Bridge Assessment is completed using a simple stoplight metaphor: participants circle each age-relevant Bridge category using a green, red, or yellow marker. Green indicates that they believe

everything in the category is a “go” and that it is on-track for successful development; red means that the participants have concerns that they may be at a “stop” or that the area is of serious concern to them and a high priority for improvement; and yellow (or orange, which shows up better on copies) indicates that they want to “slow down,” and pay more attention in the area so that it does not get off-track and become more concerning.


Simplified goal-setting systems have been developed for children, which help children learn how to set and work toward their own goals with the help of their parents. Parents/caregivers are involved in the goal-setting process, no matter the age of the child. Parents or caregivers are always the primary people helping with children's goals, supporting them and providing incentives for action steps. The CFM discusses ways that the Goal Worksheets can be “living documents;” families are encouraged to post Goal Worksheets on the refrigerator, on the child's bedroom door, or in another place so the family will be reminded of their goals. Coaching, parental reinforcement and incentives help children to attain the goals they have set for themselves. Incentives can be earned for the achievement of goals.

Using consistent navigational metaphors such as the “Bridge”, the “Carpool Lane”, and traffic light terms for measurements on the Child Bridge create a consistent explanatory language and framework that enhances participant understanding for both children and adults. Experience shows that participants readily grasp these metaphors and the tools they describe and easily apply them to create their own paths forward.

^vAlthough EMPATH has only delivered child mentoring within a family context, it is anticipated that child-serving agencies without frequent parental contact might use the Child Bridge and child mentoring approach directly with a child alone as soon as the child becomes able to participate fully in the mentoring process. EMPATH experience to date suggests that the average age that this is routinely possible is approximately 7-8 years old.

CHILD BRIDGE COMPLETED BY A 10-YEAR-OLD BOY

My Bridge to a Brighter Future™



Health and Friends	Controlling Myself	Preparing for Growing Up	School
I am healthy in body and mind.	I think before I act.	I know what I want to be when I grow up.	I like my school.
I have friends and I like them.	I can pay attention.	I know the difference between wants and needs.	I can read and write and do math like other kids my age.
I don't get into trouble at school.	I follow complex directions.	I know how people earn and save money.	I get good grades.
I can ask for help.	I can put off doing what I want.		

FAMILY-FOCUSED MOBILITY MENTORING® USING THE FAMILY CARPOOL LANE TOOL™

The heart of intergenerational Mobility Mentoring is the work of problem-solving and goal-setting with the family as a whole. In this process, the family can intentionally harness their mutual bonds of support to better solve family problems and propel themselves forward toward achieving their goals. Aligning the interests of multiple individuals is inherently complex, but the right tools can focus family attention and simplify decision-making. This work has the potential to transform families and their prospects, shifting the way the family helps move everyone forward.

Family-focused Mobility Mentoring® works with the key assumption that everyone in the family, at their core, wants the same things: to live in a safe, nurturing, predictable, and organized environment with the love and support of the family. This assumption forms the foundation for the work

that is done with families. The CFM does not pass judgment on the family functioning or seek to persuade the family to change the way it is working. The CFM instead helps the family to reflect on what is working for them, and what is not, and to form a plan for moving forward.

In practice, The CFM reads through the domains on the FCLT with the entire family together, and each person in the family has the opportunity to give a numerical value from 0 to 10 to each section. There are no right or wrong answers in this tool, and it is not expected that everyone will agree on their ratings. Everyone's voice and opinion is important when using the FCLT. After the tool is completed, the CFM helps the family to reflect on what sticks out for them, and helps the family identify a goal to work on together. An incentive is tied to goal attainment. The CFM then follows up with the family on a regular basis to check in on goal progress.

CASE EXAMPLES

CASE EXAMPLE #1

When C came into the Intergen Project, she was having trouble with her 17-year-old son. While she worked with her Mobility Mentor on some of her own goals using the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency—saving money, getting a better-paying job—her son was failing many classes in high school. He also started disappearing from home for days on end without telling his mother where he was. This was deeply troubling to C and she could not sleep when he was gone. They were becoming increasingly isolated from each other.

Along with C, the CFM completed the Child Bridge with the son and helped him to set some of his own individual goals, including improving his grades and saving money. Then, during the Family Carpool Lane process, both identified their Problem-Solving as a major issue. They decided to set a goal of having weekly “family construction time,” where they could set aside whatever was going on, to hang out and discuss the coming week.

They started meeting weekly, sometimes sharing dinner, going to the gym, or watching a movie together, and sometimes just talking. They used their weekly time to discuss the son’s disappearances. He stopped disappearing without notice, and instead informed her of when he would be out of the house so that they could set up a plan together to ensure his safety.

