Getting a Head Start on Financial Security

GETTING A HEAD START ON FINANCIAL SECURITY

By Leigh Tivol and Jennifer Brooks

ABOUT CFED

CFED empowers low- and moderate-income households to build and preserve assets by advancing policies and programs that help them achieve the American Dream, including buying a home, pursuing higher education, starting a business and saving for the future. As a leading source for data about household financial security and policy solutions, CFED understands what families need to succeed. We promote programs on the ground and invest in social enterprises that create pathways to financial security and opportunity for millions of people.

Established in 1979 as the Corporation for Enterprise Development, CFED works nationally and internationally through its offices in Washington, DC; Durham, North Carolina; and San Francisco, California.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is critical to a child's cognitive, behavioral and social development, as well as his or her lifelong economic prospects. Recent research has shown that cognitive aptitude and ability are established early, and that investing in the human capital of young children results in the greatest rates of return[1] in the areas of earnings, savings, financial security and life outcomes.

The federal Head Start program provides quality early childhood education and other supports to children in low-income families living at or below the federal poverty line. Head Start prepares young children for school by enhancing their social and cognitive development, and delivers educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to participating children and parents. The program serves two age cohorts: children from birth to age three, who participate in Early Head Start, and those from age three to five, who participate in preschool Head Start. The Head Start program delivers these services at the local level by providing grants to local agencies that work directly with economically disadvantaged children and families. Free to eligible families, Head Start places substantial emphasis on parent engagement and provides support to parents to help them reach their own academic and employment goals.

Because Head Start reaches nearly one million children—and their parents—each year,[2] it is a logical venue for connecting low-income families with a range of programs and services that will help them become financially secure in the short-term and improve long-term economic prospects. In addition, because Head Start teachers are often themselves working poor,[3] they are a second, but equally important, audience for services and curricula that improve their financial position.

For both Head Start families and staff, a steady source of income that can allow them to meet their day-to-day needs is essential; however, to move beyond living paycheck to paycheck, they also need assets. Without savings and assets, families can struggle just to cover day-to-day costs, pay their debts and manage unexpected expenses. For these families, the prospect of investing in their futures—through postsecondary education or owning a home or business—is next to impossible. Assets bolster financial security for low- and moderate-income families. In fact, the way most individuals, families and communities move forward economically is by building assets.

Equally important, assets also improve families' future orientation and make a substantial difference in the long-term outcomes for vulnerable children. Assets provide families with a reason to believe in themselves and their potential, the opportunity to imagine a future better than the present, an ability to plan and prepare for that future, and a chance to invest in their children. Indeed, overwhelming evidence indicates that asset holding increases economic security, encourages initiative, increases economic confidence, increases home- and business ownership, increases financial skills, strengthens families and communities, and improves the prospects of future generations.

This guide examines a range of strategies that stakeholders in both the Head Start community and the asset-building community can undertake to link Head Start families, children and teachers with opportunities to build assets and strengthen their overall household financial security. We first provide background on why

1 As compared to other societal investments in human capital, such as remedial training for older youth or job training for adults. Flavio Cunha and James Heckman, "The Economics of Human Development: The Technology of Skill Formation," *American Economic Review* 97, no. 2 (2007): 231-47.

2 For more information, see Head Start's Program Information Report Data, available at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/mr/pir.

3 The average salary for Head Start preschool teachers in 2010 was $27,889 – in line with the national average of $29,200 for public and private preschool instructors during the same time period, but substantially below the national average for kindergarten teachers—$51,550. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment Statistics." May 2010. http://www.bls.gov/oes/2010/may/oes_nat.htm.

HEAD START STRUCTURE AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Oversight and Administration

The Office of Head Start (OHS), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), provides grants to approximately 1,600 local agencies to provide Head Start and Early Head Start services across the country.

Much of the immediate oversight and management of local Head Start programs occurs at the regional level. There are 10 ACF regional offices nationally that represent ACF to local and tribal governments, grantees, nonprofits and other related organizations. Each regional office houses staff who are dedicated to Head Start administration and who report to OHS's Program Operations Division.

Each local Head Start agency is assigned a Program Specialist within the regional office who provides federal oversight, guidance and clarification on Head Start performance standards, policies, rules and regulations. Head Start regional staff also participate in compliance and monitoring of Head Start grantees. Additional training and technical assistance are provided via a cadre of national centers that support all Head Start programs across the country.

Funding and Grantees

The federal government provides 80% of the annual cost to operate Head Start programs; the remainder comes from local monetary contributions, in-kind donations and/or volunteer time. Head Start funds flow directly from the federal government to the local Head Start agency (which may be a municipality, school district, for-profit or nonprofit organization, and which may run multiple Head Start sites or classrooms). Agencies receive their funding via a five-year cycle and must demonstrate ongoing quality to continue participation in the program. Grants for Head Start and Early Head Start programs are awarded by the 10 ACF Regional Offices and the Head Start Bureau's American Indian-Alaska Native and Migrant and Seasonal Workers Program Branches.

Although Head Start grantees may be municipal or tribal governments, school districts or for-profit entities, the majority are Community Action Agencies and other nonprofit entities ranging in size from small agencies operating a single classroom to extremely large grantees overseeing multiple partners operating 1,000 classrooms.[4] Head Start programs are tailored to meet local needs and are delivered in a variety of settings, including centers or schools that children attend for part-day or full-day services; family child care homes (which serve small groups of children in a home-based care setting), and children's own homes, where a staff person visits once a week to provide services to the child and family.

Head Start Associations

In addition to support from federal and regional program administrators, Head Start grantees can also tap into services, resources and advocacy from coalitions of Head Start stakeholders, including the National Head Start Association and regional and state Head Start associations (which exist in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands). These associations are typically funded through a blend of membership dues paid by Head Start grantees, revenues from professional development events such as conferences, and foundation or other private grants. They represent the interests of their Head Start communities, including children, families, programs and staff, and can be important sources of training, education and information.

[4] Ibid.

assets matter for families with young children and the powerful impact that assets can have on child and family well-being and outcomes. Next, we offer an overview of ways that stakeholders can integrate asset building into Head Start programs. In the final section, we describe in detail a number of strategies organized into seven main categories. Throughout, we offer brief case studies that document how real-life Head Start programs have mobilized the power and potential of asset-building approaches to help clients gain financial stability and security for themselves and their families.

