



Columbia University
MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Young Children in Immigrant Families
The Role of Philanthropy
Sharing Knowledge, Creating Services,
and Building Supportive Policies**

Report of a Meeting, January 18-19, 2006

Kinsey Alden Dinan

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The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health, and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Using research to inform policy and practice, NCCP seeks to advance family-oriented solutions and the strategic use of public resources at the state and national levels to ensure positive outcomes for the next generation. Founded in 1989 as a division of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, NCCP is a nonpartisan, public interest research organization.

Young Children in Immigrant Families—The Role of Philanthropy:
Sharing Knowledge, Creating Services, and Building Supportive Policies,
Report of a Meeting held January 18-19, 2006

by Kinsey Alden Dinan

This report provides an overview of the issues raised at the Young Children in Immigrant Families meeting that was held in Miami, Florida on January 18-19, 2006. The meeting brought together members of the foundation community to discuss critical issues related to promoting positive outcomes for young children in immigrant families. Based on the meeting panels and discussions, this report provides a brief description of recent demographic trends related to immigration and immigrant families and explores promising strategies that foundations could support to address challenges faced by young children in these families.

AUTHOR

Kinsey Alden Dinan, M.A., is a Research Associate at NCCP, where her focus is on research and analysis of state and federal policies that promote the economic security and well-being of low-income children and their families. Her areas of expertise also include U.S. immigration policy and issues related to immigrant families and their children.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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*Children under age 6 with immigrant parents face difficult challenges—
about half are low income...one-third of these children are
linguistically isolated...and rates of...hardship are significantly
higher than among children with native-born parents.*

Executive Summary

A growing number of young children in this country are children of immigrants. The goal of the Young Children in Immigrant Families meeting, cosponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, together with The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Foundation for Child Development, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, Four Freedoms Fund, and Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, was to increase strategic investments in this important population and thus promote positive outcomes for these children. The meeting brought together members of the foundation community who focus on issues related to young children and/or immigrant families, along with the following experts on immigrant issues from community-based organizations, policy research organizations, academia, and advocacy groups:

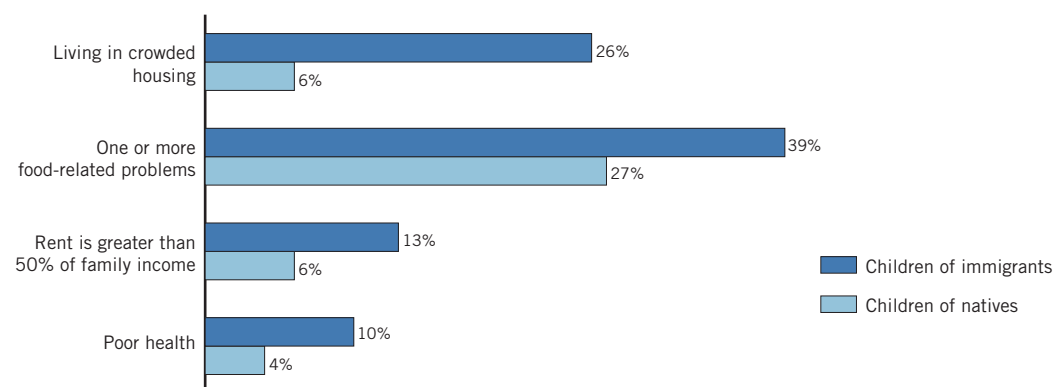
- Ismael Ahmed, Executive Director, Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
- Tanya Broder, Staff Attorney, National Immigration Law Center
- Randy Capps, Senior Research Associate, Urban Institute
- Sharon Darling, President and Founder, National Center for Family Literacy
- Michael Fix, Vice President and Director of Studies, Migration Policy Institute
- Elżbieta M. Goździak, Director of Research, Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University
- Donald J. Hernandez, Professor, Children, Youth, and Public Policy, Department of Sociology, University at Albany, State University of New York
- Deecana Jang, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy
- Jesse Kao Lee, Hmong Project Coordinator, Ready 4 K
- Cecilia Muñoz, Vice President, Office of Research, Advocacy and Legislation, National Council of La Raza
- Beatriz “BB” Otero, Executive Director, CentroNía
- Frank Sharry, Executive Director, National Immigration Forum
- Rebecca Stark, Program Coordinator, PICO National Network
- Janet Varon, Executive Director, Northwest Health Law Advocates

Over the past 35 years, the foreign-born population in the United States has tripled, reaching 35 million people in 2005. These years also saw a shift in immigrants’ ethnic background—from predominantly white Europeans to Latinos and Asians—leading to increased ethnic diversity in the U.S. population, especially among children. Another important trend of the last 10 to 15 years has been a shift in immigrants’ destinations within the United States. While immigrant families remain highly concentrated in “traditional gateway” states such as California, there has been a growing dispersion of immigrants to new areas, leading to significant increases in immigrant populations in many small communities.