They also used their weekly meetings to plan for the son’s future. They found a good program for him at a community college. They completed financial aid forms and his application together, and created a budget for his anticipated expenses. He graduated from high school, saved money for college, and has now started college. They are both thriving and value the close relationship they have now.

CASE EXAMPLE #2:

K was overwhelmed when she started working with the Intergen Project. She was homeless, struggled with depression, and had a learning disability that made engaging in higher education more difficult.® She worked with her Mobility Mentor on her own Bridge to Self-Sufficiency® goals, including getting more education to find a better job, but was having trouble because of her child’s needs. Her son was a very active 2-year-old. He was in daycare but she didn’t know what to do with him when he came home. The only thing that kept him quiet was watching TV, so she kept the television on all the time.

Through doing the Child Bridge, K identified self-regulation as her son’s biggest issue: he was “out of control”. She felt that he lacked self-regulation skills that would help control his behavior. She knew that the TV was a big part of the problem, and her CFM helped her to make a realistic plan for gradually cutting down on TV time and doing other activities instead. As K put it, “It was a TV thing for me...started with 15 minutes, now we’re up to a whole hour. He can’t watch TV for a whole hour after he walks through that door...and his behavior is getting much better. It’s that timing thing...now I sit him down and...we even do activities together...I sit on the floor and play.”

Further, through doing the FCLT, K noticed that her physical space was really impacting both her and her son, so she set a goal of organizing and tidying-up her living space over the course of a few months. This has helped her feel more clear-headed at home, and has helped make room for her to play with her son.

K is now feeling much more in control, and started a culinary arts program to achieve her dream of becoming a chef. The family is moving along toward a brighter future together.

SECTION 8: INITIAL FINDINGS

EMPath began an initial pilot of the Child Bridge to a Brighter Future™ and the Family Carpool Lane Tool™ in September 2014 with a small number of families in which the head of household was already receiving Mobility Mentoring®, and then expanded the pilot in July 2015. The number of families served is still very small—as of this publication, about 65 participants had been served, in about 25 households—and the amount of time each family has spent in the project has been relatively low: an average of around 4 months. While the project is still nascent, some successes have been noted even with the relatively small number of families involved with the project for six months or more (14 families including 42 individuals). By collecting both qualitative feedback in focus groups and formal quantitative data, much has been learned about how the project has impacted families.

Adults seem to be attaining goals and moving toward economic independence at rates comparable to or better than community averages. While there was initial concern that involvement in the Intergen Project would be too much for participants, causing adults' own self-sufficiency-related outcomes to slip (at least in the short term), this has not been the case.

Sixty-four percent of adult participants were working during their time in the Intergen Project. This compares favorably to the state average for low-income households of 40%.⁸⁴ Ninety-three percent of families in the Intergen Project had bank accounts, and 78% had money set aside in bank accounts. This also compares favorably against the state average for households making under \$15,000 per year, which is 55%.⁸⁵ Eighty-six percent of heads of household were either in school or working, and 36% were both in school and working.

It is important to note some qualifying factors to the data above. Because the Intergen Project is a voluntary program, it may be true that more motivated participants have chosen to engage. However, these families are still in crisis, and in many cases families chose to engage in the project specifically because they were experiencing crisis. Almost two-thirds of the families served for over six months were homeless, and 64% had children with a significant, diagnosed physical or behavioral health issue. Overall, it appears likely that the Intergen Project at least does not inhibit self-

sufficiency related adult outcomes. Over a longer term, it is hypothesized that adult outcomes will improve more steadily among those engaged in the Intergen Project, than among those not otherwise engaged, or engaged in adult Mobility Mentoring® alone, because the family alignment will likely prevent many family problems from reaching a crisis and impeding achievement.

Overall, 86% of heads of household made significant progress toward self-sufficiency-related goals during their time in the Intergen Project, starting new academic programs, getting new jobs, and saving money. These goals will improve their Outcomes Level gains: they now have higher incomes, more education, and/or more secure finances. Participants shared that the Intergen Project helped clarify their thinking so that they could take on new goals. As one participant said, “Before this program I didn’t give a damn about nobody...it helped me out a lot. My mind is more focused, I’m not always in the bed, you know, I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing now. A couple years ago, you couldn’t get me to do nothing...” Getting her child’s needs taken care of helped her to focus on what she knew she needed to do.

