

Family Values Resource Institute, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Charles R Thomas III, Ed.D.
Executive Director

**From Generational Poverty to Generational Prosperity:
Inside the Frontline Strategy of Family Values Resource Institute**

Is there a cure to generational poverty? At Family Values Resource Institute, Inc. (FVRI), a 501(c)(3) organization located in Baton Rouge, LA for over 20 years, there is no claim to have a cure, but there is a one-stop strategy that will create change on the frontlines of serving in a community. While FVRI embraces the need for those organizations who steadfastly advocate for good free-market, family, and educational policies, it also recognizes that it is not possible to eliminate poverty out of our society through government policy alone. People are God-created, free will beings who learn and decide through both following good examples and overcoming bad mistakes. Thus, it is not possible to accurately attribute the exact *cause* of poverty to one or more factors in each individual's case; however, we can effectively help individuals address *correlational* factors that can increase the probability of poverty for them and their children.

FVRI has identified five correlational and interrelated factors that have data to suggest direct or indirect relationship to the likelihood of poverty and/or generational poverty which it seeks to strategically improve through its programs: 1) unintended pregnancies and lack of preparation to parent; 2) children that lack early foundations for educational success; 3) students that lack after-school and summer enrichment at home

or in the community; 4) adults who enter the workforce without basic high school education and lower opportunities for career advancement; and 5) family instability between couples and children due to stress in finances, discipline, communication, etc.

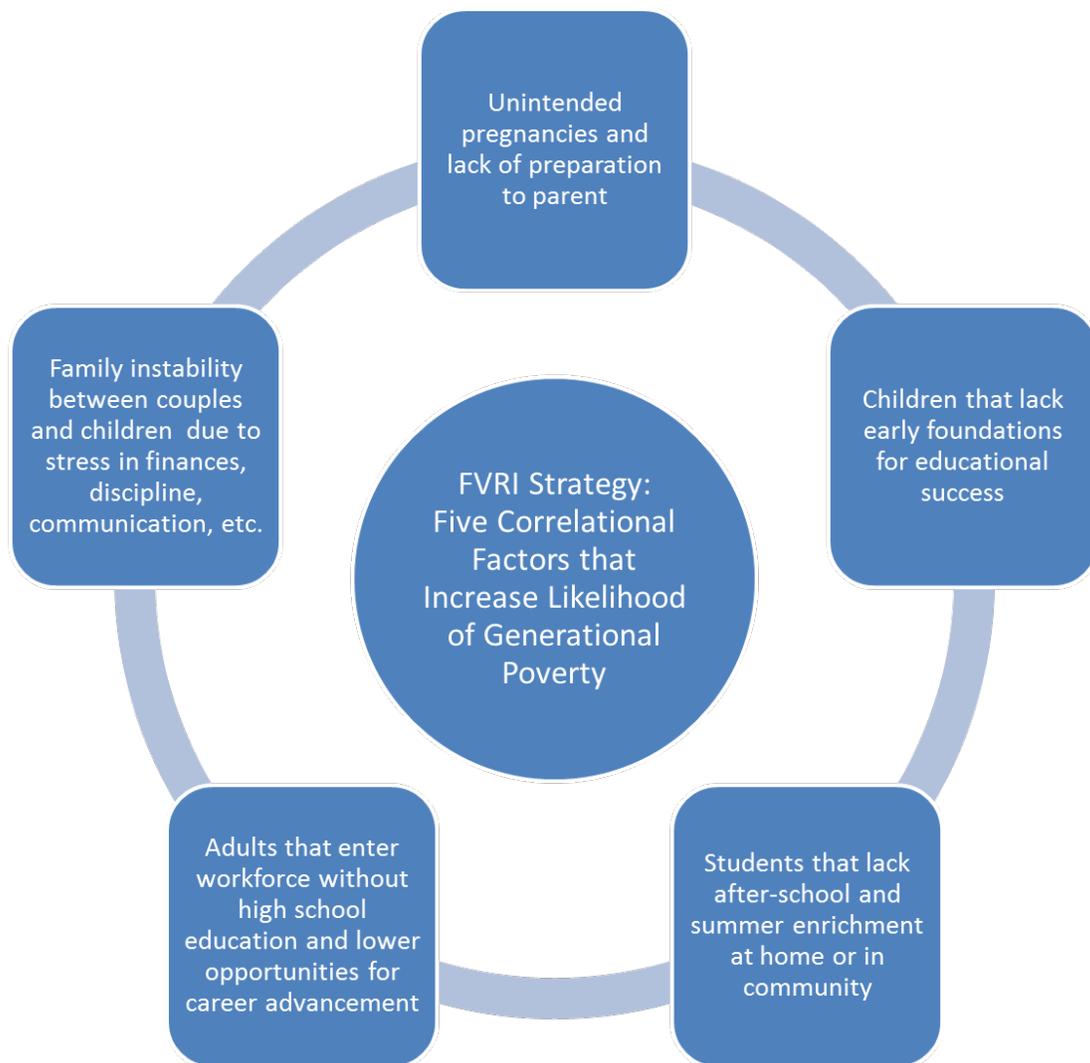


Figure 1. Family Values Resource Institute's Five Correlational Factors for Generational Poverty

