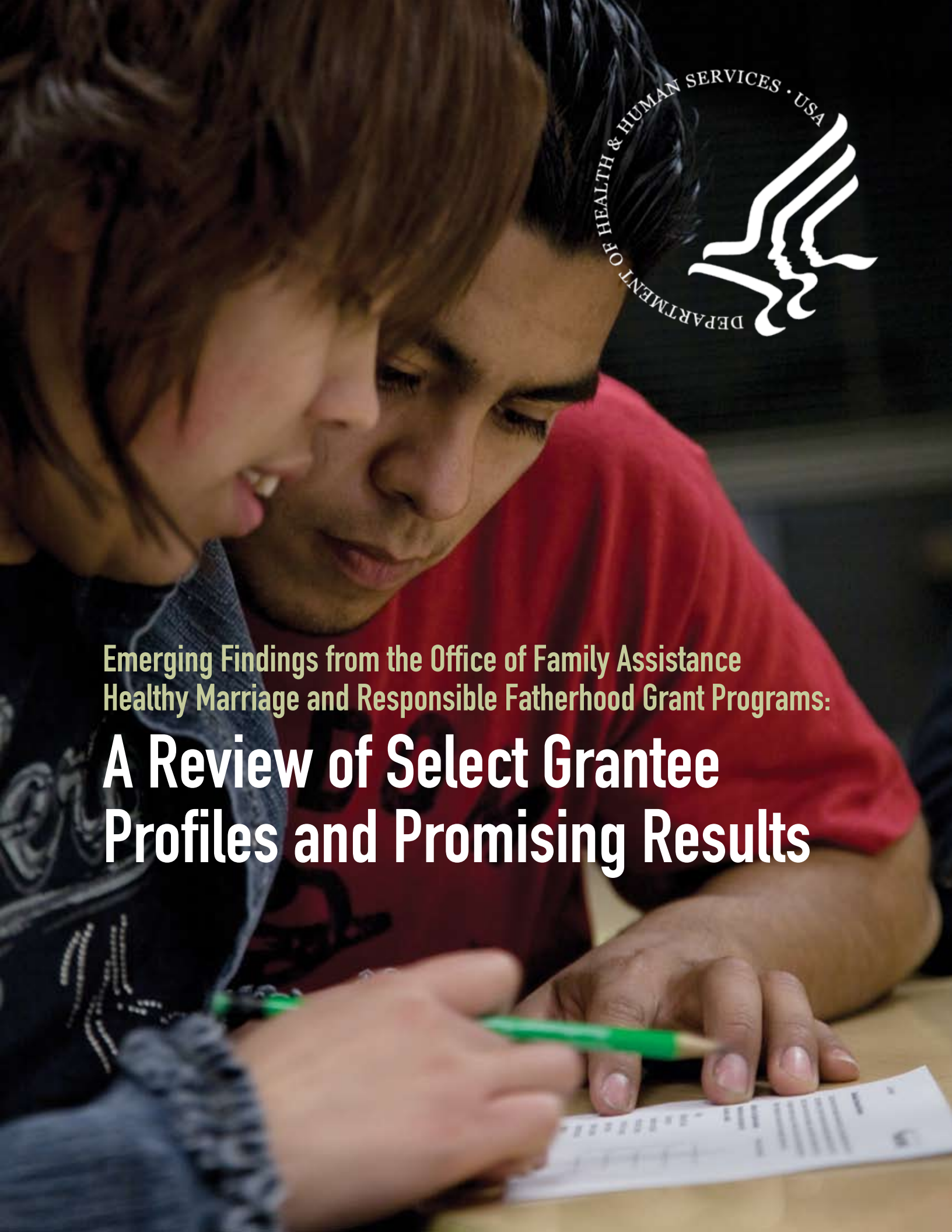

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

Emerging Findings from the Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Programs:

A Review of Select Grantee Profiles and Promising Results

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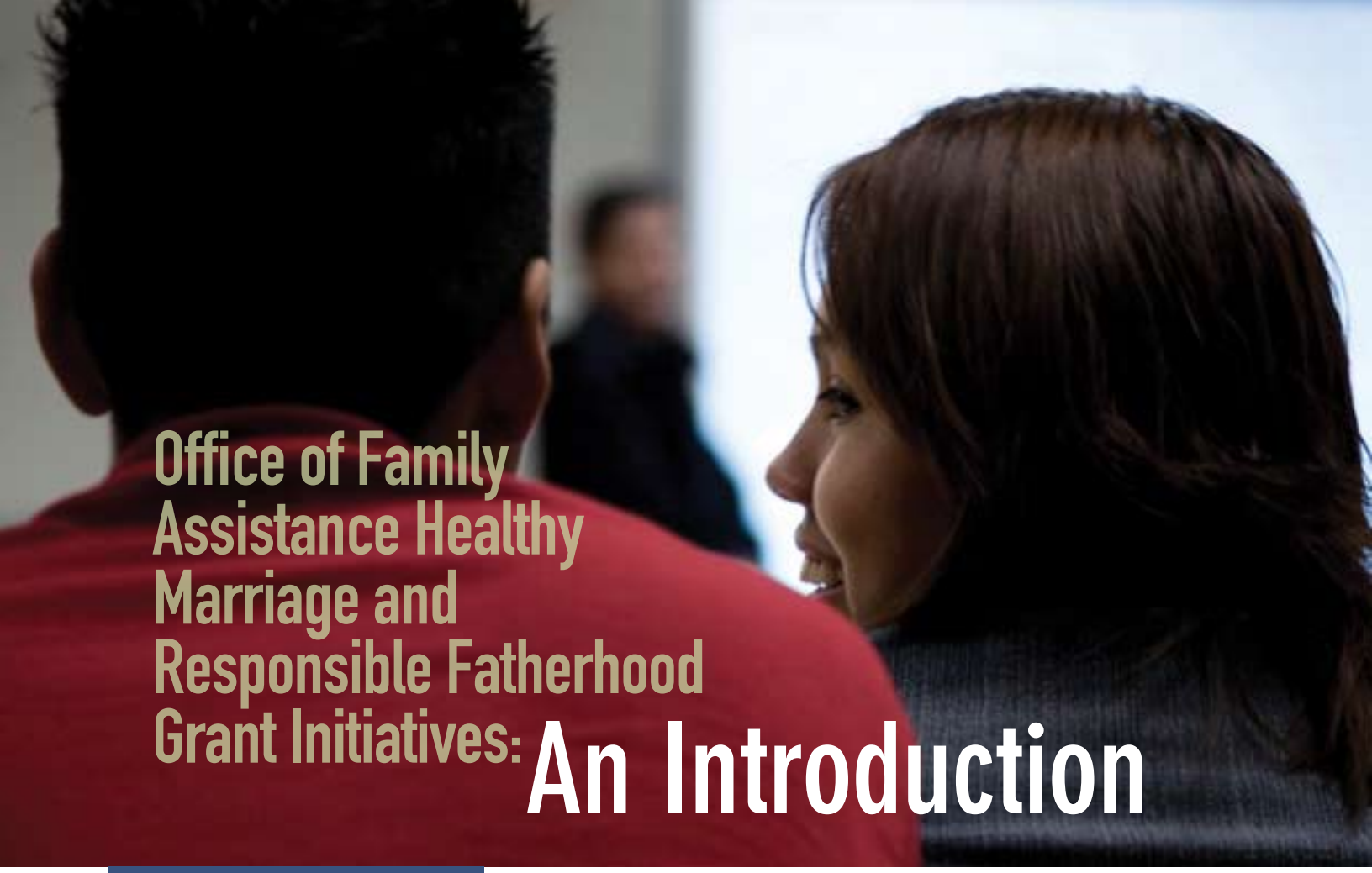


Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grant Initiatives: An Introduction

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (PL 104-193) was a landmark law, both with respect to the changing relationship between the State and Federal levels of government and in the history of public programs to help low-income families with children. The law specifically eliminated any individual entitlement to or guarantee of assistance and created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Job Opportunities and Basic Skill Training, and Emergency Assistance (EA) programs and requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance.

The four purposes of the TANF program as described in Section 401 of the Social Security Act and 45 CFR 260.20 of the TANF regulations are as follows:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish an annual numerical goal for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies.
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Since TANF's passage, States, tribes, and territories have the flexibility to implement creative and innovative programs that support the formation and maintenance of two-parent married families. When Congress enacted PRWORA and established the TANF program, States were given the authority to provide

marriage support services as an acknowledgement that two-parent households are the most effective environment for raising children.

The TANF program was renewed in the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 (S.1932), which was signed by the President into law in February 2006. The TANF and Related Programs section of the DRA (Section 7103) authorizes the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) through the direct administration of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), to provide competitive funding for demonstration projects that promote healthy marriages through any of the following activities:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health.
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting.
- Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs that address parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers.
- Premarital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or persons interested in marriage.
- Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples.
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.
- Programs to reduce disincentives to marriage as a result of means-tested aid programs, if such programs are offered in conjunction with any of the above seven activities.

In addition, the DRA authorizes competitive Responsible Fatherhood grants for States, territories, Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and public and non-profit community entities, including faith-based organizations, to develop and implement projects in any of the following three authorized activity areas:

1. Healthy Marriage:

- Skill-based marriage education.
- Marriage preparation programs.
- Marital inventories.
- Premarital counseling.
- Relationship skills education, with a special focus on skills that prepare men and women for healthy marriages.
- Counseling, mentoring, and information dissemination about the benefits of marriage and two-parent families.
- Education on controlling, reducing, and eliminating aggressive behavior, particularly in the context of marriage.
- Divorce education and reduction programs, including mediation and counseling.