Children, too, seemed to progress in their time with the Intergen Project. Of those children involved in the project for six months or more, 53% improved their scores on the Child Bridge, and an additional 35% remained stable. Improvement in Child Bridge scores is no small feat, as for each pillar there are only three possible rankings (On-Track, Some Concern, and High Priority). It is a relatively big accomplishment to improve.

Although offered in a completely voluntary way, The Child Bridge has been readily accepted by parents and children. One hundred percent of children engaged in the project have completed the Child Bridge tool. Parents with older children have been pleasantly surprised at the degree to which their children engage in the project. As a mother of three children between the ages of 9 and 17 said, “I was most impressed with my children’s willingness to share about their strengths and weaknesses and abilities to set realistic goals to help them achieve academic, personal, and health successes.”

Overall, 77% of children involved in the project six months or more have achieved at least one goal, and 86% have made progress toward their goals (accomplishing action steps). Examples of child goals that have been completed are: improving grades, reading to the child, and saving money. Many of the goals achieved directly impact the Outcomes Level, such as education or finances.

Moreover, Inner-Self Level impacts in children have also been measurably affected. Seventy-eight percent of children have shown improvement on an externally validated measure of self-regulation.⁸⁶ These findings are significant because such a large proportion—almost two-thirds—of the children were homeless during this time, and homelessness has been found to correlate with significant developmental delays.⁸⁷

At the Family Level, 100% of families involved in the project for six months or more have come together to set family-level goals. This is impressive when one considers the complication of getting everyone in a family to come to the same meeting: parents' work schedules and children's own after-school programs and work often conflict with each other. Even more impressively, 100% of families involved in the project for six months or more have attained at least one family goal. Examples of meaningful family-level goals that have been attained are: organizing shared space, having weekly family meetings, and establishing morning, afternoon, or bedtime routines for the family. These goals have meaningfully improved family functioning: 71% of families involved in the project for six months or more improved scores on the externally validated CHAOS measure of confusion and order in the home.⁸⁸ Improvement on this measure may be a proxy for improvement in some of the Family Level outcomes.

“She is actually seeing her future now, she’s actually seeing the big picture... and she does it on her own...of course I keep her accountable, but...she’s actually able to do it on her own, which is a major thing.”

– Intergen Participant speaking about her 14-year-old daughter.

FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES

In addition to the outcomes gathered about the project, qualitative feedback was gathered about how families felt about their participation in the Intergen Project, and ways the approach could be improved. Participant voice has been vitally important to the entire process, as the goal was to create tools and ways of working with participants that truly meet their needs. Several participant focus groups were held to gather this important feedback.

Overall, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Families feel that the tools have helped them to parse out their children's current needs and strengths and to create a plan for helping their child move forward. They report that the Child Bridge “helps me think about [my daughter] in a more compartmentalized kind of way.” One parent stated that the Child Bridge “helped me be more mindful of where kids are at and what they need to do.” As another mother said, “Now I have some guidance on where he [my son] needs help and where I need to give him the most support ... now I know my plan.”

Similarly for the FCLT (Family Carpool Lane Tool™), families appreciate the ability to figure out exactly what is holding them back. As one mother said,

I didn't realize how much space (at home) was a part of how I get things done, or don't get things done...this whole thing was a really good way to say, instead of just saying I feel so overwhelmed right now, why do I feel overwhelmed? ... It's not necessarily everything, it's just my [space].

Participants consistently report that the FCLT process is one of the most important processes for their families. The process helps them to come together, to understand what each individual in the family is working on, and what his or her perspective is, and to set a common course for the future. As one mother said,

We could see overall where we as a unit were. And it was good because the kids were able to see where mommy was at. And I was able to see where they were at... So it was a learning experience in that moment, you know, learning about each other. You know, how do we perceive things, how do we think about our things...we were able to put it all together because at the end of it, we all have to pick a similar goal.

Indeed, families see the goals as key to their success. As one mother said,

You have three kids...and you work, and you're the head of your household, and you have your own life, and you have bills to pay, and this and that...How do you keep it all up here (in your head) without feeling like your mind is so cluttered...the only way you can keep yourself from going crazy is to not think about the big stuff, and focus on the one little goal at a time.

Going through a continuous process of setting, revising, and working on goals gives families new language and new habits. As one participant, who participated in the initial pilot, stated, "The word 'goal' is now a part of our vocabulary. My kids and I are always setting goals." The newfound practice of setting goals is key, as it is expected to allow the family to continue their forward progress long after their involvement with the project was complete.