Promoting positive outcomes for young children in immigrant families requires understanding and effectively responding to these trends. Research points to significant gaps in meeting these children’s needs in the areas of education, health care, and economic security. Young children of immigrants, for example, are underrepresented in prekindergarten programs and center-based early care and education (ECE) settings, despite facing relatively high rates of risk factors that can impede school readiness. Immigrant families also face barriers in accessing the health care they need, particularly in the area of mental health.

Finally, immigrant families with children are much more likely than native-born families to be low income and face a range of economic hardships—even with high marriage rates and strong attachment to the workforce (see figure). Their economic vulnerability is further exacerbated by low rates of public benefit receipt as a result of limits on immigrants’ eligibility for benefits, a widespread fear of interacting with government officials among (eligible) immigrants, and other participation barriers. At the same time, there is tremendous diversity among immigrant families, with many children of immigrants living in highly educated and economically secure families that do not necessarily face the risks explored here.

Hardship in immigrant families, 2002



Source: Capps, R. & Fix, M. (2006). Preschool Age Children of Immigrants. Paper presented at Young Children in Immigrant Families—The Role of Philanthropy, meeting held Jan. 18-19, 2006, Miami, Florida. Data are from Urban Institute tabulations from the 2002 National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF).

There are a variety of strategies that foundations can support to improve the education, health, and economic security of young children in immigrant families.

Strategies to Improve Educational Outcomes

- Increase immigrant families' access to high-quality center-based early care and education and prekindergarten programs, with teachers and curricula able to meet the particular needs of immigrant children and English language learners (ELLs).
- Focus on the needs of ELLs in grades K through 12.
- Promote educational strategies that address the needs of ELL students and their families (such as, bilingual education and family literacy programs).

Strategies to Improve Health Outcomes

- Increase access to health services, including efforts to expand public health insurance programs to reach all children regardless of immigration status.
- Provide adequate language interpretation at health facilities to ensure proper communication and relieve children of the burden of translating for their parents.
- Recognize and respond to the high level of mental health needs in some immigrant communities with multiple delivery systems and culturally competent services.

Strategies to Improve Economic Security

- Increase immigrants' access to jobs that offer adequate pay and employer-based benefits.
- Take steps to facilitate immigrants' access to banks and other financial institutions.
- Address the barriers that prevent low-income immigrant families from receiving public benefits.

Key to achieving progress in all of these areas is building capacity within immigrant communities and organizations to both meet immigrants' needs and promote positive policy change. There is currently widespread agreement in this country that our immigration system is broken, but there is an intense debate about how to respond. This debate is reflected in legislative battles at the state and federal level. In the states, for example, more than 300 anti-immigrant bills were proposed in 2005, although nearly all were defeated.

Strategies to Promote Pro-Immigrant Policies at National, State, and Local Levels

- Build strength and leadership within immigrant communities and grassroots organizations, particularly in new immigrant destination areas.
- Promote strong networks and alliances that span issues and states.
- Forge alliances among low-income communities, including immigrant and native-born communities.
- Engage in media and messaging efforts to “win the hearts and minds of Americans.”

In addition to investments in the strategies identified above, funding is needed to ensure continued research regarding young children in immigrant families. Research needs include

nanced demographic research, in-depth examinations of ECE systems' ability to effectively serve children in immigrant families, and communications research. Foundations also can take steps to ensure that their approaches to grantmaking are as effective as possible through, for example, providing more flexible grants, offering longer grant periods, and infusing attention to immigrant children and families across all grantees.

The issues raised at the Young Children in Immigrant Families meeting will only become more pressing as the number of children of immigrants continues to grow. Efforts to ensure these children's success must begin by meeting their needs today, and members of the foundation community have an important role to play in working to achieve this goal.