2. THE IMPACT OF ASSETS ON CHILD OUTCOMES

While poverty—both income and asset poverty—can negatively affect child well-being, a growing body of research indicates that the presence of assets can not only mitigate those effects, it can also result in significantly more positive outcomes and life chances. Recent key findings include:

- Children of parents with savings are significantly more likely to climb up the income ladder – especially low-income individuals and families. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of children born to low-income but high-saving parents move up from the bottom income quartile over a generation, compared to only 50% of children of low-saving, low-income parents.[5]

- Savings in early childhood increases aspirations of parents for their children's future, especially with regard to college. Parents' expectations and beliefs have a powerful impact on a child's aspirations and academic achievement. One longitudinal study found that children whose mothers had high expectations of them were more likely to have higher grade-point averages and to graduate from high school.[6] Research demonstrates that establishing savings accounts in the early years can help parents of young children to perceive college as a tangible goal for their child and also become engaged in savings and financial management.

- Savings positively affect a child's expectations for him or herself. Research has shown that having college savings increases a child's expectation that he or she will attend college.[7] Establishing asset-building accounts in early childhood can help kids set early goals for college and motivate them at a young age to work toward those goals. Moreover, even modest amounts of savings can produce these "asset effects." Research by the Center for Social Development (CSD) indicates that, regardless of income, children from families with as little as $3,000 in savings had greater odds of graduating from high school than children in families without savings.[8]

- Asset ownership is associated with higher rates of college attendance and completion. A recent CSD study affirms the positive relationship between assets and college expectations and completion. After controlling for family income and other characteristics, the study found that assets are consistent, stable predictors of college graduation, and that financial assets are linked to higher education expectations among both parents and children.[9] Another recent study found that when children have a college savings account in their name, they are six times more likely to attend and complete college than similar youth who do not have an account.[10]

5 Reid Cramer, Rourke O'Brien, Daniel Cooper and Maria Luengo-Prado, *A Penny Saved is Mobility Earned: Advancing Economic Mobility through Savings* (Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009).

6 Michael Sherraden and Min Zhan, "Assets, Expectations, and Children's Educational Achievement in Female-headed Households," *Social Service Review* 77, no. 2 (2003): 191-211.

7 William Elliott III, Margaret Sherrard Sherraden, Lissa Johnson, Suzanne Johnson and Signe Peterson, *College Expectations Among Young Children: The Potential Role of Savings [Working Paper No. 07-06]* ,(St. Louis: Washington University in St. Louis Center for Social Development, 2007), 4-36.

8 Min Zhan and Michael Sherraden, "Assets and Liabilities, Educational Expectations, and Children's College Degree Attainment," *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, no. 6 (2011): 846-854.

9 Ibid.

10 William Elliott III and Sondra Beverly, "The Role of Savings and Wealth in Reducing "Wilt" between Expectations and College Attendance," *Journal of Children & Poverty* 17, no. 2 (2011): 165-185.

- **With proper support, families with young children can save and begin to accumulate assets.** Research demonstrates that low-income parents of young children can and do save. A national demonstration of Children's Savings Accounts (described in detail in the next section) included three sites that served preschool-aged children, including one Head Start site that served 500 children. Despite significant economic and social barriers,[11] families at these sites saved an average of between $7 and $10 per month. This amount is impressive given the economic challenges facing parents of young children. The participation rates at these sites were equally impressive: at two of the sites, where program coordinators worked closely with families and provided "high touch" services to encourage savings, 72% and 64% of families, respectively, deposited to their accounts. At the third site, where program coordinators offered less direct support and the economic downturn was a significant factor, one-third of families nonetheless deposited savings into their accounts.

The implications from this research are clear: helping low-income families with children to build savings and assets can have long-term positive effects. Head Start, with its system of existing supports and broad reach to low-income children and families across the country, represents a highly promising opportunity to connect with these families and deliver a range of asset-building supports.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, INCOME POVERTY AND ASSET POVERTY

Poverty can create stress that puts young children at risk. Economic hardship can impede a child's cognitive development and ability to learn. Living in poverty has been shown to increase the levels of stress hormones in young children and impair blood supply to their brains.[12] As a result, a child's language and memory skills can be permanently impaired. Research on language development has demonstrated that, by age three, large gaps can be seen in the vocabularies of children in families receiving public assistance compared to their counterparts in more well-off families.[13]

Unfortunately, by any measure, poverty in this country has been increasing. In 2011, the official poverty rate increased to the highest level in nearly two decades: 14% of households were income poor. However, income poverty describes only one aspect of household finances, namely the percentage of people with insufficient income to cover day-to-day expenses. It doesn't describe those who have insufficient resources—money in the bank or assets such as a home or a car—to meet emergencies or longer-term needs. Taking these resources into account, substantially more children and families are financially vulnerable.

According to the 2012 *Assets & Opportunity Scorecard,* 27% of households—nearly double the percentage that are income poor—are living in "asset poverty."[14] These families do not have the savings or other assets to cover basic expenses for three months if a layoff or other emergency leads to a loss of income. Even more disturbing, 43% of households—equivalent to 127.5 million people nationwide—are "liquid asset poor." Because the liquid asset poverty rate excludes assets such as a home, business or car that cannot easily be converted to cash, it provides a more realistic picture of the percentage of families with insufficient resources to meet emergency needs.

11 See, for example, Sondra G. Beverly and Jared Barton, *Barriers to Asset Accumulation for Families in the SEED Pre-School Demonstration and Impact Assessment* (Lawrence: University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, 2006), 1-15.

12 Ibid.

13 .Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks, 1995).

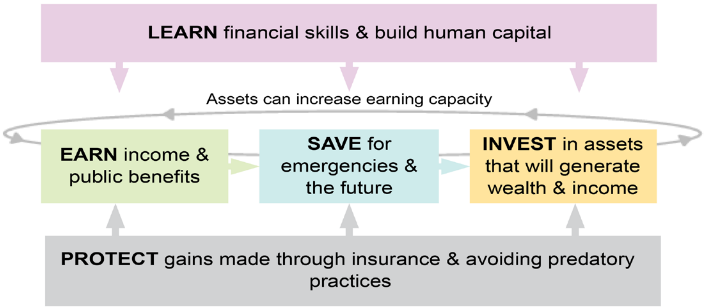
14 "Assets & Opportunity Scorecard," CFED, 2011, http://assetsandopportunity.org/scorecard.

3. STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING ASSET-BASED APPROACHES INTO HEAD START

Asset-building strategies can change aspirations and help families with young children both to become financially secure in the short term and to improve their economic prospects in the long term. Head Start represents an important delivery system for these services and interventions. State and local governments, Head Start providers and Head Start leadership can integrate asset-building strategies into early childhood programming using a number of tools targeted toward children, their parents and/or Head Start staff.

Choosing the appropriate strategies to prioritize, however, requires an understanding of the many factors that contribute to either building up or eroding the financial security of households, and how these factors are related to each other. CFED's Household Financial Security Framework, shown at right, is a tool that can help Head Start stakeholders and others think through what is most needed to build financial security over time among the households they serve.

Household Financial Security Framework



Source: CFED, 2010

Through the lens of this Framework, stakeholders can gain a holistic sense of whether the overall financial security needs of Head Start households in their communities are being met, and where any specific gaps may be. Armed with these insights, stakeholders can then identify one or more approaches they might take to address the gaps. As the Framework suggests, however, there is no single "silver bullet" strategy that will address all of a family's needs. Rather, interventions must meet families where they are on the path to financial security and recognize that a range of strategies in the areas of income, savings, investments, education and consumer protections may be needed.

Stakeholders can implement these strategies through a variety of approaches that require less or more of their own resources. For example, the simplest approach is for stakeholders to refer children, families and staff to existing resources. This approach can be as straightforward as knowing who the providers of asset-building services are and passing that information along. In the table and narrative that follow, we offer suggestions for resources and information clearinghouses that may be of value to Head Start providers and clients.

Another approach is for Head Start stakeholders to develop partnerships to expand the ability of Head Start providers to offer asset-building opportunities. Formalizing relationships with one or more entities that deliver asset-building services—such as financial educators, free tax-preparation providers or credit counselors—can connect families to important services without the need to build new internal capacity. This level of engagement may mean that partner agencies come on-site to serve clients directly, rather than placing the impetus on the client to contact the partner.

A final approach is for stakeholders to integrate asset-building concepts and strategies into Head Start's own programmatic offerings. This strategy may require more investment, but may also be the most effective, in that it embeds asset-building interventions into the programming and services that Head Start is already offering. Examples include classroom-based financial education for Head Start children, or facilitating direct deposit for Head Start staff. Head Start funds may be used for a range of services, including academic support services, child care, early childhood education, English-as-a-second-language, food and nutrition, GED classes for parents, guidance counseling, literacy services, medical, dental and mental health, and parental involvement. Many of these services could be a platform for integrating information about asset building and/or linking parents to asset-building strategies. For instance, parents participating in GED classes could receive information about opening an Individual Development Account (IDA) to save for postsecondary education once they have completed a GED.

Whichever approach is taken, it is important to keep in mind the realities and context of a Head Start program. One important contextual factor is that Head Start programs have literally hundreds of performance compliance checkpoints. Financial stability and asset-building strategies need to dovetail with current requirements, and not be (or not be perceived as) an additional burden.

One way to build financial stability and asset-building strategies into existing ways of working is to go through the Head Start staff members who are charged with working one-on-one with families. (The specific responsibilities and titles for these staff vary across programs.) These trained family support workers regularly meet with families, respond to a range of family-related issues and can play an important role in connecting families to programs and services that are both appropriate and of interest. Their status as trusted advisors makes them valuable partners in communicating with Head Start families about financial stability/asset-building opportunities that families might not otherwise know about or feel comfortable pursuing. One charge that family support workers have is to encourage parents to develop family services plans that outline personal goals. Family support workers can use the plans to encourage parents to set goals related to increasing financial stability and, subsequently, can use the plans as a touch-point to follow up. So, with no additional effort, family support workers can guide parents to include goals related to participating in financial education, opening a savings account, working on their credit, etc., and can inquire about their progress.

The table to the right summarizes a range of specific strategies that stakeholders can undertake to deliver asset-building opportunities to Head Start children, families and staff. The strategies are organized into the five categories of the Household Financial Security Framework: learn, earn, save, invest and protect. As in life, movement through these "steps" can be iterative and distinctions about where one strategy ends and another begins are not always clear cut. Thus, some activities in the table and text that follows fall into more than one category. The text following the table goes into more detail on each of the strategies and offers suggestions for implementation.

Stakeholders can implement these strategies through a variety of approaches that require less or more of their own resources.

STRATEGIES TO LINK HEAD START PROGRAMMING AND ASSET-BUILDING

ACTIVITY	AUDIENCE			ACTORS/PARTNERS					
	Children	Parents	Staff	Local Head Start progs.	Local asset-building progs.	Local gov't	State gov't	State Head Start ass'ns	Regional/ Federal Head Start offices
LEARN: Inform and Empower Children and Adults Through Financial Education									
Integrate classroom-based financial education into Head Start curriculum	✓			✓	✓				
Provide adult financial education, directly or via partnership		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Refer adults to reputable credit counseling services		✓	✓	✓	✓				
EARN: Facilitate Family Access to Public Benefits									
Refer adults to public benefits screening tools		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Promote referral and enrollment in other social service/asset building programs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EARN: Link Families to the Earned Income Tax Credit and Free Tax Preparation									
Link adults to free tax preparation help		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SAVE: Get Families Banked									
Connect adults to starter bank accounts		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Facilitate and encourage direct deposit			✓	✓				✓	✓
SAVE & INVEST: Encourage Savings by Matching Deposits									
Refer adults to local IDA programs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Apply for federal funding to offer IDAs in tandem with one or more Head Start centers		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Launch a Children's Savings Account program, or link to similar programs	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
INVEST & PROTECT: Help Families Buy and Keep Homes									
Link adults to first-time homebuyer assistance programs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Connect adults to local, state, federal foreclosure prevention programs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LEARN & INVEST: Expand Educational Opportunities for Head Start Teachers									
Connect teachers to financial aid and IDAs to meet credentialing requirements			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓

Inform and Empower Children and Adults through Financial Education

Financial education, defined as training to help families acquire the information and skills necessary to take control of their personal finances, can encourage saving behavior and help families acquire the information and skills necessary to take control of their personal finances. In many ways, financial education is the first and most fundamental asset-building strategy that Head Start programs can help to deliver. Most financial education curricula for adults cover basic subjects, such as designing a family budget, finding ways to save, managing credit wisely, understanding banking services, buying insurance and paying taxes. Curricula for children introduce many of these concepts in developmentally appropriate ways.