Overall, families have provided strong, positive feedback about the effects their involvement in the Intergen Project has had on them and their children. Many participants talked about fixing a broken or damaged relationship with their children. As one parent said, "It's like you're repairing, in a sense... even if you didn't feel like your relationship was broken, it's like you're repairing that relationship." Being involved with the Intergen Project appears to have affected Family Level outcomes of family relationships and dynamics. As one parent said, "The project has changed the dynamics of my family." Another mother engaged in the project said, "*I think it brings unity in the family.* And you feel like you're a part of your kid, you're supporting your kid, he's not doing it on his own either, he can depend on you. You know, you're keeping your kid accountable, and when you set goals together with [the CFM] your kids are keeping you accountable." A third participant stated, "It was our family goals that brought us closer."

"The word 'goal' is now a part of our vocabulary. My kids and I are always setting goals."



CHALLENGES

Individual coaching takes time and when attempting to work with multiple family members at all three levels described in this brief, it takes even more time. To fully operationalize the Intergen intervention, all family members must complete a Bridge assessment, set their individual goals, and then join together to assess themselves as a family and set family goals as well. Every meeting to do these things can take anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours, requiring an investment of time from both the families and staff. Travel is also required (usually from staff to the participants' home, but sometimes from participants to program offices). Although currently participant retention remains high, (only three families exited and all for reasons of their control), it can be imagined that the time investment might serve as an obstacle to consistent family participation. However, the time is well-spent: parent and child are having rich, back-and-forth interaction, reflecting on where the child is now in various domains and setting priorities. As EMPath continues to pilot the project, efforts will be made to streamline the meetings while retaining the rich content.

Because the staff time investment was high, the costs were also high. During the Intergen pilot, start-up costs averaged approximately \$10,000/family/year with an average family size of 2.5 members. Although such coaching costs on a per-person served basis are not atypical for coaching services, they do represent a significant investment on the part of organizations attempting to take on such projects. While efficiencies will present themselves as the project is scaled, it is undeniable that implementing an intergenerational program will require a significant investment.

In the experience of EMPath, the level of staff training and experience necessary to effectively coach families is also not insignificant. In general, EMPath has found that staff hired for family coaching work should possess at least a Bachelor's and preferably a Master's Degree, and will then require many hours of training in the Intergen tools and approaches. Even then, some staff still find it hard to put aside their strong tendencies to want to direct family members' problem-solving and actions, as opposed to supporting individuals in making their own decisions. Maintaining strong professional boundaries can be problematic for staff, especially if they have directly experienced some of the challenges the families face.

Because human service delivery is, to a large extent, generationally siloed it can be difficult to find good operating platforms that can easily work with both parents and children together. Most human service agencies serve either adults or children and communicate only rarely with the family members that they do not directly serve. Within the child service arena, providers are typically divided into those that serve very young, school-aged, or adolescent children. Therefore, finding a way to serve families together, over time, without serious logistical or time complications is difficult. And finding organizations serving one particular age category that want to develop the staff and organizational competencies to work with family members across the age spectrum can also be a challenge.

Since the number of participants served in the Intergen Project has, to date, been very small (65 individuals), it is too early to make any predictions as to whether working to overcome all these challenges will produce positive results. However, what can be said at this point is that increased use of the tools and staff experience is leading to more efficient, less time-intensive coaching; current levels of participant gains point toward positive return on investment of overall project costs; EMPath has been successful in recruiting and retaining well-qualified staff Mentors, and staff and participant satisfaction with the project is very high.

With regard to generational siloes in the human services arena, there has been rapidly increasing use of EMPath's Mobility Mentoring® tools for parent coaching in early learning and care settings such as Early Head Start and daycares. As might be expected, implementation of parent coaching appears to have gone most smoothly in child home-visiting programs where family contact is inherent in the model. Also, because the adult Bridge to Self-Sufficiency has always included aspects of family goal-setting, there is growing use of the Bridge in adult settings such as TANF, housing, and job-training programs expressly interested in taking more integrated family-based approaches to their work. All these activities suggest that there is increasing interest across the spectrum of human service programs in tools and approaches that can serve family members across the age divide.

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SECTION 9: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Intergen work is still very new. While in the past tools were not released until they had been used at EMPATH for years, the strong interest in the Intergen ideas has prompted the writing of this brief at this early point in the Intergen work. A goal of this brief is to spark thinking about intergenerational models, and how they might be utilized in a variety of service areas.

One area in which the intergenerational focus may be particularly useful is public systems. In publicly funded family-based interventions (for example, Early Head Start), the suite of Intergen tools may have the potential to provide a common platform for improving parent outcomes such as self-sufficiency, parenting skills, family alignment and child outcomes. In public platforms that intervene with either adults or children, the suite of Intergen tools may have the potential to serve as a shared platform, across programs or agencies, that coordinates separate adult and child interventions (for example adult TANF services and child early education and care) and integrates them into a mutually reinforcing system of service delivery and goals attainment. It is hoped that tests of the tools in such diverse contexts will begin in the near future.