2. Responsible Parenting:

- Skills-based parenting education.
- Disseminating information about good parenting practices.
- Counseling, mentoring, and mediation.
- Disseminating information on the causes of domestic violence and child abuse.
- Encouraging child support payments.

3. Economic Stability:

- Improving fathers' economic status through Work First, job search, employment training, subsidized employment, job retention, and job enhancement services, as well as through career-advancing education.
- Coordinating with existing employment services, such as welfare-to-work programs and referrals to local employment training initiatives.
- Disseminating employment materials
- Offering services that improve a family's ability to effectively manage family business affairs through education (e.g., financial planning seminars), counseling, and mentoring on matters such as household management, budgeting, banking, financial transactions, and home maintenance.

In September 2006, OFA awarded grants to 226 organizations under the authority of the DRA. These grants provide vital services that promote the well-being of children and families in general. The following report summarizes the service models, activities, and preliminary outcomes of a select group of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees that were identified by James Bell Associates (JBA) as part of OFA's "Promising Practices" initiative to document programs that show evidence of positive participant outcomes. The grantees included in this report were selected by JBA because of their ability to articulate discrete program activities and service models as well as their success in documenting positive preliminary participant outcomes. For more information on the Promising Practices Initiative and JBA's process for selecting grantees, please see the detailed Report on Promising Practices among OFA Grantees that is scheduled for release in the summer of 2009.

Healthy Marriage Grantee Profiles

Healthy marriages are important to the well-being of adults, children, and society. Children raised by happily married parents are less likely to engage in substance abuse, criminal activity, or commit suicide. They are also less likely to suffer from emotional disorders and mental illness, poverty, child abuse and neglect. Because being raised by happily married parents has such a profoundly positive effect on a child's well being, Congress specified "the formation and maintenance of two-parent families" as one of the primary goals of the TANF program when signed into law in 1996.

The mission of ACF's Healthy Marriage Initiative is to help couples that choose marriage gain greater access to marriage education services that enable them to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages.

ACF was particularly interested in funding marriage education and enrichment projects specifically designed for existing couples, including married couples, engaged couples, and couples interested in marriage.

To this end, ACF funded innovative projects to deliver healthy marriage activities and services in one or more of the following allowable activity areas:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health.
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting.
- Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers.

- Premarital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or persons interested in marriage.
- Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples.
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any other of the above seven activities.

Eligible applicants could submit one or more applications for:

- Community Healthy Marriage Grants to implement multiple allowable activities.
- Healthy Marriage Grants to serve low-income married couples.
- Healthy Marriage Grants to serve low-income unwed expectant or new parents.
- Healthy Marriage Grants to implment any allowable activity.

The following section provides descriptions of funded projects that have shown promise in furthering the goals of ACF's Healthy Marriage Initiative based on initial evaluation findings.

The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative

Community Healthy Marriage Grantee (multiple activities)

The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative

Organization Description

The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (ACHMI) is a university-community partnership developed through several years of pilot projects. Partners include the Human Development and Family Studies Department at Auburn University, the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention/The Children's Trust Fund, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the Family Resource Center Network, the Montgomery Chapter of the 100 Black Men of America, and a growing network of public, non-profit, and faith-based organizations. All of these organizations recognize the clear evidence from research that relational health and stability is a key factor in determining the well-being of children, adults, families, and communities.

Project Description

- ACHMI's activities center on promoting access to research-based information on skills and knowledge associated with healthy, stable relationships/marriages and on effecting positive changes in people's lives.
- Key project activities include a public awareness campaign and marriage and relationship marriage education (ME) for youth, non-married parents, premarital couples, unmarried individuals, and married couples.
- State level project staff provide training to community educators and assist community partners in program implementation and data collection. Project staff also host conferences, implement the public awareness campaign, and provide Web-based resources for citizens and professionals.
- The project has created and distributed the Alabama Marriage Handbook through marriage license offices and community organizations throughout the State.

- Public service announcements and written educational materials have been seen by hundreds of thousands of Alabamians. In addition, over 6,000 youth and adults have completed ACHMI's ME program, while more than 50,000 have participated in educational workshops around the state.

Outcomes

Preliminary results from a rigorous evaluation demonstrate desirable change over time in both youth and adults in nearly all targeted areas. In particular, positive changes have been observed in children whose parents participate in the project. Some areas in which statistically significant positive changes in youth and adults have been found include:

For Youth

- Self-esteem
- Conflict management skills
- Realistic beliefs about relationships

For Adults

- Trust
- Commitment
- Positive relationship interactions
- Parenting practices and efficacy

Success Story

Marriage Education Saves a Relationship

One day in January of last year, while I was at work, I noticed a flyer from the Family Guidance Center. It was advertising free relationship education classes. I took the flyer home and decided to call the number on the flyer to find out more. I had been engaged until a month before, and I was feeling horrible. My fiancée of four years had ended the engagement and was not even speaking to me. I knew that I had to do something. I still loved my ex-fiancée very much and still had hope for our future, but did not want to push her. After talking to the relationship educator, I enrolled in two of the classes offered.

I attended the first two classes alone. My ex didn't even know I was going because she still was not speaking to me. We talked after the second class, and she agreed to come with me to the third class. She even stayed after each class to make up the missed sessions that I had already taken. At first, we didn't use the skills we had learned. But after a while, we learned how to use them well and started practicing them in front of our "coaches." A lot of pain and hurt was there and through this class we discovered how to work through these barriers in our relationship by using the skills we were learning. We completed the class together and are engaged again. We attended a One Year Reunion at the Family Guidance Center a few weeks ago and announced our wedding date.

I refer everyone I can to these classes. There really is "education" we can get. I also plan to help teach the youth in my neighborhood about relationship skills in hopes they will make good choices and use skills to create a healthy relationship and marriage. As you can see, I am so glad I made that call. It has made all the difference in my life…and my future.

For more information about the Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative visit http://www.alabamamarriage.org/

"A lot of pain and hurt was there and through this class we discovered how to work through these barriers in our relationship by using the skills we were learning."

The Active Relationships Center

Community Healthy Marriage Grantee (multiple activities)

Hispanic Active Relationships Project

Organization Description

The Active Relationships Center (ARC) based in Dallas, Texas, has been a training and information resource on healthy marriage since 1999. ARC's founder, Kelly Simpson, dates the organization's initiation into "healthy marriage" programming to 1997 when she attended the first annual Smart Marriages Conference. Ms. Simpson, who has a Master's Degree in Psychology and is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, launched ARC's first curricula in 2003 through pilots with the U.S. Army and faith-based organizations, and wrote its first healthy marriage grant in 2004. Since that time, ARC has been noted for excellence in the healthy marriage field and its curricula are included for use by the Army Strong Bonds program.

Program Description

- The Hispanic Active Relationships Project (HARP) of Cameron County, Texas serves over 1,000 Hispanic families per year. Services are available in both English and Spanish.
- Project services began with a multi-media public awareness campaign on the value of marriage and marriage education, followed by ongoing marriage education and relationship skills seminars that serve married couples, engaged or dating (pre-martial) couples, unmarried individuals, and youth.
- HARP services also include peer mentoring for couples and weekend retreats.

Outcomes

Results of pre- and post-seminar assessments indicate widespread improvements in both communication and money management skills. Communication classes have resulted in the largest positive changes overall, including a:

- 12 percent increase in marital satisfaction
- 12 percent increase in assessed communication skills
- 19 percent decrease in relationship aggression

Success Stories

Emily and Jorge

Jorge saw the HARP billboard as he was driving home one day. Since his relationship was about to end, the billboard caught his attention. He wrote down HARP's number and once he was home he told his wife about the billboard and that he wanted to call to get information. His wife, Emily, had given up on the relationship and was convinced that their marital problems did not have a solution. After Jorge called and received the workshop information he convinced Emily to at least go and try it out. He asked her to give their relationship one last chance before signing their divorce papers.

Emily was very angry, resentful, full of mixed emotions, and did not want to get her hopes up too high. Both Emily and Jorge ended up staying for the whole 12-hour class. They are still together and are determined to make their marriage work. Thanks to the HARP workshops, they learned that it is okay to forgive each other and they discovered great tools to communicate better and resolve their issues. Emily and Jorge, standing in front of class with tears in their eyes, spoke about how their lives and relationship had changed for good and how they will be forever thankful to HARP for having such a huge impact on their lives.

Rosemary and Rafael

Rosemary and Rafael only started attending the HARP class because Rafael's mother had asked them to. They had been co-habiting for two years and were the parents of a two-year-old boy. They admitted after the workshop that they had not intended to stay for the whole class, but ended up listening attentively and participating in every exercise. Rosemary and Rafael knew they were not a perfect couple and admitted they had major communication issues in their relationship. After the workshop, participants were offered a "Together-in-Texas" certificate that allowed them to receive a discount on a marriage license. Rafael surprised everyone, including Rosemary, by asking for one and explaining that he had learned the importance of marriage and the commitment that comes with it. He expressed his desire to get married for the good of their relationship and their son. Rosemary was very excited as she had been dreaming about getting married.

Rafael's decision not only affected Rosemary; it also motivated the rest of the participants to invest more time in their marriages and to value the gift of marriage. The next month they both attended a money management workshop and announced that they had made wedding plans and were saving money for a small reception.

For more information about the Hispanic Active Relationships Project visit http://www.activerelationships.com

"Thanks to the HARP workshops, they learned that it is okay to forgive each other and they discovered great tools to communicate better and resolve their issues."