FVRI Philosophy, Vision, Mission and Values

Based on the philosophy that strong families that value life and learning are the keys to creating generational health (mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wholeness) and prosperity (in the spirit, body and soul), FVRI's mission is to provide educational and counseling programs in predominantly urban areas to empower families with resources, skills, and principles that help individuals and families overcome each of the correlational factors. FVRI envisions that their work will lead to more self-sufficient, cohesive families that fully experience life, liberty, and prosperity. In order to strategically bring this vision into reality, FVRI operates based on five core values.

1. *Holistic Learning:* FVRI believes a holistic approach to learning is the most effective way to address the academic, emotional, social, and spiritual barriers to creating generational prosperity. FVRI promotes Faith-based resources as an inseparable complement to the Research-based educational and counseling approaches that do not compromise the organization's core holistic principles.
2. *Informed Guidance:* As God-created free will beings, FVRI believes that a person should have access to all necessary information to make an informed decision in matters that affect his or her life, especially if that decision has an impact on the life of another human being.
3. *Compassionate Service:* FVRI realizes that people don't care how much you know in your ability to assist them through challenges until they know how much you care and sympathize with their situation.

4. *Passionate Advocacy:* As the desire of FVRI is to see more than its local clients benefit from their one-stop approach, it is a passionate advocate for the causes that hinder generational prosperity and quality of life, especially in urban areas.
5. *Organizational Integrity:* The greatest thanks an organization can give its donors and partners is to ensure it operates with the highest integrity and accountability for maximum effectiveness in all aspects of its programs and administration.

FVRI Programs

The Women's Help Center. The program purpose of the Women's Help Center (WHC), FVRI's founding program, is "Providing Help, Hope and Healing for women facing unintended pregnancies through life-affirming resources." The WHC focuses on the first correlational factor for generational poverty, unintended pregnancies and lack of preparation to parent, by providing women with pregnancy confirmation tests including limited ultrasounds, prenatal care classes, parenting resources, and referrals to other support resources.

The recognized physical and psychological risks in pregnancy terminations require that women are informed of these risks and their alternatives in facing a pregnancy that she considers terminating due to life's circumstances. Unfortunately, there are those who are unaware of the severity of these risks, and even those who knowingly deny women this information in order to deter a life-affirming decision. However, through the additional programs, FVRI's approach is to provide the additional

support services that would give a woman the Help, Hope, and Healing to know an unintended pregnancy does not have to end her ability to begin or continue generational prosperity. The WHC is also a member of the Louisiana Alliance for Life, a state-wide, alternatives to abortion special project that is managed by FVRI.

The Family Empowerment Center. The purpose of The Family Empowerment Center (FEC) is "To Enlighten, Equip and Edify families with resource tools and support that help overcome life's challenges to generational prosperity." The FEC brings FVRI programs "full circle" by focusing on the last correlational factor for generational poverty, family instability between couples and children due to stress in finances, discipline, communication, and other challenges. The program helps families and individuals through pre-marital and marriage counseling, parenting and life skills courses, and faith-based support groups with an educational and coaching emphasis on effective facilitation of externally licensed and/or internally developed resources and interactive lessons in group or individual settings at no cost to participants. The FEC also provides recommendations to licensed professional counselors if necessary.

First, The FEC Enlightens couples with pre-marital and marriage counseling for unified, full life covenant marriages. The session formats include Couple 2 Couple, Woman 2 Woman, and Man 2 Man, and are facilitated featuring faith-based resources such as *Marriage on the Rock* by Jimmy Evans.

Second, The FEC Equips parents and future parents as leaders of a nurturing home for life-long learning for both parents and children. The parenting education approach emphasizes a holistic leadership framework for great parents as balanced

and reflective leaders of their home and integrates resources from leading researchers and faith-based counselors such as Dr. Kevin Leman, Dr. James Dobson, Dr. Gary Smalley, and Dr. Thomas Phelan. The FEC uses two instructional formats: an Earn While You Learn program for clients to receive credits towards shopping in our Baby Boutique featuring donated and sponsored baby items; and customized on-site workshops and courses for faith-based and community organizations facilitated by its staff. Its holistic framework also covers various practical topics to enrich parents and future parents such as Life Skills, Recovery (abuse, addiction, loss), Managing Special Circumstances (single parenting, blended family), and Transitions into Manhood and Fatherhood for Youth and Adult Men.

Third, the FEC Edifies Individuals to overcome challenges in life through faith and healing of the whole person. This component features Bible study and Support Groups focused on restoration and healing from past mistakes and wounds that hinder spiritual, emotional, and mental growth and prosperity. It also seeks to recommend and connect clients who are not a part of a local church to one that will nurture the healing and growth taking place in their life.