The work with the Intergen Project is not complete. There are still many future questions to be explored, including:

- How do intergenerational programs work with various subpopulations, and in different service settings?
- What is the optimal staffing for service delivery?
- What are the long-term outcomes?
- Do intervention benefits outweigh the costs?
- Is the suite of tools too onerous, or does combined delivery create stronger outcomes and efficiencies in service delivery (i.e. is the cost/time of serving three family members together cheaper/easier/more effective than serving them separately)?
- What can be learned from other applications of the tools (for example, from a child-focused organization using the Child Bridge alone)?

At this juncture, EMPATH staff and participants perceive the Intergen Project as a highly promising intervention. Initial findings are strong, and families speak positively about the project and refer their friends for services. The hope is, as with other approaches EMPATH has designed and delivered, that consistent deployment of the intervention by EMPATH and at partner organizations will lead to its further refinement and evolution.

GLOSSARY

BANDWIDTH: Mental capacity. It is widely suggested to be a limited resource for all individuals, and can be “taxed” by stressful situations or environments.

BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY® (THE BRIDGE): EMPath’s overarching economic mobility framework that forms the basis for all work done with adults in the organization. Charts an individual’s path from poverty to self-sufficiency on a bridge held up by five pillars: Family Stability, Well-being, Financial Management, Education and Training, and Employment and Career Management. See page 18 for illustration.

CHILD AND FAMILY MENTOR (CFM): Staff person at EMPath who provides Mobility Mentoring® to both children and families in the Intergen Project.

CHILD BRIDGE TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE™ (CHILD BRIDGE): EMPath’s overarching child development framework that forms the basis for all work done with children in the organization. Charts a child’s path to a brighter future on a bridge held up by five pillars: Health and Well-being, Social-Emotional Development, Self-Regulation, Preparing for Independence, and Educational Progress. See page 20 for illustration.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE: Having the ability to provide basic means of subsistence for one’s family without reliance on means-tested public benefits.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY PATHWAYS (EMPATH): Formerly Crittenton Women’s Union, a nonprofit poverty disruptor based in Boston, MA.

FAMILY CARPOOL LANE TOOL™ (FCLT): EMPath’s overarching family alignment framework that forms the basis for all work done with families in the organization. Helps family members to define, along ten domains, the areas of family life that are helping or hindering their goals attainment. See page 21 for illustration.

FAMILY LEVEL: One of the three levels described in the attached brief at which poverty affects families; at this level poverty impacts family alignment, communication, and relationships (but not bonds).

INNER-SELF LEVEL: One of the three levels described in the attached brief at which poverty affects families; at this level poverty impacts individuals’ self-regulation and sense of self.

INTERGENERATIONAL: Recognizing the bi-directional bonds and interdependence of family members.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY PROJECT (THE INTERGEN PROJECT): A project initiated at EMPath in September 2014 that provides integrated Mobility Mentoring® services to every individual in a family, and to the family as a whole.

MOBILITY MENTOR (MM): Staff person at EMPath who provides Mobility Mentoring® coaching services to adults.

MOBILITY MENTORING®: EMPath’s model for coaching individuals out of poverty. Includes four essential elements: an overarching core framework (such as the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®), goal setting and outcomes orientation, coaching, and incentives.

OUTCOMES LEVEL: One of the three levels described in the attached brief at which poverty affects families; at this level poverty impacts individuals’ outcomes in physical and mental health, school achievement, career and earnings, and finances.

POVERTY: Lacking the financial resources to provide for one’s family in a secure way.

SELF-REGULATION: Important set of skills that includes the ability to control impulses, solve problems, and maintain focus despite distraction.

SENSE OF SELF: Includes the interacting concepts of self-efficacy, identity, and understanding of one’s place in the social world.

TOXIC STRESS: Stress that is in excess of an individual’s ability to cope with it. It causes impacts to health, mind, behavior, and well-being.

TWO-GENERATION (2-GEN): a type of program that addresses the service needs of both parent and child.

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EMPath

Economic Mobility Pathways

Economic Mobility Pathways
One Washington Mall, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02108
Telephone: 617.259.2900
Fax: 617.247.8826

WWW.EMPATHWAYS.ORG
[@DISRUPTPOVERTY](https://twitter.com/DISRUPTPOVERTY)