

## Poverty and Inequitable Opportunities

**W**hat is the link between poverty and inequitable opportunities for women and how does it impact the lives of young children? From the Starbucks single parent employee who struggles to juggle parenting responsibilities with an unpredictable work schedule to the parent who uses the park for child care while working at the nearby McDonalds, how does a low-wage job or no job impact a parent's ability to be the best parent that they want to or can be?

Despite having one of the largest economies in the world, Californians in poverty have skyrocketed from 6 million to 8.7 million people, according to the Western Center on Law and Poverty. Many of those living in poverty are children and parents of young children. We continue to hear that funds are insufficient to provide much needed services to lift families and children out of poverty, but what is the price of not providing services? Countless articles have been written about the importance of brain development in the early years and more recently on the impact of poverty on brain development. Research suggests that children who experience poverty early on in their lives may suffer negative brain changes that can lead to lifelong problems, such as learning difficulties, depression and the inability to cope with stress according to a

study by researchers from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis Missouri. Children in poverty were more likely to experience stressful life events such as moving homes and schools and lack of food which can impact brain development.

The Great Recession hit California hard and those "living on the edge" were impacted significantly. According to a report "Falling Behind", issued by the Women's Foundation of California in January 2012, **"Single mothers were hardest-hit by the recession and recent budget cuts"**. The employment rate for California's single mothers dropped by 10.4 % from 2007–2010. Fewer than six out of 10 unmarried mothers had jobs in 2010—the smallest share since 1996. Reductions in state support for childcare, as well as the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Program, hindered the ability of low-income parents to get into the workforce or to keep their jobs in the aftermath of the recession.

So with all this information, why don't we have subsidized child care and support for all low-income working families?

Several efforts are underway to shed light on the issue and to move forward on significant changes. Too Small to Fail and The Next Generation are two organizations that have formed in the past few years to address the issue of supportive services for families with young children. At the Federal level, House Democrats support the initiative *When Women Succeed, America Succeeds: An Economic Agenda for Women and Families* to address the economic challenges facing women and families today. Included in their agenda are pay, work and family balance, and child care. In California, Senator Holly Mitchell and her Select committee on Women and Inequality have held forums and hearings to identify the problems and possible solutions.

As the California economy continues to improve, it is time to invest in programs and policies that help low-income families prepare to work and remain successfully employed. Without the benefit of child care support and subsidies, parents living in poverty lack opportunities to improve themselves and become self sufficient and children are impacted in the long term for policies we fail to promote now. ●

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### Resources:

**Too Small to Fail:** <http://toosmall.org/>

**Next Generation:** <http://thenextgeneration.org/children-families>

**When Women Succeed Campaign:** <http://womensucceed.tumblr.com>

**Senate Select Committee on Women and Inequality**  
<http://womenandinequality.senate.ca.gov/>