The New Heights Career Development Center. The purpose of The New Heights Career Development Center (NHCDC) is "Educating individuals with foundational skills for work readiness Today, and life-long learning for career growth Tomorrow." The NHCDC focuses on adults who enter the workforce without basic high school education and lower opportunities for career advancement provides individuals with foundational skills for work readiness and career growth with High School Equivalency Test

preparation, vocational training, college and career standardized test preparation, and career coaching. According to the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, approximately 85% of Adult learners in Louisiana tested below the Adult Secondary functioning level (9th Grade level equivalent). The NHCDD features two unique components to its educational approach to address this dire situation with an emphasis on career preparation to build generational prosperity.

First, just as top athletes require training in both cardio and weight lifting, building generational prosperity requires family providers equipped both with skills for both immediate work readiness, as well as the ability for life-long learning and continuous career growth. The NHCDC first offers High School Equivalency Test preparation with an emphasis on competency in math, literacy and communication skills necessary for immediate application in employment or vocational training. Currently, students are referred to vocational and job programs as FVRI works towards completing a planned facility expansion that will house skilled worker training labs through partnerships with key local and regional industries to prepare students with basic training and credentials to fill high demand skilled positions, especially those with career growth opportunities. The NHCDC additionally provides interactive group learning and career specific projects to foster the development of hard and soft career skills for any career path through active learning experiences, critical thinking, and reflection.

Second, the NHCDC recognizes that many of the challenges to acquiring either work ready skills or life-long learning abilities must overcome academic, emotional, social, and spiritual barriers. Unfortunately, many programs designed to funnel work and/or college ready adults into post-secondary institutions or specific industry funded

training programs fail to adequately address the holistic needs of students necessary to make such gains, especially given other life circumstances many students face. In order to accommodate the needs of the whole student and family, students are encouraged to participate in services offered by other programs in the FVRI organization including courses and for couples and parents, life skills, as well as the future opportunity for convenient child care options for those in need of child care assistance in order to pursue educational opportunities.

The Shining Stars Youth Development Center. The purpose of The Shining Stars Youth Development Center (SSYDC) is to be “A Partner with Parents to provide children with the foundational character for academic, family and career success.” The SSYDC focuses on two correlational factors for generational poverty: children that lack early foundations for educational success; and students that lack after-school and summer enrichment at home or in the community. Upon the completion of the FVRI facility expansion which will house the SSYDC, it will feature an early childhood learning center and K-12 after-school and summer enrichment programs as a Partner with Parents to prepare children for academic, family and career success.

The Educational Philosophy of the Shining Stars Youth Development Center will be based on two core principles for youth development that builds generational prosperity. First, SSYDC recognizes that the biggest hurdle to the success of young people is entering society not ready to face it with a sense of purpose and preparedness. As humans beings do not have the ability solely with-in ourselves to foresee and control all, self-sufficiency in one's purpose and preparedness should be

holistic with a greater-than-self perspective of spiritual development based on faith in the Creator, as well as mental, physical, emotional, and social development for a successful family and career life.

Second, SSYDC believes the most effective way to build a sense of purpose and preparedness in children begins at birth by mothers and fathers who nurture a child's faith, intellect, and social awareness. However, as there are no perfect parents whether children are born into the ideal married, two-parent home or not, the educational approach of the SSYDC recognizes the need for teamwork and support with parents in their effort to teach the whole child: mind, body, and spirit.

The Instructional Model of the SSYDC will include Early Childhood Learning for children age 6 weeks to Pre-K4 participate in play, exploration, and problem solving to develop Kindergarten readiness in:

- 1) Specified academic domains (Cognitive Development and Content Knowledge, Language and Literacy, and Physical Well Being and Motor Development); and
- 2). General life-long learning readiness (Attitudes, Behaviors, and Characteristics in Approaches to Learning, Social-Emotional Development).

K-8 students will participate in team building exercises, career and artistic exploration, and specific academic enrichment in problem solving and communication skills that are designed to reinforce life-long learning and career readiness through secondary and post-secondary options.

SSYDC also encourages parents to utilize other FVRI Support Services in order to accommodate needs of the whole student and family including: the faith-based instruction for the SSYDC that is done voluntarily and in conjunction with the Family Empowerment Center at FVRI, and parents in need of furthering their education and career options through the New Heights Career Development Center.

Conclusion

While FVRI promotes a unique, one-stop approach that it offers as an innovative approach and resource for transforming both impoverished communities as well as complementing more affluent communities facing family instability challenges as well, it does not believe it has a cure for generational poverty can be reliably reproduced in the formula of its programming. The key to any effort to develop individuals and families is the human capital of the organization performing the services. FVRI seeks to be a partner with and resource to other family organizations in the team effort to ensure all American families can ensure to ourselves and to our posterity the enjoyment of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (PROSPERITY).

For more information about Family Values Resource Institute, Inc. and opportunities to support this organization, please visit www.FVRI.org.