Northwest Family Services

Community Healthy Marriage Grantee (multiple activities)

Lasting Relationships

Organization Description

Northwest Family Services (NWFS) is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization with a long history of serving the community, providing leadership, and supporting other community- and faith-based organizations. For over 25 years, NWFS has helped people make and keep commitments to pursuing healthy behaviors. NWFS provides direct services to more than 35,000 people annually with a professional staff of 30 people, more than half of whom are bilingual (Spanish and English) and bi-cultural. NWFS provides over half of its services to low-income Latino youth and families.

Project Description

- NWFS partnered with Catholic Charities and the Multnomah County Health Department to provide relationship and marriage education services to pregnant and parenting teens, high school and college students, low-income couples, and the public at large throughout a four-county region that includes Portland, the most populous city in Oregon.
- The project annually serves over 3,500 high school youth, 175 young pregnant and parenting couples, 1,000 people considering marriage, and 600 couples.
- NWFS staff work with a range of schools, community-based organizations, and faith communities to provide services in the community, eliminating the need for participants with few resources to travel to a central location. For example, classes and free childcare are offered in low-income housing complexes with large Latino populations. Neighbors come together to receive support and learn important skills that maintain stable relationships, which builds a strong sense of community.
- High school students learn about healthy relationships through an innovative curriculum designed specifically for youth. Educators from the Multnomah County Health Department partner with teachers from 15 Portland-area high schools to deliver interactive workshops during health classes.

Outcomes

Analysis of pre/post data show that participants are increasing their knowledge of healthy relationships and learning new skills needed to form and maintain healthy relationships. Follow-up surveys indicate that participants retained their new knowledge and skills more than a year after participating in the program.

- Participants attending premarital workshops and marriage education classes improved their knowledge of and confidence in skills related to communication, conflict resolution, accessing local community social services, safe relationships, and the values associated with commitment to a healthy marriage.
- These gains appear to be maintained in participants surveyed up to 14 months after leaving the program, with participants retaining high levels of knowledge, skill, and attitudinal changes in most areas.
- Pre/post tests administered to high school students showed that youth increased their understanding of communication skills, understanding of the benefits of delaying the onset of sexual activity, and knowledge of the benefits of marriage. Some of the greatest gains were in the areas of developing realistic expectations of partners and relationships, the role of communication in relationships, and the effect of one's behavior on relationships.

Success Stories

Two Couples Improve Their Communication Skills

Ben and Jenna *are a married couple in their mid-twenties with a two year-old son and a newborn daughter. This family was under a lot of stress and was involved with the child welfare and social services systems. The child welfare services agency was concerned about their family stability. Ben and Jenna were referred to NWFS and attended one of the relationship courses. After several classes their situation was reassessed by a case manager and their situation was found to be much improved. The couple explained that they learned skills for coping with their anger. The husband commented, "We now take walks when we start to yell at each other. Our instructor told us to find something that helps us calm down and do it when we take a time out. I am really excited about what I did the other day. Instead of getting angry and yelling in front of the kids, I went for a walk."*

Sam and Linda *sat in the back during a workshop and seemed very conflicted. They barely spoke to each other and seemed as if they did not want to sit next to each other. At the end of the first session, the presenter spoke with them to see how they were doing, and they replied that this class was a "last-ditch" effort for them. They had been feeling very distant from each other for a long time and were not sure if they were going to stay together. After the last class session, they seemed energized and excited about the skills they had learned and stayed afterward to talk to the facilitators. They described how this program had made a tremendous difference in their ability to communicate.*

For more information about Northwest Family Services visit http://www.nwfs.org/

"I am really excited about what I did the other day. Instead of getting angry and yelling in front of the kids, I went for a walk."

Elizabeth's New Life Center

Community Healthy Marriage Grantee (multiple activities)

Marriage Works! Ohio (MW! Ohio)

Organization Description

The Elizabeth's New Life Center (ENLC) in Dayton, Ohio, serves the southwest Ohio region by working to resolve problems associated with out-of-wedlock pregnancies. ENLC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that includes a network of five pregnancy resource centers in three counties, a prenatal care center, a youth development department, and a marriage support center. For 20 years, ENLC has served thousands of low-income, inner-city families through wrap-around services created to serve the whole woman and their families.

Project Description

- The Marriage Works! Ohio (MW! Ohio) project partners with four other community service providers to offer free classes, seminars, and special events for couples at every stage of their relationship throughout Dayton and the surrounding Miami Valley region of southwestern Ohio. Classes focus on marriage enrichment and building healthy relationships.
- MW! Ohio's diverse target population includes low-income families, unwed expectant couples or parents, and high school students.
- Program staff provides a range of wraparound services that includes one-on-one support to help couples enrich and strengthen their relationships while addressing issues such as communication, conflict resolution, infidelity, divorce prevention, and reconciliation. Referrals to local social service agencies are also provided as needed.

- MW! Ohio educates the community on the importance of marriage through an extensive local media campaign which provides information about healthy relationships and informs the public of marriage education and support services offered by the project.

Outcomes

Comparisons of pre- and post-test data among participants in adult relationship education classes demonstrate significant increases in:

- Knowledge of basic relationship skills
- Communication skills
- Commitment to the relationship
- Positive conflict resolution

In addition, high school students have demonstrated increases in:

- Knowledge about healthy relationships
- Relationship skills
- Positive attitudes toward marriage

Success Stories

Revitalizing Marriages

"Dear MW! Ohio staff:

I really thought that I was doomed to a marriage of anger, dissatisfaction and dysfunction…I really don't know how I ended up at a MW! class but now I see this was heaven sent. I believe this class made us look at our lives, our shortcomings and if nothing else made me remember that I was married and not just living with the mother of my children. [The quality of] Our marriage has jumped by leaps and bounds. We started talking without all the anger and hostility—that didn't happen overnight but it happened. I started bringing my check stubs home. We painted the interior of the house and that was an accomplishment because we never could be civil enough to pick out a color for years… On August 26th we celebrated our eighth wedding anniversary. We thank both of you from the bottom of our hearts for the help. I hope and pray that every couple's marriage has gotten better."

Impacting Teens

"Through this program, I have learned so much about myself. I realized how badly I let guys treat me and how badly I let me treat myself. This program could not have come at a more perfect time. I am currently talking to a guy that treats me well. And although we both know we really like each other, we have very clear boundaries set. Instead of giving up on him because I didn't get what I "wanted" soon enough, I've learned to be patient. Each day our friendship grows more instead of our physical connection. Also this program made me realize that I need to treat my family better, especially my parents! My friendships have grown and I've learned how to treat people better."

For more information about Marriage Works! Ohio visit http://www.trustmarriage.com

"Through this program, I have learned so much about myself."

Cornerstone Community Development Center

Healthy Marriage Grantee
(low-income married couples)

Enriching Marriages in Indiana Project

Organization Description

Cornerstone Community Development Center is a non-profit, non-sectarian unit of Cornerstone of Hope Church, Inc., located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The marriage ministry of Cornerstone of Hope Church was formed to educate couples on effective ways to resolve conflict, improve communication, and enhance marital relations. The church had been hosting programs for couples within the congregation for several years, and after seeing the couple's marriages flourish, decided to expand the program to the community in collaboration with other houses of worship and community partners.

Project Description

- The Enriching Marriages in Indiana Project (EMIP) trains and equips low-income couples that have chosen marriage to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of their relationships through a range of marriage education services. Through these services, couples acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages.
- Headquartered in Indianapolis, program staff travel across Indiana to educate couples on the benefits of marriage. Since beginning the project in 2006, the program has served a total of 661 couples in nine cities and 12 counties.
- The philosophical approach of EMIP is to "Educate, Enhance, and Mentor." Education is provided on the benefits of marriage and effective coping styles. The program seeks to Enhance the relationships of participants by providing practical solutions to promote vitality in relationships. Mentoring programs provide couples with support systems and examples of success. The major programmatic components that embody this service philosophy include:
    - A mentoring program in which mentor couples model healthy relationship behaviors and serve as coaches to other couples.
    - Monthly workshops on budgeting and finance, communication skills, conflict/crisis management, parenting skills, and blended families.

- An annual Valentine Conference in which eight hours of marriage education is provided in a fun and romantic setting.
- An Annual Marriage Retreat that provides a full weekend of marriage education and training.
- Weekly couples education sessions facilitated by mentor couples.

Outcomes

Most participants rated the marriage workshops as extremely informative and helpful to their relationships. Moreover, a preliminary analysis of evaluation data reveals significant positive changes in workshop participants' communication skills and attitudes towards their relationships. Specific pre-post test findings include measurable improvements in the areas of:

- Communication
- Conflict management
- Financial skills

In addition, many participants (approximately 28 percent) indicated an interest and willingness to serve as mentors to new couples.

Success Story

Testimonial from a Couple whose Marriage was Saved

As we reflect on the last three years, we are amazed at seeing where we are today versus three years ago. We started attending the workshops, conferences, and retreats at the birth of this program while our marriage was very unstable. Even though we attended several sessions, [we separated] in December 2006. During the separation, the staff at EMIP encouraged us to attend various other workshops, retreats, and conferences. Even though we had decided to give up on our marriage your team kept the faith. Thank you for not giving up on us.

During the workshops we learned so much about ourselves and being a couple. The training on communication, and blended families helped us the most. We learned how to communicate better through our mentors. We learned to talk things over before acting, how to engage in a conversation and express our feelings by not starting a statement with "you", but "I". We were taught to respect each other's feelings and to repeat statements back to get clarity and understanding. We were also taught to listen to understand and not respond.