Local Head Start Programs and state Head Start Associations can …

Integrate basic financial concepts into curricula for children. Even very small children can begin to understand basic concepts about what money is and how it works. At the preschool level, for instance, children can learn about the values and denominations of coins and understand that money can be exchanged for goods and services. Many free, age-appropriate financial education curricula are readily available for preschool-aged children, and are accompanied by teacher instruction manuals and other tools. Even teachers who might not feel equipped to teach a more sophisticated financial education class for older children or adults are generally comfortable delivering the basic financial education concepts covered in a typical preschool curriculum. Numerous curriculum resources are available through the national Jump$tart clearinghouse.

Provide financial education to parents and teachers, either directly or through partnerships with other organizations. Head Start programs and/or associations can train their own staff to deliver financial education through one of the many available "train the trainer" programs or by selecting a financial education curriculum with a high-quality teachers' manual that provides detailed guidance on instruction techniques.

In addition, a large and diverse network of financial education providers—which includes city-based initiatives, credit counseling agencies, Cooperative Extension offices, Community Action Agencies, churches and other nonprofits, and banks or credit unions—already exists. These providers are potential partners for Head Start programs wishing to incorporate or expand financial education programming. Collaborating with one or more of these organizations can be an avenue to bring financial education services to a Head Start center without creating additional burden on Head Start staff. Many Head Start programs already partner with these kinds of organizations to offer financial education to parents with children enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start. Partnering providers may be able to deliver financial education on-site rather than requiring adults to go to another location.

Partnering providers may also be able to deliver train-the-trainer sessions for Head Start program staff, either on-site at centers or at association conferences. If statewide financial education networks exist, state Head Start associations could also play a role in creating these connections. A good resource on adult financial education is the National Endowment for Financial Education's clearinghouse.

CASE STUDY: FINANCIAL EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS HEAD START SITES

In Massachusetts, two Community Action Agencies – ABCD and the Montachusett Opportunity Council – have launched a pilot program at three Head Start sites to offer financial education to both children and their parents. Young children are exposed to age-appropriate financial education concepts in the classroom via a curriculum that was customized by the Head Start Support Office to align with both Head Start and state educational standards. The program has helped increase enthusiasm for the initiative among the Head Start teachers who are delivering the curriculum; the financial education actually helps make their jobs easier with regard to meeting state requirements, rather than adding a new requirement to the long list of things they must teach. In addition, teachers receive classroom supplies to help with the lessons.

The pilot also offers parents on-site adult financial education, taught by Community Action Agencies' trained financial education instructors and conveniently scheduled for the morning or early evening, when children are being dropped off or picked up.

In a separate but fortuitous effort, the Massachusetts Office of Early Education and Care (EEC) funded a financial educator to travel the state and hold a series of train-the-trainer sessions for Head Start and other early childhood case managers so that they could incorporate money management concepts into their home visits with young parents. While this was not part of the original Head Start financial education pilot, it quickly became obvious that it was a natural partnership, and administrators from the EEC and the Administration for Children and Families agreed to bring the two initiatives together.

Early outcomes of the pilot appear positive. Partners reported that "by the end of the first round of the project (Spring 2011), children were using financial vocabulary words in the classroom, incorporating financial concepts into their imaginative play, and parents reported that their children were discussing how to spend money at home." In addition, the sites received positive feedback from parents who attended the adult financial education sessions, and a few parents even went on to apply for participation in an IDA program (see "Encourage Savings by Matching Deposits" section, below, for details).

Refer parents/teachers to reputable credit counselors. Having a good credit score is essential for purchasing an asset, such as a home. Increasingly, however, credit scores are also used to screen individuals for jobs or rental housing—making managing debt and credit even more important. Many low-income families struggle with credit scores due to bankruptcy, legal claims or judgments, medical debts and the like; for these families, a low credit score can be a barrier to accessing opportunities for a better job, a safer home or simply opening a bank account.

Head Start programs can develop referral networks that link parents and staff to the many excellent nonprofit credit counseling agencies that can help individuals rebuild their credit. Quality referrals are particularly important; a large number of predatory, "sham" credit counseling agencies have sprung up that target low-income consumers, charge high fees and provide little or no actual help. The National Foundation for Credit Counseling maintains a list of reputable nonprofit credit counseling agencies to which Head Start parents and staff may be referred.

Facilitate Family Access to Public Benefits

Public benefit programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps), the Women Infants and Children program, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, energy assistance and the like can make an enormous difference in helping low-income families meet their day-to-day needs—but only if families are enrolled in and accessing all the benefits for which they qualify. Unfortunately, many families are either not aware that there are benefits available, or are not claiming benefits for which they are eligible. The cumulative effect of these missed opportunities is substantial; one report found that some $65 billion in government benefits are left on the table each year.[15] The loss accrues not only to individual households struggling to make ends meet, but also to the states and localities that miss out on the opportunity to draw more resources to their communities.

Head Start centers are a critical venue for connecting both participating families (who must by definition be low-income) and frontline staff (who are themselves often poor) to other benefits for which they are eligible.

Local, state, regional and federal Head Start entities, as well as local and state governments, can …

Refer parents and teachers to public benefits screening tools. In recent years, a number of web-based applications have been developed that make applying for local, state and/or federal benefits simpler and easier. These systems centralize the screening and application process for multiple benefits programs. A prospective benefits recipient provides information about their financial status and other essential data, and the system identifies which programs the individual qualifies for and, in some cases, can even submit applications for benefits online. Cities and states that have adopted such programming can target Head Start parents and teachers in their marketing efforts and even bring benefits counselors on-site to screen potential recipients. Head Start programs themselves can ensure that messages about these services are reaching parents and staff and provide encouragement and incentives to participate in screenings. Head Start associations can make local leadership aware of the availability of benefits access tools and encourage their use through regional, state and/or local campaigns. A useful listing of benefits access programs is available in Appendix B of a 2010 Annie E. Casey Foundation report, Improving Access to Public Benefits: Helping Eligible Individuals and Families Get the Income Supports They Need.

Promote referral and enrollment in other social service/asset-building programs. Head Start programs can reach out to local programs for which parents and/or staff would likely qualify and set up streamlined referral systems that help connect Head Start clients to these outside programs (and vice versa). These referral partnerships can create win-win scenarios: the programs involved benefit from a steady inflow of prospective clients, while clients benefit from leveraging multiple services for which they qualify. Some referral partners may be willing to set aside a certain number of slots specifically for Head Start families or staff, or to come to the Head Start site to make presentations and enroll clients on the spot.

