



October 20, 2014

## FamilySpeak: A Focus on Two-Generation Strategies

Michigan's Children in partnership with the National Black Child Development Institute and their Detroit chapter hosted a FamilySpeak forum that focused on two-generation strategies – programs that provide services to both parents and their children to ensure that families can thrive. Organizations that serve Detroit and Wayne County brought families who have benefited from their programs to testify before a listening panel comprised of state, county, and local-level policymakers as well as representatives from philanthropy. The following organizations were represented at the FamilySpeak.

- Coalition On Temporary Shelter (COTS) provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, as well as comprehensive support services for the homeless and at-risk population. COTS' mission is to alleviate homelessness by providing an array of services which enable people to achieve self-sufficiency and obtain quality affordable housing.
- Families on the Move provides support for foster/adoptive caregivers, training, advocacy, family events and support groups for parents and youths.
- Stand Up Parents! Great Start Wayne County Parent Coalition is a group of Wayne County parents and guardians of children pre-birth to twelve years of age. They are dedicated to improving the responsiveness and performance of programs and services that are to support the needs of all children pre-birth through age eight and their families with parent involvement as the key to children's success.
- Wayne Children's Healthcare Access Program (WCHAP) is an independent, physician led, public-private community health collaborative. A medical home implementation model, WCHAP works to improve quality, access and child health outcomes; strengthen provider, family and community partnerships; and reduce costs and advance systems change.

Parents spoke to challenges they have faced navigating public systems and how programs with a two-generation focus have connected them to needed services including health and mental health services; support to leave unsafe relationships; access to high quality early childhood programming; transitional housing needs; and other critical supports.

From this FamilySpeak forum, several policy opportunities emerged that can ensure more Michigan families can benefit from two-generation strategies that help children thrive while parents move ahead. What the families told us at this FamilySpeak is that traditional two-generation programs are very effective, and in some instances, may not be enough for particularly challenged families. Typical two-generation programs that Michigan's Children has advocated for a long time include Head Start and Early Head Start, evidence-based home visiting, high quality child care, adult literacy and education, workforce development, etc. What families shared at our FamilySpeak forum was that for Michigan's most challenged families, access to traditional two-generation programs are essential, and when needed, access to services to address particular struggles they are facing. The programs at our FamilySpeak forum exemplified this, and the families shared significant benefits from those programs.

For example:

- The need to *support domestic violence survivors* was brought up by multiple parents at the FamilySpeak event. Parents talked about various reasons that caused them to stay in unsafe relationships – a significant barrier being economic instability and homelessness for them and their children if they left their abusive partners. One parent spoke to this and how connecting to a two-generation program ensured that she and her children had shelter, clothes, and food; and also connected them to other essential services that allowed her to get her life back on track. Specifically, her children were able to attend a high quality child care while she worked to stabilize her mental health struggles, secure permanent housing, and obtain family-supporting income.
- Multiple parents spoke about their own mental health struggles, and how two-generation programs connected them to *services to address their mental health challenges as well as resulting challenges their children were experiencing*. For example, one parent with a bipolar disorder diagnosis talked about her Early Head Start program connecting her to mental health services for herself while also connecting her children to Early On early intervention.
- FamilySpeak participants shared of their experiences being empowered to *utilize their parent perspectives to improve services* they receive – whether it be through a Great Start Parent Coalition, a Head Start or Great Start Readiness Parent Advisory Group, or other parent space. Parents became even stronger advocates on behalf of their own children and ultimately on behalf of programs and systems serving many children, which has greater positive ramifications.
- With a group of foster and adoptive parents at the FamilySpeak, the *need for increased access to abuse/neglect prevention services* became evident. Some of the foster parents who spoke also spoke of their own struggles as children in the foster care system. Michigan must prioritize this important preventive measure that will ensure more children have a safe and healthy upbringing while also reducing taxpayers’ financial burden by reducing the number of children in foster care.
- Several parents spoke to challenges navigating health systems including health insurances. While expansion of Medicaid through the Healthy Michigan Fund has been essential to insuring more parents in Michigan, we must also do a better job of ensuring that *parents can easily navigate health systems* so that more children can receive appropriate preventive medical care in a doctor’s office rather than in a hospital setting.

Michigan’s Children is thankful to all of the families and programs who participated in our FamilySpeak forum, for sharing their challenges navigating public programs and services, and how connecting to the two-generation programs represented at the FamilySpeak has changed their families’ lives for the better. We hope that the Listening Panelists and other policymakers will learn from their stories to reduce barriers and increase opportunities to two-generation strategies that holistically support families through policy change.

*Special thanks to the sponsor of our Wayne County FamilySpeak forum:*





**Michigan's Children** is the only statewide, multi-issue advocacy organization focused solely on public policy in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families. We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, and present FamilySpeak as a signature program and as a non-partisan activity.

The **National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)** has been at the forefront of engaging leaders, policymakers, professionals, and parents around critical and timely issues that directly impact Black children and their families. We are a trusted partner in delivering culturally relevant resources that respond to the unique strengths and needs of Black children around issues including early childhood education, health, child welfare, literacy, and family engagement. With the support of our Affiliate network in communities across the country including the **Detroit Chapter**, we are committed to our mission “to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and their families through education and advocacy.”