It was interesting to find out that relationships have seasons just like our lives do, and that seasons do change. Two of the highlights that we really enjoyed are the retreats and the Valentine Conference. At the retreat, we learned how to spend time alone with each other and as individuals. We've learned to complement each other and give each other the highest respect.

This program is beneficial to us and we will continue to participate because we realize that if the marriage breaks down so does the family. Because of EMIP and its staff we have renewed our vows after two years of separation and are back together.

For more information about the Enriching Marriages in Indiana Project (EMIP) visit http://cohc-indy.org

"We've learned to complement each other and give each other the highest respect."

Public Strategies, Inc.

Healthy Marriage Grantee (low-income, unwed expectant or new parents)

Family Expectations

Organization Description

Public Strategies, Inc. (PSI) is a private project management and strategic planning firm with a home office in Oklahoma City, and offices in Denver, Tulsa, Houston, and the Washington D.C. area. With over 120 full- and part-time employees, PSI serves public, private, and not-for-profit organizations in sectors such as education, business, and human services, and is committed to meeting the distinct needs of clients by providing a variety of services.

Project Description

- The Family Expectations (FE) program has provided relationship education services to Oklahoma County couples since 2005. The current OFA grant allows the program to serve 100 low-income, unwed expectant couples or couples with a child less than three months of age each year.
- FE is a comprehensive, couple-based intervention with an overarching goal of increasing family well-being by helping expectant couples and new parents strengthen their relationships or marriages prior to and immediately following the birth of a child.
- The core of the program is an intense series of group workshops that the couple attends together. The workshops address issues such as healthy communication, anger and stress management, baby care, child development, and the importance of preserving couple time.
- Upon completion of the workshops, couples are invited to attend a variety of additional post-workshop activities that refresh couple communication skills and provide new information on child development and sustaining healthy relationships.

- Each couple is given access to a Family Support Coordinator that works collaboratively with them to develop a family plan, identify family strengths and needs, provide information and referrals, and help couples integrate the curriculum concepts learned into their daily life.

Outcomes

PSI is part of a national evaluation of programs serving low-income, unwed couples that are interested in marriage, beginning during pregnancy or around the time of their child's birth. This evaluation project, entitled Building Strong Families (BSF), is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research under contract for the ACF. As part of this evaluation, PSI is prohibited from conducting its own evaluation activities, but is actively involved in supporting the national BSF evaluation process. PSI participants are involved in a rigorous impact analysis that includes random assignment to the program or a control group, and follow-up surveys with both groups at 12, 18, 36, and 60 months following enrollment in the evaluation.

Success Stories

Two Stories of Engagement

A Family Expectations couple entered the program in a rapidly declining relationship. The couple mentioned to both their Family Support Coordinator (FSC) and their Marriage Educators that they were currently together because of their expected baby, and that FE was their last hope of finding a way to make their relationship work. The couple later attended a booster session three months after the beginning of their workshop. At this session they introduced their new child and announced that they were getting married. They reminded the class that they did not expect to stay together when they entered the program, but they credited FE for providing them with a solid foundation on which to build their strong relationship. At the start of this couple's participation in FE, the father was opposed to marriage and viewed it only as a "piece of paper." He attributed this belief largely to the failure of both his parents' marriage and the marriage of his partner's parents. After completing their workshop group and meeting with their FSC, he came to the realization that marriage is a commitment to a relationship and family, and is integral to establishing a healthy support system for children. The couple was married in April.

Another FE couple entered the program while living in two different households: she with her mother and the couple's children, and he in his own apartment. After four unsuccessful attempts made by their FSC to schedule an initial in-person visit, the couple proceeded to attend their first office visit as well as all subsequent visits, and they later completed their 30-hour relationship education workshop. During one pivotal meeting with their FSC, the couple spoke openly about their relationship. She admitted that she did not express her feelings well, and he commented that he believed this was a barrier in their relationship. He continued his statement by saying that their participation in FE had allowed her to open up more and allowed him to know her better. It was this knowledge, he said, that provided him with the confirmation that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her and their children. The couple announced their engagement during their next office visit.

For more information about Family Expectations, visit their website at: http://www.familiesok.org/

"He came to the realization that marriage is a commitment to a relationship and family, and is integral to establishing a healthy support system for children."

Arizona Youth Partnership

Healthy Marriage Grantee
(any allowable activity)

Healthy Marriages/Strong Families

Organization Description

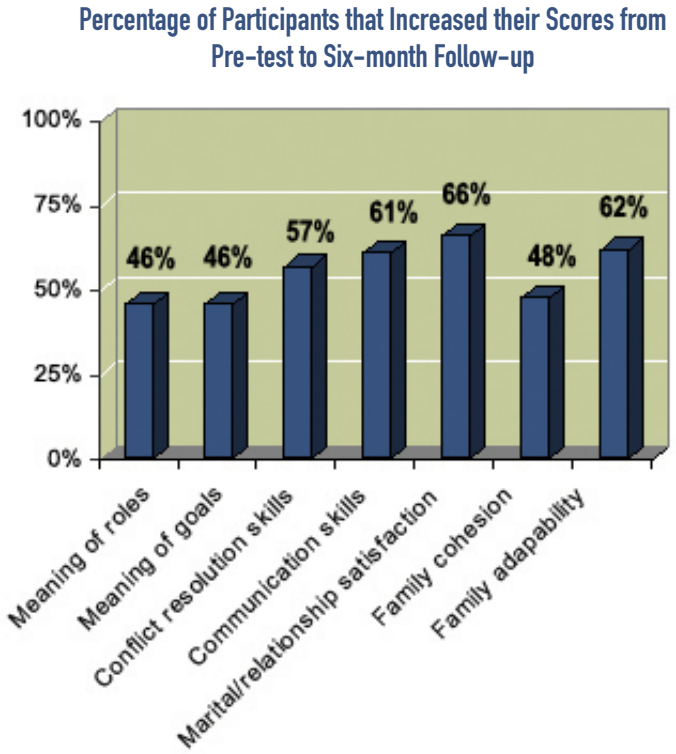
Arizona Youth Partnership (AzYP), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, works with youth and families living in 29 rural communities across nine counties in the state of Arizona to bring needed resources to unserved and underserved communities. AzYP works in partnership with communities to develop resources to promote the positive growth of their children by: 1) teaching youth healthy decision-making skills; 2) teaching couples healthy relationship skills; 3) teaching parents how to communicate with their children; and 4) facilitating community coalitions to create and implement strategic plans to reduce underage drinking and drug use.

Project Description

- Annually, the Healthy Marriages/Strong Families project serves 200 couples living in rural areas of Arizona who have children enrolled in Head Start.
- Arizona Youth Partnership staff provide education and skill development to married and premarital couples at weekend retreats. To date, 457 couples have completed the training.
- The Project also nurtures healthy marriages through the Families for Families™ Network, a support group for couples that meets monthly for training booster sessions. Mentor host couples provide support to couples who have recently completed a weekend retreat and assist them in setting monthly relationship goals.

Outcomes

Surveys administered to participants before the retreat and at one and six-month intervals after the retreat show gains in seven marital/relationship and family outcomes.



These preliminary evaluation findings suggest that statistically significant increases in each outcome were sustained over the one-month and six-month period following the weekend retreats.

Participant Stories

Testimonials after a Weekend Retreat

"At first I didn't think it was going to work – didn't think we would even make it through the weekend retreat – but we did and my husband is using the tools and things have changed for the better and are so wonderful now. We have moved into a new house, our work life is going great, our home life is going great, we are both attending church – life if wonderful. Thank you for helping us make the positive change!"

After attending the weekend retreats, one participant shared how much better his relationship with his wife had become. He said, "I used to hate coming home to my wife. When I did come home it was really just to throw money at her and leave before we could get into an argument. Now, with the tools that we learned during the weekend, I can't wait to come home and be able to discuss issues with my wife. I never knew that we had such a strong marriage. All we needed were the tools. Thank you all for the work you do."

For more information on the Arizona Youth Partnership or the Healthy Marriages / Strong Families project visit http://azyp.org/

"Thank you for helping us make the positive change!"

Florida State University

Healthy Marriage Grantee
(any allowable activity)

Project Relate

Organization Description

Florida State University (FSU) is an internationally recognized teaching and research institution committed to preparing its graduates for the ever-expanding opportunities of a global society. Located in the Florida capital of Tallahassee, FSU hosts a total of 41,000 students representing all 50 states and 129 countries.

Project Description

- Project Relate targets young adults in college, a key demographic group for future marriage, using premarital education and marriage skills training. The overarching goal of the project is to strengthen and support marriage by giving young adults the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about healthy relationships.
- The project centers on a skills-based relationship education program that is incorporated into an existing university course. Through this course, it is expected that 25 percent of the undergraduate population (approximately 10,500 students) will be exposed to programming that facilitates their ability to make positive and adaptive decisions in their relationships.
- As a result of the project, a pool of at least 42 trained and certified marriage education providers will be established.
- Ultimately, the project hopes to develop an empirically-grounded relationship education program for college students that can be disseminated both statewide and nationally.

Outcomes

- Preliminary results from the evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of marriage education in encouraging healthy relationship behaviors among college students. Specifically, participants who receive marriage education have shown increased knowledge of the:
  - Benefits of marriage, including its value for raising children.
  - Characteristics of healthy marriages (and committed premarital romantic relationships).
- Of particular interest, an analysis of the data shows that participation in the program is associated with less cheating (infidelity) on relationship partners.