15 McKinsey & Company, "Single Stop Rollout Strategy Project—Final report," February 2007.

Link Families to the Earned Income Tax Credit and Free Tax Preparation

One of the largest and most effective wage support programs for low- and moderate-income families is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is claimed through the tax filing process. The EITC supplements the earnings of workers by reducing their tax burdens. If the EITC is greater than the amount of taxes owed, the taxpayer receives a refund. In 2009, the federal credit lifted more than 6.6 million Americans out of poverty, including 3.3 million children.[16] The EITC is also a means of reducing asset poverty. Studies have shown that some families use EITC payments for significant purchases such as a house or to pay off debts.[17] Families can also use the credit they receive each year to start saving for the future.

Tax time is thus an important opportunity to ensure low-income families receive the credit, as well as to connect them to mainstream financial services. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites provide free tax help to low- and moderate-income families (generally, those with incomes of $49,000 and below). Certified volunteers, sponsored by a variety of organizations, receive training to help prepare basic tax returns in communities across the country. VITA sites are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls and other convenient locations. VITA sites can aid in opening savings accounts, and they dramatically increase the claim rate for the EITC. VITA sites can also partner with matched savings programs to give people a reason to choose to save.

Local, state, regional and federal Head Start entities, as well as local and state governments and asset-building programs, can …

Link Head Start parents and staff to free tax preparation programs. Strategies for connecting parents and staff to free tax preparation help include creating simple referral mechanisms between VITA sites and Head Start centers, hosting a VITA site at a Head Start Center, and/or providing basic information on free tax prep help and the EITC to Head Start parents and employees via brochures, flyers and/or presentations at parent meetings. Ideally, efforts to help parents claim the EITC should begin when they enroll their children in school and should be integrated into any family service plans developed. State Head Start associations can leverage partnerships with statewide VITA networks and educate association members via regular communications channels about the availability and importance of free tax prep. Information on tax preparation sites across the country is available via the National Community Tax Coalition's website.

Get Families Banked

Recent theory argues that financial education alone may not be sufficient to change behavior with respect to financial products, and that a more appropriate goal is *financial capability*, which results when individuals develop financial knowledge *and* have access to mainstream financial services to put their learning into practice.[18] Recent research shows that having both financial education and accounts leads consumers to seek additional financial knowledge and desire greater assets. A holistic approach that combines account ownership with financial education has been especially beneficial for low-income consumers.[19]

16 "Policy Basics: The Earned Income Tax Credit." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. February 2012. http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2505.

17 Steve Holt, *The Earned Income Tax Credit at Age 30: What We Know* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 2009), 17.

18 Elizabeth Johnson and Margaret S. Sherraden, "From Financial Literacy to Financial Capability among Youth," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 34, no. 3 (2007): 119-145.

19 Christi Baker and Doug Dylla, *Analyzing the Relationship between Account Ownership and Financial Education*, (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, 2007), 1-28.

Indeed, for many low-income families, a banking relationship is an early and important step on the path to asset building. Savings accounts are one of the most basic asset-accumulation tools, and transaction (i.e., checking) accounts can act as a gateway into the financial mainstream.

Yet, a 2009 FDIC Survey of Banked and Underbanked Households reports that over 17 million adults (7.7% of U.S. households) do not have a checking or savings account with a mainstream financial institution. An additional 43 million adults (18% of households) are underbanked, meaning that while they have bank accounts, they still rely on fringe financial services, such as check cashers, to conduct basic financial transactions. The lack of a basic bank account is particularly common among minority and low-income households. Nationally, 22% and 19% of African-American and Hispanic households, respectively, are unbanked, compared to only 3.3% of White households. In addition, more than one in four households earning less than $15,000 annually do not have a bank account.[20]

Local, state, regional and federal Head Start entities, as well as local and state governments and asset-building programs, can …

Connect parents and teachers to starter bank accounts. Providing low-income unbanked and underbanked people with free or low-cost starter or "second chance"[21] bank accounts is a simple way to connect them to mainstream financial services. One of the fastest-growing avenues for such accounts are Bank On programs, which are typically city- or state-led coalitions that bring together local governments, financial institutions and community organizations to help improve the financial futures of unbanked families by offering accounts and access to financial education. There are over 70 Bank On programs in cities and states around the country at some stage of planning or implementation. Connecting Head Start parents and staff with Bank On initiatives at the local and/or statewide levels is an easy way to open the door to the financial mainstream. A list of Bank On programs is available at www.joinbankon.org.

Communities without a Bank On program can consider launching one, forming their own partnership with one or more local financial institutions and/or connecting to similar ventures such as America Saves (www.americasaves.org), a campaign coordinated by the Consumer Federation of America (CFA), a nonprofit with numerous local affiliates, all working to help individuals save money, reduce debt and build wealth. Many America Saves programs include bank partners who offer low- or no-cost accounts.

Facilitate and incent direct deposit for teachers. One of the insights from Bank On San Francisco—the first Bank On initiative in the country—was that while they were able to reduce the number of unbanked residents, some who were receiving paper paychecks continued to use check-cashers and other fringe financial services. These underbanked families were spending an estimated five percent of their income on check-cashing fees. Direct deposit of paychecks is a way to avoid those fees and free up that income for other purposes.

In addition, direct deposit is also one of the surest ways to help employees save by facilitating the automatic deposit of a portion of their paychecks into an asset-building account each month. Studies have shown that the use of direct deposit can be an important predictor of savings success, in part because employees do not have to

20 *FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households*, (Washington, DC: FDIC, 2009).

21 "Second chance" accounts are designed for consumers who have struggled with the use of checking accounts in the past, and may be blocked from opening traditional accounts by their appearance in ChexSystems.

remember to make a deposit to their savings each time they get paid. Rather, they can "set it and forget it" once they have taken the initial action to put direct deposit in place.

Head Start programs and federal leadership can facilitate direct deposit for every staff member, ideally at the time of hire, and provide clear, helpful instructions on the process. Programs can also consider providing incentives to use direct deposit by offering small rewards (such as gift cards or similar items) to employees who set up direct deposit and/or who direct a portion of their paychecks to a savings account. Head Start associations could play a role in encouraging a direct deposit campaign.

