



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# **The Role of Community Development Corporations in Promoting the Well-Being of Young Children** (FEBRUARY 2002)

## **The Context**

Over the past decade there has been increased attention to improving outcomes for young children and helping families better meet the dual challenges of providing nurturing parenting and economic support for their children. For the most part, however, activity to promote healthy child development and provide support to families with young children has not been linked with efforts to promote family economic security in low-income communities. At the same time, initiatives to promote community building and address economic issues in low-income communities have typically not explicitly addressed the developmental and family support needs of young children and families.

Recognizing this, the National Center for Children in Poverty decided to undertake an exploratory project to see what community-based organizations in low-income communities and neighborhoods are doing to promote the healthy development of low-income young children and families through child development and family support strategies. NCCP focused on three questions:

- In what ways are community development corporations (CDCs) promoting the well-being of low-income families with young children?
- What are the issues, challenges, and opportunities facing CDCs seeking to play a more active role in promoting the well-being of young children and their families?
- What more might be done to strengthen CDCs' role in promoting the well-being of the next generation?

## **The Findings**

- CDCs are focusing attention on young children and families using one or more of three basic strategies. These include: implementing child development and family support programs; assisting child care providers by rehabilitating (rehabbing) homes and providing training in business and child care skills; and developing support strategies for families, including grandparents and others raising young children. (See box.)
- Although most CDCs profiled in the report undertake only one type of strategy, a few are creating approaches that reflect a strategic plan, sometimes by having a director of early childhood programs, and sometimes by developing an actual plan that addresses the needs of parents, providers, and young children.
- The school readiness framework does not, at this point, seem to be driving many efforts, and few initiatives track impacts or outcomes.
- Most efforts have involved significant help from national or regional intermediaries focused on child care and economic development, but CDCs are typically not linked with other child and family leaders trying to improve outcomes for young children either within their communities or states.

## EXAMPLES OF CHILD- AND FAMILY-FOCUSED STRATEGIES DEVELOPED BY CDCs

### Implementing child development and family support programs

- Adopting national child development and family support program models including home visiting, Even Start, Head Start, and Early Head Start
- Requiring that center-based programs seek national accreditation to ensure high quality
- Providing developmental screening and, if necessary, referrals for fuller assessments of young children

### Helping child care providers

- Rehabbing homes for family child care providers
- Supporting family child care providers in creating sustainable businesses
- Working with child care providers to help them become advocates for improved child care availability and quality
- Providing short-term substitute child care for providers who are ill or taking vacation
- Helping unlicensed providers become licensed
- Developing provider loan programs and scholarships for professional development

### Helping families

- Organizing support groups for parents, grandparents, and children
- Building parent leadership networks to address issues of availability and quality of child care
- Providing short-term, emergency child care scholarships to providers so children can stay in the same setting
- Addressing environmental risks to children, such as lead poisoning

- In strengthening an agenda for young children and families, CDCs report some specific challenges. These include: ambivalence about focusing on a specific age group; the perception that early childhood care is a “professionalized” service rather than a neighborhood function, despite the reality that the majority of children are actually cared for by neighbors and friends in the community; the complexities of building new relationships, including, at times, difficulty in working with schools; the need for technical assistance and support; and, as is true of all community organizations working with children and families, funding challenges.

## Toward the Future

- Given the stability of CDCs as a community presence, their networks, their leadership building capacity, their capacity to manage programs, and their ability to do neighborhood planning and needs assessments, CDCs have the potential to play a stronger role in promoting improved outcomes for young children and families if they had access to better resources and technical assistance.
- CDCs are in a position to strengthen their focus on improved outcomes for young children and families by promoting greater community awareness about the importance of early childhood through participation in literacy campaigns; more consistently informing parents about benefits, particularly given changing rules regarding Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and other assistance programs; creating deliberate “two-generation approaches” to the more vulnerable families in the community; paying more attention to school readiness strategies and to outcome indicators; and leading or participating in strategic community planning for young children and families.
- More dialogue between CDCs and broader efforts to improve conditions and outcomes for young children and families would be helpful. National organizations serving the CDC community could play a lead role in this, but the broader children’s policy and advocacy community also needs to ensure that the CDC voice is heard at the table.

For more information about what community development corporations are doing to promote the well-being of young children and families, as well as research citations, please refer to *The Role of Community Development Corporations in Promoting the Well-Being of Young Children*, by Jane Knitzer and Fida Adely. Copies of the full publication are available through the NCCP Web site at: [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org).

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