Success Stories

Female Student

I had a wonderful experience while taking this course. When I first read the course outline I assumed much of the content would be old news to me, but I was wrong. Delving into the many challenges that relationships present was so much more informative than anything I had heard before. In this class we were taught structured techniques versus the general rules regarding communication. We always hear that communication is key and that in all relationships (whether with family, friends, or romantic partners) you must have open lines of communication. This statement is easier said than done especially, when emotions get involved.

My boyfriend and I got married in August of 2008, and when we are struggling with a decision, we use the "speaker-listener" technique we learned in class. The instructor taught the technique very well and showed us that it works as long as we are committed to doing it properly. She showed us plenty of situations with videos as well as through class skits. She applied the technique to all relationships in our lives, even those we have with roommates. The class as a whole was great and taught me many things, but this technique stood out because it applied to a situation I was dealing with at the time. My husband thought I was crazy back then, but now even he likes the technique. Now I need a technique to get him to stop leaving his socks all over the house!

Male Student

I LOVED the class and LOVED our breakout sessions. From what I learned over the semester, I now take a much less confrontational approach to disagreements and issues that may arise in my life. I never really felt that the class had much of an impact on me, but now that I have been given this chance to reflect on the past month since the end of the class, I realize that even though I may not explicitly try to implement "time-outs" or "giving the floor", these and all of the rest of the techniques that were taught seem to have subconsciously taken root and help me in various situations. So many people use a multitude of clichés such as "walk a mile in their shoes", but in this class I was able to gain more insights into the spheres of others, the way they act in situations, and the way I may react to their situations. This ultimately helps me be a better person, whether it be in a friendship or a romantic relationship.

"I thought it was silly at first but then my boyfriend and I tried it over the weekend. It made the conversation just that, a conversation."

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee Profiles

While there is a broad societal consensus regarding the essential role of mothers in ensuring the well-being of their children, the importance of fathers is not as well appreciated. Research clearly indicates the tremendous benefits to children who live with their fathers. Such children are far less likely to live in poverty, use drugs, or experience educational, health, emotional, or behavioral problems. In addition, they are far less likely to be victims of abuse or engage in criminal behavior than children who live without their married biological or adoptive parents. The Responsible Fatherhood Program was developed by ACF and is administered by OFA as a compliment to other activities that promote responsible parenting.

The purpose of the Responsible Fatherhood Program is to promote responsible fatherhood by funding projects that support healthy marriage activities, encourage responsible parenting, and foster economic stability. The program is designed to help fathers overcome barriers that impede them from becoming effective and nurturing parents while helping them improve their relationships with their children. Projects funded under the program include services and supports in the following allowable activity areas:

- Activities to promote healthy marriage, such as:
  - Skill-based marriage education
  - Marriage preparation programs
  - Marital inventories
  - Premarital counseling
  - Relationship skill education
  - Dissemination of information about the benefits of marriage and two-parent involvement for children
  - Education regarding how to control aggressive behavior
  - Divorce education and reduction programs
- Responsible parenting activities such as:
  - Skills-based parenting education
  - Disseminating information about good parenting practices
  - Counseling, mentoring, and mediation
  - Disseminating information on the causes of domestic violence and child abuse
  - Encouraging child support payments
- Economic stability activities, such as:
  - Job searches and job training
  - Subsidized employment, job enhancement, and educational or career advancement services
  - Coordination with existing employment services
  - Dissemination of employment materials
  - Financial planning education and seminars

Eligible applicants could submit one or more applications for:

- Responsible Fatherhood Multiple Activity Grants
- Responsible Fatherhood Single Activity Grants
- Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated Fathers and their Partners

The following section provides examples of grantees that have shown promise in furthering the goals of ACF's Responsible Fatherhood Program based on initial evaluation findings.

Education Service Center Region 19

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (multiple activity)

Promoting Optimal Parenting Skills (P.O.P.S.)

Organization Description

Education Service Center Region 19 (ESC) is one of 20 regional service centers located throughout the state of Texas which function as a link between public school districts, charter schools, and the Texas Education Agency. ESC supports teachers and administrators in El Paso and Hudspeth County schools in their role as educators and offers nearly 80 different programs and services in areas such as technology, bilingual education, special education, gifted and talented education, and programs for at-risk students. In addition, ESC administers a Head Start/Early Head Start Program that serves over 4,000 preschoolers, infants, and toddlers annually through 30 centers in El Paso and Hudspeth Counties. The program currently employs 800 staff members and is the third largest Head Start program in Texas, earning an Exemplary Rating in three consecutive Federal evaluations.

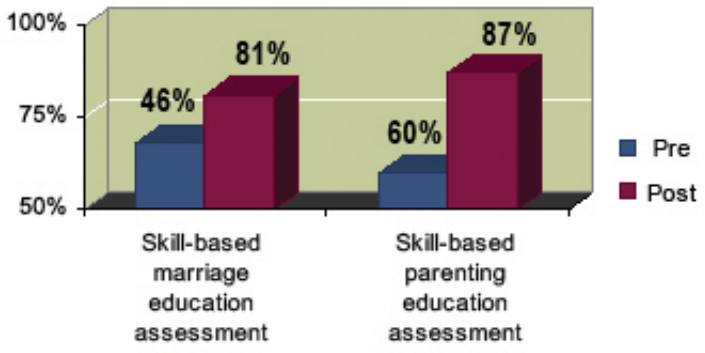
Project Description

- Promoting Optimal Parenting Skills (P.O.P.S.) serves 300 fathers a year with a comprehensive educational program that focuses on individual development and on the development of knowledge and skills critical to maintaining a healthy and fulfilling marriage, being a responsible father, and achieving economic stability.
- P.O.P.S. uses a case management approach to tailor services to the needs of individual fathers. Case managers connect fathers with opportunities for basic and higher education, job skills training, and employment.
- All participants are related to a child currently enrolled in the Head Start/ Early Head Start Program. The majority of participants are low-income Hispanic fathers.

Outcomes

- On average, participants who completed pre- and post-workshop assessments demonstrated increased knowledge and skills related to healthy relationships and parenting.

Percentage of Correct Answers on Pre- and Post- Assessments



- Over 50 participants have achieved a higher level of education, received a specific professional certification (such as welding or a commercial drivers license), or obtained employment.
- In follow-up qualitative interviews, participants' spouses and significant others described how their husbands' behavior had changed at home as a result of the program. Spouses consistently reported that since completing the Responsible Fatherhood program their husbands:
  - Communicated better, both with their wives and their children
  - Were more patient when interacting with their wives and children
  - Practiced greater financial responsibility, including saving money to pay bills
  - Were more active in helping with household chores
  - Showed a general change in attitude to reflect a more positive outlook on life and family

Success Stories

Gerardo becomes a proud father and husband

"Gerardo" is an ESC Head Start parent and a Responsible Fatherhood program participant. Gerardo believes the program has helped him become a better father, parent, and husband. "I've learned so much about being a father, a husband, and a provider," said Gerardo. "I'm spending more time with my children; I'm there for them and cherish every moment." One of the most valuable lessons Gerardo learned was patience. "A year ago, things were very difficult for me," said Gerardo. "I didn't have a chance to finish school and could not find work. I was a father of four and could not provide for them – it was very stressful." Gerardo credits the skills he learned from the Responsible Fatherhood program for how he handles stress today. "Sometimes you get frustrated and want to blow up," he admits." But you can't do that to your family. You have to give yourself five minutes, take a breath, and blow off steam." He jokes, "Or, in my case, I have four children so I take twenty minutes." The Responsible Fatherhood program has opened many doors for Gerardo. "I am grateful for the program, it has done so much for me," said Gerardo. "The program helped me get my GED and my Commercial Drivers License and now I work for Head Start." Gerardo knows that his greatest success is his transformation to loving father and husband and his role as a provider for his family. "Thanks to the Responsible Fatherhood program, I'm a better man, I am blessed with a beautiful family and I love being a dad," said Gerardo.

For more information about the Education Service Center Region 19 or P.O.P.S. visit http://www.esc19.net

"I was a father of four and could not provide for them – it was very stressful."

The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (multiple activity)

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Project

Organization Description

The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (the Center) is a statewide 501(c)(3) faith-based organization that provides infrastructure, programming, coordination, technical assistance, financial, and capacity building services for six non-traditional fatherhood programs serving 12 communities. It is an outgrowth of the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Fatherhood Initiative, Reducing Poverty through Fatherhood Engagement, launched in 1997. Since its creation in 2002, the Center's overarching mission has been addressing the root causes of poverty by reconnecting low-income, non-custodial fathers to their children both financially and emotionally through community-level programs. Approximately 800 fathers voluntarily participate in these programs annually.

Project Description

- The Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Project (PRFP) works with local fatherhood programs to provide a 24-week holistic program for low-income, non-custodial fathers who are primarily African-American. The Center aims to serve 500 new participants per year.
- PRFP staff works one-on-one with fathers to develop and achieve individual goals in their "One Man Plan." Weekly group sessions provide peer support, education, and critical information.
- Parenting education provides each father with information and skills to strengthen his role as a father and to develop a co-parenting relationship with his child's mother. Fathers learn to navigate the legal systems that impact them and their children, particularly in the areas of child support, visitation, and Child Protective Services.
- Local programs reduce barriers to employment and link participants to jobs that pay a living wage, provide job readiness education and connections to local job training programs, assist with obtaining professional licenses (e.g., barber licenses, commercial driver's licenses), and provide referrals to local employers interested in hiring participants. Fathers also receive education about managing their finances and meeting their child support obligations.