Encourage Savings by Matching Deposits

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are special savings accounts that match the deposits of low- and moderate-income people. For every dollar saved in an IDA, savers receive a corresponding match which serves as both a reward and an incentive to further the saving habit. Savers agree to complete financial education classes and use their savings for an asset-building purpose—typically for post-secondary education or job training, home purchase or to capitalize a small business. In addition to earning match dollars, savers learn about budgeting and saving and receive additional training before purchasing an asset. An IDA program can be as short as six months or as long as several years from beginning to end.

The federal government is the largest funder of IDAs nationally through its Assets for Independence (AFI) program. Operated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), AFI provides grants to community organizations and government agencies that administer IDA

CASE STUDY:
BRINGING AFI TO UMATILLA-MORROW HEAD START

A recent collaboration between CASA of Oregon, an AFI grantee, and the Umatilla-Morrow Head Start (UMHS), is breaking new ground for both partners.

UMHS, located in rural eastern Oregon, observed that its Head Start families were struggling with a range of financial stability issues, including lack of education and difficulty finding employment. After learning about IDAs at a regional asset-building summit in 2011, UMHS began to consider IDAs as an avenue toward creating new opportunities for their Head Start families, and reached out to CASA, one of the leading IDA providers in the state, to explore collaboration. The two organizations serve similar clients—low-income, rural, Spanish-speaking residents—which made the partnership a natural fit.

Working through their team of home-visit caseworkers, UMHS has taken the lead on informing and enrolling prospective accountholders, and has enrolled a small group of Head Start parents in the IDA program. In turn, CASA is managing the IDA accounts and providing additional support.

The success of the partnership has prompted CASA to approach other Head Start programs in Oregon, with the goal of bringing at least four more Head Start partners into the CASA network in the coming year.

programs. Since 1999, AFI has funded more than 600 projects in communities across the country. Applicants must raise a dollar of non-federal match (usually local, state or philanthropic funds; however, Community Development Block Grant funds may also be used) for every dollar of federal funding they seek.

Research proves that IDAs help savers accumulate wealth and improve their economic self-sufficiency. For example, a five-year evaluation of the AFI program found that those who participated in the program were 35% more likely to become homeowners, 84% more likely to become business owners, and nearly twice as likely to pursue post-secondary education or training than their non-AFI counterparts. Other research shows that more than half of IDA program graduates who had previously received public assistance no longer received assistance after completing the program, and nearly all still owned their homes two years after purchase.

Local, state, regional and federal Head Start entities, as well as local and state governments and asset-building programs, can …

Refer parents and teachers to local IDA programs. Hundreds of IDA programs are operating across the country which seek to recruit and enroll eligible, motivated accountholders. IDA programs present an opportunity for a natural partnership, given that many Head Start families and staff would qualify for IDA programs. Head Start leaders can develop referral relationships with IDA providers, offer IDA programs the opportunity to make presentations to Head Start parents and staff, and distribute information about local IDA programs. Listings of IDA programs are available through the AFI Resource Center and CFED's website.

Apply to run an AFI program. The AFI program is actively seeking new grantees, and numerous resources exist to support prospective applicants in developing a successful application. Head Start providers—or the cities in which they are located—can consider applying for AFI funds to serve Head Start families and staff. Regional ACF offices can be helpful in providing information and guidance on submitting an application, and state or regional Head Start Associations could explore the potential for connecting with larger-scale collaborative IDA partnerships in states where those exist. More information on applying for AFI funds is available at the AFI Resource Center.

Of particular note is the fact that a large number of Head Start programs are run by Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which are ideal applicants for AFI IDA funding for a number of reasons. In fact, a substantial proportion of current AFI grantees are CAAs. CAAs have the trust of their clients, who represent the same target population as those for IDAs. In addition, many CAAs already operate a multitude of other services that can be linked with IDAs, such as financial education, homebuyer support and credit counseling. Finally, CAAs are able to be creative and flexible with Community Development Block Grant funding to provide the required non-federal match.

Launch a Children's Savings Account program, or link to similar programs. Like IDAs for adults, Children's Savings Accounts (CSAs) are one way to foster development of a meaningful and enduring asset for children. In their ideal form, CSAs are established for children at birth and grow over their lifetimes. Accounts are seeded with an initial deposit and built by contributions from family, friends and the children themselves. Where possible, accounts are augmented by savings matches and other incentives provided by private- and/or public-sector entities. Young accountholders and their families also receive age-appropriate financial education.

In recent years, new opportunities to deliver CSAs at scale are piquing the interest of leaders in both public and private sectors and leading to a set of emerging initiatives that are serving larger and more diverse populations of young savers, including efforts to integrate CSAs and financial education in programs run by the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and others. Although no federal children's savings policy has been enacted to date, a number of states have taken some action to promote and provide savings incentives for children and families. For instance, 12 states[22] currently offer a savings match or other incentives for deposits made into 529 college savings accounts. Strides have also been made with private-sector efforts supported by nongovernmental funding.

Depending on the appetite and resources for such an effort, connecting families to children's savings opportunities might be as simple as a local Head Start center working with a local bank or credit union to open basic savings accounts for children with a modest initial deposit of a few dollars. Or, it could involve working with a state 529 program that already offers a savings match, and promoting and marketing the 529 program to Head Start families and staff. Or, it could involve a larger, more complex partnership with a state, municipality and/or foundations to provide CSAs with many additional features. State and local governments with an interest in asset-building strategies for young children should explore partnerships with Head Start as a delivery mechanism for children's savings, and could allocate resources to provide savings incentives. Information on Children's Savings Accounts is available through CFED's website.

CASE STUDY: CHILDREN'S SAVINGS ACCOUNTS FOR KIDS IN OAKLAND AND LIVINGSTON COUNTIES IN MICHIGAN

Beginning in early 2005, the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA) in Pontiac, MI, opened 529 college savings accounts for 499 preschool-aged children enrolled in its Head Start program at seven sites throughout Oakland and Livingston counties. Each young accountholder received an initial deposit of $800 and the opportunity to earn a dollar-for-dollar match on his or her savings over a four-year period. In addition, each accountholder received a $200 match from the state of Michigan in return for making the initial deposit in the account.[23]

Initial findings from quasi-experimental research provide useful data about creating CSAs for low-income children in the early childhood years. For example, 85% of families reported having incomes at less than or equal to 150% of the poverty threshold. In addition, almost all participants in the program faced significant income burdens and 22% reported food insufficiency.[24] Despite these challenges, researchers found that most parents aspired to save and had at least rudimentary knowledge of household budgeting and financial management practices.[25] Indeed, account monitoring data from OLHSA show fully one-third of families contributed funds to their CSAs.[26] This saving is particularly impressive given the location of the site—Michigan was affected earlier and more severely than most other states by the economic downturn. In total, average total accumulation per accountholder after two-and-a-half years was $1,457 (median $1,091), and the average quarterly net savings was $29.