Outcomes

Preliminary analysis of data from pre- and post-workshop assessments indicate that, on average, participants increased their knowledge and skills related to parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability. In addition to improving assessment scores, the project has observed the following positive participant outcomes:

- 63 percent of participants unemployed at intake obtained employment.
- 27 percent of those who were employed at intake increased their earnings.
- 79 percent of participants who had child support arrearages decreased their arrearages.
- 68 percent of participants who did not have a visitation order were able to increase their contact with their child(ren).
- 70 percent who had child support orders at intake increased their contact with their child(ren).

Success Stories

"Aaron" came into the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Lexington site in need of advice on visitation and wanted to become a more engaged father in his child's life. The strained relationship with the custodial parent prevented Aaron from having frequent visitation with his daughter. Aaron maintained full-time employment and paid his court-ordered child support payments. With the assistance of program staff, he completed the pro se request for visitation packet and filed it with Charleston County Family Court. This situation was somewhat frustrating to him as he had to make repeated 200-mile round trips along with program staff to Charleston for court hearings. After three trips to Charleston, Aaron was awarded visitation of his daughter in June of 2008. Aaron also received a promotion and salary increase with his employer during this period. Due to Aaron's unwavering commitment to fatherhood and with the help of the program, he has gone from being a quiet group participant to a confident and outspoken participant. These steps were only preparing him for the next phase, which occurred on August 18, 2008 when Aaron obtained custody of his child.

"Derrick" entered the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Richland site as the result of a referral by Child Support Enforcement and the Family Court with the requirement to have his case reviewed in three months to assess his progress. He had been incarcerated for a non-violent offense and while in prison had amassed a significant arrearage and missed valuable time with his children. The program helped Derrick develop a plan to re-establish a relationship with his children's mothers, spend time and become better acquainted with his children, and reduce his arrearage. With help from the program staff, he immediately took great strides towards accomplishing his goals. At his second hearing, he appeared in court in his uniform from his place of employment and where he had signed up for wage withholding. At the hearing, one of the mothers of his children spoke highly of him and told the court that he was well on his way to reestablishing a relationship with her and their child. Since that time, Derrick has also renewed his relationship with his once estranged wife, and lives with her and their two children. To program staff, Derrick exemplifies responsible fatherhood in every way by providing financially, strengthening the family relationships, and committing to "be there" for his family in every way.

For more information about the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families visit www.scfathersandfamilies.com

"Due to Aaron's unwavering commitment to fatherhood and the program, he has gone from being a quiet group participant to a confident and outspoken participant."

The Council on Prevention Education: Substances, Inc.

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (single activity)

Jefferson County Fatherhood Initiative

Organization Description

The Council on Prevention Education: Substances, Inc. (COPES) is a private, non-profit organization that provides consultation, education, and training services for youth and families to promote healthy personal and family development. COPES trains schools, churches, juvenile justice programs, civic organizations, neighborhood associations, recreation centers, and city and county governments in the implementation of family skill-building programs that seek to reduce negative behaviors such as substance abuse, domestic violence, delinquency, and criminal activity. COPES' services focus primarily on personal growth and the prevention of substance abuse, violence, HIV, and Hepatitis.

Project Description

- The Jefferson County Fatherhood Initiative is a collaborative project designed to strengthen the parenting and relationship skills of fathers reentering the Louisville, Kentucky community following release from prison, with a specific focus on men in substance abuse recovery.
- The project works with fathers to improve their family relationships, reconnect with their spouses (or intimate partners) and children, and overcome obstacles to being effective and nurturing parents.
- The program teaches effective communication, building refusal skills, setting boundaries, conflict resolution, positive parenting techniques, and development of healthy attitudes and behaviors regarding substance abuse and sexual activity.
- The program also includes outreach and counseling services for participating men's spouses/intimate partners and their minor children, particularly those between the ages of 12 and 17.
- Each year the program serves approximately 100 individuals, including re-entry fathers, their partners, and children.

Outcomes

Preliminary analysis of data from a series of pre-, post- and six-month follow-up

surveys found that participants reported and maintained statistically significant gains—as compared to a control group of demographically similar non-participants—in the domains of:

- Effective communication skills
- Intra-personal skills
- Relationship satisfaction

Key Participant Outcomes

- 90 percent of post-course survey respondents report improved skills in giving positive feedback, which includes validating and affirming their children.
- 90 percent of respondents indicate that they feel better about creating expectations and enforcing consequences for their children.
- 89 percent of respondents "strongly agree" or "agree" that their personal use of alcohol and/or drugs has decreased.

Success Stories

Participant Testimonials

"Creating Lasting Family Connections classes have helped me to deal with my feelings. It has also helped me to deal better with other people's feelings. The classes have showed me how to care for my wife and kids and how to say no to them without hurting their feelings. I think anyone that is having trouble in their marriage should take this class because it really helps."

-Leslie

"After I went to the Creating Lasting Family Connections class the first day, I knew I was in the right place. My inappropriate humor, intellectualizing and rationalizing was replaced with real honesty. The facilitators taught me good things about myself that I hope to share with my family and friends. I'm surprised these life skills aren't taught in college. If this is not human growth and development, I don't know what is. Thanks from my soul."

-Jack

"As an ex-con and recovering alcoholic/addict, I was lucky to participate in this Creating Lasting Family Connections program. I felt really loved, cared for, and important because they took time to teach the skills I learned. I learned how to communicate with my wife and children in a calm and loving way and to not be harsh and inconsiderate. I learned how to be real and not passive in expressing my feelings."

-Dwayne

"Before taking the COPES class I thought the only way to get others to listen to me was by showing force. But now I know I can get others to listen and understand me in a kind way and not having to feel bad about how I handled it. I have learned that to say yes all the time isn't good for the ones I love or for me. When I let them know I mean what I am saying when saying no, even if it does make them upset, they actually feel more respect toward me for standing by my word. I have learned so much from the COPES program and I thank everyone who works for COPES for giving me a greater outlook towards my life."

-Delmas

For more information on the COPES program, including a three-minute video of how the Creating Lasting Family Connections program impacted one man's life, visit http://www.copes.org.

"I felt really loved, cared for, and important because they took time to teach the skills I learned."

The Latin American Youth Center

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (single activity grant)

The Latin American Youth Center Responsible Fatherhood Program

Organization Description

The Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) is a community-based, multi-cultural and multi-lingual youth and family development center dedicated to supporting youth and families in their determination to live, work, and study with dignity, hope, and joy. Founded in the late 1960s to address the absence of services for the emerging Latino community, LAYC is one of the nation's leading youth development organizations. LAYC now serves all low-income youth, young adults, and their families. Approximately 4,000 individuals are reached each year in Washington, D.C. and Maryland's Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. LAYC achieves its mission by operating a network of youth centers, public charter schools, and social enterprises that offer more than 50 year-round, culturally-sensitive programs and services.

Project Description

- The program primarily serves young immigrant fathers and mothers who reside, work, or attend school in the multi-cultural neighborhoods of Washington D.C.
- The primary goal is to increase the ability of young people to be responsible, involved parents who have meaningful relationships with their children; to be emotionally and financially supportive of their children and partners/spouses; and make healthy decisions for themselves, their families, and their communities.

- The program consists of 13 workshops on parenting skills, the experiences of young fathers, and the challenges they face. All sessions are offered in English and Spanish.
- Mentors recruited from the local community help young fathers develop their parenting skills and develop career and educational plans. In addition, mentors serve as a sounding board for questions and concerns and model good parenting behavior.
- The program offers individualized and intensive case management and provides access to the range of LAYC programs that promote academic achievement, employment skills, healthy behaviors, and advocacy.

Outcomes

Qualitative data collected through participant focus groups indicate a strong positive impact on participants. Analysis of available quantitative data suggests that participants achieved statistically significant improvements related to:

- Knowledge acquisition
- Self-reported perception and behavior
- Relationship with their child's other parent

Additional analysis of pre/post surveys also indicates that participants report improved relationships with their child's other parent.

Success Stories

Impacting Young Parents

"Camila" and "Juan" participated in the first cohort of Fiscal Year 2008. Aged 16 and 17, respectively, they were the first two high school students to complete the program. Both were students at LAYC's YouthBuild Public Charter School, where they were working toward a GED. Program staff were not sure how Camila and Juan would incorporate themselves into the group. That question was answered when Camila began to participate more in class discussions. Her comments revealed a depth of experience and a wisdom that exceeded her years. It became clear that her knowledge was borne of necessity: she was the primary caregiver for her six younger brothers and sisters. Her grandmother, who was in charge of raising them, was neglectful and frequently absent, leaving Camila in charge of the house.

In the space of a few weeks, Camila went from being a silent member of the group to being a leader in class. While Camila still did not speak a lot, when she did, she had the attention and respect of the entire class. The other participants were impressed with her personal history and her composure; some were amazed at the responsibilities that Camila had been forced to take on at an early age. As Juan gradually grew more comfortable with himself and his place in the group he started participating more in class, bringing his son to the program site, and visiting with his case manager.

Camila and Juan are still on track to graduate from LAYC's YouthBuild Public Charter School GED program. Camila and Juan are employed in the area and both are involved in LAYC's Promotores program, which provides intense case management to at-risk youth. Their mentor says that both are good parents and that, more so than before, they put their children first. In his opinion, LAYC's Responsible Fatherhood program helped Camila and Juan become more conscious of their own actions: thinking before they act and making their children's needs their first priority.

"Her comments revealed a depth of experience and a wisdom that exceeded her years. It became clear that her knowledge was borne of necessity: she was the primary caregiver for her six younger brothers and sisters."

New Mexico State University

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (single activity)

Strengthening Families Initiative

Organization Description

New Mexico State University (NMSU) is the state's land-grant university serving the educational needs of New Mexico's diverse population through comprehensive programs of education, research, and outreach, with an approximate enrollment of 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students. NMSU's Departments of Family and Consumer Sciences and Extension Home Economics in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences are uniquely suited to provide parenting education to incarcerated fathers and their families.

Project Description

- The Strengthening Families Initiative - Incarcerated Fathers Program (SFI) is conducting research-based parenting education for incarcerated fathers along with coordinated education and service components for parenting partners and inmates' children aged 17 or younger.
- The project targets primarily Hispanic and Caucasian fathers currently serving a prison sentence at Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility or La Tuna Federal Prison.

- SFI provides extensive research-based parenting education and life skills education; disseminates domestic violence information; promotes contact between inmates and their children and distributes educational materials to parenting partners; provides community based referrals for parenting partners and/or children when needed; co-sponsors Family Day events; and distributes a project newsletter to all of the parenting partners/caregivers of the inmates' children.
- SFI served 246 fathers in the first two years of the grant along with 617 children of inmates.

Outcomes

Pre- and post-class assessments revealed statistically significant positive growth in the areas of:

- Life skills (i.e., attitudes, knowledge, and behavior related to financial management and employment)
- Parenting attitudes and beliefs (i.e., appropriate expectations of children, empathy towards children's needs, use of corporal punishment, and cultivating children's independence)
- Knowledge of positive disciplinary techniques (e.g., praise, redirection, consequences, active listening, use of "I" statements)

Success Stories

A Reluctant Start

It was a Monday afternoon and the beginning of a new 15-session parenting class series at the correctional institution. There were 20 men registered for the class, although on this particular day three were absent because they were in lockdown. Of the remaining inmates, one could not decide whether to take the class and was leaning toward dropping out. He just showed up because his friend "talked him into it." He was a subdued man with long wavy hair, a few tattoos showing on his arms, and a facial expression confirming the lack of excitement. With some encouragement from the facilitator to give the class a chance and the promise that he could drop the class at any time, the inmate returned the following week, and then the following week, and the following . . . .

Throughout these few weeks, the inmates learned about the importance of being a father, how fathers influence children, age-appropriate expectations, and ways that fathers in prison could actually communicate and connect with their children. In addition, the fathers created a children's book for each of their children. Each inmate was provided with a blank book, lots of stickers and wall art stencils (these materials alleviate any anxiety for those who may have literacy challenges or feel they have no artistic ability).

It was a couple of weeks after the men had completed their books and the books had been sent to the inmate's family. Not much was different about this particular session until the end of class when the facilitator walked by each desk to collect the evaluation forms. It was then that the inmate who had been reluctant at the beginning of the course broke into a big smile and seemed hesitant to speak. Encouraged to share his thoughts, he said that his son had received the book he had made and that "he (my son) carries it around with him all day." The facilitator asked if that was surprising. It seemed that one might have noticed tears in the eyes as the inmate quietly replied, "Yes, because it has been over a year since I have seen my son and I wasn't sure if it would be a good idea. Now I know that it was."

"Yes, because it has been over a year since I have seen my son and I wasn't sure if it would be a good idea. Now I know that it was."

Child Abuse Services, Training & Life Enrichment

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (single activity)

Strong Fathers/Strong Families Project

Organization Description

The CASTLE (Child Abuse Services, Training & Life Enrichment) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that was established in 1981 by the Exchange Clubs of Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie, Florida to protect local children from abuse and neglect. The overarching mission of CASTLE is to improve the quality of family life while preventing child abuse and neglect through community education, supports, and resources. All CASTLE services, including its core Safe Families abuse prevention program, are accredited by the Council on Accreditation and the National Exchange Club Foundation. In addition, all CASTLE programs operate under a Performance and Quality Improvement (PQI) model that includes peer reviews, client satisfaction surveys, measurements of program effectiveness, and the use of this information to make program improvements.

Project Description

- The Strong Fathers/Strong Families project works with incarcerated fathers and their families to promote responsible parenting and family stability. The project's primary target population includes county jail inmates in St. Lucie, Martin, and Indian River Counties who are fathers of at least one minor child (or who are in a future or potential fathering role), as well as their spouses/intimate partners and children.
- The project provides jail-based fatherhood classes using a standardized, nationally recognized fatherhood skill development curriculum. The fatherhood course consists of 12 weekly two-hour classes, for a total of 24 hours of classroom-based instruction.
- Mothers/partners can participate in concurrent community-based parenting classes, and children can participate in a support group that centers on their fathers' separation from the family.

- Additional family outreach and support services, including needs assessments, are available after release.
- A total of 144 inmates participated in fatherhood classes during Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, with 75 percent completing eight or more hours of instruction.

Outcomes

Preliminary evaluation outcomes indicate numerous positive trends in participants' parenting knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

- 87 percent of participating fathers achieved scores of 75 percent correct or better on weekly post-class tests of knowledge during FY 2008.
- 96 percent of participants achieved scores of 75 percent correct or better on a post-course test of domestic violence knowledge and attitudes.
- Enrolled fathers have exhibited positive gains in parenting knowledge, attitudes, and skills as measured by the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory, 2nd Edition (AAPI-2), with respondents demonstrating solid gains in all five AAPI domains from pre- to post-course administrations. On average, participants AAPI-2 scores increased by 23 percent across all five test domains.

The project also appears to have a positive effect on fathers' level of contact with their children, with the average number of times enrolled fathers had physical or telephone contact with their children increasing from 1.3 times per month during the first quarter of FY 2008 to an average of 9.9 times per month during the last quarter of FY 2008.

Success Stories

John's Story

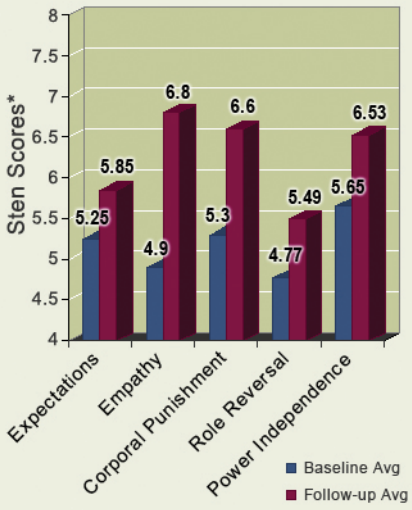
During his incarceration in the St. Lucie County Jail, John completed a total of 12 fatherhood classes as part of his participation in the Strong Fathers/Strong Families Project. The program taught John that his responsibilities toward his children go beyond discipline and financial support. While John was participating in the program, he spoke many times about the struggles he and his wife were having with raising their two children, and he expressed frustration with the fact that he and his spouse were often on "different pages" when it came to discipline and other parenting issues.

John's family was offered services through the Strong Fathers/Strong Families program while John was incarcerated. Although his wife was unable to attend the program's Mothers Group due to transportation problems, the family was able to receive in-home parenting education. The family's in-home counselor addressed family reunification issues and age-appropriate parenting behaviors, while John's children received counseling and other support services. Due to his early release from jail, John was able to participate in most of the in-home parenting education component.

"We don't know what we would have done without CASTLE" and "We are a stronger family because of CASTLE" are two examples of positive sentiments expressed by John and his wife about their participation in the Strong Fathers/Strong Families project. Their children have also expressed positive feelings about their involvement, with one declaring that she was "so happy my parents don't yell at each other or at us anymore." The program will continue to support John and his wife through the family reunification process as their enhanced knowledge and skills enable them to develop a nurturing home environment.

For more information about the Strong Fathers/Strong Families Project or the Exchange Club Center for Child Abuse Services visit http://www.castletc.org

Average AAPI Sten Scores by AAPI-2 Subscale from Initial to Post-Course Administration



"We've learned to complement each other and give each other the highest respect."

The Council on Crime and Justice

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (incarcerated fathers and their partners)

Family Strengthening Project

Organization Description

The Council on Crime and Justice is an independent, non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization that has been a leader in the fields of social and criminal justice in Minnesota since its founding in 1957. The Council works on behalf of offenders and their families, victims of crime, and populations at risk of involvement in the justice system. The Council's mission is to build community capacity to address the causes and consequences of crime and violence through research, demonstration, and advocacy.

Project Description

- The Family Strengthening Project (FSP) is designed to reduce the impact of incarceration on children of incarcerated parents by providing comprehensive services to incarcerated fathers and their families in the community.
- The FSP promotes responsible fatherhood by strengthening marriages and/or significant relationships, fostering healthy connections between parents and children, and increasing families' economic self-sufficiency.
- The FSP serves not only the incarcerated individual, but the entire family simultaneously.
- The FSP is also unique in terms of early intervention and longevity of services offered. Many families enroll within weeks of incarceration, and may continue services for up to two years during incarceration and one year post-release.
- The comprehensive services provided for the family include: family case advocacy and support, educational classes in financial literacy, parenting, marriage/relationship strengthening, and individual and couples counseling with a focus on family relationships.
- Families are eligible for employment skills training and placement, one-on-one financial counseling, mentorship matching opportunities, and comprehensive family reunification and re-entry planning.

Outcomes

At the time of this report, 131 families were fully enrolled in FSP. This includes 29 previously incarcerated fathers who had been released. The following outcomes were found among participants released back into the community:

- Of the 29 participants released, none had committed a new offense.
- Of the 29, 21 were still in committed relationships and/or living with their partner.
- Of the 29, 13 were employed and several others were currently seeking employment, attending school, or participating in skills training programs.
- There had been no reported incidents of domestic violence for the families that had been reunited upon release.
- Of the 29, only seven had been re-incarcerated for technical violations of their release stipulations.