22 Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Nevada, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Utah and West Virginia offer savings matches; Indiana, Utah and Vermont offer tax credits.

23 Michigan suspended its 529 matching grant program in 2009 as a result of budget cuts.

24 Beverly and Barton, *Barriers to Asset Accumulation*, 1-15.

25 Sondra Beverly, *Financial Knowledge, Attitudes, Ownership, and Practices among Families in the SEED Pre-School Demonstration and Impact Assessment* (Lawrence: University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, 2006), 1-15.

26 Lisa Reyes Mason, Yunju Nam, Margaret Clancy, Vernon Loke and Youngmi Kim, *SEED Account Monitoring Research: Participants, Savings, and Accumulation* (St. Louis: Washington University Center for Social Development, 2009).

Help Families Buy and Keep Homes

A home is the chief asset of many American households. It is an integral part of the American dream and provides both physical and financial security. Because mortgage payments can be substituted for rent, even households with very modest disposable incomes can nonetheless, over time, build assets through homeownership. In fact, homeownership is the single largest source of equity for American households, even in today's challenging housing markets. Yet low- and moderate-income families face a number of barriers to achieving homeownership. Some can afford the monthly mortgage payment but struggle to save enough money for downpayment and closing costs. For others, the even tighter prime credit markets make it difficult to obtain an affordable, consumer-friendly mortgage product. Still others enter the purchase process with little to no information about what to expect and how to protect their interests.

Even for those who succeed in homeownership, the experience of recent years has shown that it is by no means a risk-free proposition. Foreclosure can dash the dream, stripping owners of hard-earned investments. It can also devastate a community, leaving behind vacant houses that drag down property values for surrounding homes and drain tax dollars from cash-strapped local governments.

Local, state, regional and federal Head Start entities, as well as local and state governments and asset-building programs, can …

Refer Head Start parents and teachers to first-time homebuyer assistance programs. First-time homebuyer assistance programs are typically administered through state housing finance agencies and local housing authorities and delivered through local nonprofits, such as community development corporations. They provide a range of assistance to support first-time homebuyers, including competitively-priced mortgage lending products, downpayment assistance to help lower-income borrowers who may not have a lump sum to put down on a home, homebuyer education programs and other initiatives designed specifically to assist low-income renters who wish to become homeowners, such as lease-purchase programs and Section 8 vouchers that can be used for homeownership. Head Start leadership at the local and state level can promote these resources among families and staff; similarly, state and local housing agencies can engage in outreach to the Head Start community as a prime pool of prospective candidates for their services.

Connect parents and teachers to foreclosure prevention programs. Like first-time homebuyer programs, foreclosure prevention efforts are also often provided via state and local housing agencies, as well as through community-based nonprofit organizations and legal service agencies, and even through federal programs designed to restructure existing mortgages. These programs offer trained counselors who can help Head Start parents and staff navigate the highly complex realm of foreclosure avoidance and mitigation. There is a potential role here for local, regional and federal Head Start administrators to connect parents and teachers to the appropriate resources, and for providers of foreclosure prevention services to reach out to Head Start families and staff to raise awareness. Along with state-level programs, numerous national foreclosure prevention resources exist, including a large NeighborWorks campaign.

Expand Educational Opportunities for Head Start Teachers

Higher education is an important investment in human capital that opens many doors to opportunity. But there is also a more pragmatic reason for focusing on postsecondary education in the Head Start realm: beginning in October 2011, each Head Start classroom must have a teacher with at least an associate's degree in early childhood education, and by 2013, at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide must have at least a bachelor's degree. In addition, teachers' aides, education coordinators and Early Head Start teachers will also need to meet higher credential standards.

Local, state, regional and federal Head Start entities, as well as local and state governments and asset-building programs, can …

Connect teachers to financial aid and IDAs to meet credentialing requirements. Stakeholders can help connect Head Start teachers to opportunities for scholarships, loans and financial aid advice. Individual Development Accounts, described above, are another way to help make that requirement achievable.

4. THE ROLE OF STATE AND FEDERAL POLICY

In addition to the on-the-ground, family- and staff-focused strategies that Head Start stakeholders can implement, state governments and the federal government also have an important role to play in adopting and implementing policies—both administrative and legislative—that clear away barriers and affirmatively support asset-building strategies for children and families participating in Head Start. These policies can take many forms, as described below. Some of these strategies must be implemented on either the state or the federal level; for others, both state and federal governments can play a role.

State policymakers can …

Provide supplemental state support to expand Head Start's reach. Head Start does not currently cover all eligible children; however, states can supplement federal Head Start funds with state dollars to increase the number of Head Start slots available. In FY 2010, 16 states[27] provided more than $147 million in total supplemental funding to allow nearly 17,000 more Head Start-eligible children and families to participate. Other states have created separate (non-Head Start) pre-K programs. Not only can additional state funding be used to expand coverage to more children and make overall quality improvements, it can also provide funding to implement many of the ideas described above.

Federal policymakers can …

Provide incentives for Head Start programs that embed asset-building strategies. Head Start programs are already stretched thin, and integrating asset-building elements for families and staff may not immediately rise to the highest priority given the many other urgent needs that program administrators face. However, federal and regional Head Start officials might consider raising the stakes by offering incentives—financial and/or non-financial—to local Head Start programs that make

27 Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington and Wisconsin. See the National Institute for Early Education Research's The State of Preschool 2010 for details, available at http://nieer.org/yearbook.

the effort to embed asset strategies and services into their existing programming. Showcasing success stories and providing even modest rewards for Head Start staff who are excelling in this area could help to raise the profile and energy level of such a campaign.

Institutionalize support for asset-building strategies within the Administration for Children and Families. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) launched the ASSET (Assets, Savings, Support, Education and Training) Initiative in 2010 to bring together ACF offices and their partner agencies and organizations and encourage the integration of asset-based strategies. Working through the regional ACF offices, the ASSET Initiative is encouraging each ACF program and office,[28] including Head Start, to integrate asset-building strategies into their existing services. These strategies include financial education, access to mainstream banking, credit and debt management, tax credit and public benefits access, and matched savings.