Surveys administered to incarcerated fathers and their community partners during and following project participation indicate a significant impact on families, as indicated by the high levels of agreement with the statements below.

Percentage of incarcerated fathers and community partners who agree or strongly agree with the following statements

Incarcerated Fathers = IF, Community Partners = CP	IF	CP
My relationship with my partner has improved since being in the class	56%	77%
This class increased my knowledge about having healthy relationships	71%	100%
This class increased my knowledge of positive parenting practices	98%	98%
My relationship with my children has improved since being in this class	84%	86%

Success Stories

Phillip and Shelley's Story

Phillip and Shelley have been participants in the FSP since June of 2007. They have three children and have been in a committed relationship for nearly five years. However, the impact of Phillip's incarceration on the family had started to take its toll when they volunteered to participate in FSP. Both Phillip and Shelley indicated that they needed a way to stay connected and develop a new method of long-distance communication. Phillip was especially concerned about becoming a better parent and being able to gain employment upon release so that he could, once again, help to provide for the family.

While in prison, Phillip utilized many tools that enabled him to effectively parent from a distance and participate in the FSP's parenting classes with out missing a single class. During several visits throughout his incarceration, Phillip and the FSP Family Case Advocate developed employment training goals, researched housing options, and made preparations for educational advancement.

On October 13, 2008, Phillip was released from prison and reunited with his family. Nearly all of Phillip's initial goals have been reached; he obtained his driver's permit, stayed connected with his children, strengthened his relationship with Shelley, and graduated from a GED program. Phillip also worked with one of FSP's partner organizations, Goodwill Easter Seals (GWES), in order to complete Employment Readiness Training and Cognitive Skills Class. Due to the manner in which Phillip impressed GWES, he is now a paid employee working in their Online Sales Division.

"Phillip was especially concerned about becoming a better parent and being able to gain employment upon release so that he could, once again, help to provide for the family."

The RIDGE Project, Inc.

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantee (incarcerated fathers and their partners)

Keeping Families and Inmates Together in Harmony (Keeping FAITH)

Organization Description

The RIDGE Project, Inc., a non-profit organization founded in 2000, provides multi-faceted programs designed to move youth and families out of generational cycles of welfare dependency, fatherlessness, and incarceration and give them the skills to become responsible, productive, healthy, and happy families and citizens. The RIDGE Project currently serves over 30,000 Ohio residents each year.

Project Description

- Keeping Families and Inmates Together in Harmony (Keeping FAITH) is a fatherhood, marriage, and family strengthening program developed specifically to address the unique obstacles that fathers and their families face when the father is incarcerated or recently released. Participants receive both skill-based marriage education and skill-based parenting education.
- While the incarcerated father works through the program from within the prison, his family is involved in the program as well, with specific components integrated to bring the family together.
- Currently implemented in 11 Ohio prisons, in FY 2008 the Keeping FAITH program served 745 individuals, including more than 350 couples (inmates and their families).

Outcomes

Preliminary analysis of data from a series of pre- and post- surveys found that participants reported statistically significant gains in the domains of:

- Perceived value of the relationship
- Commitment to work on the relationship
- Relationship satisfaction
- Use of effective communication skills

- The program also appears to have a beneficial impact on participant recidivism. Of the 58 program participants that have been released for more than 12 months, only 10, or 17% have been reincarcerated.

Success Story

A Fresh Start for the Johnsons

The Johnson family had been through a lot. Mr. Johnson was serving time while his wife and two sons had to deal with the humiliation and shame of facing society every day after newspapers had splashed their story into thousands of homes. The RIDGE Project conducted a presentation at the institution where Mr. Johnson was located, and he decided to participate. Mr. Johnson admits that he was not initially interested in the program, but did want more contact with his family, and he had heard that phone calls and visits could be paid for through this program. Not long after the first presentation, his wife called the RIDGE Project office crying while she explained that through that one presentation, the Keeping FAITH program had changed their lives.

Mrs. Johnson then explained that she had never seen or heard her husband cry in the twenty years they had been together. The first project Keeping FAITH presentation included a young man who had grown up visiting his father in prison. After returning to his unit, Mr. Johnson called his wife and broke down crying, telling her that when he heard that young man say through his own tears, "No matter what, you cannot give up on your children; you have to tell them all the time that you are there for them and that you love them. You have to give them a tangible reason to love you when the world hates you. You have to help them be strong enough not to give into the despair they fight every day."

That day, Mr. Johnson saw his own son's pain for the first time and suddenly wanted more than anything else to make things right for them. For the first time in their relationship, he apologized for the pain he was putting them through and began thinking of them instead of just himself. He and his wife completed every part of the Keeping FAITH program, and program staff had the privilege of watching their relationship thrive through very difficult seasons. The communication and dedication within that family has been rewarding for the staff to see. This father has learned the vital importance of being a "man worth following," a man of honor and integrity, ready to lead his family. Today, he is home with the opportunity to be the father and husband he has longed to be, and his family is overjoyed to have him.

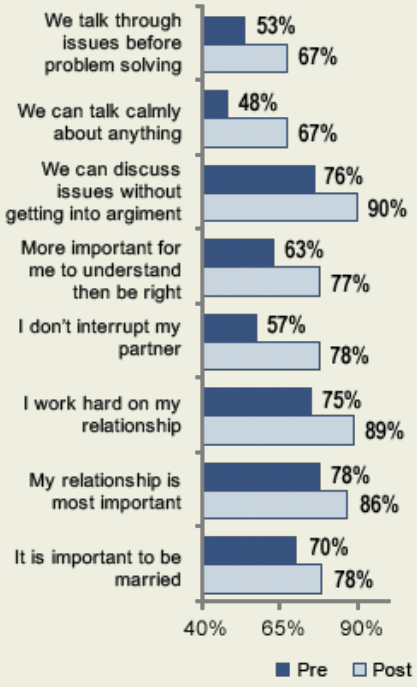
Testimonial

I have spent the last two years in prison and this is the third time I have been incarcerated. Not only did the Keeping FAITH program wake me up to the reality of my bad decisions, but it was the first time I felt the love and respect of being a father, not just from my wife and my daughter, but especially from your staff. They have been such inspirational teachers. My thinking process is totally different from the way it was before I started taking your class. My wife and I plan to map out issues from here on out! The map works and it allows me to hear my partner's feelings, thoughts, and wants. I can see how my life affects my children and family. I want to be a part of the RIDGE program even after I am released from prison. My life, my family's life, and our future depend on Keeping FAITH. I want to say thank you for following your dreams because now I can follow mine!

-Michael

For more information about the RIDGE Project and the Keeping FAITH Project, visit their website at http://www.theridgeproject.com/

Percentage of inmates who agree with statement before (pre test) and after (post test) the Keeping FAITH program.



This report has provided examples of the types of projects funded by OFA as part of its Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives. Profiled projects were selected as part of an investigation into Promising Practices by JBA. While projects were selected based (in part) on their ability to demonstrate preliminary positive impacts on participants, it remains too early in the program implementation and evaluation process to draw definitive conclusions regarding their outcomes. This is true both for individual projects as well as for the healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood program areas overall.

To gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs, several rigorous national evaluations involving OFA-funded grantees are presently underway. These evaluation efforts will provide a more definitive understanding of the impact of programs like the ones described in this report in the years to come. Below is a short description of some of the current national cross-site evaluations that involve grantees funded though the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives.

Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation

Supporting Healthy Marriage is an evaluation of polices and programs aimed at helping couples strengthen and maintain healthy marital relationships. This evaluation is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The evaluation is being conducted by MDRC and its research partners Abt Associates Inc, Child Trends, Optimal Solutions Group, and McFarland and Associates, Inc. The Supporting Healthy Marriage project is the first large-scale, multi-site, multi-year, rigorous test of marriage education programs for low-income married couples.

Building Strong Families

This initiative seeks to develop and evaluate programs designed to help interested unwed parents achieve their aspirations for healthy marriage and a stable family life. The project tests interventions for low-income, unwed couples beginning during pregnancy or around the time of their child's birth. The evaluation is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research Inc., and its research partners MDRC Public Strategies Inc., the Urban Institute, and Decision Information Resources

Demonstrating the Effectiveness of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Inc., under contract to the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative: Grantee Implementation Evaluation

The Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) is building interest in and capacity to provide culturally relevant marriage education to Hispanics nationwide as part of the Federal Healthy Marriage Initiative. Little is known about how such programs effectively reach and serve Hispanic families. The HHMI evaluation is a joint effort between the Administration for Children and Families Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Conducted under contract with the Lewin Group and its subcontractors—MDRC and the Washington University Center for Latino Family Research—the evaluation examines ways in which federally funded healthy marriage grantees that target significant numbers of Hispanic couples are developing, adapting, and implementing culturally relevant and appropriate healthy marriage programs for Hispanic populations.

Evaluation of the Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and Their Partners (MFS-IP)

The MFS-IP is part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) initiative to support healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. To evaluate the overall effectiveness of the MFS-IP grantees, the ASPE, awarded a contract to RTI to conduct an implementation evaluation as well as a multi-site, longitudinal impact evaluation of selected grantees. The specific objectives of the MFS-IP evaluation are: to describe the programs on a number of dimensions including program history and context, type of grantee organization, target population, intervention strategies, and program design; to describe program implementation, challenges, successes, and lessons learned; to determine the impact of these diverse programs on outcomes such as relationship stability and quality, positive family interactions, family financial well-being, and recidivism; and to identify the mechanisms through which these programs achieve success.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance
www.acf.hhs.gov

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