An important legacy of the ASSET Initiative will be to increase agency knowledge of asset-building strategies, institutionalize relationships (both within ACF and with external partners), and adjust program operations so that connection to asset-building strategies is a standard practice.

There are a number of steps each federal agency administrator should take to leave this important legacy. For example, federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) administrators should provide guidance to state agencies that administer the program to encourage them to take advantage of the program's flexibility around eligible uses and incorporate financial education into clients' work activities options. Federal Head Start administrators should provide guidance and training to state agencies that administer Head Start on strategies they should implement to improve the financial capability of Head Start parents and teachers, with a focus on saving for their children's education. These actions can be implemented within ACF's existing authority and do not require new legislation or rulemaking.

For more information on the ASSET Initiative, visit www.idaresources.org for the initiative's fact sheet.

Both state and federal policymakers can …

Remove asset limits from public benefit programs in which Head Start families and/or staff are enrolled. Many public benefits, such as TANF, Medicaid or SNAP, that Head Start families may be receiving are available only to those with few or no assets. If a family owns assets over a pre-determined limit (typically approximately $2,000), it must "spend down" longer-term savings in order to receive what is often short-term public assistance. Personal savings and assets are precisely the kind of resources that allow families to move off of public benefit programs—yet asset limits create a powerful disincentive to save.

States and the federal government should eliminate asset limits from public benefit programs, or at a minimum, raise them to levels that will not discourage Head Start families and other low-income households from saving for their future and that of their children. For some programs, such as Supplemental Security Income, the federal government sets the asset limits, while for others, states determine many key policies. States have discretion in setting or eliminating asset limits for TANF,

28 Administration for Native Americans, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Office of Child Care, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Office of Community Services, Office of Family Assistance, Office of Head Start, Office of Refugee Resettlement, The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). States and the federal government share authority over SNAP asset tests; however, states can use an approach called "categorical eligibility" to effectively eliminate the asset test in that program.

For more information on lifting asset limits in public benefit programs, visit the 2012 *Assets & Opportunity Scorecard*.

Launch a dedicated children's savings program. As described earlier, savings programs targeted at young children can be a powerful tool to promote asset accumulation and to build aspirations for the future. Such initiatives would appear to be an excellent fit with Head Start programs, and indeed, there has been significant interest at both the federal agency level and at the local level in linking Head Start with child savings efforts. However, resources have not yet been identified to undertake such an effort. A number of federal legislative proposals have sought to advance children's savings initiatives in a range of forms—from support for saving policy aimed at a broad array of uses to proposals targeted at specific savings for education or retirement. States, too, have leeway to create and fund children's savings programs, and can dedicate resources for savings incentives, financial education and program management.

For more information on federal and state policy support for children's savings, visit **www.cfed.org/programs/abc/policy/**.

5. CONCLUSION

Constructing a transformative set of asset-building strategies for Head Start families and staff will require support and action from a broad range of stakeholders—including state and national governments, the nonprofit sector, local practitioners and low-income families themselves.

This document provides a wide range of ideas for integrating asset building into Head Start programming. Stakeholders interested in implementing these initiatives will want to carefully consider the specific needs of their Head Start families and staff, as well the existing resources and capacity available in their communities, to determine which of these strategies should be targeted as high priority for execution based on urgency and/or feasibility. Starting with a handful of well-selected asset-building opportunities can help to create early success, and build momentum for additional partnerships and initiatives going forward.

The Head Start network is an ideal setting for delivering asset-building services to families who need it most. By exploring opportunities to link these two areas, stakeholders can advance the powerful goal of building real financial security—and encouraging and emboldening hopes and dreams for the future—for the hundreds of thousands of adults and children who are part of the Head Start "family."

RESOURCES

Inform and Empower Children and Adults through Financial Education

- Integrating basic financial concepts into curricula for children: See the national Jump$tart clearinghouse (http://www.jumpstart.org/jump$tart-clearinghouse.html).
- Providing financial education to parents and teachers: See the National Endowment for Financial Education's clearinghouse (http://www.nefe.org/tabid/89/Default.aspx)
- Referring parents/teachers to reputable credit counselors: See the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (http://www.nfcc.org/).

Facilitate Family Access to Public Benefits

- Referring parents and teachers to public benefits screening tools: See Appendix B of a 2010 Annie E. Casey Foundation report, Improving Access to Public Benefits: Helping Eligible Individuals and Families Get the Income Supports They Need (http://www.aecf.org/~/media/Pubs/Topics/Economic%20Security/Family%20Economic%20Supports/ImprovingAccesstoPublicBenefitsHelpingEligibl/BenefitsAccess41410.pdf).

Link Families to the Earned Income Tax Credit and Free Tax Preparation

- Linking Head Start parents and staff to free tax preparation programs: See the National Community Tax Coalition's website, http://tax-coalition.org/our-coalition/our-coalition/program-locator.

Get Families Banked

- Connecting parents and teachers to starter bank accounts: See Bank On's national website (www.joinbankon.org).

Encourage Savings by Matching Deposits

- Referring parents and teachers to local IDA programs: See the AFI Resource Center (http://www.idaresources.org/afigrantees) and CFED's website http://cfed.org/programs/idas/directory_search/).

- Applying to run an AFI program: See the AFI Resource Center (http://www.idaresources.org/page?pageid=a047000000DegEv).
- Launching a Children's Savings Account program, or link to similar programs: See CFED's website (http://cfed.org/programs/abc/).

Help Families Buy and Keep Homes

- Connecting parents and teachers to foreclosure prevention programs: See NeighborWorks (http://www.foreclosurehelpandhope.org/).

State and Federal Policy

- Integrating asset-based strategies into Administration for Children and Families programs: See the ASSET Initiative's fact sheet (http://idaresources.org/servlet/servlet.FileDownload?file=01570000000kUcq).
- Removing asset limits from public benefit programs in which Head Start families and/or staff are enrolled: See CFED's Assets & Opportunity Scorecard (http://scorecard.assetsandopportunity.org/2012/measure/lifting-asset-limits-in-public-benefit-programs).
- Launching a dedicated children's savings program: See CFED's website (http://cfed.org/programs/abc/policy/).

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